

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER – C
May 4 – 10, 2025

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 Testament of Bl. Christian de Chergé (opened and read on May 26, 1996)
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 A Reflection developed from a sermon of St. John Chrysostom

Sunday

GROWING IN LOVE FOR JESUS

A Reflection taken from a sermon by St. Augustine

“Jesus stepped forward, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish” (Jn.21). The Lord appeared to his disciples in Galilee after his resurrection. Today we hear the story of his questioning of Peter. Three times Peter had denied knowing Jesus, and now Jesus requires of him a three-fold declaration of love. Now that Christ had been raised to unending life, he comes to raise Peter to a new life as well. Notice, moreover, that each time Peter declares his love for Jesus he is told to feed Jesus’ flock; i.e., to care for those whom Christ is calling to be his own as he called Peter.

Is there any advantage for Christ as a result of Peter’s renewed love for him? Isn’t the same thing true in our case? If Christ loves you then you gain a great advantage, but what is the advantage for Christ? Pause and ask yourself how you actually love Christ. He told us how in speaking to Peter: *“Do you love me? Then feed my sheep”*. He repeats it three times. We can’t miss the importance Jesus gives to loving all he calls to be with him forever. Remember how Jesus describes judgment: Whatever you did, or failed to do, for the least of my brothers and sisters you did or didn’t do for me!

No wonder the Lord has only one question: Do you love me? Each time we say we do, he responds with the command to feed his sheep. As we love one another so we love Christ! In Christ, we encounter the Eternal God who became human. We knew him first as a true member of our race. As God in human form, he did many wonderful signs, and as a human being he suffered much from what other human beings did. Yet, however much suffering people inflicted on him, he responded with merciful love. We killed him and he returned from the dead still loving and caring for us. The Risen Christ lived with us for forty days and ascended into Heaven before the eyes of his disciples, leaving the command to proclaim the good news of God’s never-ending love to all.

We believe all these things, even though we never saw them. We believe that we are commanded to love Christ, our Lord, and to obey his command to go to all peoples on earth and proclaim the good news of resurrection and life everlasting. Why is it good news? Because it tells us the Kingdom of God is among us, and the love for one another, which marks off citizens of that Kingdom, is beginning to spread. Listen: *“If you don’t love the brother or sister whom you see, how can you love the God whom you can’t see?”* We show our love for our shepherd by loving his sheep. The sheep are members of Christ and of Christ’s body as really as the human body he took upon himself was and is really his own.

Recall the words of the Baptist: *“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!”* How could a lamb bear such a burden? He shows how strong he is by overcoming death. He has given us the Spirit, through whom that strength came to Him. You have received that Spirit. What reason can you have to be afraid of carrying out your Lord’s command? May nothing be dearer to us than Christ Our Lord! Let us love him with all our hearts! Then all will know they are loved both by God and by all of those who follow Christ. The world is filled with people who love us and seek to care for us.

Monday

THE GRACE THAT OVERCOMES THE WORLD

A Reflection developed from a sermon by St. Bernard

Whoever is born of God overcomes the world. That means that God had decided that whoever Christ has made a brother or sister is a child of God, and it means that God has predestined all who believe to be conformed to the image of the Son. Whoever deliberately chooses to look to God for all that makes life good and beautiful is acting like a child of God—such a person looks only to God for the inheritance that will bring life's fullness. So those who are born of God overcome the world. They are victorious over temptation because they can't be tempted to think anything other than God and God's way is anything they really want or need. Thus, we understand why our victory over the world is by and in faith. We believe that in God is all one can need and that it is given in Christ.

Whenever you resist temptation, whenever you overcome wickedness, don't credit your own strength. Don't glory in yourself but in the Lord. Paul says that by faith we who are saints overcome kingdoms. Peter says that in faith, one resists the world's ways. John says that faith is the victory that overcomes the world. We see in it and in Christ how to resist every temptation to turn away from God, even under the threat of death. Do we see many who believe in Jesus but are nevertheless entangled in the love of what is merely worldly? Such a person seems neither to be afraid of threats nor attracted by promises. Such a person neither obeys God's commands nor follows the counsels of Christ. Does such a one truly believe that Christ is God's Son? Such faith, if divorced from works, is dead. Without the works of love, faith is dead, and without faith, we are dead to God. If someone isn't truly alive, that person can't overcome anything!

A living and victorious faith comes from Christ dwelling in our hearts! Our hearts are the homes of our desires and longings. If all our longing is for God, then we can live wholly by faith. That is what it means to say that whoever believes in Christ as the Son of God will overcome the world. Jesus, however, came by water and by blood. We have all received the water, but we have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood. We are offered the grace to shed even our blood for God and for God's Christ. The thing to remember is that where your heart is, there is your treasure. Remember always that our only treasure is God. Remember, too, that Christ has promised to pray for us. We know that the Heavenly Father will receive into the Kingdom whomever the Son receives as a brother or a sister. That is how Christ makes us fellow heirs. There is, then, no doubt that we will receive a share in all that the Father has, because it has been given to Christ and Christ has shared it with us. Rejoice in your calling and in your election as heirs of God with Christ. Don't be afraid! God never goes back on his promises. Amen!

Tuesday

OUR LIFE AS A SONG OF PRAISE

A Reflection from a sermon by St. Augustine

“Sing to the Lord a new song! Sing God’s praise in the assembly of the holy ones”. We are called to sing a new song to the Lord. What is this “new song”? It is a song that can be learned only by a “new person”. This new person is created by faith and by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The new song we are to sing is a song of joy! This is because it is a song of love. It can be sung only by a person who has learned to love as Christ loves. That means the song of love we are to sing is the new life we are to live in Christ! We learn to sing it as we learn to live a new life of risen love. The new person, the new song, and the new covenant are all aspects of the New Kingdom of God. Those who are new persons, living a new and risen life, sing the new song and belong to the New Covenant and the New Kingdom.

Everyone loves something. But not everyone loves what gives life. The psalms constantly warn us to choose carefully what we will love after we make a choice. But we can only do this if we have been chosen. We couldn’t love until we had been loved—that’s how one learns to love. St. Paul says it: *“We love him because he first loved us”*. God gave himself to us in Jesus Christ as the object of our love. *“The love of God has been poured into our hearts”*. St. Paul goes on to say that we are to love as God loves and that this comes *“through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us”*.

We are called to love God with a love God gives us. As St. John tells us: *“God is love and whoever dwells in love dwells in God and God dwells in that person”*. It isn’t enough to say that love is from God. Scripture teaches us what we wouldn’t dare to say on our own: *“God is love”*. The only one who can say this is one who has God’s indwelling love. God is crying out to tell us that if we love God, we have God. No one would be able to love God if God didn’t already possess and dwell in that person!

It all comes down to this: We are called to become songs of love for God! We only sing this song when we love one another. Jesus has shown us how in calling us to love as he loves. This love is a joyful thing, and when we are loving one another, we are to do it in joy. If what we want most is to love God in Jesus, and if loving one another in practical ways is an expression of that love, then when we serve and love one another, we have exactly what we want most. Could you want to do something else that takes you away from the love of your heart?

Each of us is the fruit of true faith resulting from the holy seed of the Spirit. We have been born in Christ, and our life is from above. So, listen to the Spirit: *“Sing to the Lord a new song!”* That’s what the Spirit says. Can we hear one another singing? Yes, so long as what we do doesn’t contradict what we claim to be singing. Sing genuine divine love with your voices, your hearts, and your lives. That’s how one sings with one’s whole heart! Listen to the choir that is Christ’s body, the church. That song is transforming the world.

Wednesday

LIVING COMMUNION WITH CHRIST

A Reflection taken from The Mystery of the Church by Fr. Yves Congar

“Jesus said to the crowds, I am the living bread which has come down from heaven; anyone who eats this bread will live forever”. The Eucharist is the sacrament of the redemptive mystery of the cross and the sacrament of the unity of the Mystical Body. By its grace, this body is brought into being. In this sacrament, we receive Christ as our food. We thus unite ourselves in a special union similar to that of a living being and its food. Ordinarily, a living being assimilates its food and makes it part of its own substance. But here the roles are reversed. We feed on the eucharistic bread and wine, but all the power of assimilation resides in Christ and in feeding us, he unites us and incorporates us into his life.

In his Confessions, St. Augustine pointed out that Christ declares, *“Eat me and grow in stature; but it is not you who will change me into yourself, as you do bodily food, but it is I who will change you into me.”* (Book VII, 10) The result of such communion is union with Christ, an infinitely mysterious one, which is like the union that takes place in a living thing. It is both an incorporation and an intensification of life. As we have seen, our Lord compares in a most explicit way the union he wishes to establish between us and himself, especially through the Eucharist, to the unity existing between him and his Heavenly Father. But this is a unity of perfect life, a substantial unity of life.

The Eucharist is, then, the perfect sacrament of our incorporation with Christ. Theologians are unanimous in holding that its special effect is to bring about the unity of the Mystical Body. By a special increase of grace and of living faith, it incorporates us with Christ precisely inasmuch as it takes us into the supreme act of love by which Christ offered himself for us on the cross, so as to bring together into one, all God’s children, scattered far and wide.

We may not communicate in isolation from our brothers and sisters. We communicate in the true Body of Christ only by communicating at the same time in his Mystical Body. The “breaking of the Bread” brings with it, inseparably, the presence of Christ uniting us to that multitude which shares in Christ’s redemption. The one bread makes us one body; though we are numerically many. Here we have the entire mystery of the Mystical Body. But it is not a mere fact but a call, a command and a promise. Living the unity of this Body is salvation.

Thursday

FACING A GOODBYE

Testament of Bl. Christian de Chergé (opened and read on May 26, 1996)

If it should happen one day - and it could be today - that I become a victim of the terrorism which now seems ready to engulf all the foreigners living in Algeria, I would like my community, my Church, and my family to remember that my life was GIVEN to God and this country. I ask them to accept the fact that the One Master of all life was not a stranger to this brutal departure. I would ask them to pray for me: for how could I be found worthy of such an offering? I ask them to associate this death with so many other equally violent ones, which are forgotten through indifference or anonymity. My life has no more value than any other. Nor any less value. In any case, it does not have the innocence of childhood. I have lived long enough to know that I am an accomplice in the evil which seems to prevail so terribly in the world, even in the evil which might blindly strike me down. I should like, when the time comes, to have a moment of spiritual clarity which would allow me to beg forgiveness of God and of my fellow human beings, and at the same time forgive with all my heart the one who would strike me down. I could not desire such a death. It seems to me important to state this. I do not see, in fact, how I could rejoice if the people I love were indiscriminately accused of my murder. It would be too high a price to pay for what will perhaps be called the "grace of martyrdom" to owe it to an Algerian, whoever he might be, especially if he says he is acting in fidelity to what he believes to be Islam.

I am aware of the scorn which can be heaped on the Algerians indiscriminately. I am also aware of the caricatures of Islam that a certain Islamism fosters. It is too easy to soothe one's conscience by identifying this religious way with the fundamentalist ideology of its extremists. For me, Algeria and Islam are something different: it is a body and a soul. I have proclaimed this often enough, I think, in the light of what I have received from it. I so often find there that true strand of the Gospel which I learned at my mother's knee, my very first Church, precisely in Algeria, and already inspired with respect for Muslim believers. Obviously, my death will appear to confirm those who hastily judged me naïve or idealistic: "Let him tell us now what he thinks of his ideals!" But these persons should know that finally, my most avid curiosity will be set free. This is what I shall be able to do, God willing: immerse my gaze in that of the Father to contemplate with him His children of Islam, just as He sees them, all shining with the glory of Christ, the fruit of His Passion, filled with the Gift of the Spirit whose secret joy will always be to establish communion and restore the likeness, playing with the differences.

For this life lost, totally mine and totally theirs, I thank God, who seems to have willed it entirely for the sake of that JOY in everything and despite everything. In this THANK YOU, which is said for everything in my life from now on, I certainly include you, friends of yesterday and today, and you, my friends of this place, along with my mother and father, my sisters and brothers and their families, You are the hundredfold granted as was promised! And also you, my last-minute friend, who will not have known what you were doing: Yes, I want this THANK YOU and this GOODBYE to be a "GOD-BLESS" for you, too, because in God's face I see yours. May we meet again as happy thieves in Paradise, if it please God, the Father of us both.

Friday

GOD'S PLAN FOR THE WORLD'S SALVATION

A Reflection from Against Heresies by St. Irenaeus

We are saved body and soul by Christ. He does this especially by feeding us with his blood given in the Eucharistic chalice and his body given in the Eucharistic bread we break. But there is no blood or body without the veins, the flesh and all the rest of what makes up a human being. The Word of God actually became human and redeemed us with his own human blood and body. Keep in mind what St. Paul tells us: *"In Him, through his blood, we have been redeemed and our sins have been forgiven"*.

We are Christ's members, and we are nourished by all Creation as God's gift to us. It is God who causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall, just as he declared it is his blood that we receive from the chalice that is creation! Where would we get nourishment except from God's creation? Our chalice mixes the wine with the bread, and the word of God makes these elements the body and blood of Christ. God makes us live and grow through them. Indeed, through them, God gives us eternal life.

In the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul says that *"we are members of Christ's body"*, of his flesh and bones. He is not speaking only of a spiritual and incorporeal person, for spirits don't have flesh and bones, as we know Christ has. Paul is speaking of a real human body composed of flesh, sinews, and bones, and nourished by a creation that is made Christ's own body and blood. All this receives nourishment from the bread and wine that are Christ's body and blood.

A small slip taken from a vine is planted in the ground and, in due time, it becomes itself a vine and bears fruit. A grain of wheat is planted in the ground and gradually decays so that it may spring up and be multiplied by the hidden action of God's Spirit. The Spirit of God sustains all things. Whatever is alive dies in some way, and, by God's power, then rises again to produce new life. The Spirit of God multiplies all hidden things.

It is the wisdom of God that created all things, that sustains them, and places them at our service. Some receive God's word and become eucharist. God sends his Word into his creation to transform it and prepare it to be raised up as a new and ever-enduring creation. Our bodies will be buried in the earth, but God will raise them up to serve him and praise him always. The word of God will raise all up to give God glory forever. God will clothe mortal nature with immortality and endow our corruptible selves with incorruptibility.

God doesn't save just a part of us but saves and preserves all that is part of us—body and spirit. We are to rejoice in all this and make it a part of that which leads all that comes from God back to God. God's power is shown most perfectly in weakness. Let us rejoice in what is strong and in what is weak. All is to give glory to God. His glory lasts forever.

Saturday

REVERENCING THE SACRAMENT OF JESUS' BODY & BLOOD **A Reflection developed from a sermon of St. John Chrysostom**

Sages from the East came and paid homage to Christ's body, even though it was a baby's body. Foreigners who did not worship the One True God left their homes because of an interpretation of the appearance of a new star in heaven and came to worship Jesus in great fear and trembling. We are "citizens of Heaven", Scripture tells us. We should imitate what the Sages did. They only saw Christ as a baby. They didn't see anything of what we see. Yet they approached Jesus with profound awe and reverence. You see him on an altar, offered by a chosen priest, and upon offerings of bread and wine, you see by faith the Holy Spirit bountifully poured out upon Christ. You, unlike the sages, see more than Christ's body; you know Christ's power, and through him, you know God's entire plan of salvation. You have been carefully instructed, and so you know of the marvels he performed.

Well, then, are we awakening in ourselves a feeling of awe and reverence even greater than the eastern sages showed? Coming to the sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood is not something to do casually or thoughtlessly. Yet failing to share in this sacramental meal is spiritual hunger and death. This is food that strengthens us. It emboldens us to speak freely to our God and of our God. It is hope, salvation, light, and life for us. If we go to the next world strengthened by this sacrifice we enter its gates with perfect confidence, as though one were protected all over by armor of steel covered with gold. But why do I speak of the next world? It is because this sacrament transforms earth into Heaven for you.

Would you like to throw open the gates of Heaven, or even of the Heaven of the Heavens? If you did and then looked through them, what would you see? You would see Heaven's most precious possession! But I can point to it right here on earth. I needn't point to angels or archangels or to the Heaven of the Heavens but only to their Lord—the Lord of all. Here on earth, we gaze on what is most precious of all. We not only gaze on it, but we touch it, we even eat it, we take it in our hands, and we carry it with us to our homes when we leave the church.

What is essential in our reverence toward Christ present with us and for us? It is essential that we cleanse ourselves inwardly, cleanse our souls, and not just our bodies. It is essential that we ask Christ to send upon us the Spirit that it may cleanse us in ways we cannot cleanse ourselves. What we need to do is cast away all sin. What we need to do is let the love of Christ enter our hearts and use our entire selves in loving, even as he has loved us. That is how one approaches the Body and Blood of Christ. It is given for our strengthening in saving faith and love. It is given for the sharing of faith and showing love for our neighbor. It is given so we may become other Christs. Christ gave us his flesh and blood to eat in order to deepen our love for Him. There should be burning within us a fire of love and longing proportionate to the magnitude of the graces we receive here.