THE THIRTY-THIRD WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME C
The Sunday of Joy Never Ending
November 16 – 22, 2025

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Sunday

THE GIFT OF UNENDING JOY

A Reflection: The Gift of Unending Joy

In November of 1949, twenty-nine monks from Gethsemane Abbey arrived at Mepkin to found the Monastery of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Fifteen were novices, supposedly flexible enough to adapt to the hardships that go with founding a new community. An ancient motto to help us along the path to God says: "Through hardships, to Heaven"! Monastic life provides hardships, and God provides the grace to bear with them and persevere. Brother Boniface summed up the challenge and the grace by pointing to two of Mepkin's huge live oaks: "Those great big oak trees were once just little nuts that held their ground!" Monks are nuts for Christ, putting down roots into monastic life and persevering until death, as St. Benedict says, they show the Church and the world the inner beauty that grows in one who walks the monastic way with Jesus. It is a matter of seeking the face of God in prayer, work, and community living. Only 10 of the 29 founders persevered to be buried at Mepkin.

All Christians are called to pray, to work, and to live in a community of mutual love, and monks seek to do this in the most thorough way possible. It is hard. Everything begins and ends with prayer – no matter how hot the summer heat or how hard the drudgery of turning what contained only a summer home into a property able to feed and clothe an entire community. Trappist tradition insists that monks support themselves by the work of their own hands. It took many experiments for the community to find success in raising chickens for their eggs, and then mushrooms.

This makes it difficult not to let prayer slip from the center of who you are and what you do. Besides, you live in silence and a kind of solitude; you rise early so you can get prayer and meditation in before the day's work begins. Many of our human ways of finding encouragement and support are deliberately given up in monastic life. A monastery is a kind of half-open door through which one can glimpse the life and joy of the Kingdom of God. The name 'mepkin' is said to mean "beautiful place". To translate natural into spiritual beauty, it is important to have a beautiful church and liturgy. The monastery became the "Abbey of Our Lady of Mepkin" – Our Lady of the Beautiful Place – to show that beauty leads to joy. The present award-winning church was dedicated in 1993 with this in mind.

Mepkin Plantation didn't put prayer first but focused on work, done by slaves. Monks work to become wholly free and make the fruit of their work a free gift to others. It is a life of turning from all that enslaves people and leads them away from the love of God and loving respect for others. This is the path to God's Kingdom and unending joy. The twin blessings that are the Mepkin community and its church remind all of God's call to live now the life of charity that will last forever. Those who have gone into glory remind us who remain to keep death and God daily before our eyes. We show that we too can share God's unending joy. The special thing our founders did was love one another in God for an entire lifetime. Deeper than hardships, and even sin, is the joy given us in Christ. It shapes each monk's life as a witness for all to see and an invitation to follow Jesus. It is a response to the call that is faith and our call to celebrate on earth the Day of Unending Joy.

Monday

THE CALL TO PATIENT ENDURANCE

A Reflection developed from a Letter by St. Nilus of Ancyra

We undergo many times of trials. In such times, it is of great advantage for us to endure them patiently, relying on the help of the Lord. Scripture says, "*By patient endurance, you will win life*". It did not say that you will win life by fasting, or by solitude, or by silence, or by singing psalms; yes, these things are very helpful in finding life with the Lord. But Scripture actually said: "by patient endurance" in every trial that overtakes you will find life.

We have many afflictions. They may come from being treated contemptuously or even insolently. They may involve all sorts of disgrace, either minor or major. They may be bodily and due to physical weakness, or they may be spiritual and due to the inimical attacks of Satan. It doesn't matter whether they are trials caused by other people or by evil spirits. What matters is that "by patient endurance, you will win life".

Of course, we must also be prepared to give wholehearted thanks to God for trials. We must turn to God in prayer. This is part of being humble. God is our benefactor, God is our Savior—and the Savior of the world, and it is God who disposes all things in such a way as to bring about what is good, or certainly what is for our benefit.

St. Paul has written: "*With patient endurance, we run the race of faith that is set before us*". What has greater power than virtue? And what virtue has greater firmness and strength than patient endurance? Of course, I am speaking of endurance for God's sake.

Enduring for God's sake is the queen of virtues and even the foundation of virtue. It is for us a haven of tranquility. It is peace in time of war. It is calm in rough waters. It is safety, even amidst treachery or danger. It makes those who practice it stronger than steel! No weapon, no bow or arrow, no troop of worked-up soldiers, no siege engine, no flying spear, and no enemy advance can harm such a person.

Do you fear an entire army of evil spirits? Do you fear the organization that promotes Satan's ends and sees you as an enemy? Do you fear the devil himself, even when he stands in front of you backed up by all his armies and devices? Do not be afraid. None of these things have the power to injure a man or a woman who knows how to be patient and endure everything for the sake of God. This is your daily task. It is your task this very day. Be confident and trust in the Lord.

Tuesday

THE TWO GAZES

From an Angelus Message of His Holiness Pope Francis

The Gospel in today's Liturgy narrates the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus, chief of the publicans of the city of Jericho (*Lk* 19: 1-10). At the center of this account, there is the verb *to seek*. Zacchaeus "was seeking to see who Jesus was", and Jesus, after meeting him, states: "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost". Let us focus a little on these two gazes that seek: *the gaze of Zacchaeus,* who is seeking Jesus, and *the gaze of Jesus* who is looking for Zacchaeus.

The gaze of Zacchaeus. He is a publican, one of those Jews who collected taxes on behalf of the Roman rulers, a traitor of the homeland, and took advantage of their position. Therefore, Zacchaeus was rich, hated by all, and branded a sinner. The text says "he was short in stature", and this perhaps also alludes to his inner baseness, to his mediocre, dishonest life, with his gaze always turned downwards. But the important thing is that he was little. And yet, Zacchaeus *wants to see Jesus*. Something drove him to see him. "He ran ahead", says the Gospel, "and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way". He climbed a sycamore: Zacchaeus, the man who dominated everyone, made himself ridiculous and took the path of ridicule – to see Jesus. Let us think a little of what would happen if, for instance, a minister of the economy climbed a tree to look at something: he would risk mockery. And Zacchaeus risked mockery to see Jesus; he made himself look ridiculous. Zacchaeus, despite his lowliness, feels the need to seek another way of looking, that of Christ. He does not yet know him, but he awaits someone who will free him from his condition, morally low, to bring him out of the mire in which he finds himself. This is fundamental: Zacchaeus teaches us that, in life, all is never lost, never. We can always find space for the desire to begin again, to start over, to convert. Re-convert, re-begin, re-start. And this is what Zacchaeus does.

In this regard, the second aspect is decisive: *the gaze of Jesus*. He was sent by the Father to seek those who are lost, and when he arrives in Jericho, he passes right by the tree where Zacchaeus is. The Gospel narrates that "Jesus looked up and said to him, "'Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house'". It is a truly beautiful image, because if Jesus has to look up, it means that he is looking at Zacchaeus from below. This is the history of salvation: God has never looked down on us – no; to humiliate us – no; to judge us - no; on the contrary, he lowered himself to the point of washing our feet, looking at us from below, and restoring our dignity. In this way, the meeting of eyes between Zacchaeus and Jesus seems to encapsulate the whole of salvation history: humanity, with its miseries, seeks redemption, but firstly, God, with mercy, seeks the creature to save it.

Let us remember this: the gaze of God never stops at our past, full of errors, but looks with infinite confidence at what we can become. Jesus always looks at us with love. He looks at us, as with Zacchaeus, he comes towards us, he calls us by name, and, if we welcome him, he comes to our home. Then we might ask ourselves: how do we look at ourselves? Do we feel inadequate? Do we seek the encounter with Jesus? And then: what gaze do we have towards those who have erred, and who struggle to get up again from the dust of their mistakes? Is it a gaze from above that judges, disdains, excludes? Remember that it is legitimate to look down on someone only to help them get up again: nothing more. But we Christians must have the gaze of Christ, who embraces from below, who seeks those who are lost, with compassion. This is, and must be, the gaze of the Church, always, the gaze of Christ, not the condemning gaze.

Wednesday

SAINT MATILDA OF HACKEBORN (part1)

From the Angelus Address of Pope Benedict XVI, 29 September 2010

St. Matilda of Hackeborn is one of the great figures of the convent of Helfta, who lived in the 13th century. Her sister, St Gertrude the Great, tells of the special graces that God granted to St Matilda in the sixth book of *Liber Specialis Gratiae* (Book of Special Grace), which states: "What we have written is very little in comparison with what we have omitted. We are publishing these things solely for the glory of God and the usefulness of our neighbor, for it would seem wrong to us to keep quiet about the many graces that Matilda received from God, not so much for herself, in our opinion, but for us and for those who will come after us" (Mechthild von Hackeborn, *Liber specialis gratiae,* vi, 1).

Matilda was born in 1241 or 1242 in the Castle of Helfta. She was the Baron's third daughter. When she was seven, she went with her mother to visit her sister Gertrude in the convent of Rodersdorf. She was so enchanted by this environment that she ardently desired to belong to it. She entered as a schoolgirl and in 1258 became a nun at the convent, which in the meantime had moved to Helfta, to the property of the Hackeborns. She was distinguished by her humility, her fervor, her friendliness, the clarity and innocence of her life, and by the familiarity and intensity with which she lived her relationship with God, the Virgin, and the Saints. She was endowed with lofty natural and spiritual qualities such as knowledge, intelligence, familiarity with the humanities, and a marvelously sweet voice. Everything suited her to being a true treasure for the convent from every point of view (*ibid, Proem*.). Thus, when "God's nightingale", as she was called, was still very young, she became the principal of the convent's school, choir mistress, and novice mistress, offices that she fulfilled with talent and unflagging zeal, not only for the benefit of the nuns but for anyone who wanted to draw on her wisdom and goodness.

Illumined by the divine gift of mystic contemplation, Matilda wrote many prayers. She was a teacher of faithful doctrine and deep humility, a counselor, comforter, and guide in discernment. We read: "She distributed doctrine in an abundance never previously seen at the convent, and alas, we are rather afraid that nothing like it will ever be seen again. The sisters would cluster around her to hear the word of God as if she were a preacher. "She was the refuge and consoler of all and, by a unique gift of God, was endowed with the grace of being able to reveal freely the secrets of the heart of each one. Many people, not only in the convent but also outsiders, religious and lay people, who came from afar, testified that this holy virgin had freed them from their afflictions and that they had never known such comfort as they found near her. *"Furthermore, she composed and taught so many prayers that if they were gathered together they would make a book larger than a Psalter"* (*ibid.,* VI, 1).

Matilda gave an emphasis in liturgical prayer to the canonical hours, to the celebrations of Holy Mass, and, especially, to Holy Communion. Here she was often rapt in ecstasy in profound intimacy with the Lord in his most ardent and sweetest Heart, carrying on a marvelous conversation in which she asked for inner illumination while interceding specially for her community and her sisters. At the center are the mysteries of Christ, which the Virgin Mary constantly recommends to people, so that they may walk on the path of holiness: "If you want true holiness, be close to my Son; he is holiness itself that sanctifies all things" (*ibid.,* I, 40). The whole world, the Church, benefactors, and sinners were present in her intimacy with God. For her, Heaven and earth were united.

Thursday

THE WAY OF PEACE

From a Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis

"Jesus wept". Indeed, as "he drew near Jerusalem", the Lord "wept at the sight of the city". Why? Jesus himself provides the answer to this question: "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes". Thus, he "wept because Jerusalem did not know the way of peace and chose the way of hostility, of hatred, of war".

Today, Pope Francis recalled, "Jesus is in heaven, watching us", and "he will come to us here, on the altar". But "today too, Jesus weeps, because we have chosen the way of war, the way of hatred, the way of hostility". This is even more glaring now that "we are approaching Christmas: there will be lights, there will be celebrations, trees lit up, even nativity scenes... all decorated: the world continues to wage war, to wage wars. The world has not comprehended the way of peace".

Remembering his visit to the Redipuglia Military Memorial on 13 September 2014 during the centenary of World War I, the Pope quoted the words of Benedict XV as he spoke of the "useless slaughter" that took the lives of "millions and millions of men". However, he added, "still we do not comprehend the way of peace". And "it doesn't end there: today, in the newspaper, in the press, we see that in those parts there have been bombings" and we hear that "that is war". But "there is war everywhere today, there is hatred". We even reach the point that we console ourselves by saying: "Well, yes, it's a bombing, but thank God only 20 children were killed!". Or we tell ourselves: "Not too many people died, many were abducted...". But in doing so, "even our way of thinking becomes irrational".

Indeed, the Pontiff asked, "What remains of a war, of the one that we are experiencing now?". What remains are "ruins, thousands of uneducated children, the deaths of so many innocent people: so many!" And also "so much money in the pockets of arms dealers".

A war, the Pontiff explained, "can be justified — in quotation marks — with many, many reasons. But when the whole world, as it is today, is at war — the whole world! — it is a world war being fought piecemeal: here, there, there, everywhere". And "there is no justification. God weeps. Jesus weeps".

Thus again we hear Lord's words before Jerusalem, expressed in the Gospel according to Luke: "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace!". Today, "this world is not a peacemaker". And "while arms dealers do their work, there are poor peacemakers who, simply in order to help one person, and another and another, give their lives". And they carry out this mission by taking as their model "a symbol, an icon of our times: Teresa of Calcutta". In fact, "with the cynicism of the powerful, it could be said: but what did that woman do? She lost her life helping people to die?". The issue is that today, "the way of peace isn't comprehended". Indeed, "Jesus' proposal of peace has not been heard". And "this is why he wept looking at Jerusalem, and he weeps now".

"It will be good for us too", the Pope said, "to ask for the grace to weep for this world which does not recognize the way of peace, which lives to wage war, while cynically claiming not to do so". And, he added, "let us ask for a conversion of heart". In conclusion, right "at the threshold of this Jubilee of Mercy", Francis expressed the hope "that our jubilee, our joy may be the grace so that the world may once again find the capacity to weep for its crimes, for what it does with wars".

Friday

THE MEANING OF MARY'S PRESENTATION

A Reflection developed from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII

The Feast of the Presentation of Mary originated as a celebration of her gift of her total self to God, and her call to lead us to make the same gift of ourselves. The feast originated in the tale told in an apocryphal gospel about the offering of Mary to be raised in God's Jerusalem Temple. This didn't happen historically and doesn't reflect genuine Jewish practice from the time of Jesus, but the Church has seen in the tale an opportunity to call all God's people to the same sort of gift of self that Mary made, and that God used to make her the Mother of Jesus, and of us all.

Mary's vocation was a "religious" vocation. This is not to be taken in the technical sense the phrase now has. It means that with an eager and trustful heart, Mary offered herself to God. No doubt she learned to make this gift from her parents. In effect, then, they led her to God and helped her offer herself to God. In this sense, Mary and her parents provide a model for all believing families, Christian and Jewish.

We don't all grow up, any more than Mary did, with a clear idea that we are called to help draw more and more people into God's Kingdom. But we now know that we are called to share our faith in God and in God's saving Kingdom with those given us as family members and, especially, as our children.

The voice of Christ continues to ring out over the entire world. Christ gently and firmly draws to God all who are open to becoming God's special people through prayer and self-gift in works of love and in fostering the fullness of life. What does it mean to respond to this call? It means losing oneself and, in this very loss, find oneself again. God repays those who give everything for his sake and for the sake of the salvation to which he calls all mankind a 100-fold recompense for giving themselves 100% to his love and service.

Think of how many ways of consecrating oneself 100% to God are offered to people throughout the world. The ancient monastic and contemplative orders and styles of life are only the beginning of these many ways. Each of us must uniquely answer the call of God. Each life is unique and each has a unique witness to God's leading to the full flowering of our humanity and our many human talents. This is what Mary did, and consider how vast God has made her opportunities and capabilities for sharing her love for God! What God did for Mary, God would do for each of us, each in a special way.

Be courageous! Don't be afraid! God's love conquers all obstacles. We need only begin now, or continue now, to make our self-gift to divine love and watch it flower into a life of love and service, joy and peace.

Saturday

THE WITNESS OF THE LIFE & DEATH OF CECILIA

A Reflection developed from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII

The liturgy has much to say about Cecilia, the virgin and martyr. She is an example of the singular beauty that Christ gives to those who love Him. She sheds upon so many the heavenly light and sweetness of faith in God. She was deeply conscious of the truths of her faith and of the duty to God that they taught her.

It has been said of St. Cecilia that wherever she went, she bore witness to the Gospel. How blessed are all those who can do this, following her example. Above all, how blessed are those who show us what a great honor it is for a follower of Christ to find the inner strength to sacrifice everything, even life itself, when faced with the choice of choosing justice and fraternity and mutual love and peace by obeying the teachings of our Redeemer. Jesus has given these ideals new and deeper meanings than ever before and shown us how to so live them that all the world will be redeemed and saved.

I can only wish that all might find within their hearts the divine gift of a desire to live frankly and generously in obedience to the precepts of the Gospel. Wasn't Jesus' new commandment a call to love others even as he has loved them, and loved us? It isn't a path to personal or inner narrowness but to honor and openness and service. It is a path that multiplies care and concern and action on behalf of all that is good.

Cecilia was wealthy. A young man wanted to marry her, but not for herself. He lusted after her money and property. When she decided to give all she had inherited to the poor, he denounced her as a Christian. He hoped this would cause her to turn back from her purpose out of fear for her life. It only caused her to make an even greater gift of her life to God. She went ahead and gave away her wealth and property, but in giving it she gave her very life and self. This is the call that her feast proclaims. It is a call that God makes to all of us—whether we have any property or wealth or not.

What we give is not important unless the gift is yourself. You may give it in a lifetime of dedication to God and to the love of others. You may give it by refusing to turn away from what you hear as God's call to you. Whatever that call costs, refusing to turn back is your path to God and to God's Kingdom.