

THE FOURTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME - A
The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord
February 1 – 7, 2026

Sun. The Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Feb. 1 **HOLINESS, THE BEATITUDES, AND DISCERNMENT**
 A Reflection by Tim Muldoon

Mon. The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord
2 **WHEN WE MEET ONE ANOTHER IN THE LORD**
 From a Homily of Pope Francis on the Feast of the Presentation 2018

Tues. Memorial of St. Blaise
3 **PREPARING OURSELVES TO EMBRACE CHRIST**
 A reflection by St. Pope John Paul II

Wed. Memorial of the Dead
4 **WHAT OUR DEPARTED CONTINUOUSLY DO**
 From Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Thurs. Memorial of St. Agatha
5 **THE GIFT OF ONE'S SELF**
 A Reflection from a text by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Fri. Memorial of St. Paul Miki & Companions
6 **THE HARVEST OF A WITNESS TO CHARITY**
 A Reflection from a text by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Sat. Memorial of Our Lady
7 **THE VIRGIN MARY AS GOD'S TEMPLE**
 A Reflection from a Text by Fr. Yves Congar

Sunday

HOLINESS, THE BEATITUDES, AND DISCERNMENT

A Reflection by Tim Muldoon

In 2018, Pope Francis wrote an apostolic exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Rejoice and Be Glad). The title comes from the Beatitudes in Matthew's Gospel, specifically Jesus' exhortation to rejoice when people "insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me."

Gaudete et Exsultate is a meditation on the call to holiness in everyday life. (The word holiness appears 78 times.) The pope points to the "saints next door," who quietly persevere in their holiness because their lives have become so closely united with Christ. In an extended meditation on the Beatitudes, he describes them as God's invitation to deepen our capacity to love. We become happy – and holy – to the extent that we "go against the flow" of many of the world's values, choosing instead: to be poor of heart, to share in others' mourning, to react to others in meekness and humility, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to see and act in mercy, to vigilantly keep our hearts free to love, to sow peace around us, and to keep the Gospel with us always even in the face of persecution.

The exhortation is an extended meditation on Ignatian discernment (the word appears 17 times) and particularly on the call to reach out to others. The Pope calls Matthew 25 the call to serve others as Christ himself served, he who is "the great criterion."

He writes: "If we seek the holiness pleasing to God's eyes, this text offers us one clear criterion on which we will be judged. "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

He recalls the words of St. John Paul II: "If we truly start out anew from the contemplation of Christ, we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he himself wished to be identified."

For Pope Francis, as for his predecessors, the call to discernment is always a call to self-knowledge that spills over into a commitment of one's life for the care of those whom Christ loved.

In our prayer this week, we might ask God, then, to help us "rejoice and be glad" in the call to serve those who are easily forgotten: the unborn, the migrant, the elderly, the destitute, the victims of trafficking, and so many others. May we allow God's grace to enlarge our hearts in order that we might find authentic happiness and holiness.

Monday

WHEN WE MEET ONE ANOTHER IN THE LORD

From a Homily of Pope Francis on the Feast of the Presentation 2018

Forty days after Christmas, we celebrate the Lord who enters the Temple and comes to encounter his people. In the Christian East, this feast is called the “Feast of the Encounter”: it is the encounter between God, who became a child to bring newness to our world, and an unexpected humanity, represented by the elderly man and woman in the Temple.

In the Temple, there is also an encounter between two couples: the young Mary and Joseph, and the elderly Simeon and Anna. The old receive the young, while the young draw upon the old. In the Temple, Mary and Joseph find the roots of their people. This is important because God's promise does not come to fulfillment merely in individuals, once for all, but within a community and throughout history. There too, Mary and Joseph find the roots of their faith, for faith is something not learned from a book, but the art of living with God and learned from the experience of those who have gone before us. The two young people, in meeting the two older people, thus find themselves. And the two older people, nearing the end of their days, receive Jesus, the meaning of their lives. This event fulfills the prophecy of Joel: “Your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.” In this encounter, the young see their mission and the elderly realize their dreams. All because, at the center of the encounter, is Jesus.

Let us look into our own lives, dear consecrated brothers and sisters. Everything started in an encounter with the Lord. Our journey of consecration was born of an encounter and a call. We need to keep this in mind. And if we remember aright, we will realize that in that encounter, we were not alone with Jesus. Present with us were also the people of God, the Church, the young and old, just as in today's Gospel. It is striking too, that while the young Mary and Joseph faithfully observe the Law – the Gospel tells us this four times – and never speak, the elderly Simeon and Anna come running up and prophesy. It seems it should be the other way around. Generally, it is the young who speak enthusiastically about the future, while the elderly protect the past. In the Gospel, the very opposite occurs because when we meet one another in the Lord, God's surprises immediately follow.

For this to occur in the consecrated life, we have to remember that we can never renew our encounter with the Lord without others. We can never leave others behind, never pass over generations, but we must accompany one another daily, keeping the Lord always at the center. For if the young are called to open new doors, the elderly hold the keys. An institute remains youthful by going back to its roots, by listening to its older members. There is no future without this encounter between the old and the young. There is no growth without roots and no flowering without new buds. There is never prophecy without memory, or memory without prophecy. And a constant encounter.

Tuesday

SAINT BLAISE

From Ibreviary by Pietro Barbini

Little is known about the life of Saint Blaise, whose liturgical memory is celebrated today. Biographical information on the Saint can be found in the hagiography of Camillo Tutini, who collected numerous testimonies passed down orally. It is known that he was a doctor and bishop of Sebaste in Armenia and that his martyrdom occurred during the persecutions of Christians, around 316, during the conflicts between the emperors Constantine (West) and Licino (East). Captured by the Romans, he was beaten and flayed alive with iron combs, the ones used to card wool, and finally beheaded for refusing to renounce his faith in Christ. He is a Saint known and venerated both in the West and in the East. His cult is widespread in both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

In his hometown, where he carried out his episcopal ministry, it is said that he performed numerous miracles, among others, the one for which he is known, that is, the healing, which occurred during his imprisonment, of a boy from a fishbone stuck in his trachea. Even today, in fact, the Saint is invoked for "throat ailments".

Furthermore, San Biagio (St. Blaise) is one of the fourteen so-called auxiliary saints, that is, those saints invoked for the healing of particular ailments. Venerated in many Italian cities and towns, where he is also the patron saint, he is celebrated on February 3 in almost the entire Italian peninsula.

It is tradition to introduce, in the middle of the liturgical celebration, a special blessing on the "throats" of the faithful, imparted by the parish priest by crossing two candles (in ancient times, blessed oil was used). Also interesting are some popular traditions handed down over time on the occasion of the celebrations of the Saint. Some people, like in Milan, celebrate with their families by eating the leftover panettone especially for Christmas, and some prepare typical sweets with particular shapes, which recall the saint, blessed by the parish priest, and then distributed to the faithful. In Lanzara, a hamlet in the province of Salerno, for example, it is traditional to eat the famous "polpetta di San Biagio".

In the city of Salemi, however, it is said that in 1542 the Saint saved the population from a serious famine, caused by an invasion of locusts that destroyed the crops in the countryside, interceding and answering the prayers of the people who invoked his help (in fact, Saint Biagio or St. Blaise), in addition to being the protector of "throat ailments" is also the protector of crops; from that day on, every year on February 3, Salemi celebrates the Saint by preparing the so-called "cavadduzzi", literally "locusts", to remember the miracle, and the "caddureddi" (whose shape represents the "throat"), which are small loaves of bread prepared with water and flour, blessed by the parish priest and then distributed to the faithful. Since 2008, also in Salemi, a spectacular representation of the "miracle of the locusts" has been organized, with the collaboration of all the schools and associations of the city, which ends with the arrival of the Saint at the church to lay down the gifts and have his "throats" blessed.

Wednesday

WHAT OUR DEPARTED CONTINUOUSLY DO

A Reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

The dead are alive. In God, they are more alive than we are. Their life expresses itself in prayer and praise. This is directed to God, but it is also done for our sake. These friends are enwrapped in God's love, and that is only possible if they, like God, are love. The Second Vatican Council (*Lumen Gentium*) reminds us that those God has chosen to be holy and entirely his now intercede for others. This is likened to Christ's intercession.

Christ is the sole mediator between God and the world, and those with God take part in that mediation. It is love. That means their love constantly helps us in our weakness because they intercede for us along with Christ. They are bound to him in virtue of God's election; this makes them holy. This is the total gift of self to God, which they are always making, or perhaps still learning to make. That is what Christ is.

We are called to unite our prayer with those of the dead in the same adoration and praise and intercession that is Christ's. Insofar as we are one with them, we are one with Christ and so with God! But that is the purpose of our living. Let me speak about the power of example. This is given by our departed sisters and brothers, and it is proportioned to the completeness of their union with Christ. It is by this union that God is in them. That means they can manifest to mankind the presence of God and God's face fully shown to us in Christ. They show us Christ, and Christ shows us God, and we can then live in a way that shows to all who know us the face of Christ and of God.

The Council says this finely, "*He himself speaks to us in his chosen ones and shows us the meaning and reality of the Kingdom*". Those in the Kingdom were, and are, signs of God's presence, and that of the Kingdom, among us. That means they are God's word, and help us to see more of what God's unique Word, Christ, means for the life of our race and its members. Each of our departed showed us something of what the living Word of God can mean by their daily life. This is a witness to the truth of the Gospel's Good News. For those who are now with God, there are no more half-measures. They no longer have moments of uncertainty. They have now realized what God meant to say to us through them, and as we pray with them, and even for them, we are better digesting that message and seeing how to make it real and true practically.

The Gospel tells us all this. It helps us live what may be called the culture of the Beatitudes. They are tools to form a common mentality in our race and to guide our acting and thinking as we try to show God's presence to others. We do what our departed have shown us how to do—and what they continue to do by reminding us of their lives as we remember them. To think of them is now to think of God and Jesus Christ. That is what we are called to do today specially. By the grace of Christ, may this be true. What they now do continuously, we can begin to do with them as we pray with them.

Thursday

THE GIFT OF ONE'S SELF

A Reflection from a text by Carlo Cardinal Martini

The New Testament illustrates the inexhaustible richness of Jesus' words as they became the sources and guides of life for the first Christians. This witness was, and is, continued in the witness of the martyrs. In both cases, what is witnessed is charity, lived out in the gift of self in service of others. The service is more often spiritual than simply material. A marvelous example is found in St. Agatha.

Agatha illustrates the sharing of goods we see in the Jerusalem community as presented in the Book of Acts. She was rich, yet she became poor because she shared so much with those who were in need. She helped the Christian community of Catania in Sicily to change things for the poor in a way that prefigured the new society that faith in Christ can and will create. In Acts, this sort of giving of self is bound together with prayer and with listening to the Lord's Word in joy. It becomes more than a gift of social change. It is equally a gift of a new hope born of faith in Christ's resurrection as shared by us through our union with Him. We give things, but the giving is actually rooted in the gift of self.

In Agatha's case, this was a consecration of her life and self through the preservation of her virginity as a way of saying that she was married to Jesus and wholly his. For Agatha, this led to martyrdom, and her steadfastness in the face of every sort of torment was her way of showing that nothing at all can destroy our hope in God, as given to us in Jesus' death and resurrection. Notice that this is a free gift, perhaps even more deliberately free than the sharing of all the things she possessed.

Recall the story in Acts of Annas and Saphira, who sold property and pretended to give all to God and their community but actually kept half for themselves. They were making themselves hypocrites, and this destroyed them. Agatha refused to pretend in any way. There is a multitude of stories about how she overcame every sort of test and torture. This makes her life a witness to the supreme value of genuineness in our self-giving to God. It makes the point that living hope, no matter what happens, can be a tremendous gift to our fellow Christians. Agatha never stopped hoping or putting all her trust, and so her very self, into God's hands. She witnessed to God's never-ending love for us.

Charity and the concrete ways of sharing and sharing oneself are bound together. Charity is broader than any particular act. It is the best obedience to the Lord. It is a celebration of the resurrection and of the hope we are given in the Lord's resurrection. Charity is joy at Jesus' eternal presence amid his own. But it does aim for concrete action. It searches for ways to do everything that is possible in showing the new life that is proper to believers, socially as well as personally. Every sharing is a free manifestation of the richness of charity, just as our charity is a gift that witnesses to God's never-ending love for us.

Friday

THE HARVEST OF A WITNESS TO CHARITY

A Reflection from a text by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Quite frequently, St. Paul's letters speak of Christian charity using the language of worship, calling it an "offering" and a "sacrifice". In Romans, he says, "Think of God's mercy and worship him in a way that is worthy of a thinking being by offering your living bodies as a holy sacrifice" (Rm.12:1f). He says the same to the Ephesians. It means, first, that worship is one's entire life-work, one's every day gift of self to God. Second, it presents concrete acts of spiritual and material charity as worship. He calls this the best way to come to know the will of God!

The Japanese martyrs provide marvelous examples, especially Fr. Paul Miki. He and his companions, Jesuits and Franciscans and lay Christians, were marched through the countryside to demonstrate what comes of disobeying the emperor. Actually, it showed the hope of Christians for something far beyond any imperial gift or favor. Paul made this clear in a sermon given as he hung on the cross waiting for the executioner to pierce his heart with a lance. From his heart flowed charity more than blood, and it created a Christian community that lived for centuries without church organization or even clergy. These believers had faith and hope, and these kept them faithful to Christ during centuries of being outlawed and persecuted.

The Christian vision of the life of charity is embodied in the famous hymn found in First Corinthians. It distinguishes a Christian's inward love from that of deeds done in conventional service of another and connects them with tongues, prophecies, and miracles. It denies that even giving oneself to be killed can be important unless motivated by Christian charity. That doesn't make such charity a mystery but links it with acceptance of God and others without conditions, with pardon, with patience and kindness, and understanding not based on ordinary reasoning or social training. Most of all, it links it with hope.

Hope provides an inner orientation that permits a person to choose the right direction. Love puts us in the presence of God even while it is the supreme discovery of who we are as human beings. It shows us our brothers and sisters in a new light. It is the fruit of our total abandonment into the loving arms of our God. The Spirit speaks to us about this love in the history, as we may call it, of Christian sainthood. Because the saints allowed themselves to be guided by the Spirit, they were made holy. They didn't seek to glorify self or any earthly reality, even the Church, but humbly entrusted their lives to God. The Spirit gave them strength and insight to appreciate the world's needs and do something about them. What they did was give themselves to love and to hope in God. The martyrs, for example, are not our heroes because of the pains they bore for God. The Japanese martyrs were tied up on a cross, and then a soldier thrust a lance into their hearts to kill them. It was a simple death without a great deal of suffering. We offer what we are, and God brings much fruit from it.

Saturday

THE VIRGIN MARY AS GOD'S TEMPLE

A Reflection from a Text by Fr. Yves Congar

The Gospels expressly relate the Virgin Mary to the Temple of God only in the accounts of her presentation of Jesus and of the events of a family journey to celebrate the Passover at the Temple when Jesus was twelve. Christian piety added things, as in various Apocryphal texts, but the Church insists the Gospels say more than enough. We deal with symbolic representations of profound spiritual realities.

Mary was chosen and predestined to be the mother of Jesus, truly God, and truly human, and was made worthy of her vocation by grace. She shows us how to live such a vocation with unfailing fidelity. The gospel of Luke presents her as a model to be imitated by all Christian believers striving to respond to the vocations God gives them. Mary is, next to her Son, the first of the living stones out of which God is building a temple so all may worship and find grace-given salvation.

If Mary is the Mother of God, she has a special relation to the Body of Christ. But this Body is the true Temple. This is true of Christ's physical body, too, but most particularly of what we call Christ's "mystical" body, the Church. Consider why this is so pertinent to understanding the role of Mary in God's plan of salvation. First, because Christ lives and grows within her, she is the Temple of God in a unique way. Yet Christ lives and grows within us spiritually and so makes us temples of God. Second, because of the grace that filled Mary, she was able to respond completely and without reservation to the call of God to become his mother. Yet we, too, have been given graces to enable us to respond to God's calls to us.

It is not difficult to see how Mary provides a model for all Christians to follow as they seek to respond to God's call to bring light to the world and to lead every member of the human race to the salvation which God offers all in Christ. If we find this filled with difficulties, so did Mary. If we have to carry a cross with Jesus, so did Mary. If we have to let go of our own plans for life, that is precisely what God's call required of Mary. She responded freely and fully to each call to surrender herself and her ways of thinking and feeling to the requirements of God's Plan of Salvation through her son. All this makes her more and more a temple where worship of God and prayer to God fill each day and hour more and more. She, and all believers, have been made, as it were, pregnant with Christ and salvation. What are we to do in response if not to go to whoever we know to be in need—as Mary did to Elizabeth—and show them love and mercy?