

**THE THIRD WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME - A  
FEAST of the FOUNDERS of the CISTERCIAN ORDER  
January 25 – 31, 2026**

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A Reflection taken from the Salesian website

*Sunday*

## **INTERRELATIONSHIPS IN MATTHEW 4**

### **From Writings on the Cultural Context of Scripture by John Pilch**

The Gospel for this Sunday proposes three topics for our consideration: the Baptizer, Jesus' ministry, and Jesus' disciples.

John is in prison; he will shortly be put to death. Matthew, Mark, and Luke make it clear that Jesus does not begin his own ministry until the Baptizer has completed his. In John's Gospel, Jesus begins his ministry before the Baptizer's imprisonment. All the Gospels indicate that the Baptizer had a successful and effective ministry in his own right. During Jesus' ministry, people often confused Jesus with or identified him as the Baptizer.

One plausible explanation for this confusion, proposed by contemporary scholars, is this. Moved to conversion by John's preaching, Jesus became his disciple. When John was imprisoned, Jesus ventured out on his own and gathered disciples, but continued to baptize and broaden his ministry. Soon, he began to experience the ability to cast out demons and realized he had a distinctive ministry of his own. With this, Jesus stopped baptizing and came into his own.

After John's imprisonment, Jesus moves from Nazareth, his tiny hometown, to Capernaum, a larger crossroads town by the Sea of Galilee. He continues preaching John's message: "Repent, for the reign of heaven has approached."

Matthew encapsulates Jesus' ministry in a summary statement: Jesus was teaching in the synagogues, preaching the good news, and healing. In Jesus' day, the synagogue was a gathering place, like a modern-day community center, where males could meet on every day of the week to study or pray. Here, Jesus read and listened to Torah, disputed and argued with others, but did not attend Sabbath services, since there were none at that time. For the ordinary first-century Jewish believer, the Sabbath was not a day of worship; it was simply a day of rest.

As for his healing program, Jesus is clearly a "folk" healer and not a "professional." In contrast to the latter, Jesus attempts to heal people. He doesn't just talk about healing.

Jesus' act of calling disciples is a common event in the Middle East. Usually, a person with a grievance invites people to join him in resolving the grievance. We don't know Jesus' grievance, but the disciples certainly did. This, in part, explains why they dropped everything to follow him. In unified groups, there is strength. Such group orientation or connectedness permeates this reading as it does the entire Bible. The lives of the Baptizer, the disciples, and the healed clients are entirely intertwined with Jesus.

*Monday*

## **DISCERNING THE NEEDS OF ONE'S TIME**

**Developed from a Reflection by Fr. Guerric Heckel, OSCO**

The great founders of religious life had such an impact because of their ability to discern the urgent needs of the people of their age and respond with originality. As we honor Sts. Robert, Alberic, and Stephen, I find myself asking: What are the urgent needs of our day?

First off, our existing institutions aren't designed to handle the magnitude or complexity of a globalized world. The economic, ecological, political, and systemic realities facing us require new forms of organization and leadership anchored in teamwork, diversity, and networking.

Second, living an "asceticism of love" is no longer a matter of imitating a suffering and sacrificial hero, but of embracing the daring, empowering mission of the Gospel imperative to work for a new reign of God on earth. Following Christ is much more about the transformation of this world and its inhabitants than an escape into salvation in the hereafter.

Third, there is a growing awareness that those in "secular" life are integral to the living of the core meaning of a "vowed" life. Take the hunger for genuine hospitality as one of the urgent needs of our time. John Vanier, the founder of the L'Arche communities, has written: "Communities that have trouble making room for strangers because they have grown insulated or preoccupied with their own needs and struggles, and communities that are dying".

Theologian Diarmuid O'Murchu puts it this way: "Religious aren't about a different set of values but about the values all humans yearn for in their deepest selves. Monks and nuns are called to take these values more seriously and strive to live them out authentically. Yet ensuring holiness doesn't result in having a privileged position over others. Dialogue and networking are likely to be the strategies for future monastic life. Monks need to engage the cultural spiritual hunger in more creative ways".

We have heard that everyone has a call to be a mystic. Monks express that call in a special way, which includes the call to foster it in others. We aren't dealing with a model for life that revolves around observing laws as much as emphasizing community life more than individual holiness. How we relate to others in community is (e.g.) what celibacy is about. Sharing resources characterizes poverty, and the exercise of co-responsibility expresses obedience. We emphasize a spirituality of engagement rather than escape.

Our founders, if they lived today, would doubtless be discerning "Embracing God's Creation and Ecological Responsibility". This emphasis on the creation of a new earth as the heart of spirituality resounds through Pope Francis' *Laudato Si*. That calls for a community that can grow, learn, and adapt to an evolving world. Isn't that what characterized the Cistercian Founders? Foundings are fueled by a kind of wild, creative energy from the Spirit. Vision and hope are the driving forces. Without one another's support, that vision wouldn't have caught fire. Our charism involves keeping that vision of new life alive today.

Tuesday

## THE PRAYER OF PRAISE

From the Morning Meditation of Pope Francis on Tuesday, 28 January 2014

Pope Francis continued his reflection on the Second Book of Samuel, which recounts of David's dancing before the Ark of the Lord upon its entry into Jerusalem. "King David offered sacrifice in honor of God," he prayed. Then his prayer became exultant ... it became the prayer of praise and of joy, and he began to dance. The Bible says: 'David danced before the Lord with all his might', and he rejoiced greatly as he offered praise to the Lord. "That," Pope Francis said, "was truly the prayer of praise".

Pope Francis remarked: "I thought immediately of Sarah after she gave birth to Isaac: 'God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me'. This elderly woman at the age of 90 laughed and danced for joy". David was young, but he also "danced, he danced before the Lord. This is an example of the prayer of praise".

The prayer of praise is quite different than the prayer we normally raise to God, when "we ask something of the Lord" or even "thank the Lord". "We often leave aside the prayer of praise". It doesn't come so easily to us. Some might think that this kind of prayer is only "for those who belong to the renewal in the spirit movement, not for all Christians. The prayer of praise is a Christian prayer for all of us. Each day during Mass, when we sing: 'Holy, Holy...', this is the prayer of praise. We praise God for his greatness. And it does not matter if we are good singers.

Praising God is "totally gratuitous". "We do not ask, we do not thank. We praise: you are great. 'Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit...'. We say this with all our hearts. It is also an act of justice, for He is great, He is our God. Let us think about a good question we can ask ourselves today: How is my prayer of praise? Do I know how to praise the Lord? Or when I pray the *Gloria* or the *Sanctus*, do I only pray with my lips and not with all my heart? What does David's dancing say to me? And Sarah, who dances for joy? As David enters the city, he begins something else as well: celebration. The joy of praise leads us to the joy of celebration". This celebration then extends to the whole family. "Each person was given a cake of bread and departed to his own house to celebrate" (cf. v. 19). But when David reentered his household, he had to face the reproach and scorn of Michal, the daughter of King Saul: "'Aren't you ashamed of what you have done? How could you have done this, you, the king, dancing in front of everyone? Are you not ashamed?' I wonder how many times in our hearts we hold in contempt good people who praise the Lord?" so spontaneously, as it comes to them.

In the Bible, we read that "'Michal had no child to the day of her death'. What does the word of God mean here? That joy, that the prayer of praise makes us fruitful. Sarah was dancing for joy at 90 years old in the great moment of her fruitfulness! Fruitfulness gives praise to the Lord". The one who praises the Lord, who prays by praising the Lord and rejoices "as they sing the *Sanctus* at Mass" is fruitful. On the other hand, those who "close themselves into the formality of a cold, measured prayer perhaps end up like Michal, in the sterility of formality". "Let us think of and imagine David who dances with all his might before the Lord. Let us think about how beautiful it is to offer the prayer of praise. Perhaps it will do us good to repeat the words of the psalm we just prayed, number 23: 'Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors! That the King of glory may come in, the Lord strong and mighty, he is the king of glory! Lift up your heads, O gates! Who is this king of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the king of glory!'" This ought to be our prayer of praise. When we raise this prayer to the Lord, we ought "to say to our heart: 'Lift up your hearts, for you stand before the king of glory'".

*Wednesday*

## **OUR FUTURE AND INCARNATIONAL HUMANISM**

### **A Reflection from Angel of the Schools by Jacques Maritain**

Against an old scholasticism which was incapable of recognizing in Aquinas the true heir of St. Augustine, Thomas defends the rights of truth in the natural sphere and the great value of reason. Against the Averroists, incapable of recognizing in Aquinas the true interpreter of Aristotle, Thomas defends the rights of revealed truth and the supreme value of faith. He affirms both the essential naturalness of metaphysics and the essential supernaturalness of the infused virtues like faith, and hope, and charity. He defends the essential subordination of the natural to the supernatural, proclaiming not only that grace perfects nature without destroying it and that the properly divine life that grace implants in us can alone heal the wound in our nature. Grace must take hold of nature absolutely.

Aquinas' special achievement was to bring all the virtues of the mind into the service of Jesus Christ. He saw what we call the problem of culture and humanism. He answered the questions. That answer was: Sanctify it by grace.

A human person becomes perfect only supernaturally. A human person develops only on the Cross! A genuine Christian humanism is possible, but only on the premise that its ultimate goal is union with God through the humanity of Christ the Mediator. The means of that development must be proportionate to its essentially supernatural goal. It must be a humanism of the incarnation, an incarnational humanism.

This requires that it order itself entirely toward love and contemplation. It must entirely subordinate mere knowledge to divine wisdom, just as the holy soul of Aquinas did. One must subordinate metaphysical wisdom to theological wisdom and theological wisdom to the wisdom of the saints.

This wisdom realizes that the form of reason can subject the world only if it is itself subject to the supra-rational and supra-human order of the Holy Spirit. That means it is subject to and formed by the Spirit's gifts.

Unless this happens in fact, any humanism – even a Christian one – can only lead to the destruction of humankind and the ruin of all that is human and of this world. We can only create the humanism our time needs if we learn from the Spirit, and by means of the virtues it infuses in us through grace, to imitate Christ in our hearts and in our minds, in our humanness and in our adoption as Children of God. We must open ourselves to grace if we would show the way to open nature and ordinary human life to that love which saves all things, and all men and women.

Thursday

## **GOD'S CALL & THE VIRTUE OF DUTIFULNESS**

### **A Reflection from Holy Pagans by Cardinal Jean Danielou**

Holy Scripture and the Fathers speak of Lot's dutifulness as an example for us. When the angel appears to him and calls him to rise up and leave Sodom with his family, he obeys. This despite of his sons-in-law. He sets forth and, without a backward glance, his eyes fixed on God's will. His wife, on the contrary, can't tear herself away from her former life, and she turns back, being turned into a pillar of salt in punishment. Our Lord himself deals with this story and gives it its full meaning. *"On that day, if anyone is on the housetop with his goods in the house, let him not go down to take them away. Remember Lot's wife. Those who seek to save their lives will lose them, and those who lose their lives will save them"*.

Lot represents a person who consents at the call of God to leave the circle of familiar things and move toward the unknown. He doesn't shut himself up in a world of personal experiences but accepts guidance toward what is foreign and of which nothing definite is known. We can't use our previous experience in deciding to trust God and trust that God will lead us in a good way. People like this can escape from imprisonment within themselves. They can escape the unending cycle of biological life, from the alternation of desire and satiety in which the people of Sodom lived enclosed.

Lot comes out of Sodom; i.e., he leaves slavery to the senses and emerges into freedom of the spirit. Only those who leave in this way, and do so without hope of return or without even a backward glance, go forward. They burn their boats and thus lose their lives. But they have found in very truth the way to life. This is the living way, and walking upon it, one will never cease to go forward.

Those, however, who turn to look back, do not consent to let themselves be wholly dispossessed of what they had. They try to keep a tight hold on their possessions. Such people, just like Lot's wife, find themselves fixed in a kind of spiritual immobility. It is a form of spiritual death. Thinking to save what they have, they actually lose themselves.

What gives particular value to the example of Lot and his wife is that they show us ordinary persons. We are not dealing with eminent people like Melchizedek or Enoch. We are not dealing with sages or priests. We are contemplating ordinary everyday people living an ordinary everyday life.

Lot, because he obeys in the end, represents how important all the ordinary virtues are in leading one to God. These virtues are woven into uncountable ordinary lives. These are the lives of those numberless men and women who have known only the interior light of their consciences. Yet they have obeyed.

They recognize in the call of their consciences a revelation from God. In Lot, for instance, holy scripture acknowledges the authenticity of virtues to be found even in pagans. It recognizes that these virtues can lead people to salvation. That is the grace and wisdom of God as it acts in ordinary lives like our own. We can hear God, and we can obey God's grace, and we can come to God. We must only continue to obey God's voice.

*Friday*

## **UNIFORMITY WITH GOD'S WILL**

### **From the Writings of St. Alphonsus Maria De Liguori**

To do God's will – this was the goal upon which the saints constantly fixed their gaze. They were fully persuaded that in this consists the perfection of the soul. Blessed Henry Suso used to say: “It is not God's will that we abound in spiritual delights, but that in all things we should submit to his holy will.” “Those who give themselves to prayer,” says St. Teresa, “should concentrate solely on this: the conformity of their wills with the divine will. They should be convinced that this constitutes their highest perfection. The more fully they practice this, the greater the gifts they will receive from God, and the greater the progress they will make in the interior life.” A certain Dominican nun was vouchsafed a vision of heaven one day. She recognized some persons she had known during their mortal life on earth. It was told her these souls were raised to the sublime heights of the seraphs on account of the uniformity of their wills with that of God's during their lifetime here on earth. Again, Blessed Henry of Suso said of himself: “I would rather be the vilest worm on earth by God's will, than be a seraph on my own.”

During our sojourn in this world, we should learn from the saints now in heaven how to love God. The pure and perfect love of God they enjoy consists in uniting themselves perfectly to his will. It would be the greatest delight of the seraphs to pile up sand on the seashore or to pull weeds in the garden for all eternity, if they found out such was God's will. Our Lord himself teaches us to ask to do the will of God on earth as the saints do in heaven: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Because David fulfilled all his wishes, God called him a man after his own heart: “I have found David, a man according to my own heart, who shall do all my will.” David was always ready to embrace the divine will, as he frequently protested: “My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready.” He asked God for one thing alone – to teach him to do His will: “Teach me to do Thy will.”

A single act of uniformity with the divine will suffices to make a saint. Behold, while Saul was persecuting the Church, God enlightened him and converted him. What does Saul do? What does he say? Nothing else but to offer himself to do God's will: “What wilt Thou have me to do?” In return, the Lord calls him a vessel of election, “to carry My name before the Gentiles.” Absolutely true – because he who gives his will to God gives him everything. He who gives his goods in alms, his blood in scourgings, his food in fasting, gives God what he has. But he who gives God his will gives himself, gives everything he is. Such a one can say: “Though I am poor, Lord, I give Thee all I possess; but when I say I give Thee my will, I have nothing left to give Thee.” This is what God requires of us: “My son, give me thy heart.” Saint Augustone's comment was: “There is nothing more pleasing we can offer God than to say to him: 'Possess thyself of us'.” We cannot offer God anything more pleasing than to say: “Take, Lord, we give Thee our entire will. Only let us know thy will, and we will carry it out.”

Saturday

## **DOES JESUS' NAME REALLY MEAN FULLNESS OF LIFE**

### **A Reflection taken from the Salesian website**

*"People were bringing little children to Jesus so that he would touch them. The disciples scolded them, but when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them: Let the little children come to me; do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs."*

What does Jesus' name stand for? It stands for salvation, which means "well-being" or "fullness of life". So when Jesus tells us to let the children come to him, he means "let them have life and have it to the full". But many children in our world have no opportunity even to grow up. It is estimated that 11 million children die of disease and starvation each year. That doesn't include those who are injured in wars or abused sexually and maimed psychologically.

About 150 years ago, Don Bosco realized that his world was in a similar situation. In Italy, too many young people lacked the opportunity to know the fullness of life. In 1841, he began to work among the young people of Turin. He wanted street children to (a) have a home where they were welcomed, (b) have a playground, (c) have a school that educated them for life, and (d) have a church that would evangelize them. Today, there are 16,000 Salesian priests and brothers, 14,000 sisters and 24,000 co-operating lay persons.

These aren't enough. You are called to help and serve children, whether they are Catholic or not, Christian or not, American or not. When we celebrate the feast day of St. John Bosco, we celebrate this ministry to children. But the only way to celebrate such a day is to give oneself to the same ministry to children. Everyone can do important work. One of the most important of these works is prayer. Do you spend any time in your average day praying for children and those who reach out to help them? There are very many people who work hard daily to prey on children and use them. There must be even more people who pray for them and seek to help them in other ways.

Each of the four aspects of Don Bosco's program can transform lives. It reminds us how great the difference that opportunities for education make. Think about the knowledge that someone cares for you and that you have opportunities to play and enjoy your young life can transform a life. Think of the difference it makes when children actually get to meet Jesus! This last is why the tale of St. Dominic Savio has been so important in the Church. Each of us can be as important as Don Bosco was, and for as many people. Start praying and then take the opportunities that come your way to help in other ways. It is what God calls you to do. Don't refuse to listen to or follow God's call.