

**The Second Week of Easter
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 From the Message of Pope Francis 3 May 2020

Sunday

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN, YET BELIEVE

A Reflection from the writings of Fr. Romano Guardini

And Jesus said to Thomas, "You have learned to believe, Thomas, because you have seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have learned to believe!" Such words as these are really extraordinary! Thomas believed because he saw. But Our Lord did not call him blessed. He had been allowed to "see," to see the hands and the side, and to touch the blessed wounds, yet he was not blessed! Perhaps Thomas had a narrow escape from a great danger. He wanted proofs, wanted to see and touch; but then, too, it might have been rebellion deep within him, the vainglory of an intelligence that would not surrender, a sluggishness and coldness of heart. He got what he asked for: a look and a touch. But it must have been a concession he deplored having received, when he thought on it afterwards. He could have believed and been saved, not because he got what he demanded; he could have believed because God's mercy had touched his heart and given him the grace of interior vision, the gift of the opening of the heart, and of its surrender.

God could also have let him stay with the words he had spoken: in that state of unbelief which cuts itself off from everything, that insists on human evidence to become convinced. In that case he would have remained an unbeliever and gone on his way. In that state, external seeing and touching would not have helped him at all, he simply would have called it delusion. Nothing that comes from God, even the greatest miracle, proves out like 2×2 . It touches one; it is only seen and grasped when the heart is open and the spirit is purged of self. Then it awakens faith... Thomas was standing a hair's breadth away from obduracy and perdition. He was not at all blessed.

Blessed indeed are "those who have not seen, and yet have learned to believe!" Those who ask for no miracles, demand nothing out of the ordinary, but who find God's message in everyday life. Those who require no compelling proofs, but who know that everything coming from God must remain in a certain ultimate suspense, so that faith may never cease to require daring. Those who know that the heart is not overcome by faith, that there is no force or violence there, compelling belief by rigid certitudes. What comes from God touches gently, comes quietly; does not disturb freedom; leads to quiet, profound, peaceful resolve within the heart. And those are called blessed who make the effort to remain openhearted. Who seek to cleanse their hearts of all self-righteousness, obstinacy, presumption, inclination to "know better." Who are quick to heart, humble, free-spirited... Blessed are those who can see the Lord in all these things!

Monday

THE FAITH THAT OVERCOMES THE WORLD

A Reflection from a sermon by St Bernard of Clairvaux

...“All that is born of God triumphs over the world.” For the world hates both Christ and those who belong to Christ, but it is also overcome by them with Christ’s help... The truth of Paul’s words thus becomes perfectly clear: “All those whom he (God the Father) has known from the first, he has destined to be shaped to the image of his son”. Notice the “shaping.” It is after Christ that they are adopted, so that he is the first-born of many brothers: it is after Christ that the world hates them: it is after Christ that the world is conquered by them.

It is right, then, to say that what is born of God triumphs over the world, and thus the proof of our heavenly birth is victory over temptation. Just as the natural son triumphed over the world and its prince, so we also who are sons by adoption emerge as victors. Yes, victors, but only in him who strengthens us and in whom we can do all things. For “our faith is the victory which prevails over the world.”

For it is by faith that we are adopted among the sons of God: it is our faith that the world, submerged in wickedness, hates and prosecutes: and it is by faith that the world is conquered. As the Scripture says, “Saints have conquered kingdoms by faith”. Surely our victory is to be attributed to faith, for faith owns our very life: “The just man lives by faith”. So each time that you resist temptation, each time you prevail over evil, do not attribute it to your own strength. Congratulate not yourself but the Lord. For in what circumstances would the armed and brace prince yield before your weakness? In short, listen to the warning of the shepherd appointed to tend the Lord’s fold: “Your enemy the devil goes around like a raging lion seeking someone to devour. Bravely resist him by your faith”. You see how all these evidences of the truth are in harmony. Paul says that the saints have conquered kingdoms by faith. Peter says that we must resist the prince of this world by faith. And John says: “Our faith is the victory which prevails over the world.”

Next we read: “For who can conquer the world except him who believes that Jesus is the son of God”? Any person, brethren, who does not believe in the Son of God is undoubtedly both conquered and judged through this disbelief. For without faith we cannot please God... If a man is not terrified by Christ’s threats nor attracted by his promises, if a man does not obey his commands nor fall in with his designs, does he really believe that Jesus is the Son of God? In fact, even if he proclaims that he knows God, he denies it by his actions. Besides, faith without works is dead. It can hardly seem surprising if such a man fails to conquer, for he is not even alive.

You ask what is a lively and victorious faith. It is undoubtedly the faith through which Christ lives in our hearts. For Christ is our strength and our life. Paul says: “When Christ your life appears, you too will appear in glory with him”. The source of that glory will surely be our victory. We shall appear with him because our victory is won in him. In short, the power to become sons of God is given only to those who acknowledge Christ, and to these only must we apply the words “Every man who is born of God triumphs over the world.”

Tuesday

VICTORY AS THE FRUIT OF SACRIFICE

A Reflection from The Revelation of God by Fr. Yves Congar

The victory of the Lamb springs from its sacrifice. This is proclaimed in the canticles of both the elders and the angels: "Worthy are you to take the book and break its seals, for you have been slain and by your blood have purchased for God men from every tribe and tongue, and people and nation." "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing".

The Apocalypse in this instance expresses the unanimous theology of the books of the New Testament which unite Christ's triumph and glory with his humiliation and Passion. The Son of man had to be lifted up as the serpent was lifted up in the desert in order that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. "He humbled himself by living a life of utter obedience, even to the extent of dying, and the death he died was the death of a common criminal. That is why God has now lifted him so high and has given him the name beyond all names". But no words more aptly express the connection between the cross and glory than those in the story of the disciples of Emmaus on the evening of Easter Day: "Was it not fated that the Christ should suffer thus, and then should come into his glory?".

The factor that is common to these passages is the affirmation of a conjunction between the cross and the self-sacrifice on the one hand, and the power of communicating life on the other... between Good Friday and Easter Day. Thus in our "new creation", the cross ... becomes the true and new tree of life...

This connection between sacrifice and victory, death and life, seems to me to express a kind of inner law that is natural to life "in Christ." I have been amazed at the constant recurrence of life springing from death, at the foot of the cross, and the cross alone destroys the pride of life in us and releases the energies of that life which is hidden with Christ in God. Trial is the condition of renewal and progress. "For your sake we are killed all the day long; we were accounted as sheep for the slaughter. But in all these things we win an overwhelming victory through him who has proved his love for us".

Wednesday

ROOTED IN LOVE

A Reflection from the spiritual writings of Ancrene Wisse

God has earned our love in every kind of way... He gave us all the world in Adam our first father... He did even more... "Christ," says St. Paul, "so loved his beloved that he paid for her the price of himself." Pay close attention, my dear sisters, to why one ought to love him: first, as a man who woos, like a king who loved a noble poor lady of a far land... Hereby hangs a tale, a parable with a hidden meaning.

A lady was completely surrounded by her enemies, her land all ruined, and she completely destitute, inside an earthen castle. Nevertheless, the love of a mighty king was turned to her so passionately that by way of courtship he sent his messengers, one after the other, often many together. He sent her many beautiful presents, provisions to keep her alive, the help of his noble army to hold her castle. She received it all like one who did not care, and was so hard-hearted that he could never come any nearer to her love... He came himself in the end... spoke so sweetly, and such happy words they could raise the dead to life again. He worked miracles, and performed many acts of power before her eyes, revealed to her his might, told her of his kingdom, asked to make her queen of all he had. All this was no use. Is this contempt not strange? For she was never worthy to be his handmaiden. But in his graciousness love had so overcome him that in the end he said:

"Lady, you are beleaguered, and your enemies are so strong that you can in no way escape from their hands without my help. So that they do not put you to shameful death after all your grief, for the love of you I will take this fight upon myself, and rid you of those who seek your death. Yet I know it to be true that I will receive from them my death-wound – and I wish it with all my heart, to win your heart. Now then, I beseech you, for the love I show you, that you love me at least after this deed, dead, when you would not living."

The king did everything just so: he rid her of all her enemies and was himself cruelly abused and finally killed – yet through a miracle he arose from death to life. Would not this same lady be of an evil sort of nature if she did not love him ever after over all things?

This king is Jesus, God's Son, who in just this way wooed our souls, which the devil had surrounded; and he, like a noble wooer, after many messengers and many presents, came to prove his love, and showed through chivalry that he was worthy of love, as knights were at one time accustomed to do... And for love of his love had his shield pierced on every side in the fight, like a brave knight. His shield, which covered his Godhead, was his beloved body which was spread on the cross, broad like a shield above in his stretched arms, and narrow beneath where the one foot...was set upon the other.

"But Lord," you say, "why? Could he not have delivered us with less pain?" Yes indeed, very easily, but he would not... A thing little loved is easily bought. He bought us with his heart's blood – never was a price dearer – to draw out our love toward him, that cost him so bitterly... After a brave knight's death, his shield is hung high in church in his memory. So is this shield, that is, the crucifix, set high in church in such a place where it is soonest seen, to bring to mind Jesus Christ's chivalry, which he performed on the cross. His beloved should see by it how he bought her love, letting his shield be pierced, his side opened to show her his heart, to show her openly how deeply he loved her, and to draw out her heart.

Thursday

THE FIRSTBORN OF THE DEAD

A Reflection by Geoffrey of Auxerre

He arose from the dead, the first fruits of those who sleep, so that death may no longer have dominion over him who is the first to pass through death to immortality. And he is the firstborn among many brethren, who, dead to the world and dead to sin, by adoption are born to God... By his godhead he is the only-begotten; in his humanity he deigned to become the firstborn, giving to those who receive him the power to become children of God that they may be heirs of God and joint heirs with himself...

He loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. My brothers, we should listen closely to these words, and pay careful attention, because they concern the mystery of our redemption and of our welfare. We must diligently study four matters: the source, the work, the cause, and the means they commend. The source: God and man; the work: our cleansing from our sins; the cause: love; the means: by his own blood. The source's divinity commends glory, his humanity increases our affection. His divinity draws our attentive souls upward; devout consideration of his humanity spreads to all people everywhere so that a person may communicate it to all his fellow humans for whom the God-man deigned to give himself up.

The work is the abolition of our sins, a work possible only to him. The greatest sinners used to say of it: 'Who can forgive sins but God alone?' A difficult work, but of no little effect; a great work, and greatly needed for everyone touched by the stain of sin. Moreover, unless people receive complete forgiveness of their sins while still alive, so that after death they can be expiated by others, unforgiven faults and indelible stains will produce undying worms, so that the unquenchable fire can neither cleanse the stains nor destroy the worms...

During the first years of my conversion, a lay brother named Yves, who was very devout, lay dying at the monastery of Clairvaux. To a brother who was visiting him, one who is still alive today and can bear witness today, he said: 'An angel of the Lord appeared to me, showing me his beautiful and joyful countenance as I lay here in my weakness. And he said, "You humans do well to desire the sight and presence of the Lord. If you knew how much he loves you, how much he wants you, with what longing he waits for you, you would hurry to him with far more fervent affection.'" These were his last words, to which his serene summons, which immediately followed, bore sufficiently trustworthy testimony. But if you do not believe the word of an angel, or the words of a man soon to go to God, believe the works of the Lord, believe the condescension by which the Word became flesh for your sakes. God became a human for the sake of humans. Believe the bloodshed of the New Testament, believe him suffering, believe him dying and descending into hell, 'for love is strong as death, and jealousy as hard as hell'. No greater human love exists than to lay down one's life for one's friends... So that you may realize how exceedingly he loves you, look, he gives a gift you can appreciate deeply, a gift he purchases with the great price of his blood, his death, his cross.

What a marvelous thing, beloved, if we can only keep thus firmly in mind the source, the work, the cause, and the means of our salvation, that this more than threefold cord may not be broken in us without difficulty. If only these thoughts can draw, can entice, can firmly fasten and indissolubly bind and inseparably bind us to our Saviour!

Friday

THE PERIL OF FAILING TO SHARE CHRIST'S LOVE

A Reflection developed from a Sermon by St. Pope Leo the Great

If our hearts don't hesitate to believe what our lips have professed then not only has Christ died and been raised to life for us, but in Christ we too have been crucified, in him we have died and been buried and in him we are being raised up to a new way of life. This last is our third day. St. Paul says, "if you have risen with Christ then seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God; set your hearts on heavenly things and not on the things of earth, for you are dead and our life is hidden with Christ in God."

As people of faith, we know for certain that we have the power to raise up our hearts to heavenly things and to devalue desires that are merely worldly. The Lord solemnly guarantees his presence to us in these words, "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of this world". If Christ is with us there is nothing that we cannot do with him. The name "Jesus" means "Savior". He doesn't forsake us by ascending into heaven. From the right hand of the Father Christ strengthens us not only to endure trials as he did but to love others and serve others as he did.

There are many who believe it is very dangerous to fail to celebrate the festival of the resurrection. It is even more dangerous to fail to live the risen life Christ shares with us and gives us the strength to live with all our hearts. We must not act like fools who have given themselves over to selfish pleasure-seeking or run away from what seems difficult or hard. The earth is full of the Lord's mercy. Christ's victory is available to us everywhere. This gives substance to his promise, "Fear not I have overcome the world". It is always Easter for us as long as we abstain from the old leaven of vice and sin.

If you understand the mystery of God's boundless love and kindness, says St. Paul, and if you realize what the Son of God had done for our salvation, then have among you the same attitude as was Christ's. Even if you are rich you mustn't fear the abasement of loving the poor by giving what you have. If you are of noble birth don't be afraid of doing whatever genuine love requires in dealing with others. Don't consider anything beneath your dignity, for you follow one who took upon himself the condition of a slave for others' sakes. We too must walk in his footsteps. We must learn to devalue whatever would prevent us from loving a brother or sister in need.

Listen again to St. Paul: "Have the same attitude as Christ Jesus. He was God and didn't regard this as something to be clung to; instead, he emptied himself and became like a slave, becoming identical with ourselves as a human being for all to see. In his human body, he humbled himself and became obedient even to a Name that is above every other name!" This is God's call to each of us. Go and do likewise.

Saturday

WORDS OF VOCATION

From the Message of Pope Francis for the 2020 World Day of Vocations, 3 May 2020

The Gospel tells us that in the midst of this challenging journey, we are not alone. Like the first ray of dawn in the heart of the night, the Lord comes walking on the troubled waters to join the disciples; he invites Peter to come to him on the waves, saves him when he sees him sinking and, once in the boat, makes the winds die down.

The first word of vocation, then, is gratitude. Taking the right course is not something we do on our own, nor does it depend solely on the road we choose to travel. How we find fulfillment in life is more than a decision we make as isolated individuals; above all else, it is a response to a call from on high. The Lord points out our destination on the opposite shore and he grants us the courage to board the boat. In calling us, he becomes our helmsman; he accompanies and guides us; he prevents us from running aground on the shoals of indecision and even enables us to walk on surging waters.

When the disciples see Jesus walking towards them on the sea, they first think that he is a ghost and are filled with fear. Jesus immediately reassures them with words that should constantly accompany our lives and our vocational journey: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear" (Jn 6:20). This, then, is the second word I wish to offer you: encouragement.

What frequently hinders our journey, our growth, our choosing the road the Lord is marking out for us, are certain "ghosts" that trouble our hearts. When we are called to leave safe shores and embrace a state of life – like marriage, ministerial priesthood, consecrated life – our first reaction is often from the "ghost of disbelief". Surely, this vocation is not for me! Can this really be the right path? Is the Lord really asking me to do this?

The Lord knows that a fundamental life choice calls for courage. He knows the questions, doubts and difficulties that toss the boat of our heart, and so he reassures us: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear!" We know in faith that he is present and comes to meet us, that he is ever at our side even amid stormy seas. This knowledge sets us free from that lethargy which I have called "sweet sorrow" (*Letter to Priests, 4 August 2019*), the interior discouragement that holds us back from experiencing the beauty of our vocation.

As we live out our specific vocation, those headwinds can wear us down. Here I think of all those who have important responsibilities in civil society, spouses whom I like to refer to – not without reason – as "courageous", and in a particular way those who have embraced the consecrated life or the priesthood. I am conscious of your hard work, the sense of isolation that can at times weigh upon your hearts, the risk of falling into a rut that can gradually make the ardent flame of our vocation die down, the burden of the uncertainty and insecurity of the times, and worry about the future. Take heart, do not be afraid! Jesus is at our side, and if we acknowledge him as the one Lord of our lives, he will stretch out his hand, take hold of us and save us.

Even amid the storm-tossed waters, then, our lives become open to praise. This is the last of our vocation words, and it is an invitation to cultivate the interior disposition of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Grateful that the Lord gazed upon her, faithful amid fear and turmoil, she courageously embraced her vocation and made of her life an eternal song of praise to the Lord.

May the Virgin Mary accompany us and intercede for us.