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Sunday

THEY RECOGNIZED JESUS AT THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD **A Reflection from an unknown Twelfth century author**

Their eyes were opened, and they knew him when he broke the bread. When bread is broken, it is in a way diminished, or “emptied.” By breaking, understand the virtue of humility by which Christ, even he who is the bread of life, broke, diminished, and emptied himself. And by emptying, himself he gave us knowledge of himself.

The hidden Wisdom of the Father, and a treasure whole and concealed – what use are they? Break your bread for the hungry, Lord, the bread that is yourself, so that human eyes may be opened, and it may not be regarded as a sin for us to long to be like you, knowing good and evil. Let him who from the beginning wished to strive after or grope for you in your undiminished state, know you through the breaking of bread.

Break yourself that we may learn to break our own selves, for you are not known through the breaking of bread. Balaam heard words of God and saw visions of the Almighty, but he fell with open eyes because he did not know the Lord through the breaking of bread. It is the same today: you see many studying the Scriptures, teaching in their words. With words they claim to have a knowledge of God, but with their deeds they deny it, because God cannot be known except through the breaking of bread.

And in fact, the Lord became our bread, and we are his bread. He condescended to eat his bread with sweat on his brow, so that we might eat with joy. If you want to know him, break yourself as he did, because anyone who claims to abide in Christ ought to live as he lived. The kingdom of God lies not in words, but in power.

Break yourself, then, by the labor of obedience, by the humiliation of repentance. Bear in your body the marks of Jesus Christ by accepting the condition of a servant, not of a superior. And when you have emptied yourself, you will know the Lord through the breaking of bread. True humility opens our eyes, “breaking” and diminishing the other virtues which might blind us with a spirit of pride, and teaching us that of ourselves we are nothing. And when we humble ourselves by self-contempt, so much the more do we grow in the knowledge of God.

Monday

THE TRUE BREAD FROM HEAVEN

A Reflection from the treatise On Prayer by Origen

[Jesus] says, "My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world". The true bread is He who nourishes the true Man, made in the image of God; and the one who has been nourished by it will come to be in the likeness of Him who Created him. And what is more nourishing to the soul than the Word, or what is more honorable than the Wisdom of God to the mind that holds it? What more rightly corresponds to a rational nature than truth?

But if someone objects to this and says that He would not have taught us to ask for "daily bread" if He meant something else, let him hear that even in the Gospel according to John sometimes He speaks about it as though it were something other than Himself, and sometimes as though He were Himself "bread." An example of the first is, "Moses gave you bread from heaven, not the true bread, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven". An example of referring it to Himself is what he says to those who said to him, "Give us this bread always": "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst."

Now, all food is called "bread" in Scripture, as is clear from what is written about Moses, "For forty days I neither ate bread nor drank water". How manifold and varying, then, is the nourishing Word, since not everyone can be nourished by the solid and vigorous food of divine teachings. That is why, when He wishes to offer food for an athlete, suitable for the more perfect, He says, "The bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh", and a little further on, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is true food". This is the "True food," the "flesh" of Christ, existing as the Word become flesh... And when we eat and drink Him, He also has dwelt in us.

Just as the corporeal bread distributed to the body of the person to be nourished goes into his being, so also "the living bread which came down from heaven" and is distributed to the mind and the soul gives a share in its own power to the person who provides himself with food from it. And thus the bread we ask will be "daily" in the sense that it will be "for our being."... It procures at one time health, vigor, and strength to the soul; and since the Word of God is immortal, it shares its own immortality with the one who eats it.

Tuesday

THE ENTOMBMENT AND RESURRECTION

A Reflection from the Meditations of St. Anselm

... Leave not Mary Magdalene, but court her society, help her to prepare the spices, and come with her betimes to the Lord's sepulchre. O, may you merit to see with the eye of the soul, as she did by bodily vision, now an angel sitting on the stone which he had rolled away from the door of the monument; and now again, within the monument, two, one at the head, and one at the feet, preaching the Resurrection and its glories; and yet again Jesus Himself, refreshing the sad and tearful Magdalene with eyes so gentle, and saying with voice so sweet, 'Mary.' At this word, all the cataracts of her soul are broken loose, and tears are distilled from her very marrow, and sighs and sobs from her heart's inmost recess. 'Mary.' O happy thou! What were thy thoughts, thy heart, thy soul, when, in answer to this word, flinging thyself at His Feet, and greeting Him in return, thou sayest 'Rabboni!' What were the emotions, what the yearnings, what the ardours of thy soul, when thou sayest 'Rabboni'? Tears prevent more, emotion chokes thy voice, and excess of love absorbs every sense of mind and body.

But why, my dear Jesus, dost Thou drive me, loving Thee as I do, from Thy sacred and so longed-for Feet? 'Touch Me not,' Thou sayest. Why, O Lord, why? Why may I not touch those all-desired Feet of Thine, that were burrowed through with nails and drenched with Blood? Why may I not touch them and caress them with a thousand kisses? What! Is He less my Friend now that He is more glorious? See, I will not let Thee go; I will not leave Thee; I will not spare my tears; my heart shall break with sighs and sobs unless I touch Thee. But He says, 'Touch Me not.' This blessing shall not be refused thee, though it be delayed; go only, and tell My brethren that I have risen again. She ran quickly, wishing to return quickly; she returns, but not alone; there are other women with her. And Jesus goes to meet them, and with gentlest greeting raises them from their dejection and consoles their sorrow. And see, what was deferred before is granted now. For 'they came up, and took hold of His Feet, and worshipped Him'. Linger here, virgin, as long as you can, and neither let sleep break in upon your joys, nor any exterior distraction interrupt it.

Wednesday

THE BRIDEGROOM HAS RENEWED THE INVITATION

From the Letters of Blessed Maria Gabriella and her abbess Mother Maria Pia

(Letter One - Easter, 1939) Dearest Mamma, I write these lines to send you my last thoughts and my last farewell. The Divine Bridegroom has renewed the invitation, and the longed-for day approaches. I do not say the day of my death, but the day when, loosed from the bands of this miserable flesh, I can finally move on from this life to the happy and blessed life of heaven. The separation from the body is not a death but a transition to real life. Rejoice, oh my Mother, because there will be no more enclosure, and I, although you will not see me, I will come and visit you and hug you so much, as my love for you grows more and more. Be at peace because up there I will be much more useful to you than I could be here; there I will see clearly all your needs, and I will intercede more with the Lord...

I wish indeed that the same day you receive the news, you will all go to Mass and Communion and pray for me and thank the Lord very much for the graces he has given me and for his predilections in my regard... I still recommend that you remain tranquil and happy in the Lord. Pray for me and commend me to the prayers of our relatives and acquaintances, to whom I am sending with you my final greeting. One last time, I ask everyone for forgiveness for any offenses that I may have caused. I embrace you tightly in the heart of Jesus, together with all the family. Always your daughter, Sister Maria Gabriella

(Letter Two - Wednesday, April 26, 1939) Dear Mrs. Sagheddu, How much you must have waited for this letter from me! With it comes the last letter written by your daughter, who wrote it according to my advice, and she agreed that I would send it to you after her passage to the heavenly kingdom.

For Thursday the twentieth, Mother Maria Gabriella had a significant worsening. Already since Easter we were keeping vigil with her at night, even though she did not want to disturb us... Her body of twenty-five years and two months, fought with strong resistance. But she was suffering with such docility and resignation. Consenting to acts of acceptance, love, and offering that we suggested to her, Saturday night seemed to be her last, but she was fully conscious. She asked with that small voice that was soon clear, "Communion, if possible, if possible." It was brought to her again as Viaticum. She recovered a bit... But we remained all night, the nurse, two sisters, and I... and the Father Chaplain, who wanted to stay, despite his advanced age, not wishing to leave her without accompanying her to the last breath... That Saturday...all during the night she suffered greatly, indeed, like a lamb...

At half past five, very tranquilly, she ceased to breathe. She lowered her eyelids, as if she were unable to speak, to say, "Yes." Then she raised her eyelids again. She was already with her Lord, whom she loved so much that she offered the sacrifice of her young life for the union of the separated churches. It was Good Shepherd Sunday, and the gospel spoke thus: "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also." Signora, cry pure tears: you are her Mother. But give thanks, give thanks to the Lord. Yesterday we had the burial ceremony... Now she rests in the tomb of the monastery, which is located under the presbytery, and her coffin is placed, just below the altar... I will send you a rosary that when she was sick, I put into her hands, saying that I would later send it to her mother. "Thank you," she replied gratefully... May Jesus bless you... Sister Maria Pia, o.c.r.

Thursday

THE LIVING BREAD

A Reflection from the Homily of Pope Francis on 7 May 2019

In the Gospel, a crowd had gathered around Jesus. They had just seen the multiplication of the loaves; it was one of those events that remained etched in the mind and heart of the first community of disciples. There had been a party: a feast that showed God's superabundant generosity and concern for his children, who became brothers and sisters in the sharing of bread. Let us imagine for a moment that crowd. Something had changed. For a few moments, those thirsting and silent people who followed Jesus in search of a word were able to touch with their hands and feel in their bodies the miracle of a fraternity capable of satisfying superabundantly.

The Lord came to give life to the world. He always does so in a way that defies the narrowness of our calculations, the mediocrity of our expectations, and the superficiality of our rationalizations. A way that questions our viewpoints and our certainties, while inviting us to move to a new horizon, enabling us to view reality differently. He is the living Bread come down from heaven, who tells us: "Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst". All those people discovered that hunger for bread has other names too: hunger for God, hunger for fraternity, hunger for encounter, and a shared feast.

We have become accustomed to eating the stale bread of disinformation and ending up as prisoners of dishonor, labels, and ignominy. We thought that conformism would satisfy our thirst, yet we ended up drinking only indifference and insensitivity. We fed ourselves on dreams of splendor and grandeur, and ended up consuming distraction, insularity, and solitude. We gorged ourselves on networking and lost the taste of fraternity. We looked for quick and safe results, only to find ourselves overwhelmed by impatience and anxiety. As prisoners of a virtual reality, we lost the taste and flavor of the truly real.

Let us not be afraid to say it clearly: Lord, we are hungry. We are hungry, Lord, for the bread of your word, which can open up our insularity and our solitude. We are hungry, Lord, for an experience of fraternity in which indifference, dishonor, and ignominy will not fill our tables or take pride of place in our homes. We are hungry, Lord, for encounters where your word can raise hope, awaken tenderness, and sensitize the heart by opening paths of transformation and conversion.

We are hungry, Lord, to experience, like that crowd, the multiplication of your mercy, which can break down our stereotypes and communicate the Father's compassion for each person, especially those for whom no one cares: the forgotten or despised. Let us not be afraid to say it clearly: we are hungry for bread, Lord: the bread of your word, the bread of fraternity. In every Eucharist, the Lord breaks and shares himself. He invites us to break and share ourselves with him, and to be part of that miraculous multiplication that desires to reach out and touch, with tenderness and compassion, every corner of this city, this country, and this land.

Friday

THE STORY OF THE CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL **A Reflection from the Franciscan Media website**

Saint Paul's entire life can be explained in terms of one experience—his meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus. In an instant, he saw that all the zeal of his dynamic personality was being wasted, like the strength of a boxer swinging wildly. Perhaps he had never seen Jesus, who was only a few years older. But he had acquired a zealot's hatred of all Jesus stood for, as he began to harass the Church: "...entering house after house and dragging out men and women, he handed them over for imprisonment" (Acts 8:3b). Now he himself was "entered," possessed, all his energy harnessed to one goal—being a slave of Christ in the ministry of reconciliation, an instrument to help others experience the one Savior.

One sentence determined his theology: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5b). Jesus was mysteriously identified with people, the loving group of people Saul had been running down like criminals. Jesus, he saw, was the mysterious fulfillment of all he had been blindly pursuing.

From then on, his only work was to "present everyone perfect in Christ. For this I labor and struggle, in accord with the exercise of his power working within me" (Colossians 1:28b-29). "For our gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and [with] much conviction" (1 Thessalonians 1:5a).

Paul's life became a tireless proclaiming and living out of the message of the cross: Christians die baptismally to sin and are buried with Christ; they are dead to all that is sinful and unredeemed in the world. They are made into a new creation, already sharing Christ's victory and someday to rise from the dead like him. Through this risen Christ, the Father pours out the Spirit on them, making them completely new.

So Paul's great message to the world was: You are saved entirely by God, not by anything you can do. Saving faith is the gift of total, free, personal, and loving commitment to Christ, a commitment that then bears fruit in more "works" than the Law could ever contemplate.

Saturday

THE FAITH OF ST. MARK

A Reflection taken from discourses by St. Pope John XXIII

I want to remind you of two things. The first is St. Mark's faith; it didn't give up even when others rejected him. The second is his devotion to the Gospel message, traditionally said to represent the preaching of St. Peter. This stands for the treasure of truth that we must guard in our hearts. It is our sacred inheritance, one which our parents in faith bequeathed to us. In this, they showed how greatly they honored it and that they refused to treat it as an embellishment of other enterprises. They taught us to accept it as our basic treasury of wisdom and Christian virtues.

Unlike the many ideologies that come and go during human history, no message has succeeded in giving peace to human hearts except that which calls all to faith in Jesus Christ. People long for the truth about what is good and brings a more abundant life, and they have to avoid being lured astray by various utopias and easy answers. These are only deceit and illusion.

Christianity is not a complex system of oppressive rules, as unbelievers at times think. It is peace and joy and love, and a life that is continually being renewed. Faith works in us like the mysterious pulse of spring. We need to assert this as confidently as the apostles; we need to be as convinced of it as was St. Mark; we need to live it in a way that makes it convincing and attractive.

Only faith can give unfailing meaning and serenity to daily life. In it, we find the source of these things, the Risen Christ. He has set us all free from the slavery that is sin; he invites us to become new creatures with him. This is a joyful mystery that has a meaning affecting every single Christian life in its innermost sanctuary of spiritual life. Its power can make us like the Risen Christ.

Throughout the whole of Eastertide, the Church proclaims the joyful truth: The Lord is risen indeed! Those who were sinners and came to Christ have risen too. Those who doubted or were diffident about their faith, or were overly timid or lukewarm, are all risen. So too those who have been sorely tried and who suffer or are poor and oppressed have new hope.

Those who are rising live joy in love. Love is not only a great spring of joy, but joy draws its zest from love. God loves us and gives everything for us. We are called to follow him. If we love as Jesus loves, we will love others as Jesus does, and we will bear witness to life in Christ as joy. It is joy for the world. When all are filled with joy, who will have time for hatred and violence and injustice? Come to the Lord and find life. This is St. Mark's message to us now and always. Do not forget the evangelizing power of faith-filled joy.