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Sunday

THE SHEPHERD OF THE SHEEP

From a Commentary by St. Clement of Alexandria

In our sickness, we need a savior, in our wanderings a guide, in our blindness someone to show us the light, in our thirst the fountain of living water which quenches forever the thirst of those who drink from it. We dead people need life, we sheep need a shepherd, we children need a teacher, the whole world needs Jesus!

If we would understand the profound wisdom of the most holy shepherd and teacher, the ruler of the universe and the Word of the Father, when using an allegory, he calls himself the shepherd of the sheep, we can do so, for he is also the teacher of little ones.

Speaking at some length through Ezekiel to the Jewish elders, he gives them a salutary example of true solicitude. I will bind up the injured, he says; I will heal the sick; I will bring back the strays and pasture them on my holy mountain. These are the promises of the Good Shepherd.

Pasture us children like sheep, Lord. Fill us with your own food, the food of righteousness. As our guide, we pray you to lead us to your holy mountain, the Church on high, touching the heavens.

I will be their shepherd, he says, *and I will be close to them*, like their own clothing. He desires to save my flesh by clothing it in the robe of immortality, and he has anointed my body. *They shall call on me*, he says, *and I will answer, "Here I am."* Lord, you have heard me more quickly than I ever hoped! *And if they pass over, they shall not fall*, says the Lord, meaning that we who are passing over into immortality shall not fall into corruption, for he will preserve us. He has said he would, and, to do so is his own wish. Such is our Teacher, both good and just. He said he had not come to be served but to serve, and so the gospel shows him tired out, he who labored for our sake and promised *to give his life as ransom for many*, a thing which, as he said, only the Good Shepherd will do.

How bountiful the giver who for our sake gives his most precious possession, his own life! He is a real benefactor and friend, who desired to be our brother when he might have been our Lord, and who, in his goodness, even went so far as to die for us!

Monday

THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

A Reflection from St. Rafael Arnaiz

The other day, everything seemed *dark* to me. My somber life, *locked up* in the infirmary, no sunshine, no light, or anything else that might help me bear the weight that God has thrown down upon my shoulders... Illness, silence, abandonment... My soul was suffering a great deal. Memories of the world and my freedom overwhelmed me... My thoughts were gloomy. I felt no love for God, and I felt forgotten by human beings, with neither faith nor light. My habit weighed upon me... The darkness of the church saddened me... I looked up at the tabernacle, and it had nothing to say to me. I felt *dead* though alive, trapped within the monastery like a dead man in his grave... worse than that, because at least there's rest in the grave...

Such was the state of my soul when I went up to receive the Lord. I had just knelt down and was about to ask Jesus to put my spirit to rest when I felt this very great fervor and immense love for Jesus, and completely forgot about everything I'd been thinking about before, because I remembered these words that *I believe* Jesus gave me at that moment: "*I am the Resurrection and the Life.*"

Why attempt to put my soul's consolation into words?! I nearly wept for joy, finding myself at the feet of Jesus... My hands gripped the crucifix, and my heart longed for death again, but this time *for love of Jesus*, for love of true life and true freedom... I wanted to die on my knees, embracing the cross, loving God's will... loving my illness, my confinement, my silence, my darkness, my loneliness. Loving my sufferings, which in a moment of light, with a little spark of love for God... are so quickly forgotten.

...And so everything began to fade away in the light of the infinite goodness of a God who would lean down toward me to say, "Why are you suffering?... I am your health... I am the Life... What are you searching for here?" Oh, good Jesus... if only people knew what it means to love You on the cross!... If only they had any idea what it means to renounce everything for Your sake! What a joy it is to live without a will of one's own. What a great treasure it is to be no one and nothing... to be the very last... What a great treasure Jesus' cross is, and how wonderful it is to live in its embrace... Lord, I want to love Your cross madly... do not permit me to be parted from it.

This is my life as a Cistercian oblate... to suffer, to endure, and to love with abandon everything that God in His infinite goodness wishes to send me... He is the one who is doing it, and if my consolation comes from Him... so too does my pain... How could we not love the one who does it all for our own good? How could we not go mad with joy upon realizing that God is the one who sends us our cross? How could we not adore that blessed cross until our dying day, knowing that it is our only health, resurrection, and life?... All I can say is that I have found true happiness in loving the cross of Christ. I am happy, completely happy, more than anyone could ever imagine, when I embrace the bloodstained cross and realize that Jesus loves me despite my misery, my negligence, and my sins, as does Mary. But I am of no importance... God alone.

Tuesday

ATTITUDES THAT PREVENT US FROM KNOWING CHRIST

From the Homily of Pope Francis, Tuesday, 5 May 2020

Jesus was in the temple. It was close to the Feast of the Dedication (cf. Jn 10:22-30). During that time the Jews, too, “gathered round him and said to him, ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly’” (v. 24). They would make one lose patience, but quite meekly “Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe’” (v. 25). But you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep” (v. 26). And this, perhaps, raises a doubt: I believe and I belong to Jesus’s sheep; but if Jesus says to us: “You cannot believe because you do not belong”, is there faith before the encounter with Jesus? What is this belonging to Jesus’s faith? What is it that stops me at the door, which is Jesus?

There are attitudes prior to professing Jesus. For us, too, who are in Jesus’s flock. They are like “prior aversions” that do not allow us to go forward in knowledge of the Lord. The first of them is wealth. Many of us, too, who have entered through the door of the Lord, stop and do not go forward because we are imprisoned in wealth... Wealth is an obstacle to moving forward. But must we fall into pauperism? No. But do not be slaves to wealth, do not live for wealth, because wealth is a lord, it is the lord of this world, and we cannot serve two lords (cf. Lk 16:13). And wealth stops us.

Another thing that prevents moving forward in knowledge of Jesus is rigidity: rigidity of heart. Also, rigidity in the interpretation of the Law. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, the doctors of the Law, for this rigidity (cf. Mt 23:1-36) which is not faithfulness: faithfulness is always a gift to God; rigidity is a security for myself... This distances us from the wisdom of Jesus, from the wisdom, beauty of Jesus: it takes away your freedom. And so many pastors cause this rigidity to grow in the souls of the faithful; and this rigidity does not help us enter through the door of Jesus (cf. Jn 10:7): observing the law as it is written or as I interpret it is more important than the freedom of moving forward following Jesus.

Another thing that does not allow us to move forward in the knowledge of Jesus is sloth. That weariness... Let us think of that man at the pool: 38 years there (cf. Jn 5:1-9). Sloth. It takes away our will to go forward, and everything is “yes, but... no, not now, no, but...”, which leads you to get cozy and makes you tepid. Sloth is another thing that prevents us from moving forward.

Another, which is rather ugly, is a clericalist attitude. Clericalism in put in Jesus’s place: He says: “No, this must be like this, like this, like this...” –“But, the Teacher” – “Leave the Teacher be: this is like this, and if you do not do like this, like this, like this, you cannot enter”. Clericalism takes away the freedom of believers. This is an ugly disease in the Church: the clericalist attitude.

Then, another thing that prevents us from going forward, from entering to know Jesus and profess Jesus, is the worldly spirit. When the observance of faith, the practice of faith, ends up in worldliness. And everything is mundane. Let us consider the celebration of a few sacraments in some parishes: how much worldliness there is!

These are the things that prevent us from belonging to Jesus’s sheep. We are “sheep” [in pursuit] of all these things: wealth, sloth, rigidity, worldliness, clericalism, methods, ideologies, forms of life. Freedom is lacking. And you cannot follow Jesus without freedom. “But sometimes freedom goes beyond, and one slips”. Yes, it’s true. We can slip while moving. But it is worse to slip before moving, with these things that prevent us from beginning to move.

Wednesday

THE SOUL WHO RECEIVES THIS BREAD OF LIFE

From the mystical Dialogue between God and St. Catherine of Siena

...Open wide your mind's eye and look into the abyss of my charity. There is not a person whose heart would not melt in love to see, among all the other blessings I have given you, the blessing you receive in this sacrament. And how, dearest daughter, should you and others look upon this mystery and touch it? Not only with your bodily eyes and feeling, for here they would fail you. You know that all your eyes see is this white bit of bread; this is all your hand can touch, and all your tongue can taste, so that your dull bodily senses are deceived. But the soul's sensitivity cannot be deceived, unless she so chooses by extinguishing the light of holy faith by infidelity.

What tastes and sees and touches this sacrament? The soul's sensitivity. How does she see it? With her mind's eye, so long as it has the pupil of holy faith. This eye sees in that whiteness the divine nature joined with the human; wholly God, wholly human; the body, soul, and blood of Christ, his soul united with his body and his body and soul united with my divine nature, never straying from me... So the spiritual must be the principal vision, because it cannot be deceived. It is with this eye, then, that you must contemplate this sacrament.

How is this sacrament touched? With the hand of love. This hand it is that touches what the eye has seen and known in this sacrament. The hand of love touches through faith, confirming, as it were, what the soul sees and knows spiritually through faith. How is this sacrament tasted? With holy desire. The body tastes only the flavor of bread, but the soul tastes me, God and human. So you see, the body's senses can be deceived, but not the soul's... What she has seen she touches with love and faith. And she tastes it with her spiritual sense of holy desire, that is, she tastes the burning, unspeakable charity with which I have made her worthy to receive the tremendous mystery of this sacrament and its grace. So you see, you must receive this sacrament not only with your bodily senses but with your spiritual sensitivity, by disposing your soul to see and receive and taste this sacrament with affectionate love.

Dearest daughter, contemplate the marvelous state of the soul, that receives this bread of life, this food of angels, as she ought. When she receives this sacrament, she lives in me and I in her. Just as the fish is in the sea and the sea in the fish, so am I in the soul and the soul in me, the sea of peace. Grace lives in such a soul because, having received this bread of life in grace, she lives in grace. When this appearance of bread has been consumed, I leave behind the imprint of my grace, just as a seal that is pressed into warm wax leaves its imprint when it is lifted off.

Thus does the power of this sacrament remain there in the soul; that is, the warmth of my divine charity, the mercy of the Holy Spirit, remains there. The light of my only-begotten Son's wisdom remains there, enlightening the mind's eye. [The soul] is left strong, sharing in my strength and power, which make her strong and powerful against her selfish sensuality and against the devil and the world... See, then, how bound and obliged you are to love me in return, since I have loved you so much, and because I am supreme eternal Goodness, deserving to be loved by you.

Thursday

WHOEVER RECEIVES ME

A Reflection on the Gospel of John by Adrienne von Speyer

When the Lord wanted to institute his Eucharist in the form of a meal, he had to take hunger and satiation into consideration. They are very simple concepts, taken from everyday life, to which the Lord, in his self-giving, imparts a new, infinite, spiritual sense. He wants to express his whole relationship to us in these two concepts. Hunger, then, would be everything that we have to bring to him, and satiation, everything that he gives us. In the end, everyone experiences hunger in one way or another, and one cannot say from the outset that the bad experience either has more or less hunger than the good. And, likewise, everyone is sated, for his sacrifice exists not only for a few elect individuals, but for all... Even the one who betrays him... Thus, the hunger of the world and its satiation by the Lord complement each other.

Food is expected to fulfill its purpose of stilling mankind's hunger. This applies also to the Eucharist, except that in its case, no limits can be given to satiation. Nor can one say when satiety from one Communion ends, and hunger for a new Communion begins, for both are simultaneous. Both... bring the receiver nearer to the Lord. From him stems both desire and its satisfaction. The kind of satiation varies... But the Eucharist, as related either to hunger or to satiation, is always an expression of a still greater love...

Whoever receives me, receives him who sent me. One can receive the Lord as Martha and Mary received him: as the human friend and master, who then gradually reveals himself as our divine Lord. One can also receive him in the sacramental form of the Eucharist, which the Lord himself has predetermined and to which we must adapt ourselves...

Whoever receives the Lord in one of these forms receives God. It is not possible to stop at one of these forms, to be content with the Lord's humanity without going further to God. Whether one is Martha or Mary, whether one receives the Lord in the Eucharist or in faith, one always receives something greater than one was prepared to receive or capable of receiving on one's own. No one knows what he receives when he receives the Lord. He cannot imagine the infinitude that visits him, for it will always be God whom he receives, and God will always be the transcendent One. Our mission in life will always be greater than our life itself. This is because he who we receive and who sends us grows beyond himself into the Father, and through his humanity introduces his divinity, and thus the Father, into us.

Friday

THE VIRTUES OF ST. JOSEPH

A Reflection from the Spiritual Conferences of St. Francis de Sales

The just shall flourish like the palm-tree... The palm has a strength, courage, and even constancy far beyond all other trees... The palm shows its strength in this, that the more it is laden, the more it shoots up and the higher it grows; which is quite unlike all other trees... for the more heavily they are laden, the more they bow down to the earth. The palm, however, shows its strength and constancy, never bending down, whatever load is placed upon it... Certainly, St. Joseph is most justly said to resemble the palm, for he was always constant, persevering, strong, and valiant...

As regards his constancy, did he not display it wonderfully when, seeing Our Lady with child, and not knowing how that could be, his mind was tossed with distress, perplexity, and trouble? Yet, despite all, he never complained, he was never harsh or ungracious towards his holy Spouse, but remained just as gentle and respectful in his demeanour as he had ever been. But what valour and strength did he not display in the victor which he gained over the two greatest enemies of man, the devil and the world? And that by the practice of a most perfect humility... throughout the whole course of his life... We may, therefore, well say: "Valiant and strong is the man who, like St. Joseph, perseveres in humility; he will be conqueror at once of the devil and of the world, which is full of ambition, vanity, and pride."

As regards perseverance, which overcomes that secret enemy of our souls, weariness and dejection under the continued assaults of humbling, painful circumstances... how greatly was the Saint tried in this way by God and man in his journey into Egypt! The Angel commanded him to set forth immediately and to take Our Lady and the Holy Child into that country. Instantly, without a moment's delay, without even a word, he obeys. He does not ask: "Where shall I go? What road shall I take? How shall we be fed?... With his tools on his back, so that he may earn his poor livelihood and that of his family in the sweat of his brow, he sets forth on his journey..."

God wills that he should be always poor... And what poverty – despised, rejected, needy poverty! That voluntary poverty, which is one of the vows of religious, is very mild... forbidding and depriving them only of superfluities. But the poverty of St. Joseph, of Our Lord and of Our Lady, was not like this, for although it too was voluntary, and although they loved it dearly, it was nevertheless abject, mean, despised, and most needy; for everyone looked upon this Saint as a poor carpenter. Though he toiled with the most affectionate zeal for the support of his little family, yet he could not earn enough to prevent their wanting many necessary things. Then, as the years went on, and his poverty and abjection continued, he still submitted always most humbly to the will of God. He never allowed himself to be conquered or subdued by dejection of mind, which yet, no doubt, constantly attacked him, but always increased and grew in more perfect submission as in all other virtues...

St. Joseph is, then, undoubtedly in heaven in body and soul... If we have confidence in him, he will obtain for us growth in all virtues, but especially in those which, as we have seen, he possesses in a higher degree than any other man. These are great purity of body and mind, humility, constancy, courage, and perseverance. These virtues will make us victorious in this life over our enemies, and through them we shall merit the grace to enjoy... eternal life.

Saturday

AS BRIGHTNESS FROM LIGHT

A Reflection taken from the Expositio Fidei by St. Athanasius

We believe in one Unbegotten God, Father Almighty, maker of all things both visible and invisible, that has His being from Himself. And in one Only-begotten Word, Wisdom, Son, begotten of the Father without beginning and eternally; word not pronounced... nor an effluence of the Perfect, nor a dividing of the impassible Essence, nor an issue; but absolutely perfect Son, living and powerful, the true Image of the Father, equal in honour and glory. For this, he says, 'is the will of the Father, that as they honour the Father, so they may honour the Son also': very God of very God... For all things which the Father rules and sways, the Son rules and sways likewise: wholly from the Whole, being like the Father as the Lord says, 'he that has seen Me has seen the Father'.

But He was begotten ineffably and incomprehensibly, for 'who shall declare his generation?'... no one can. Who, when at the consummation of the ages, He had descended from the bosom of the Father, took from the undefiled Virgin Mary our humanity... delivered of His own will to suffer for us, as the Lord saith: 'No man takes My life from Me. I have power to lay it down, and have power to take it again... He was crucified and died for us, and rose from the dead, and was taken up into the heavens, having been created as the beginning of ways for us, when on earth He showed us light from out of darkness, salvation from error, life from the dead, an entrance to paradise, from which Adam was cast out, and into which he again entered by means of the thief, as the Lord said, 'This day shall you be with Me in paradise'...

We believe, likewise, also in the Holy Spirit that searches all things, even the deep things of God... But the Holy Spirit, being that which proceeds from the Father, is ever in the hands of the Father Who sends and of the Son Who conveys Him, by Whose means He filled all things. The Father, possessing His existence from Himself, begot the Son... and did not create Him, as a river from a well and as a branch from a root, and as brightness from a light, things which nature knows to be indivisible; through whom to the Father be glory and power and greatness before all ages, and unto all the ages of the ages. Amen.