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Sunday

I WILL ASK THE FATHER

From a Commentary by St. John Chrysostom

If you love me, said Christ, keep my commandments. I have commanded you to love one another and to treat one another as I have treated you. To love me is to obey these commands, to submit to me, your beloved. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor. This promise shows once again Christ's consideration. Because his disciples did not yet know who he was, it was likely that they would greatly miss his companionship, his teaching, his actual physical presence, and be completely disconsolate when he had gone. Therefore, he said: *I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, meaning another like himself.*

They received the Spirit after Christ had purified them by his sacrifice. The Spirit did not come down on them while Christ was still with them, because this sacrifice had not yet been offered. But when sin had been blotted out and the disciples, sent out to face danger, were preparing themselves for the battle, they needed the Holy Spirit's coming to encourage them. If you ask why the Spirit did not come immediately after the resurrection, this was in order to increase their gratitude for receiving him by increasing their desire. They were troubled by nothing as long as Christ was with them, but when his departure had left them desolate and very much afraid, they would be most eager to receive the Spirit.

He will remain with you, Christ said, meaning his presence with you will not be ended by death. But since there was a danger that hearing of a Counselor might lead them to expect another incarnation and to think they would be able to see the Holy Spirit, he corrected this idea by saying: The world cannot receive him because it does not see him. For he will not be with you in the same way as I am, but will dwell in your very souls. *He will be in you.*

Christ called him the Spirit of truth because the Spirit would help them to understand the types of the old law. By *He will be with you* he meant, *He will be with you as I am with you*, but he also hinted at the difference between them, namely, that the spirit would not suffer as he had done, nor would he ever depart.

The world cannot receive him because it does not see him. Does this imply that the Spirit is visible? By no means; Christ is speaking here of knowledge, for he adds: *or knows him.* Sight being the sense by which we perceive things most distinctly, he habitually used this sense to signify knowledge. By *the world*, he means here the wicked, thus giving his disciples the consolation of receiving a special gift. He said that the Spirit was another like himself, that he would not leave them, that he would come to them just as he himself had come, and that he would remain in them. Yet even this did not drive away their sadness, for they still wanted Christ himself and his companionship. So to satisfy them, he said: *I will not leave you orphans; I will come back to you.* Do not be afraid, for when I promised to send you another counselor, I did not mean that I was going to abandon you forever, nor by saying that he would remain with you did I mean that I would not see you again. Of course, I also will come to you; *I will not leave you, orphans.*

Monday

THE LIFE OF ST. ODO OF CLUNY

From the Writings of John of Salerno

It was about the feast of St. Martin, which feast we are accustomed to celebrate with an octave, and at the end of Lauds on the octave day, before it was light, and when all had retired to their beds to rest rather than to sleep, our father, Odo, used to relate that this vision was granted to a certain poor old man. He saw a venerable figure with white hair, wearing a splendid stole and a cope, with a bishop's crozier in his hand. Coming nearer, the figure began to inspect the structure of the monastery closely. When asked who he was and why he was inspecting the building, he said: "I am the one whose octave day the brethren are celebrating, and I have come to visit them. Tell them not to give up, but to carry on with the work they have begun." ... The brethren, therefore, delighted and feeling secure in the promise of such a one, began to give thanks to God with joyous hearts. Who the person was, who saw this vision, it is not for me to say, because it was our father's custom deliberately never to describe his own person. But if anything had appeared to him, great or small, he described what he had seen in this way – one of our brethren, or a certain poor old man, saw this or that.

...Odo sometimes confessed that his means always sufficed both to feed the brethren and to give alms to the poor. Never did a poor man turn away empty from the bosom of his mercy. Whenever I went out with him, he was always careful to ask if we had something for the poor, and if we had all that was necessary, he went on his way happily and without hesitation. And because he gave to all who asked of him, by the power of God, all things were supplied to him. He always had in mind that precept of Tobias: *See that you turn not your face away from that time, and give to all who ask of you...*

When he was on a journey, he used to make any boys that he found on the road sing something, and as though to pay their performance, he would order them to be given a present... He used to speak in this way that we might be encouraged by their cheerfulness, and that they might profit by his mercy. For his words were full of joy, and his speech used to make us laugh with delight. But always holding the reins of moderation in his hand, he would quote that chapter of the Rule which says, not to love much or violent laughter... So he restrained us while his spiritual joy filled our hearts with inward rejoicing. But what can one such as I say that is worthy of him, or what can I relate of such great happiness?... He was like a cornerstone with four faces, angelic and human, bountiful and pleasing, so that that seemed to be fulfilled in him daily, which we read in the psalm: *Acceptable is the man that showeth mercy and lendeth, and again, as the Apostle Paul says, God loveth a cheerful giver.*

Tuesday

FIRSTBORN OF MANY BROTHERS

From a Sermon by Blessed Isaac of Stella, abbot

Just as the head and body of a man form one single man, so the Son of the Virgin and those he has chosen to be his members form a single man and the one Son of Man. Christ is whole and entire, head and body, say the Scriptures, since all the members form one body, which with its head is one Son of Man, and he with the Son of God is one Son of God, who himself with God is one God. Therefore, the whole body with its head is Son of Man, Son of God, and God. This is the explanation of the Lord's words: Father, I desire that as you and I are one, so they may be one with us.

And so, according to this well-known reading of Scripture, neither the body without the head, nor the head without the body, nor the head and body without God make the whole Christ. When all are united with God, they become one God. The Son of God is one with God by nature; the Son of Man is one with him in his person; we, his body, are one with him sacramentally. Consequently, those who by faith are spiritual members of Christ can truly say that they are what he is: the Son of God and God himself. But what Christ is by his nature, we are as his partners; what he is of himself in all fullness, we are as participants. Finally, what the Son of God is by generation, his members are by adoption, according to the text: As sons, you have received the Spirit of adoption, enabling you to cry, Abba, Father.

Through his Spirit, he gave men the power to become sons of God, so that all those he has chosen might be taught by the firstborn among many brothers to say: Our Father, who art in heaven. Again, he says elsewhere: I ascend to my Father and to your Father.

By the Spirit, from the womb of the Virgin, was born our head, the Son of Man; and by the same Spirit, in the waters of baptism, we are reborn as his body and as sons of God. And just as he was born without any sin, so we are reborn in the forgiveness of all our sins. As on the cross he bore the sum total of the whole body's sins in his own physical body, so he gave his members the grace of rebirth, so that no sin might be imputed to his mystical body. It is written: Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no sin. The blessed man of this text is undoubtedly Christ, who forgives sins insofar as God is his head. Insofar as this man is the head of the body, no sin is forgiven him. But insofar as the body that belongs to this head consists of many members, sin is not imputed to it.

Just in himself, it is he who justifies himself. He alone is both Savior and saved. In his own body on the cross, he bore what he had washed from his body by the waters of baptism. Bringing salvation through wood and through water, he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, which he took upon himself. Himself a priest, he offers himself as a sacrifice to God, and he himself is God. Thus, through his own self, the Son is reconciled to himself as God, as well as to the Father and to the Holy Spirit.

Wednesday

THE 13TH OF MAY, 1917

From the Memoirs of Sister Lucia

High up on the slope in the Cova da Iria, I was playing with Jacinta and Francisco at building a little stone wall around a clump of furze. Suddenly, we saw what seemed to be a flash of lightning. "We'd better go home," I said to my cousins, "that's lightning; we may have a thunderstorm." "Yes, indeed!" they answered.

We began to go down the slope, hurrying the sheep along towards the road. We were more or less halfway down the slope and almost level with a large Holm oak tree that stood there when we saw another flash of lightning. We had only gone a few steps further when, there before us on a small Holm oak, we beheld a Lady all dressed in white. She was more brilliant than the sun, and radiated a light more clear and intense than a crystal glass filled with sparkling water, when the rays of the burning sun shine through it. We stopped, astounded, before the Apparition. We were so close, just a few feet from her, that we were bathed in the light which surrounded her, or rather, which radiated from her.

Then Our Lady spoke to us: "Do not be afraid. I will do you no harm." "Where are you from?" "I am from Heaven." "What do you want of me?" "I have come to ask you to come here for six months in succession, on the 13th day, at this same hour. Later on, I will tell you who I am and what I want. Afterwards, I will return here yet a seventh time." "Shall I go to Heaven too?" "Yes, you will." "And Jacinta?" "She will also go." "And Francisco?" "He will go there too, but he must say many Rosaries." Then I remembered to ask about two girls who had died recently. They were friends of mine and used to come to my home to learn weaving with my eldest sister. "Is Maria das Neves in Heaven?" "Yes, she is."... "And Amélia?" "She will be in purgatory until the end of the world."

"Are you willing to offer yourselves to God and bear all the sufferings He wills to send you, as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and of supplication for the conversion of sinners?" "Yes, we are willing." "Then you are going to have much to suffer, but the grace of God will be your comfort." As she pronounced these last words "...the grace of God will be your comfort", Our Lady opened her hands for the first time, communicating to us a light so intense that, as it streamed from her hands, its rays penetrated our hearts and the innermost depths of our souls, making us see ourselves in God, Who was that light, more clearly than we see ourselves in the best of mirrors. Then, moved by an interior impulse that was also communicated to us, we fell on our knees, repeating in our hearts: "O most Holy Trinity, I adore You! My God, my God, I love You in the most Blessed Sacrament!"

After a few moments, Our Lady spoke again: "Pray the Rosary every day, in order to obtain peace for the world, and the end of the war." Then she began to rise serenely, going up towards the east, until she disappeared in the immensity of space.

Thursday

WHAT MATTHIAS AS AN APOSTLE TEACHES US

A Reflection developed from a text by Fr. Romano Guardini

What makes one an apostle? It isn't a matter of having special talents, even special spiritual capacities! It isn't a matter of being what is described as "a great religious personality". Personal giftedness, spiritual creativity, dynamic faith, and all such things are not the decisive marks of an apostle. People often think of St. Paul or St. John as exceptional individuals in various senses, but that didn't make them apostles. If it were, what would we make of the fact that Judas was an apostle?

If you consider all these facts in the light of what we know about Matthias, it becomes clear that being an apostle is simply a matter of being called. What counts is that Jesus Christ has called and, in some way, placed the seal that is his choice upon a person. "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and I have appointed you to go and bear fruit". An apostle is one who is sent by God!

What is an apostle's task? It is to bear witness to Christ. As St. Paul says, it won't be the apostle who speaks through deeds and words but Christ in the apostle. One has to be as much like Christ as possible – otherwise, one becomes like Judas. One becomes like Christ by seeking only what Christ seeks. St. Paul makes a clear distinction between Christ's message and his own advice. The Lord's words constrain us to follow them, but an apostle's advice or even commands are only his own and don't require following them as we do Christ's.

To be nothing in oneself but everything in Christ, to be obliged to contain such tremendous contents in so small a vessel, to be a constant herald of a life that is not one's own, is difficult. Something of the trials such a life involves dawns on us when we read about an apostle's work in the Acts of the Apostles.

Listen to Paul and apply the words to Matthias and yourself. "I think God has sent forth us apostles as though doomed to death and as a spectacle to the world, to angels and to humans. We are fools for Christ, we are weak, ...we are without honor, to this very hour we hunger and thirst and are naked and knocked about and have no fixed place to live. We work hard and with our own hands. If badmouthed, we bless those who do it; if we are persecuted, we put up with it. When put down, we ask for help gently. Indeed, we are the refuse of the world and its throw-aways, right up to the present."

Would you want to be an apostle? You would need to love God and Christ far above self to want, let alone fulfill, the requirements of such a call. But then, you are not asked. You are appointed an apostle. You are chosen even though you did not choose on your own.

The only appropriate response to God's calls is to trust in God and God's grace. That alone can enable one to show the living Christ in one's own living. That is how Christ draws people to himself through you. That is what we are reminded of when we gather to celebrate the choice of Matthias as an apostle. He teaches us what Christ has called each of us to do in a way that matches the life God gives us.

Friday

CLOTHED IN THE MONK'S HABIT

An Excerpt from The Life of St. Pachomius

There was a man called Pachomius, who was... born of pagan parents in the Thebaid. He received the great mercy of becoming a Christian... Moved by the love of God, he sought to become a monk. When he was told of an anchorite called Palamon, he went to him to share his anchorite life. When he arrived, he knocked on the door. The old man looked down from above and said, 'What do you want?' – for he was abrupt in speech. He replied, 'I ask you, father, make me a monk.' He said to him, 'You cannot. This work of God is not so simple; for many have come but have not persevered.' Pachomius said, 'Put me to the test at it and see.' The old man spoke again, 'First try yourself out for a while, then come here again'... When the youth heard the old man say this, he was still more strengthened in spirit to endure every hardship with him. 'I believe,' he said to him, 'that with the help of God and your prayers, I will endure...' Then opening the door, [the old man] let him in and clothed him in the monk's habit...

Once, journeying through that desert a considerable distance, he came to a deserted village called Tabennesi. There, he prayed to express his love for God. And as he protracted his prayer, a voice... said to him, 'Stay here and build a monastery; for many will come to you to become monks'. When he heard this and, in purity of heart, discerned according to the Scriptures that the voice was holy, he returned to his father and told him about it. He had to use great persuasion, for his father was greatly grieved, because he held him as his true son... Then the old man said, 'Since I believe this has come to you from God, let us make a covenant between us, that we shall visit each other in turn, you and I, so as not to be separated from each other...' This they did as long as Palamon, the true athlete of Christ, lived...

Pachomius's brother, according to the flesh, who was called John, heard [about him] and came to him... Remembering the promise he had made to God, Pachomius began with his brother to build a larger monastery, to receive those who would come to this life... After this, he went with his brother to an island to cut rushes for mats. And as he was keeping vigil alone, praying to be taught *the whole will of God*, an angel appeared to him from the Lord, just as one appeared to Manoah and his wife about the birth of Samson. The angel said to him, 'The will of God is to minister to the race of men in order to reconcile them to himself.' He said this three times and went away.

He thought about the voice that he had heard and was reassured. Then he began to receive those who came to him. After appropriately testing them and their parents, he clothed them in the monks' habit. He introduced them to the life gradually. First, they had to renounce all the world, their parents, and themselves, and follow the Saviour who taught doing so, for this is *to carry the Cross*. Being well taught by him according to the Scriptures, they bore fruit *worthy of their vocation*.

Saturday

DOES THE WORLD HATE YOU?

A Reflection from a Homily by Karl Rahner

“You must not be surprised when the world hates you”, we are told. If we look at the context of this verse, we find the following: “We are to love one another, not to be like Cain, who belonged to the Evil One and cut his brother’s throat”. We must not be people who hate others because we cannot endure goodness. According to John, love, kindness, holiness, and justice arouse hatred. He assumes that Christians are people who do good works, like Abel. So John thinks that goodness and justice provoke the antagonism, anger, and hatred of the unjust because they cannot endure the contrast with themselves; they want to see their actions endorsed by the actions of others, and they are forced to blame themselves and disavow their actions if they meet someone else whose deeds are just and good, even to the point of loving their evil attackers. So goodness stirs up malice, love stirs up hatred, and justices injustice. Injustice comes to light and is exposed because it cannot bear goodness. Now John says that this must happen to us; he admonishes us not to be surprised when it does happen to us.

Let us be perfectly frank. Can we say that the world hates us? Do we suffer violence and impoverishment for conscience’s sake? To be honest, we are no better off than many other countries; we have our difficulties and perhaps our tragedies, but we cannot really pretend that the world hates us because we are just, because we love those who hate us. Now, if this is the case, are we really what we should be, people that St. John can assume will be hated by the world and who must be admonished not to wonder at that hatred? By this standard of real Christianity, we may well find ourselves wanting before God and our conscience.

We need the light of God, fidelity, and purity of conscience that is able to criticize the self and the world. A staggering task! We must keep asking ourselves whether we are not, in St. Paul’s phrase, too much conformed to this world. We must keep asking whether we do not misrepresent Christianity and give scandal to those who are in search of true Christianity because we pretend to be Christians and are nothing of the kind. May God give us the grace to bear the real hatred of the world with courage and equanimity; and may God give the Church of today and her hierarchy, and each one of us in our own lives, the grace not to make Christianity seem to the world unworthy of credence through our own fault.