

TWELFTH WEEK OF ORDINARY TIME - A

June 21 – June 27, 2026

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From an Excerpt of “The Divine Comedy” by Dante Alighieri

Sunday

GRAINS OF WHEAT

A Reflection from a commentary by St. Augustine

Thanks be to that grain of wheat who freely chose to die and so be multiplied! Thanks be to God's only Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for whom the enduring of our human death was not a thing to be scorned if it would make us worthy of his life! Mark how alone he was before his passing: his is the voice of the psalmist who said, *I am all alone until I depart from this place* -- a solitary grain that nevertheless contained an immense fruitfulness, a capacity to be multiplied beyond measure.

How many other grains of wheat imitating the Lord's passion do we find to gladden our hearts when we celebrate the anniversaries of the martyrs! Many members have that one grain, all united by bonds of peace and charity under their one head, our Savior himself, and, as you know from having heard it so often, all of them form one single body. Their many voices can often be heard praying in the psalms through the voice of a single speaker calling on God as if all were calling together, because all are one in him.

Let us listen to their cry. In it, we can hear the words of the martyrs who found themselves hard-pressed, beset by danger from violent storms of hatred in this world, a danger not so much to their bodies, which after all, they would have to part with sometime, but rather to their faith. If they were to give way, if they should succumb either to the harsh tortures of their persecutors or to love of this present life, they would forfeit the reward promised them by the God who had taken away all ground for fear. Not only had he said: *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul*; he had also left them his own example. The precept he had enjoined on them he personally carried out, without attempting to evade the hands of those who scourged him, the blows of those who struck him, or the spittle of those who spat on him. Neither the crown of thorns pressed into his head nor the cross to which the soldiers nailed him encountered any resistance from him. None of these torments did he try to avoid. Though he himself was under no obligation to suffer them, he endured them for those who were, making his own person a remedy for the sick. And so the martyrs suffered, but they would certainly have failed the test without the presence of him who said: *Know that I am with you always, until the end of time.*

Monday

ON SLANDER AND JUDGING

A Reflection from a commentary by St. John Climacus

No sensible person, I think, will dispute that slander is born of hatred and remembrance of wrongs. Slander is an offspring of hatred, a subtle yet coarse disease, a leech lurking unfelt, wasting and draining the blood of love. It is a simulation of love, the patron of a heavy and unclean heart, the ruin of chastity. I have heard people slandering, and I have rebuked them. And these doers of evil replied in self-defence that they were doing so out of love and care for the person whom they were slandering. I said to them: 'Stop that kind of love, otherwise you will be condemning as a liar him who said: "Him that... talked against his neighbour, did I drive away." If you say you love, then pray secretly, and do not mock the man. For this is the kind of love that is acceptable to the Lord.' But I will not hide this from you: Judas was in the company of Christ's disciples, and the thief was in the company of murderers. Yet it is a wondrous thing how, in a single instant, they exchanged places.

He who wants to overcome the spirit of slander should not ascribe the blame to the person who falls, but to the demon who suggests it. For no one really wants to sin against God, even though we all sin without being forced to do so. I have known a man who sinned openly and repented secretly. I condemned him as a profligate, but he was chaste before God, having propitiated God by a genuine conversion. Do not regard the feelings of a person who speaks to you about his neighbour disparagingly, but rather say to him... 'I fall into graver sins every day, so how can I criticise him?' In this way, you will achieve two things: you will heal yourself and your neighbour with one plaster. This is one of the shortest ways to the forgiveness of sins; I mean, not to judge. 'Judge not, and ye shall not be judged.'

Fire and water are incompatible, and so is judging others in one who wants to repent. If you see someone falling into sin at the very moment of his death, even then do not judge him, because the Divine judgment is hidden from men. Some have fallen openly into great sins, but they have done greater good deeds in secret; so their critics were tricked, getting smoke instead of the sun... If it is true that 'with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged,' then whatever sins we blame our neighbour for, whether bodily or spiritual, we shall fall into them ourselves. That is certain. Hasty and severe judges of the sins of their neighbour fall into this passion because they have not yet attained to a thorough and constant remembrance and concern for their own sins. For if anyone could see his own vices accurately without the veil of self-love, he would worry about no one else in this life, considering that he would not have time enough for mourning for himself, even though he were to live a hundred years, and even though he were to see a whole River Jordan of tears streaming from his eyes...

The demons, murderers as they are, push us into sin. Or if they fail to do this, they get us to pass judgment on those who are sinning, so that they may defile us with the stain which we ourselves are condemning in another... A good grape-picker, who eats the ripe grapes, will not start gathering unripe ones. A charitable and sensible mind takes careful note of whatever virtues it sees in anyone. But a fool looks for faults and defects. And of such it is said: "They have searched after iniquity, and in searching they are grown weary of searching.' Do not condemn, even if you see with your eyes, for they are often deceived.

Tuesday

THE SECRET OF THE PSALTER

A Reflection from the writing of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The Psalter occupies a unique place in the Holy Scriptures. It is God's Word and, with a few exceptions, the prayer of men as well. How are we to understand this? How can God's Word be at the same time prayer to God?...

A psalm that we cannot utter as a prayer, that makes us falter and horrifies us, is a hint to us that here Someone else is praying, not we; that the One who is here protesting his innocence, who is invoking God's judgment, who has come to such infinite depths of suffering, is none other than Jesus Christ himself. He it is who is praying here, and not only here but in the whole Psalter...

The *Man* Jesus Christ, to whom no affliction, no ill, no suffering is alien and who yet was the wholly innocent and righteous one, is praying in the Psalter through the mouth of his Church... He prayed the Psalter and now it has become his prayer for all time...

The Psalter is the vicarious prayer of Christ for his Church... This prayer belongs, not to the individual member, but to the whole Body of Christ. Only in the whole Christ does the whole Psalter become a reality, a whole which the individual can never fully comprehend and call his own. That is why the prayer of the psalms belongs in a peculiar way to the fellowship. Even if a verse or a psalm is not one's own prayer, it is nevertheless the prayer of another member of the fellowship; so it is quite certainly the prayer of the true Man Jesus Christ and his Body on earth...

In so far as Christ is in us, the Christ who took all the vengeance of God upon himself, who met God's vengeance in our stead, who thus - stricken by the wrath of God... could forgive his enemies, who himself suffered the wrath that his enemies might go free - we, too... can pray these psalms, through Jesus Christ, from the heart of Jesus Christ... Insofar as "Christ's blood and righteousness" has become "our beauty, our glorious dress," we can... pray the psalms of innocence as Christ's prayer for us and gift to us. These psalms, too, belong to us through him.

And how shall we pray those psalms of unspeakable misery and suffering, the meaning of which we have hardly begun to sense even remotely? We can and we should pray the psalms of suffering, the psalms of the passion, not in order to generate in ourselves what our hearts do not know of their own experience, not to make our own laments, but because all this suffering was real and actual in Jesus Christ, because the Man Jesus Christ suffered sickness, pain, shame, and death, because in his suffering and death all flesh suffered and died. What happened to us on the Cross of Christ, the death of our old man, and what actually does happen and should happen to us ever since our baptism in the dying of our flesh, *this* is what gives us the right to pray these prayers. Through the Cross of Christ, these psalms have been bestowed upon his Body on earth as prayers that issue from his heart... The Body of Christ is praying, and as an individual, one acknowledges that one's prayer is only a minute fragment of the whole prayer of the Church. He learns to pray the prayer of the Body of Christ. And that lifts him above his personal concerns and allows him to pray selflessly...

In all our praying there remains only the prayer of Jesus Christ; this alone has the promise of fulfillment...

Wednesday

MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD

A Reflection from a Homily by Johannes Tauler

When the Baptist said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord," he refers to the path of the virtues. This path is very straight. And again, he says that he is to prepare the Lord's paths. Footpaths reach the goal faster than public roads. The shortcut across the fields is indeed rougher and may lead one astray, and yet it is more direct than the open road.

Beloved! Whoever would discover the paths leading to the ground, he would take the shortest and most direct way, keeping all his energies to himself so as to be very attentive. For these paths are rugged, dark, and alien to our nature, and only those who are sufficiently skilled can take them. If they are aware of this, they will not be put off by hurdles and hindrances or any other human anguish. Quite the opposite: Everything will point to the ground, beckon, and draw them there.

In the same manner, we should straighten the paths within ourselves, the paths which lead our spirit to God, and God to us. These relations also require skill, and their difficulties are of a hidden nature. At this point, many give up and begin to run after exterior devotions and activities. They are like people starting from Rome and taking the road to Holland. The more they advance, the farther they get away from their destination. And when they return, they are old and spent and no longer up to the tempestuous work of love.

Beloved, when we find ourselves in the tempests of love, we should not dwell on our sins and failings. Our only concern should be that love's work be accomplished. We can be overcome by this tempest even when our hearts appear cold, disinterested, and hard. Now more than ever, we must adhere to love, clinging to it in perfect faith, freed and stripped of everything that is not love. Constantly long for it, put your whole trust in it, cleave to it. And your experience will be as powerful and overwhelming as is possible in this life. If your faith in love is imperfect, your desire will fade away. Love will be extinguished, and nothing will come of it all.

This may seem very hard to you. The devil will allow you all the marks of a spiritual life, but he will do everything in his power to deprive you of love's true witness. He will leave you with all kinds of treacherous love, which many will mistake for the real thing. If they looked deeply into their ground, they would see whether their love was true or false. The one thing necessary is to give access to the ground in order to be able to enter its depths. There you would find that grace which would incessantly raise you up. But we often resist that voice until we make ourselves unworthy to ever receive it again. This is due to complacency. If only we would respond to the glance of grace, it would lead us to find such union with God that we would experience in time the joy that will be ours in eternity, as some have done before us. May God grant that we may all experience this.

Thursday

ENCOUNTERING GOD IN THE DIVINE OFFICE

A Reflection from Fr. Anthony Delisi OCSO

A fundamental “Flame” to pass on to future generations is the belief that God is looking for you and me. St Benedict in his Rule offers us a valid and authentic way of living the Gospel. It is he who teaches us the value of early rising in imitation of Jesus to commune with our Heavenly Father. What do we do when we rise early in the morning for Vigils? We proceed at once to gather as a community for the major work of the monk: the praise of God through the Liturgy of the Hours.

Benedict teaches that the Divine Presence is everywhere and in every single place; the eyes of the Lord watch the good and the bad. But he tells us that beyond all doubt this is true when we celebrate the Divine Office. So, we gather in the early hours to encounter the Divine Presence. God is there, and we are invited to encounter Him. What does this mean for you and me? Are we willing to call this a value that needs to be passed on to future generations?

Why does Our Father look at us? Because He sees in you and me the continuation of that prayer of His Son, Jesus, who also rose early and went to quiet, lonely places to pray. As monks, we are called each day to continue that prayer. What a dignity, what an honor.

St. Benedict outlines in detail the psalms that are to be recited or sung at the Divine Office, although he allows for local flexibility. I have heard monks on occasion complain that there is not enough of Jesus in the Liturgy of the Hours. My answer is that the psalms are a part of what makes a Cistercian monk. The psalms are the prayer book of the church, inherited from the synagogue. If one feels that the Psalms are not Christocentric, then I suggest he ponder the commentaries on the Psalms by St Augustine, St Jerome, and St Athanasius.

The psalms were an integral part of the prayer of Jesus and every practicing Jew. We find the psalms on the lips of Jesus as he was dying on the cross. So, in the way that the Psalms are the prayer of Jesus, the Psalms are the songs of the monk and a great part of who he is.

Friday

ON HESITATION IN PRAYER

A Reflection from “The Commendation of Faith” by Baldwin of Forde

The fact that the righteous are sometimes ignorant of what is proper to ask for is clearly shown by what Paul says to the Romans: "The Spirit helps our infirmity, for we do not know what it is proper to pray for. But the Spirit itself asks for us with ineffable groanings"... The righteous do not know what it is proper to pray for, for when they ask to be relieved from need or tribulation or to have temptation removed, they do not realize [what positive] fruits will come from need or tribulation, or the result of temptation. They do not know what is more useful for them for salvation: whether to have or to lack the things they desire.

Nevertheless, since they have two wills - one which is weak and the other powerful; one according to the flesh which lusts against the spirit and the other according to the spirit which lusts against the flesh - a particular form of prayer has been instituted in which they say to God: 'Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you [will]. This powerful will, which is according to the spirit, and by which we wish to put the will of God before the will which is according to the flesh, is what the Holy Spirit urges and brings about,... inflames our hearts in the fervour of holy desire, and makes us ask for those things that please him and which are beneficial for us...

When we ask God for wisdom, charity, humility, patience, peace of mind - things we should certainly ask for - then even though we know what we seek, we still do not know whether what we seek is the right thing for us to have or for him to give... In such a confusion of uncertainty and ignorance, when the righteous do not know... for what they ought properly to ask, when they have only the certainty of their own weakness and do not have full confidence in their own righteousness, then, even though they trust resolutely in the mercy of God, they still tremble because of their frailty and they hesitate, nor do they hope without fear, just as they do not tremble without hope. But if they so fear, how is it that they do not despair? If they so hope, how is it that they do not relax through such a great [sense of] security? When they pray, they are placed between hope and fear: how, then, do they ask in faith without hesitation? [The answer is that] they do not hesitate in that faith which, in all things and through all things, they do not doubt to be true...

Someone who doubts focuses a great deal of attention either on the power of God or on his will. The man who brought his son to Jesus seemed to doubt [God's] power when, according to Mark, he says: 'If you can do anything, help us and have mercy on us.' Jesus said to him: 'If you can believe, all things are possible for the one who believes. He said: 'Lord, I do believe: help my unbelief.'... The leper doubted his will but not his power, when, according to Matthew, he said to Jesus: 'Lord, if you will, you can make me clean', and at once he heard: 'I will; be clean.' Note that he who doubted only his will received the assurance of his will with the grace of a cure. But he who doubted his power and said, 'If you can', straightaway heard this said to him: 'If you can believe, all things are possible for the one who believes.' In this way, it is shown that the grace of the mercy he sought depended on his faith in the omnipotence of the one whom he had doubted could do anything in his particular case.

Saturday

PARADISO

From an Excerpt of “The Divine Comedy” by Dante Alighieri

I lifted up my eyes; and... I saw more than a thousand Angels making a festival, each one distinct in effulgence and in ministry. I saw there, smiling to their sports and to their songs, a beauty which was gladness in the eyes of all the other saints. And had I equal wealth in speech as in conception, yet would I not dare to attempt the least of her delightfulness. Bernard, when he saw my eyes fixed and intent on the object of his own burning glow, turned his own with such affection to her that he made mine more ardent in their gazing. With his love fixed on his Delight, he began this holy prayer:

"Virgin Mother, daughter of thy Son, humble and exalted more than any creature, fixed goal of the eternal counsel, thou art she who didst so enoble human nature that its Maker did not disdain to become its creature. In thy womb was rekindled the Love under whose warmth this flower in the eternal peace has thus unfolded. Here thou art for us the noonday torch of charity, and below among mortals thou art the living fount of hope. Lady, thou art so great and so availest, that whoso would have grace and has not recourse to thee, his desire seeks to fly without wings. Thy loving-kindness not only succors him who asks, but oftentimes freely foreruns the asking. In thee is mercy, in thee pity, in thee munificence, in thee is found whatever of goodness is in any creature. Now this man, who from the lowest pit of the universe even to here has seen one by one the spiritual lives, implores thee of thy grace for power such that he may be able with his eyes to rise still higher toward the last salvation. And I, who never for my own vision burned more than I do for his, proffer to thee all my prayers, and pray that they be not scant, that with thy prayers thou wouldst dispel for him every cloud of his mortality, so that the Supreme Pleasure may be disclosed to him.

The eyes beloved and revered by God, fixed upon him who prayed, showed us how greatly devout prayers do please her; then they were turned to the Eternal Light, wherein we may not believe that any creature's eye finds its way so clear. And I, who was drawing near to the end of all desires, raised to its utmost, even as I ought, the ardor of my longing. Bernard was signing to me with a smile to look upward, but I was already of myself such as he wished; for my sight, becoming pure, was entering more and more through the beam of the lofty Light which in Itself is true...

Within the profound and shining subsistence of the lofty Light appeared to me three circles of three colors and one magnitude; and one seemed reflected by the other, as rainbow by rainbow, and the third seemed fire, breathed forth equally from the one and the other... O Light Eternal, who alone abidest in Thyself, alone knowest Thyself, and, known to Thyself and knowing, lovest and smilest on Thyself! That circling which, thus begotten, appeared in Thee as reflected light, when my eyes had dwelt on it for a time, seemed to me depicted with our image within itself and in its own color, wherefore my sight was entirely set upon it. As is the geometer who wholly applies himself to measure the circle, and finds not, in pondering, the principle of which he is in need, such was I at that new sight. I wished to see how the image conformed to the circle and how it had its place therein, but my own wings were not sufficient for that, save that my mind was smitten by a flash wherein its wish came to it. Here power failed the lofty phantasy; but already my desire and my will were revolved, like a wheel that is evenly moved, by the Love which moves the sun and the other stars.