

THIRTEENTH WEEK OF ORDINARY TIME - A

June 28 – July 4, 2026

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- Sun
June 28 Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
TAKE UP YOUR CROSS
From a commentary by St. Hilary of Poitiers
- Mon.
29 Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, Apostles
WHEN PRAYER BECOMES WONDER
A Reflection from the Letters of John of Dalyatha
- Tues
30 Tuesday of the 13th Week of Ordinary Time
WHY ARE THEY AFRAID?
From a Sermon by Isaac of Stella
- Wed.
July 1 Memorial of Bl. Junipero Serra, Priest
PUTTING GOD FIRST IN ALL THINGS
A Reflection developed from the writings of St. Junipero Serra
- Thurs
2 Memorial of the Dead
MAY THE VISION OF YOUR BEAUTY BE MY DEATH
From the Spiritual Canticles of St. John of the Cross
- Fri.
3 **MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
Feast of St. Thomas, Apostle
MY FAITH SEES YOU, LORD
A Reflection from the Writing of Bishop of Nikolai Velimirovich
- Sat.
4 Memorial of Our Lady
WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HER?
From Revelations of Divine Love by Julian of Norwich

Sunday

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

From a commentary by St. Hilary of Poitiers

Thanks Christ commanded the apostles to leave everything in the world that they held most dear, adding: *Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.* For those who belong to Christ have crucified their lower nature with its sinful passions and desires. No one is worthy of him who refuses to take up his cross, that is to say, to share the Lord's passion, death, burial, and resurrection, and to follow him by living out the mystery of faith in the newly received grace of the Spirit.

Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. This means that thanks to the power of the word and the renunciation of past sins, temporal gains are death to the soul, and temporal losses salvation. Apostles must therefore take death into their new life and nail their sins to the Lord's cross. They must confront their persecutors with contempt for things present, holding fast to their freedom by a glorious confession of faith, and shunning any gain that would harm their souls. They should know that no power over their souls has been given to anyone, and that by suffering loss in this short life they will achieve immortality.

Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. Christ gives us all a love for his teaching and a disposition to treat our teachers with courtesy. Earlier he had shown the danger facing those who refused to receive the apostles by requiring these to shake the dust off their feet as a testimony against them; now he commends those who do receive the apostles, assuring them of a greater recompense than they might have expected for their hospitality, and he teaches that since he still acts as mediator, when we receive him God enters us through him because he comes from God. Thus, whoever receives the apostles receives Christ, and whoever receives Christ receives God the Father, since what is received in the apostles is nothing else than what is received in Christ; nor is there anything in Christ but what is in God. Through this disposition of graces to receive the apostles is to receive God, because Christ is in them and God is in Christ.

Monday

WHEN PRAYER BECOMES WONDER

A Reflection from the Letters of John of Dalyatha

Understand, my brother, our Lord said to Simon, chief of the Apostles: *I will* give you the keys of *the Kingdom of heaven*, that you may close and open to all whom you wish. And not only to Simon did he give this power, but also to all lovers of the Truth. Now prayer consists in knocking at the door of the Giver; but the one who has entered the Kingdom and has taken possession of its treasures, how can he knock at the door?... He enjoys the good things within, and he is amazed and marvels at the beauty of the Good One. But it would be absurd to say that he is actually praying, for he is utterly inebriated with the beauty of the most glorious Bridegroom... How can such a one prostrate at the door to beg like a wayfarer, while in his hands are the keys of the treasury, to take from and to give; to live and to give life?

But you will say: Why did Simon go up on *the* roof to pray, and why does the great Paul say: Pray always? These Apostles, my brothers, use such things with us which, insofar as they are known to us, are suitable for us... It is *the Spirit Himself* who prays *for* us, says St. Paul. This then is the working of the Spirit and not the stirrings of prayer. As he said: God has *shone forth* in our *hearts*, and his Spirit *searches* His depths and reveals to us His mysteries. We may have wanted to make this prayer ourselves, but the Spirit of Jesus would not permit it because we *have* the mind of Christ to see the mysteries of the house of the Father.

So then they have gone into the place of wonder. They have gained power in the world of visions; the Spirit has united them to the wondrous beauty; they no longer get weary in prayer; they no longer weep at the door; no longer do they cry from afar: "Show us your beauty!" They no longer ask like beggars: "Share with us your riches!" They give because they have received; they share because they have grown rich; they give rest because they are given rest in the harbor of life; they rejoice, and they give joy because they are drunk with the love of the Beautiful One. *Streams* of living *waters* flow from *within him* who believes in me... These waters give life to others and give drink to the thirsty...

But perhaps you will say: "You speak of wonder, but I do not know the power of this wonder." I offer as witness the word of a brother worthy of belief who says: "When the grace of my God is pleased with me and draws my intellect to astonishment at the vision of Him, my intellect remains all the day without stirrings in the place of wonder and when it goes out from there, it prays and earnestly entreats that the light of the concealed One, which is hidden within him, may shine out in the world full of wonder." From this time forward, it is no longer a place of words in which the pen can flow with ink; here a limit is set: silence. Only the mind can pass over and see this resting-place of all the mysteries. The mind has the power to go in and to marvel at the wonderful beauty which is above all and hidden within all.

Thus every prayer which is not transformed now and then into wonder at the mysteries, has not yet arrived at perfection... To these things you will say: "Do not speak of things of which you are not capable; do not say what you have not experienced." Truly, I incline my head in shame, I am silent, and I take refuge in mercy. Help me with prayer.

Tuesday

WHY ARE THEY AFRAID?

From a Sermon by Isaac of Stella

"A great storm arose on the sea." The wind that was against them is the hot north wind from which comes all evil. Well knowing its fury, the soul banishes it by saying, "North wind, be off; wind of the south, blow through this garden of mine, and set its fragrance astir." There can be no doubt that the contrary wind is the devil, Satan who stirs up the depths of the sea, namely, the children of this world, and attempts by instigating frequent storms of opposition to shipwreck the Church. In his power, he disturbs even the mountains because of the bitter trials that overtake them. Where now, I ask, is the Power of him whom they have followed on to the boat, the power that made them boast in their confidence: "Not for us to be afraid, though earth should tremble about us, and the hills be carried away into the depth of the sea?"

By now, the waters, the mountainous waves of the deep, rage and roar, and those mountains of his Church or mountains of the little ship are in a proper panic over the force and fury of the elements. Why have they lost their bearings? Why are they afraid? Their strong Saviour is asleep. Where Christ their Strength sleeps, their fear holds sway, for then the sea's fury rises and a man forgets his faith in Christ.

While Christ's power is inoperative, it is a good thing that fear should dominate; it will in due time force the frightened and their slight and sleepy faith to seek safety with him with whom they should have kept their strength, and far from being afraid could have claimed: "God is our refuge and strong hold amid the bitter trials that overtake us." Instead, they have to beg Christ to wake up and save them because if he sleeps on, they will drown. The best thing the disciples could have done would have been to keep their Master from sleeping; they did the next best thing and woke him from sleep. In place of courage and glowing faith, they had but fear and a confession of need. Love keeps Christ awake; necessity wakes him from sleep. What a good thing it is, nonetheless, to have to make a virtue of necessity!

Seeking counsel and help is indeed virtuous, though not as virtuous as having the courage that prevents fear. So, brothers, whenever persecution rages against us, let us, after the holy Apostle's example, have recourse to Christ. Let us enliven our faith in Christ and awaken the memory of his Passion, that sleeping of his that this sleeping in the boat fittingly refers to. By ourselves, we become either weak and fearful or indulge in foolhardy fortitude; in Christ, we find the very pattern of patience, and he endows us with... virtuous endurance, teaching us true constancy. Separated from him, we are forever failures; joined to him, we are fit for anything; as the blessed Apostle says, "Nothing is beyond my powers, thanks to the strength he gives me."

How true it is that the Lord's eyelids appraise us! When he closes his eyes, the sea rages, everything becomes savagely difficult. May we not be broken! He opens his eyes, all is calm, and it is all smooth sailing. May we not become proud! For when all is quiet, all is safe, may we not become lazy. In foul weather, we must hope for fair, and in fair weather, we must beware of foul. Changes are always going on, and one thing follows another. The truly wise man will be more anxious in prosperity than in adversity, and in neither will such a person grow lazy and surrender to slumber; not for such to either despair or become complacent. So, brothers, with fear and hope for escort, let us keep ever alive in us faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Wednesday

PUTTING GOD FIRST IN ALL THINGS

A Reflection developed from the writings of St. Junipero Serra

Father Junipero Serra was wholeheartedly dedicated to seeking God and helping others do the same. At the age of 17, he joined a group of reformed Franciscans, dedicated to penance, and fasting, and living the Gospel as literally as they could manage. Born and raised in a family of peasant farmers, he was a brilliant student and earned a doctorate in theology. He held the Chair dedicated to teaching the theology of Duns Scotus in the university on his native island of Majorca.

In this period of Church history, almost all orders required their members obey and seek to understand their faith using the theological methods of a famous past member of their order or institute. For the Franciscans, that was Duns Scotus. Serra could have made a career of this. Perhaps he had an inkling that theology isn't faith or the Gospel itself. So he got permission to go to "New Spain" as a teacher at the new university in Mexico City and then got himself assigned as a missionary to a Native American community in Baja California. Except for a few years in Mexico City, he always served as a founder and administrator of missions to the Native Americans.

Serra was very hard on himself. He was compassionate to those who admitted the need to repent. He preached in a way designed to inspire very emotional repentance and turning to God. His age wrestled unsuccessfully with an inability to distinguish clearly between faith and culture, Church and national ways of being church, cultural customs and essential ways of expressing one's faith. He avoided these traps by insisting on the necessity of always keeping one's attention fixed on God and on imitation of Jesus.

He was a literalist about his Order's observances. He walked everywhere because riding was forbidden except to the ill, and he traveled without taking provisions because Jesus said so. He would only use medicines available to the poor – e.g., only letting a veterinarian treat a badly injured leg.

His unshakable focus on Jesus caused him to oppose local Spanish authorities in California who treated Native Americans like Spanish peasants. He cared only about leading people to Jesus. That was why he founded nine missions on the California coast and brought in others to serve them. He found learning Native American languages very difficult and so left preaching to others. He served as a facilitator of the missionary work.

He sought to care for those who had not yet heard Christ's call. His success was modest – for instance, he had the faculty to confirm because there were no bishops in California and was able to confirm only about 5500 Native Americans during his missionary years. But he didn't let his work in supervising missions get in the way of prayer or personal efforts to conform his inner and outer life to Christ. Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all else that is needful will be given you; that was the motto that guided him. When in doubt, look to the Jesus of the Gospels and imitate him. We, too, can do this in every situation and every day.

Thursday

MAY THE VISION OF YOUR BEAUTY BE MY DEATH

From the Spiritual Canticles of St. John of the Cross

The soul is right in daring to say: "*May the vision of Your beauty be my death*", since she knows that at the instant she sees this beauty, she will be carried away by it, and absorbed in this very beauty, and transformed in this same beauty, and made beautiful like this beauty itself, and enriched and provided for, like this very beauty.

David declares, consequently, that the death of the saints is precious in the sight of the Lord. This would not be true if they did not participate in His very grandeur, for in the sight of God nothing is precious but what God in Himself is.

Accordingly, the soul does not fear death when she loves; rather, she desires it. Yet sinners are always fearful of death. They foresee that death will take everything away and bring them all evils. As David says, the death of sinners is very evil. And hence, as the Wise Man says, the remembrance of it is bitter. Since sinners love the life of this world intensely and have little love for that of the other, they have an immense fear of death.

The soul that loves God lives more in the next life than in this, for the soul lives where it loves more than where it gives life, and thus has but little esteem for this temporal life. She says, "*May the vision of Your beauty be my death. For the sickness of love is not cured except by your presence and image.*"

The reason love sickness has no other remedy than the presence and the image of the Beloved is that, since this sickness differs from others, its medicine also differs. In other sicknesses, following sound philosophy, contraries are cured by contraries, but love is incurable except by what is in accord with love. The reason for this is that love of God is the soul's health, and the soul does not have full health until love is complete. Sickness is nothing but a want of health, and when the soul has not even a single degree of love, she is dead. But when she possesses some degrees of love of God, no matter how few, she is then alive, yet very weak and infirm because of her little love. In the measure that love increases, she will be healthier, and when love is perfect, she will have full health.

The soul does well to call imperfect love "*sickness*." For just as the sick is too weak for work, so is the soul, feeble in love, too weak to practice heroic virtue. It is also noteworthy that the soul who feels the sickness of love, a lack of love, shows that she has some love, because she is aware of what she lacks through what she has. The soul who does not feel this sickness shows that she either has no love or is perfect in love.

Friday

MY FAITH SEES YOU, LORD

A Reflection from the Writing of Bishop of Nikolai Velimirovich

My faith sees You, Lord. It is the light and the far-seeing vision of my eyes. It is the sensing of Your omnipresence. It pulls my knees to the ground and lifts my arms toward heaven. My faith is my soul's contact with You. It prompts my heart to dance and my throat to sing. When a swallow draws near, the baby swallows become excited in the nest. For even in the distance, they sense the coming of their mother. My faith is my excitement, for You are coming... If my friend is thinking of me while writing a letter in a distant city, I also dismiss other thoughts and think of my friend. My faith is my thinking about You, which prompts You, all-encompassing Lord, to think of me. When a lion is separated from his lioness, the lion's eyes are distraught with longing for the lioness. My faith is my longing for You, when You are far from me, my Beauty.

When there is no sun, the most terrifying storms lash the sea. My faith is the calming of the storm within my soul, for Your light pours into me and pacifies me. My eyes said to me: "We do not see Him." But I pacified them with the words: "The truth is that you were not created to see Him but to see what is His." My ears said to me: "We do not hear Him." But I brought them to their senses with the words: "The truth is that you were not created to hear Him but to hear what is His." Nothing of all that is created can see or hear Him but only what is His. What is created sees and hears what is created. Only what is begotten of Him can see Him. And only what is begotten of Him can hear Him. A painting cannot see the painter, but the son of a painter can see the painter. A bell cannot hear a bell-caster, but the daughter of a bell-caster can hear her father.

The eye cannot see Him because it was not created for the purpose of seeing Him. The ear cannot hear Him, because it was not created for the purpose of hearing Him. But vision can see Him, and hearing can hear Him. My faith sees You, Lord, just as what is begotten sees its begetter. My faith hears You, Lord, just as what is begotten hears its begetter. The God within me sees and hears the God in You. And God is not created but begotten. My faith is like diving into the abyss of my soul and swimming out with You. My faith is my only genuine knowledge. Everything else is like the children collecting motley pebbles by the lake.

My faith is the only genuine interest in my life. Truly, everything else is a comedy of the senses. When I say: "Give me more faith"--I am thinking: "Give me more of Yourself, O my Father and God."

Saturday

WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HER?

From Revelations of Divine Love by Julian of Norwich

He showed his sacred heart quite riven in two... And with this, our good Lord said most blessedly, 'Look how much I loved you,' as if he had said, 'My darling, look and see your Lord, your God, who is your maker and your eternal joy. See what pleasure and delight I take in your salvation, and for my love rejoice with me now.'... Look and see that I loved you so much before I died for you that I was willing to die for you; and now I have died for you, and willingly suffered as much as I can for you. And now all my bitter torment and painful hardship have changed into endless joy and bliss for you and for me. How could it now be that you could make any request that pleased me that I would not very gladly grant you? For my pleasure is your holiness and your endless joy and bliss with me.'...

And with the same expression of mirth and joy, our good Lord looked down to his right and brought to my mind the place where our Lady was standing during the time of his Passion; and he said, 'Would you like to see her?' And with these sweet words, it was as if he had said, 'I know very well that you long to see my blessed Mother, for after myself she is the most supreme joy that I could reveal to you, and that which most delights and honours me; and it is she that my blessed creatures most long to see.'

And because of the supreme, marvellous, singular love that he feels for this sweet Virgin, his blessed Mother, our Lady Saint Mary, he showed her very joyful, and that is what these sweet words mean, as if he said, 'Do you want to see how I love her, so that you can rejoice with me in the love that I have for her and she for me?' And also, to explain these sweet words more clearly, our Lord God is speaking to all mankind who will be saved as though to one person, as if he said, 'Would you like to see in her how you are loved? For love of you I made her so high, so noble and so excellent; and this makes me glad, and I want it to gladden you.' For after himself, she is the most blessed sight. But concerning this, I am not taught to long to see her bodily presence while I am here on earth, but the virtues of her blessed soul: her truth, her wisdom, her love, so that through these I may learn to know myself and reverently fear my God. And when our good Lord had shown this and said these words, 'Would you like to see her?', I answered and said, 'Yes, my good Lord, thank you. Yes, my good Lord, if it is your will.'

I prayed for this repeatedly, and I thought I would see her bodily presence, but I did not do so. And with these words, Jesus showed me a spiritual vision of her; just as I had seen her low and humble before, he now showed her to me high, noble and glorious, and more pleasing to him than any other creature. And he wants it to be known that all those who rejoice in him should rejoice in her and in the joy that he has in her and she in him. And to make it clearer, he gave this example: if a man loves someone uniquely, more than all other creatures, he wants to make all creatures love and rejoice in that person he loves so much. And these words that Jesus said, 'Would you like to see her?', seemed to me the most pleasing words about her that he could have given me with the spiritual vision of her; for our Lord gave me no special revelation except of our Lady Saint Mary, and he showed her three times: the first when she conceived, the second in her sorrow under the cross, the third as she is now, in delight, honour and joy.