

SEVENTEENTH WEEK OF ORDINARY TIME – A

July 26 – August 1, 2026

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Sunday

SEEK AND YE SHALL FIND

From a Commentary by Origen

To the seeker after the fine pearls may be applied the words: *Seek and you shall find*, and *Everyone who seeks will find*. If you ask what is to be sought, and what will be found by everyone who seeks for it, I say with confidence: pearls – especially that pearl which will be acquired for those who give their all, who sacrifice everything for it, the pearl Paul meant when he said: *I have accepted the loss of everything in order to gain Christ*. *Everything* means beautiful pearls; *to gain Christ* refers to the one pearl of great price.

Admittedly, a lamp is precious to people in darkness, and they need it until sunrise. Precious too was the radiance on the face of Moses – and I believe on the faces of the other prophets also. It was a sight of beauty leading to the point of being able to see the glory of Christ, to whom the Father bore witness in the words: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*. But *compared with this surpassing glory, what formerly was glory now seems to have no glory at all*. We need at first a glory destined to be outshone by an all-surpassing glory, just as we need the partial knowledge which *will be superseded when that which is perfect has come*.

Thus everyone beginning to live a spiritual life and growing toward maturity needs tutors, guardians, and trustees until the fullness of time arrives for him, so that after all this, he who at first was *no different from a slave although he owned the whole estate*, may on his emancipation receive his patrimony from his tutor, guardians, and trustees.

This patrimony is the pearl of great price, and the coming of what is perfect to supersede what is imperfect when, after acquiring the forms of knowledge, if we may call them so, which are inferior to knowledge of Christ, one becomes able to understand the supreme value of knowing Christ. The law and the prophets fully comprehended are the preparation for the full comprehension of the gospel and the complete understanding of the acts and words of Christ Jesus.

Monday

THE SEED THAT FILLED THE COSMOS

An Excerpt from the Reflection of Fr. Simeon OCSO

Ever the good man bringing forth an abundance of good things out of the store of his heart, Jesus is again (cf. 13:24) said to “propose” a parable to the crowds. In this narrative, Jesus creates an atmosphere that illustrates how, as Divine Word, he attracts by persuading rather than compelling. He proposes the piquancy of mustard. The parable is very brief, even though its magnetic lines shoot outward in many directions at once, creating a “tree” of meanings and associations that is a worthy doublet of the tree of the Kingdom of which it speaks. The essential meaning is as plain as it is profound: that the authentic works of God always begin in a very small way; that the divine Presence and actions, therefore, are most likely to be either overlooked as nonexistent or scorned as insignificant; and in conclusion, that for these reasons, the person truly searching for God and his Kingdom must have not only a great desire for them but also equally great patience in order to wait for the full and incontrovertible development of God's work in our midst.

Perhaps for a very long time, we will not be able to tell what growth and fruit will come from the seed. Or we may be deceived by the apparent importance of the greater size of some seeds, falsely concluding that what is at first more striking will necessarily produce the more opulent and lasting product. Only time will allow us to judge; in the meantime, everything is conjecture and prejudice.

While men delight in bulk and ostentation, God delights in what is small and hidden. It seems that in Jesus' mind, the Kingdom and smallness always go hand in hand. “Unless you turn and become like little children you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven” (18:3). This may be because God wants to fill all things with his goodness, and in what is lowly he finds no obstruction. And yet again it may be because smallness and hiddenness in this world best correspond to what God is in himself, so that God, in coming to this world, naturally gravitates toward what is most likely himself: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven” (5:3).

According to Jesus, we are to find the entire Kingdom of the heavens in a mere grain of mustard seed. This grain or *kokkos* is but a fraction of the mustard “seed” itself (*sperma*, 13:32). The mustard “shrub” can in fact grow up to reach some nine feet in height, or even twelve feet near the Lake of Galilee. And both its final growth and its pungency are wholly disproportionate to its initial size. Such a marvel of the natural order suffices for Jesus to make of the dynamic mustard seed a fit analogy, not only for his Father's Kingdom, but also for the act of faith: “If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move hence to yonder place,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you” (17:20). (It is like saying:) ‘Think small; concentrate all your energies in one direction; waste no time in comparing your size to that of others; be persistent in your growth; desire to be nothing but what God has put in your own nature, humble as it may appear. It takes the vision of the Word in whom all things were created to see the greatest magnitude in the tiniest compass, the heavenly in the earthly, and to teach us to see as he sees.

Tuesday

GOD MAKES THE IMPERFECT PERFECT

A Reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

One of the great disappointments of my life has been the painful realization that every religious group or organization I belong to is riddled with imperfection and even failure. Every group is made up of limited human beings, and I'm not the only person who has felt disillusionment at this. There are poor liturgies, uninspiring sermons, sexism, racism, disregard for the needy, abuse of power and authority and even sexual abuse. Yes, there are many who stand against such evils and strive to eliminate them. There is no excuse for such imperfection, evil, sin and even wickedness. Yet these things are found in every part of God's Church.

Jesus was well aware of this. The field sown by God's grace contains both wheat and weeds that look like wheat (darnel), as well as weeds that don't look like anything but weeds. But who is going to do the eliminating? Are there perfect people who can spot the imperfect and throw them out? Besides, who really determines who is bad and who is good? That is Jesus' task and he refuses to do it the way we want him to. What if Peter had been weeded out, or Paul, or Augustine of Hippo, or Charles de Foucauld, or any of the people God has graced with repentance? Until the end of time, the Church will always be a gathering of sinners, as Pope Francis not too long ago reminded us.

In the meantime, how are we supposed to live in this mixed church of so many types of sinners? The Gospel tells us to be understanding and compassionate and kind. The parable of the Sower is coupled with (e.g.) the parable of the Mustard Seed. This tiny seed grows into something so great that all sorts of birds can nest in it! Are all the birds alike? Do all sing sweetly? Do some make messes? Those who want to live in Jesus' Church have to be ready to accept all kinds of people who come seeking shelter and help from him. What he intends is that the community of the Church be life-giving for all. And he intends to create this with all the sorts of imperfect people like you and me.

It is through give and take with selfish, inconsiderate sinners like ourselves that we learn to be understanding, patient, tolerant and forgiving. But we have to let the grace of God work in us and in our living. We have to let Jesus refine and strengthen and purify us. After all, it is God's Church that is destined for the life of God's Kingdom. There "all will shine like the sun". If we want to be of that number, we will have to let grace make us like Jesus.

Wednesday

OF THE FOUR DAYS OF LAZARUS

From a sermon by St. Bernard of Clairvaux

He who is our life hastens to a tomb to lead out of the tomb someone four days dead. He seeks Lazarus so he might be sought and found by him. In this is charity, not that we loved him, but that he first loved us. Come then, Lord, seek him whom you love, that you may make him love and seek you. Ask where they have laid him, for he lies captive, bound, and burdened...

But what of this: Lord, he now stinks, for it is the fourth day? Maybe someone doesn't immediately get the meaning of this stinking and of these four days. I think the first day is the day of fear. By its brilliance in our hearts we die to sin and, as it were, are buried in our conscience. The second day, if I am not mistaken, is spent in strife. It is usually true that in the first stages of conversion, temptation to bad habits rises up more fiercely, and the fiery darts of the devil cannot easily be extinguished. The third seems to be one of grief, when a person looks back upon his life in bitterness of soul and does not so much work for a change of direction in the future as bewail a lamentable past.

Are you surprised that I call these days? But such as these are destined for the grave, days of mist and darkness, days of grief and bitterness. There follows a day of shame, not unlike the other three, when the pitiful soul is covered in dreadful confusion while it looks unceasingly at its sins, considering their nature and magnitude, and under the gaze of the heart it keeps mulling over the disgraceful images of its sins. A soul of this kind doesn't dissemble but judges; it piles up everything...

Therefore, *Lazarus, come forth*. Deep calls to deep, the deep of light and pity, the deep of misery and darkness. His goodness is greater than your iniquity, and where there is abundance of sin, he gives abundance of grace. *Lazarus, come forth*, he says. And if he were to speak more openly, he would say, "How long will the darkness of your conscience hold you back? How long will you weep in your bed with a heavy heart? *Come forth*, advance, breathe freely of the light of my pity." This is what you read in the prophet: *For my praise I restrained my mouth from you, lest you perish*. Another prophet spoke of himself more clearly: *My soul is troubled within me; therefore I will remember you*..."

The prophet sings more plainly in the Psalms about this raising of Lazarus, *You will not leave my soul in hell*, because, as I remember I said on the second day of the observance of this feast, the consciousness of a guilty mind is an imprisoning hell. *You will not leave your holy one* -- not a holiness that is his own, obviously, but yours, the one you yourself make holy -- *to see corruption*. Indeed the fourth day is near to corruption, for he began to stink.

He was approaching complete decay and entering the abyss of evil where the impious reviles. But when the powerful voice comes, and he is brought back to life by it, he gives thanks, saying, *you have shown me the path of life, you have filled me with joy in your presence*. You have called me to contemplate it; *you have led my soul out of the depths* while my spirit within me was troubled by seeing the dreadful face of my conscience. He called *with a loud voice*, says the gospel, *Lazarus, come forth*: in a loud voice surely filled not so much with sound as with pity and great strength.

Thursday

SCRIBES OF THE KINGDOM

An Excerpt from the Reflection of Fr. Simeon OCSO

In this epilogue to his seven parables, Jesus returns from his cosmic tour of earth, air, water, and fire to gaze upon the persons of the apostles themselves. He asks them, "Have you understood all this?" We may render the question: "Have you put all of these things together?" Have we striven to make sense of their unity? The knowledge imparted by Jesus has nothing speculative about it: it comes directly from his person in the form of images and teachings. This suggests that, to God's labor of gathering up and sorting out human destinies at the end of time corresponds the human task of pondering, interiorizing, and seeing the unity of everything Jesus has revealed. But the unity of his teaching is inseparable from the unity of his person as experienced by the apostles. And so what they have come to understand is not so much the coherence of ideas in themselves, but rather, the manner in which all God's past revelations to Israel – in the form of signs, promises, actions and commandments – now converge upon the person of Jesus. Only this Center imparts meaning retrospectively to all the disparate lines converging upon it.

The fact that the Son of God in person is asking the apostles, "Have you understood?" is far more important than the actual content of the parables. Jesus is sitting there in the midst of the apostles as their interlocutor. He is the one Word from whom all true words emanate and to whom they must return as to their element. But it does not stop there. Jesus has the conscious intention of delegating the apostles as special disciples who will work actively for the Kingdom in his stead. He is training them to be scribes who possess an authentic purpose (not like those scribes who limited themselves to a minimalist interpretation of the Law) but to see the Law fulfilled abundantly by the new interiority proclaimed in the Beatitudes. To the disciples, Jesus invites them to grow in a new level of righteousness: the personal sanctity of one who participates in the very holiness of God. This begins with companionship with Jesus, continually requires being attentive to Jesus so as to imbibe his teaching, a constant return from Jesus' words to Jesus himself so as to actualize his teaching in relationship with his person, and finally by making one act as one has seen Jesus act.

Jesus' question, "Have you understood?", and the apostles' emphatically affirmative answer, "Yes!", signal a blending of the parabolic and existential horizons of the text, so that the disciples are indeed recognizing the manner in which the parables' meaning has sunk roots into themselves and is beginning to bear fruit. In them and others to whom they will be sent and will encounter, the Kingdom slowly becomes a reality, parable and life indistinguishable. Along with Mary, mother of the Word, the apostles know that God does not treat his servants shabbily. For to be the Word's intimate servant means to become the occasion through which God continues to give himself to the world.

Friday

CONSOLATION AND DESOLATION

From the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola

In the case of those who go from one mortal sin to another, the enemy is generally wont to set before them apparent pleasures, causing them to imagine sensual gratifications and pleasures, in order to keep them fast and to plunge them deeper in their vices and sins. Towards such persons the good spirit acts in a contrary way, pricking and stinging with remorse their conscience by the judgment of reason.

In those who are striving earnestly to purify themselves from their sins, and to advance from good to better in the service of God our Lord, the contrary to what is noted in the first rule takes place; for then it is the way of the evil spirit to cause anxiety and sadness, and to place obstacles in the way, disquieting the soul by false reasonings, in order to stop its progress; and it is the property of the good spirit to give courage and strength, consolation, tears, inspirations, and peace, making things easy, and removing every hindrance, in order that the soul may make further progress in good works.

I call it consolation when an interior movement is aroused in the soul, by which it is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and as a consequence, can love no creature on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the Creator of them all. It is likewise consolation when one sheds tears that move to the love of God, whether it be because of sorrow for sins, or because of the sufferings of Christ our Lord, or for any other reason that is immediately directed to the praise and service of God. Finally, I call consolation every increase of faith, hope, and love, and all interior joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one's soul by filling it with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord.

I call it desolation what is entirely the opposite of what is described above, as darkness of soul, turmoil of spirit, inclination to what is low and earthly, restlessness rising from many disturbances and temptations which lead to want of faith, want of hope, want of love. The soul is wholly slothful, tepid, sad, and separated, as it were, from its Creator and Lord. For just as consolation is the opposite of desolation, so the thoughts that spring from consolation are the opposite of those that spring from desolation.

In time of desolation we should never make any change, but remain firm and constant in the resolution and decision which guided us the day before the desolation, or in the decision to which we adhered in the preceding consolation. For just as in consolation the good spirit guides and counsels us, so in desolation the evil spirit guides and counsels. Following his counsels we can never find the way to a right decision. Though in desolation we must never change our former resolutions, it will be very advantageous to intensify our activity against the desolation. We can insist more upon prayer, upon meditation, and on much examination of ourselves. We can make an effort in a suitable way to do some penance.

When we are in desolation, we should be mindful that God has left us to our natural powers to resist the different agitations and temptations of the enemy in order to try us. We can resist with the help of God, which always remains, though we may not clearly perceive it. For though God has taken from us the abundance of fervor and overflowing love and the intensity of His favors, nevertheless, we have sufficient grace for eternal salvation.

Saturday

THOSE WHO LOVE GOD ARE ALWAYS HAPPY

From the writings of St. Alphonsus de Ligouri

Alphonsus the Great, King of Aragon, being asked one day whom he considered the happiest person in the world, answered: "He who abandons himself to the will of God and accepts all things, prosperous and adverse, as coming from his hands." *"To those that love God, all things work together unto good."* Those who love God are always happy, because their whole happiness is to fulfill, even in adversity, the will of God. Afflictions do not mar their serenity, because by accepting misfortune, they know they give pleasure to their beloved Lord: *"Whatever shall befall the just man, it shall not make him sad."* Indeed, what can be more satisfactory to a person than to experience the fulfillment of all his desires? This is the happy lot of the man who wills only what God wills, because everything that happens, save sin, happens through the will of God.

There is a story to this effect in the "Lives of the Fathers" about a farmer whose crops were more plentiful than those of his neighbors. On being asked how this happened with such unvarying regularity, he said he was not surprised because he always had the kind of weather he wanted. He was asked to explain. He said: "It is so because I want whatever kind of weather God wants, and because I do, he gives me the harvests I want." If souls resigned to God's will are humiliated, says Salvian, they want to be humiliated; if they are poor, they want to be poor; in short, whatever happens is acceptable to them; hence they are truly at peace in this life. In cold and heat, in rain and wind, the soul united to God says: "I want it to be warm, to be cold, windy, to rain, because God wills it."... The fool, that is, the sinner, is as changeable as the moon, which today waxes and tomorrow wanes; today he laughs, tomorrow he cries; today he is meek as a lamb, tomorrow cross as a bear. Why? Because his peace of mind depends on the prosperity or the adversity he meets; he changes with the changes in the things that happen to him. The just man is like the sun, constant in his serenity, no matter what betides him. His calmness of soul is founded on his union with the will of God; hence he enjoys unruffled peace. This is the peace promised by the angel of the Nativity: *"And on earth, peace to men of good will."*...

The devout Father John Tauler relates this personal experience: For years, he had prayed God to send him someone who would teach him the real spiritual life. One day, at prayer, he heard a voice saying: "Go to such and such a church and you will have the answer to your prayers." He went, and at the door of the church he found a beggar, barefoot and in rags. He greeted the mendicant saying: "Good day, my friend." "Thank you, sir, for your kind wishes, but I do not recall ever having had a 'bad' day." "Then God has certainly given you a very happy life." "That is very true, sir. I have never been unhappy. In saying this I am not making any rash statement either. This is the reason: When I have nothing to eat, I give thanks to God; when it rains or snows, I bless God's providence; when someone insults me, drives me away, or otherwise mistreats me, I give glory to God. I said I've never had an unhappy day, and it's the truth, because I am accustomed to will unreservedly what God wills. Whatever happens to me, sweet or bitter, I gladly receive from his hands as what is best for me. Hence my unvarying happiness."... Union with God brought this poor beggar to the very heights of perfection. In his poverty he was richer than the mightiest monarch; in his sufferings, he was vastly happier than worldlings amid their worldly delights.