TWENTIETH WEEK OF ORDINARY TIME – A
& SOLEMNITY of Our Holy Father ST. BERNARD
August 16 – 22, 2026

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Sun Aug 16 — **Twentieth Sunday of Ordinary Time**
THE CHANGE IN JESUS AND THE WOMAN'S FAITH
From the Angelus Message of Pope Francis 2023

Mon. 17 — **Monday of the 20th Week of Ordinary Time**
THE SADDEST REFUSAL
From the Meditations on Matthew 19:22 by Fr. Simeon OCSO

Tues 18 — **Tuesday of the 20th Week of Ordinary Time**
HARDSHIPS AND REWARD OF DISCIPLESHIP
From the Meditations on Matthew 19:27 by Fr. Simeon OCSO

Wed. 19 — **Memorial of Bl. Guerric of Igny, Cist. Abbot**
ADVICE TO THOSE WAITING FOR CHRIST
A Reflection from a Homily by Bl. Guerric of Igny

Thurs 20 — **SOLEMNITY of ST. BERNARD, Cist. Abbot & Doctor of the Church**
BERNARD'S WIDENING MISSION
From the VITA PRIMA by William of Saint-Thierry

MONASTIC DESERT DAY

Fri. 21 — **Memorial of St. Pius X, Pope**
RESTORING ALL THINGS IN CHRIST
A Reflection from a pastoral letter by St. Pope Pius X

Sat. 22 — **Memorial of the Queenship of the BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**
MARY IS QUEEN – UNIQUELY CONFORMED TO HER SON
A Reflection taken from the General Audience of Pope Benedict XVI

Sunday

THE CHANGE IN JESUS AND THE WOMAN'S FAITH

From the Angelus Message of Pope Francis 2023

Today's Gospel recounts the encounter of Jesus with a Canaanite woman outside the territory of Israel (cf. *Mt* 15:21-28). She asks him to free her daughter, who is tormented by a demon. But the Lord pays no attention to her. She insists, and the disciples advise Jesus to acknowledge her so she would stop. Jesus, however, explains that his mission is directed to the children of Israel, using this image: "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs". And the courageous woman responds, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table". Then, Jesus says to her, "'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly" (vv. 26-28). This is a beautiful story. And this happened to Jesus.

We see that Jesus changed his attitude. What made him change was the strength of the woman's faith. Let us pause briefly over these two aspects: *the change in Jesus* and *the woman's faith*.

The change in Jesus. He was directing his preaching to the chosen people. Later the Holy Spirit would push the Church to the ends of the world. But what happens here, we could say, is an anticipation through which the universality of God's work is already manifested in the episode of the Canaanite woman. Jesus' openness is interesting. On hearing the woman's prayer, "he anticipates the plan"; faced with her concrete case, he becomes even more sympathetic and compassionate. God is like this: he is love, and the one who loves does not remain rigid. Yes, he or she stands firm, but not rigid; they do not remain rigid in their own positions, but allow themselves *to be moved and touched*. They know how to change their plans. Love is creative. And we Christians who want to imitate Christ, we are invited to *be open to change*. How good it would do our relationships, as well as our lives of faith, if we were to be docile, to truly pay attention, to soften up in the name of compassion and the good of others, as Jesus did with the Canaanite woman. The docility to change. Hearts docile to change.

Now let us look at the *woman's faith*, which the Lord praises, saying that it is "great" (v. 28). According to the disciples, the only thing that seemed "great" was her insistence; but Jesus sees her faith. If we think about it, that foreign woman had probably little or no awareness of the laws and religious precepts of Israel. What does her faith consist of then? *She does not have a wealth of concepts but of deeds* — the Canaanite woman draws near, prostrates herself, insists, engages in a close dialogue with Jesus, and overcomes every obstacle just to speak with him. This is the concreteness of faith, which is not a religious label but is a personal relationship with the Lord. How many times we fall into the temptation to confuse faith with a label! This woman's faith is not fraught with theological gallantry, but with insistence — she knocks at the door, knocks, knocks. Her faith is not made up of words, but of prayer. And God does not resist when he is prayed to. This is why he said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (*Mt* 7:7).

Monday

THE SADDEST REFUSAL

From the Meditations on Matthew 19:22 by Fr. Simeon OCSO

From now on, the young man will exude sadness. After witnessing so intimate and penetrating a dialogue between him and Jesus, we suddenly find ourselves desperate to understand his final choice of refusal. Christ fully reciprocated the youth's ardor with everything an incarnate God has to give; but the rich young man found Christ to be too much for him, too "jealous" in demanding his total person, or perhaps not living up fully to the youth's worldly standards of worth. The twelfth verb predicated of the young man, the passive voice, is "aggrieved" or "worked over by sorrow" as an intense, ongoing process. He heard the logos, not the last statement made by Jesus but Jesus himself as Logos. The embodied Word of God has wounded his heart in this encounter, and he will never recover. His condition will be one of permanent, active grief generated by his consciousness of the irreplaceable relationship he will now always lack and for which he will keenly ache.

The dynamic intensity of his grieving could be the wound by which God enters. His silence and momentary passivity, his new ability to be affected deeply, could point in this direction. He does not go away triumphantly, disappointed in Jesus. He goes away disappointed in himself, deeply troubled at his refusal. Perhaps his very sadness will act as a continual antidote to the seductions of this world's claim on him, and will hold him in suspense for a further approach of Grace. In any event, he will embody the truth of Gustave Thibon's aphorism: "Unlike the hunger of the body, the hunger of the soul can be nourished only by more hunger."

We do not know the young man's ultimate fate. The text deliberately leaves us in suspense. The anxiety its ending generates is intended to provoke in us a crisis of choice. In a real sense, we must complete the text in our own lives. At this fork in the road to which we have been strategically brought by Matthew, what path will we follow? The path of cowardly withdrawal to our previous situation, out of which we set forth with such enthusiasm, seeking a truly transcendent encounter? Or the path of self-forgetting discipleship, which makes us cling only to the person of Jesus? Total freedom through total renunciation!

In the end, it will be this young man's great tragedy that, experiencing such a passion for the ultimate, transcendental unity with God, he falls back on his dependency on created things, chief among them his need to shape his own existence. As far as we can tell, he will now remain the tortured prisoner of this dichotomy between earthly and heavenly life. His greatest treasure, ominously, is his ego. Despite his intellectual ardor, the wood of the young man's will is too wet and weighed down with addictions to catch the fire of Jesus' desire for him.

Tuesday

HARDSHIPS AND REWARD OF DISCIPLESHIP

From the Meditations on Matthew 19:27 by Fr. Simeon OCSO

What the young man sadly refused to do, the disciples have already accomplished. At this moment, Peter is like (the Roman god) Janus, looking backward and forward at the same time, seeking to know what will be the future result of his and the other disciples' radical decision to follow Jesus. He is certain of how much discipleship has cost them but profoundly uncertain as to what tomorrow holds. They must be utterly poor, even as Wisdom is poor. Their only legitimate possession must be Wisdom herself: "If riches are a desirable possession in life, what is richer than wisdom who effects all things?" (Wis. 8:5) Their one and only certainty comes from their being continually in the presence of someone whose love is the strongest experience any of them has ever had. On this one relationship and reality hangs their whole sense of self, their whole connection to the world, to society, to history, even to their eternal destiny. They constantly struggle to understand Jesus, who befuddles them with his riddles and shocking conclusions.

Precisely this paradoxical Jesus, whose meaning they can barely comprehend, has become the living center of their lives. In Jesus' dialogue with Peter, we are witnessing an encounter of wondrous symmetry. If Peter can say to Jesus: "We have left everything and followed you", Jesus could equally say: "I, too, have left everything - the delight of my Father's companionship, the blessedness of all the choirs of angels, the splendor of the uncreated Light - in order to search you out, my beloved, where you have gone astray." In fact, his own terrible kenosis is the humanly impossible feat that he undertakes and accomplishes as God. Only by participation in Jesus' divine self-emptying can the disciples - both the first twelve and the rest of us - undertake and accomplish the great renunciation to which all are invited. Intimacy of love with Christ may be shared and enjoyed only on the redemptive Cross. The destiny of the Master has got to become the destiny of the disciple.

Initially, of course, our human nature must recoil with dread at any talk of crucifixion (whether physical or 'merely' spiritual). To let go evokes great freedom of spirit that makes possible movement into newness of life. Jesus makes them realize that all things they possessed in weakness and uncertainty - including their greatest loves- will be safer and more fruitful in the hands of God, who alone can infuse them with new life and meaning. By this act, the disciple renders them purer. By moving towards God, we are also moving toward what is enduring in our greatest earthly treasures. "He who loses his life for my sake will find it". St. John of the Cross expressed it in another way: " To come to what you do not possess, you must go by a way where you do not possess." Such dispossession is the condition for deep humility, because the true goal of renouncing everything is the discovery that, without God, we are literally nothing.

Wednesday

ADVICE TO THOSE WAITING FOR CHRIST

A Reflection from a Homily by Bl. Guerric of Igny

In the Holy Ones of old, the Church of Christ waited for his coming. In the same way, we wait for Christ's Second Coming. The first hope was that Christ would pay the price of redemption. The second hope is for the reward of the labors of those who follow Christ and live and love as he lived and loved. That means our eyes are raised above earthly concerns and fixed with joyful longing on those of heaven. Some are impatient and try to snatch the prizes this world offers. Blessed are those whose whole hope rests in the Lord's name and take no notice of false and empty foolishness. Isn't it better to be humble with the meek than share ill-gotten gains with the proud? The Lord is our share, and so we will wait for him!

If you are wise, give an eye to yourself and see how you are using your time. If you are a sinner, don't waste the opportunity to repent. If you are holy, then make progress in holiness. Remember the evil servant surprised by his Lord's coming! Evil servants say, "A rule here and a rule there, only a little of this and only a little of that, wait for this and wait for that," and they mock us. The one who grants faith tests it and crowns what he tests. The Lord commands us through Hosea: "You will be waiting for me for many days, but you are not to take any other spouse".

This is the proper way of waiting for the Lord and keeping your pledge of love. Even though we miss and long for the consolation of his presence, we must not look around for other consolations but keep ourselves in suspense, looking toward his return. We are in suspense, as it were, between heaven and earth, unable as yet to grasp the heavenly things but seeking not to contaminate ourselves with the earthly. The reason why we choose this suspense, this suspended death, is to make ourselves persevere in our suspension from the cross—until we merit to die on it.

O Lord Jesus, when you were about to exercise that power of laying down your life, and accepting the sort of death by which you would will to lay it down, everything still remained in your own choice. You chose to hang from the cross so that being raised up over the earth you might draw us to yourself and then hang us too above all earthly concerns. You gave us an example so that we might also persevere until death on the cross and ascend from there to heaven all the more easily—stepping as it were from the topmost rung of the ladder of humility. Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus! Where the cross is we are. Where the cross is we wait for you. We wait for "Eli", for our God, to come and take us to himself.

I believe that I shall see the Lord's favor even in the land of the living. Do you believe that too? Then strengthen your heart and bear with the Lord. Woe to those who lose patience. He promises that he will be coming quickly. "Look", he says, "I am coming quickly and bringing with me rewards to bestow on everyone in proportion to each one's labors. The time truly is short, though it may seem long to those who are in turmoil—whether from labor or love. Both are necessary. How long can anyone's labors last upon this earth? Be certain that the Lord will come, this Lord who is our own Lord, our dread and yet our desire, our rest and our reward, the sweetness and embrace we long for. He is the blessedness of all. He has chosen you. Never forget that; love as you are loved.

Thursday

BERNARD'S WIDENING MISSION

From the VITA PRIMA by William of Saint-Thierry

Bernard was beloved by *God* and mankind. In that valley of his and in the local towns and regions that he was often obliged to visit for the requirements of the house, he blossomed with his virtuous deeds and miracles. Then he began to be drawn farther afield into distant places either because of the common needs of the church or the love of the brothers, or by obedience to superiors, or else to bring back peace so desperately needed and restore it between churches and secular princes in discord with one another… and by the power of faith to make possible many things that seemed impossible *to the* spirit of the world; as it were by *moving* mount*ains*…

His powerful preaching began especially to shine out to such an extent that he even softened the hardhearted among his hearers, so that he hardly ever *returned* empty-handed. After a while he became so remarkably proficient in his sermons and in his exemplary way of life that he was like a net for the word of God in the hand of *a* fisherman, so great was the *quantity of* rational *fish* that he began to catch. From each of these captures the boat of the house of God seemed to be filled. Briefly, then, it came about that what this little-known and ailing man, at death's door and strong only in speech, did in this life was a greater miracle than all his other miracles.

At that time Clairvaux (in name and in reality a Clear Valley), that valley whose light radiated with divine brilliance as if from the peaks, was spreading its vigor down into the sloping plains of the world… From a valley within narrow limits it has grown exceedingly wide and spacious into a cloistered dwelling… growing rapidly and increasing in numbers, so that now this place is too cramped for the great number of those abiding there… From all sides the brothers are sought after and sent, since the kings of the nations and princes of the church reckon themselves blessed, as do the cities and regions everywhere, if they can merit to increase in renown by having a company from that house and regime of the man of God…

God's fisherman, then, did not fail *to let* down his net for *capturing fish* at the Lord's command, and while some turned away and others followed their own path, the full tally of that holy congregation never lessened. To this very day, those catches of his have come and amazingly are still coming from Châlons, from Paris, from Mainz, from Liège, and from many other cities. From other regions too: Flanders, Germany, Italy, Aquitaine. Wherever he goes, for whatever reason, or wherever he is needed, or where still to this day the man of God is required to visit, wherever he goes he comes back full, totally supported by the grace of the Holy Spirit. This fullness accompanies him everywhere.

Nor does he forget those he has sent elsewhere, but wherever they are he himself always preserves fatherly concern over them. Just as rivers return *to the place* from which *they arise*, so either his sons' glad news or their sorrowful news comes back to him daily. Often what is happening among them is made known to him from his fatherly concern for them, by divine intuition without *any human contact,* though they are far away from him. If anything is provided, if anything is to be corrected among them, their temptations or their extravagances, sicknesses or death, or any intrusion of worldly troubles, he knows. So he often enjoins on those at home prayers for certain needs of absent brothers. Sometimes even those dying in far-off places make known to him through vision that he should come to them, asking him for his blessing and indeed for permission to die. This is done out of obedience in those being sent and love in the one who sends them.

Friday

RESTORING ALL THINGS IN CHRIST

A Reflection from a pastoral letter by St. Pope Pius X

Who can avoid being appalled and afflicted when beholding, in the midst of a progress in civilization so often extolled, the greater part of humankind fighting among themselves so savagely as to make it seem as though strife were universal? The desire for peace is certainly harbored in every heart, and everyone ardently longs for it, but to want peace without God is an absurdity. For where God is absent, justice flies away, and when justice is taken away, it is vain to cherish hopes for peace. "Peace is the work of Justice", said Isaiah.

There are many who, in their yearning for peace, band together into societies and parties claiming to stand for order. It is hope and labor lost. There is only one "party of order" capable of restoring peace amid all this turmoil, and that is the party of God. It is this party, then, that we must promote and attract to it as many as possible – if we are really urged on by the love of peace.

We will never, however much we labor, succeed in calling people back to the majesty and empire of God except through Jesus Christ. St Paul encourages this: "No one can lay a foundation other than that which has already been laid, and it is Jesus Christ!" It is Christ alone "whom the Father sanctified and sent into this world", as Isaiah said. Who is this but Christ, "the splendor of the Father and the image of his substance"? He is true God and truly human. Without him, nobody can know God with saving knowledge, "no one knows the Father but the Son and those to whom it pleases the Son to reveal him". It follows that to restore all things in Christ and to lead all to submission to God is one and the same aim.

This is what we have to care about. We have to seek to lead mankind back under the Lordship of Christ. If we do this, all will have been brought back to God. When we speak of this, we don't mean drawing them to a state of being uncaring about human things. This is a fantasy of materialists. We want to draw people to the true and living God, one in nature and three-fold in persons, Creator of the world and wisest orderer of everything, supremely just lawgiver who punishes wickedness and rewards justice.

The way to Christ is not hard to find. It is the Church. Listen to St. John Chrysostom: "The Church is your hope, the Church is your salvation, the Church is your refuge." That is why Christ founded it at the price of His blood. It has his teaching and his law and has received an inexhaustible treasure of graces for the sanctification and salvation of the human race. It is our common duty to bring human society back to the discipline of the Church. Now it is estranged from the wisdom of Christ, but the Church will subject it to Him as Christ is subjected to God. It is through the goodness of God that we can bring this about. But we must use every means and all our energy to end the evil of substituting the human for the divine and restore to their rightful place the holy laws and counsels of the Gospel. But to do this, we must first be clothed in Christ so that we can say with St. Paul: "For me to live is Christ".

Saturday

MARY IS QUEEN – UNIQUELY CONFORMED TO HER SON

A Reflection taken from the General Audience of Pope Benedict XVI

What does "Mary Queen" mean? Is it solely a title, together with others, a crown, an ornament like others? What does it mean? What is this queenship? As mentioned above, it is a consequence of her being united to the Son, of her being in heaven, that is, in communion with God; she shares in God's responsibility for the world and God's love for the world. There is a worldly or common idea of a king or queen: a person with great power and wealth. But this is not the kind of royalty of Jesus and Mary. Let us think of the Lord; the royalty and kingship of Christ is interwoven with humility, service, and love. It is above all serving, helping, and loving. Let us remember that Jesus on the Cross was proclaimed king with this inscription written by Pilate: "The King of the Jews" (cf. Mk 15:26). On the Cross, at that moment, he is shown to be King; and how is he King? By suffering with us and for us, by loving to the end, and in this way governing and creating truth, love, and justice. Let us also think of another moment: at the Last Supper, he bows down to wash the feet of his followers.

Consequently, Jesus' kingship has nothing to do with that of the powerful of this earth. He is a King who serves his servants; he demonstrated this throughout his life, and the same is true of Mary. She is Queen in her service to God for humanity; she is a Queen of love who lives the gift of herself to God so as to enter into the plan of man's salvation. She answered the Angel: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord" (cf. Lk 1:38) and, in the Magnifcat, she sings: God has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden (cf. Lk 1:48). She helps us. She is Queen precisely by loving us, by helping us in our every need; she is our sister, a humble handmaid.

And so we have already reached this point: how does Mary exercise this queenship of service and love? By watching over us, her children: the children who turn to her in prayer, to thank her, or to ask her for her motherly protection and her heavenly help, perhaps after having lost our way, or when we are oppressed by suffering or anguish because of the sorrowful and harrowing vicissitudes of life. In serenity or life's darkness, let us address Mary, entrusting ourselves to her continuous intercession so that she may obtain for us from the Son every grace and mercy we need for our pilgrimage on the highways of the world.

Through the Virgin Mary, let us turn with trust to the One who rules the world and holds in his hand the future of the universe. For centuries, she has been invoked as the celestial Queen of Heaven; in the Litany of Loreto, after the prayer of the holy Rosary, she is implored eight times: as Queen of Angels, of Patriarchs, of Prophets, of Apostles, of Martyrs, of Confessors, of Virgins, of all the Saints, and of Families. The rhythm of these ancient invocations and daily prayers, such as the Salve Regina, helps us to understand that the Blessed Virgin, as our Mother beside her Son Jesus in the glory of heaven, is always with us in the daily events of our life.

The title "Queen" is thus a title of trust, joy, and love. And we know that the One who holds a part of the world's destinies in her hand is good, that she loves us and helps us in our difficulties.