

TWENTY-FIRST WEEK OF ORDINARY TIME – A

August 23 – 29, 2026

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Sunday

THE PILLAR OF THE CHURCHES

From a Commentary attributed to St. John Chrysostom

Peter was to be entrusted with the keys of the Church, or rather, he was entrusted with the keys of heaven; to him would be committed the whole people of God. The Lord told him: *Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you lose on earth will be loosed in heaven.* Now Peter was inclined to be severe, so if he had been impeccable, what forbearance would he have shown toward those he instructed? His falling into sin was thus a providential grace to teach him from experience to deal kindly with others.

Just think who it was whom God permitted to fall into sin – Peter himself, the head of the apostles, the firm foundation, the unbreakable rock, the most important member of the Church, the safe harbor, the strong tower; Peter who had said to Christ, *Even if I have to die with you I will never deny you*; Peter, who by divine revelation had confessed the truth: *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

The gospel relates that on the night that Christ was betrayed Peter went indoors and was standing by the fire warming himself when a girl accosted him: *You too were with that man yesterday*, she said. But Peter answered: *I do not know the man.* Just now you said: *Even if I have to die with you*, and now you deny him and say: *I do not know the man.* Oh, Peter, is this what you promised? You were not tortured or scourged; at the words of a mere slip of a girl, you took refuge in denial!

Again the girl said to him: *You too were with that man yesterday.* Again he answered: *I have no idea what man you mean.* Who was it that spoke to you, causing you to make this denial? Not some important person but... a doorkeeper, an outcast, a slave, someone of no account whatever. She spoke to you, and you answered with a denial. What a strange thing – a girl, a prostitute, accosted Peter himself and disturbed his faith! Peter, the pillar, the rampart, could not bear the threat of a girl! She had but to speak and the pillar swayed, the rampart itself was shaken!

A third time she repeated: *You too were with that man yesterday*, but a third time he denied it. Finally Jesus looked at him, reminding him of his previous assertion. Peter understood, repented of his sin, and began to weep. Mercifully, however, Jesus forgave him his sin, because he knew that Peter, being a man, was subject to human frailty. Now, as I said before, the reason God's plan permitted Peter to sin was that he was to be entrusted with the whole people of God, and sinlessness added to his severity might have made him unforgiving toward his brothers and sisters. He fell into sin so that remembering his own fault and the Lord's forgiveness, he might also forgive others out of love for them. This was God's providential dispensation. He to whom the Church was to be entrusted, he, the pillar of the churches, the harbor of faith, was allowed to sin; Peter, the teacher of the world, was permitted to sin, so that having been forgiven himself he would be merciful to others.

Monday

THE WEAKNESS OF GOD IS STRONGER THAN MEN

From a Homily by St. John Chrysostom

It was clear through unlearned men that the cross was persuasive; in fact, it persuaded the whole world. Their discourse was not of unimportant matters but of God and true religion, of the Gospel way of life and future judgment, yet it turned plain, uneducated men into philosophers. How the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and his weakness stronger than men!

In what way is it stronger? It made its way throughout the world and overcame all men; countless men sought to eradicate the very name of the Crucified, but that name flourished and grew ever mightier. Its enemies lost out and perished; the living who waged war on a dead man proved helpless. Therefore, when a Greek tells me I am dead, he shows only that he is foolish indeed, for I, whom he thinks a fool, turn out to be wiser than those reputed wise. So too, in calling me weak, he but shows that he is weaker still. For the good deeds which tax-collectors and fishermen were able to accomplish by God's grace, the philosophers, the rulers, the countless multitudes cannot even imagine.

Paul had this in mind when he said: *The weakness of God is stronger than men.* That the preaching of these men was indeed divine is brought home to us in the same way. For how otherwise could twelve uneducated men, who lived on lakes and rivers and wastelands, get the idea for such an immense enterprise? How could men who perhaps had never been in a city or a public square think of setting out to do battle with the whole world? That they were fearful, timid men, the evangelist makes clear; he did not reject the fact or try to hide their weaknesses. Indeed, he turned these into a proof of the truth. What did he say of them? That when Christ was arrested, the others fled, despite all the miracles they had seen, while he who was leader of the others denied him!

How then account for the fact that these men who in Christ's lifetime did not stand up to the attacks by the Jews, set forth to do battle with the whole world once Christ was dead -- if, as you claim, Christ did not rise and speak to them and rouse their courage? *Did* they perhaps say to themselves: "What is this? He could not save himself but he will protect us? He did not help himself when he was alive, but now that he is dead he will extend a helping hand to us? In his lifetime he brought no nation under his banner, but by uttering his name we will win over the whole world?" Would it not be wholly irrational even to think such thoughts, much less to act upon them?

It is evident, then, that if they had not seen him risen and had proof of his power, they would not have risked so much.

Tuesday

THE HYPOCRITE IS ALWAYS A FLATTERER

A Reflection from the Morning Meditation of Pope Francis (June 6, 2017)

A true Christian cannot be a hypocrite, and a hypocrite is not a true Christian. In the Gospel passage, there is a word which Jesus uses a lot to characterize the doctors of the law: hypocrite. Hypocrites show one thing while they are thinking of something else. It comes from the Greek word to describe such people who speak and judge, but underneath there is something else. Hypocrisy is neither the language of Jesus nor of Christians. This fact is absolutely “clear”. And Jesus takes care to highlight this characteristic so that we fully understand it and recognize “how they act”, how hypocrites behave.

First, the hypocrite is always a flatterer, whether to a greater or lesser degree, but he is a flatterer. Thus, for example, the scribes and Pharisees say to Jesus: “Teacher, we know that you are true, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position of men, but truly teach the way of God”. In other words, they use “that fattery which softens the heart” and weakens resistance in life. Part of fattery is to “not speak the truth”, to “exaggerate”, to “boost vanity” with an evil intention. Because the hypocrite's technique is that “he shows you that he likes you; he always puffs you up, in order to achieve his aim”.

Second, Jesus knew how to deal with such people by verbalizing the truth. When they asked him, “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, is it just?” — Jesus, knowing their hypocrisy, states clearly: “Why put me to the test? Bring me a coin, and let me look at it.” Jesus always responds with reality. The reality is so; everything else is either hypocrisy or ideology. This is why Jesus says: “Bring me a coin”. He actually wants to show reality. He responds “with wisdom” when he says: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's — the reality was that the coin bore the image of Caesar — ‘and to God the things that are God's’”.

Lastly, it is important to note a “third aspect” relative to the “language of hypocrisy”: that it is a language of deceit, and is the same language as the serpent's with Eve; it is the same. It begins with flattery: ‘No ... if you eat of this you will be great, you will know all...’, in order to destroy her. Hypocrisy, in fact, destroys; hypocrisy kills; it kills people, even so far as to strip away a person's character and soul. It kills communities. For this reason, the Lord Jesus said to us: “Let your speech be: yes, yes, no, no. Anything more comes from the evil one.” He was very clear.

These clear words help us understand today just how much evil hypocrisy does to the Church. How much evil is achieved by those Christians who fall into this sinful practice which kills: they speak sweetly, while judging a person harshly. Let us ask the Lord to protect us from falling into this vice of hypocrisy, from masking our attitude, but with evil intentions. That the Lord might give us this grace: to know how to speak the truth, and if I cannot say it, to stay silent, but never hypocrisy.

Wednesday

WHAT LEADS US TO LOVE GOD?

A Reflection from The Confessions by St. Augustine

There is no doubt in my mind, Lord, that I love you. I feel it with certainty. You struck my heart with your word, and I loved you. But, see, heaven and earth and all that is in them are telling me on every side to love you, and they never stop saying it to everyone, that all may be without excuse. But more deeply yet, you will to have mercy on all you choose to show your mercy, and you have compassion on whomever you decide to show it to. Without such grace, heaven and earth would praise you to ears that are deaf.

What do I love when I love you? It isn't the beauty of bodily things, or the glory that fills time, or the brightness of the light that shines on us, or even the sweet melodies of song or the fragrance of flowers or honey's sweetness, or even the embraces of spouses. It isn't these things that I love when I love my God.

And yet I do love them. I love a kind of light, melodies, fragrances, food, embraces. Indeed, God is the light, the melody, the fragrance, the food and the embrace—especially that of my inner self. Deep in me is a brilliance that no space can contain, a sound that time can't carry away, a perfume that no breeze can disperse, a taste never diminished by eating, a clinging together that no satiety will end. This too is what I love when I love my God.

Who is this God? I asked the earth, and it answered: "I am not God", and I asked all things that are on earth, and they confessed the same thing. I asked the sea and the deeps and the creeping things with living souls, and they all replied: "We are not your God!" "Look above us", they said. I asked the winds of earth's atmosphere, and they all answered: "Anaxagoras was wrong; I am not God". I asked the heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars, and, "No", they said, "we aren't the God for whom you have been looking".

I said to all those things which stand near the gates that are my senses: "Tell me about my God, you who are not God. Tell me something about my God." And they all cried out in a loud voice: "He made us!"

My questions came out of my contemplation of all creation. The answer creatures gave me was proclaimed by their beauty. It is all from God. In loving it, I am drawn to God.

Thursday

HOW WE CAN SHOW OTHERS A PATH TO GOD

A Reflection developed from a homily by St. Augustine

The day was approaching on which my mother, Monica, would depart this life, and it so happened, I believe by your providence, Lord, that we were standing together at a window looking at a garden full of flowers. Filled with joy, we spoke about the beauty of the Truth we seek, forgetful of the past and wholly looking forward. We talked about who God is for us and thought of the eternal life the saints live and of what it will be like—that “which eye has not seen nor ear heard nor has it entered into the human heart”.

We thirsted for the water of life, the water from your fountain, which is found with you in Heaven and which you are. We prayed together to be sprinkled with that water and to receive it according to our capacity to meditate more deeply on its marvels. And this conversation somehow brought us to a point at which all pleasures from sense and all the brightness of ordinary light seemed not even comparable with the joys of the eternal light. We were lifted up and our love flamed upward towards the One God. We could, so to speak, see all the levels and grades of ordinary reality, but see them as leading to Heaven and You. Our hearts soared even above the moon and the stars that shine on this earth to what is so much higher.

How wonderful it is to think and speak and marvel at your works, Lord. Yes, we were carried beyond ourselves to the endless richness from which you forever feed your Israel with the food that is Truth itself. We glimpsed the life that is the all-creative wisdom that makes both what has been and what will be. It is an uncreated Wisdom which forever is and has been and shall be. It just is, and is eternally.

We were helping one another long for this. We were helping one another find words to speak of such Wisdom, and helping each other long for and even pant after it. We were sighing together and seeming to taste the first fruits of what you have in store for us. We were fixed on it and in it. We heard the sound of our own voices and the words we spoke as they began and ended, yet our thoughts were all on your Word, O Lord. Your Word abides forever. It seems to grow old in us even while it makes everything new. You know, Lord, that on that day, while we talked of these matters, the world with all its delights seemed cheap and nothing in comparison with what we were speaking about. That was the gift we gave one another through your gift.

I remember vividly what my mother said. “Son, for my part, I don’t find any joy in the things of this world! What am I doing here? Why am I here? I no longer know because I no longer hope for anything in this world. The one thing I longed for here was to see you, a Catholic Christian, before I died. God has given me this, and more superabundantly than I had imagined. Now I see you as God’s servant so completely as to think nothing of worldly happiness. What, then, am I doing here?” I don’t clearly remember my response to her reflections. But they struck me powerfully! It was some five days later that she fell into a fever and on its ninth day died. She was fifty-six and I was thirty-three. An immeasurable sorrow flowed into my heart, for see what a gift I had lost, and she had gained.

Friday

PICK IT UP, READ IT

An Excerpt from the Confessions of St. Augustine

I flung myself down under a fig tree... and gave free course to my tears. The streams of my eyes gushed out an acceptable sacrifice to thee. And, not indeed in these words, but to this effect, I cried to thee: "And thou, O Lord, how long? How long, O Lord? Wilt thou be angry forever? Oh, remember not against us our former iniquities." For I felt that I was still enthralled by them. I sent up these sorrowful cries: "How long, how long? Tomorrow and tomorrow? Why not now? Why not this very hour make an end to my uncleanness?"

I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when suddenly I heard the voice of a boy or a girl I know not which—coming from the neighboring house, chanting over and over again, "Pick it up, read it; pick it up, read it." Immediately I ceased weeping and began most earnestly to think whether it was usual for children in some kind of game to sing such a song, but I could not remember ever having heard the like. So, damming the torrent of my tears, I got to my feet, for I could not but think that this was a divine command to open the Bible and read the first passage I should light upon. For I had heard how Anthony, accidentally coming into church while the gospel was being read, received the admonition as if what was read had been addressed to him: "Go and sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me." By such an oracle he was forthwith converted to thee. So I quickly returned to the bench where Alypius was sitting, for there I had put down the apostle's book when I had left there. I snatched it up, opened it, and in silence read the paragraph on which my eyes first fell: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof." I wanted to read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty, and all the gloom of doubt vanished away.

Closing the book... I began -- now with a tranquil countenance -- to tell it all to Alypius. And he in turn disclosed to me what had been going on in himself, of which I knew nothing. He asked to see what I had read. I showed him, and he looked on even further than I had read. I had not known what followed. But indeed it was this, "Him that is weak in the faith, receive." This he applied to himself, and told me so. By these words of warning he was strengthened, and by exercising his good resolution and purpose--all very much in keeping with his character, in which, in these respects, he was always far different from and better than I -- he joined me in full commitment without any restless hesitation.

Then we went in to my mother, and told her what happened, to her great joy. We explained to her how it had occurred -- and she leaped for joy triumphant; and she blessed thee, who art "able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think." For she saw that thou hadst granted her far more than she had ever asked for in all her pitiful and doleful lamentations. For thou didst so convert me to thee that I sought neither a wife nor any other of this world's hopes, but set my feet on that rule of faith which so many years before thou hadst showed her in her dream about me. And so thou didst turn her grief into gladness more plentiful than she had ventured to desire, and dearer and purer than the desire she used to cherish of having grandchildren of my flesh.

Saturday

ON THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

From the writing of Fr. Jean Danielou

John's death appears as the supreme expression of sin. It revealed the sin of the world. Herodias' action in obtaining the head of John the Baptist was a clear manifestation of the human desire to be self-sufficient and to set oneself up apart from God. It was a victory for the inhabitants of the earth who, as Revelation says, rejoiced over the death of the prophets, "because they had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth". It was an expression of a triumphant world, a world which had done away with God. No longer could anything disturb its pretension that it was giving itself its own law. In that respect John's death set a pattern: in a decisive moment of history, it summed up the whole world of sin.

John's death was also the expression of the supreme condemnation of the world. His blood "fell upon this generation", together with all the innocent blood that has been shed. Thus did it call for the supreme condemnation. It was the judgment on the world, bringing down on it the cup of wrath spoken of by Revelation. It showed forth the mystery of iniquity; it revealed clearly that mankind is the slave of sin. Just as John the Baptist marked the last stage in the preparation for the parousia in the long line of the prophets, so his death marked the last stage in the preparation for the parousia in the order of the mystery of sin...

But John's death also marked the end of this history of condemnation for, after John's blood, another blood was going to be shed. It would not fall as a condemnation upon those who shed it, but it would be poured out as redemption for many. John's death prefigured the death of Jesus. Jesus wished to say first of all that his death resembled John's: "I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of man will suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist. The rejection and death of John the Baptist prefigured the rejection and death of Jesus. This latter death was really the high point of evil. Jesus fulfilled completely the figure of the servant of Yahweh rejected by the sinful world.

But John only prefigured Jesus, for with Jesus the shedding of blood takes on a different meaning. Blood was not shed for condemnation but for redemption. The unresolved conflict between prophets and sinners came to an end with the prophet who took the sins of the world upon himself. John had pointed out Jesus as that lamb. He knew that he himself still belonged to the world of denunciation of sin, not that of liberation from sin. The Spirit had been given to the prophets; blood had been poured out by sinners. The Spirit had been poured out as a blessing, but blood had been poured out as a curse. John's blood was the last to belong to this order. Henceforth, the blood which would gush forth from the side of Jesus would be spirit and life.