

TWENTY-SECOND WEEK OF ORDINARY TIME – A

August 30 – September 5, 2026

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Sunday

TO TAKE UP ONE'S CROSS

From a Commentary by St. Augustine

Our Lord's command seems hard and heavy, that anyone who wishes to follow him must renounce himself. But no command is hard and heavy when it comes from one who helps to carry it out. That other saying of his is true: *My yoke is easy and my burden is light*. Whatever is hard in his commands is made easy by love.

We know what great things love can accomplish, even though it is often base and sensual. We know what hardships people have endured, what intolerable indignities they have borne to attain the object of their love. What we love indicates what sort of people we are, and therefore making a decision about this should be our one concern in choosing a way of life. Why be surprised if people who set their hearts on Christ and want to follow him renounce themselves out of love? If we lose ourselves through self-love, we must surely find ourselves through self-renunciation.

Who would not wish to follow Christ to supreme happiness, perfect peace, and lasting security? We shall do well to follow him there, but we need to know the way. The Lord Jesus had not yet risen from the dead when he gave this invitation. His passion was still before him; he had still to endure the cross, to face outrages, reproaches, scourging; to be pierced by thorns, wounded, insulted, taunted and put to death. The road seems rough; you draw back, you do not want to follow Christ. Follow him just the same. The road we made for ourselves is rough, but Christ has leveled it by passing over it himself.

Who does not desire to be exalted? Everyone enjoys a high position. But self-abasement is the step that leads to it. Why take strides that are too big for you – do you want to fall instead of going up? Begin with this step and you will find yourself climbing. The two disciples who said: *Lord, command that one of us shall sit at your right hand in your kingdom and the other at your left* had no wish to think about this step of self-abasement. They wanted to reach the top without noticing the step that led there. The Lord showed them the step, however, by his reply: *Can you drink the cup that I am to drink?* You who aim at the highest exaltation, can you drink the cup of humiliation? He did not simply give the general command: *Let him renounce himself and follow me*, but added: *Let him take up his cross and follow me*.

What does it mean to take up one's cross? It means bearing whatever is unpleasant – that is following me. Once you begin to follow me by conforming your life to my commandments, you will find many to contradict you, forbid you, or dissuade you, and some of these will be people who call themselves followers of Christ. Therefore, if you meet with threats, flattery, or opposition, let this be your cross; pick it up and carry it – do not collapse under it. These words of our Lord are like an exhortation to endure martyrdom. If you are persecuted, you ought, surely, to make light of any suffering for the sake of Christ.

Monday

KEEP YOUR EYES FIXED ON JESUS!

A Reflection by Origen of Alexandria

"Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and his reputation spread throughout the countryside. He taught in their synagogues and everyone sang his praises." When we read about Jesus teaching in the synagogues of Galilee and everyone praising him, we must be careful not to look at those who heard him as uniquely privileged and at ourselves as deprived. If Scripture proclaims the truth, it was not only to the Jewish congregations of his own generation that our Lord spoke; he still speaks to us. We are assembled here today to hear him. We know he speaks not only to us but to other congregations as well. Throughout the world, Jesus comes looking for instruments through whom he can continue to teach and save. Pray that each of us may be such an instrument. Pray that Jesus will find you and me ready and fit to sing his praises and proclaim the Good News of his coming as Savior.

"Then Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as was his custom. When he stood up to read, they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 'The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me...'" It was no coincidence, but in accordance with the plan of divine providence, that Jesus unrolled the scroll and found in it this chapter prophesying about him. After all, it is written, "not a single sparrow will fall to the ground without your Father's permission", and the apostles were told that every hair on their heads had been counted; we can be sure indeed that it was not by chance that the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was produced rather than some other, and that this precise passage was found and used to speak of the mystery of Christ: *"The Spirit of the Lord has been given me, for He has anointed me"*.

When Jesus had read this prophesy, *"he rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed upon him"*! Here too, in this synagogue, in this present assembly, you all can at this very moment fix your eyes upon your Savior—if you wish to! Whenever you direct your inward gaze toward wisdom and truth and the contemplation of God's only Son, then your eyes are fixed on Jesus.

Blessed is the congregation of which it can be said, "all eyes are fixed upon Him"! How we long for our own assembly to deserve to have this said of it. Let's all of us—men and women, young and old, faithful and enquirers—turn our eyes toward Jesus. Let's turn not only the eyes of our bodies but those of our souls to Jesus!

Why? From Jesus comes the light that enlightens everyone whom God calls. The radiance of Jesus' face becomes a radiance within us, one that shows itself in the love that shines from them and onto all we meet. It lets us proclaim the Good News of this love and lets us show the world how Jesus' love and wisdom can transform a person. It is through transforming each of us that God will transform the world. We have been called to do a beautiful thing, and doing it makes us beautiful with the same beauty that shines from Christ Jesus.

Tuesday

FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

A Reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

We are easily distracted from what is essential. What is essential to the Spirit's Coming? It is not a matter of people of different language groups all understanding what is said in another language about God's wonderful deeds. It is not a matter of hearing the sound of powerful winds or seeing what looked like tongues of fire over their heads. We have been filled with the Holy Spirit, and we are called to share something of what that means.

Paul, in his First Letter to the Corinthian church, says the Spirit's Coming is an experience of love for God and for Jesus and for all who have yet to receive the Spirit. It is a matter of wanting to share the good news that God offers all a new and never-ending life, and one of service. We are all given abilities by God to help us serve and help others to a life like that of Jesus. The Spirit is Jesus' gift to us, as the Gospel today makes clear, and it enables us to forgive as God has forgiven us – without limit. It is a gift of mutual reconciliation.

One no longer seeks primarily the kinds of things people have to compete for but only God's love, which is offered freely to absolutely everyone. To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be filled with this love.

So the Spirit's presence needn't call forth emotional enthusiasm or excitement or special feelings of exaltation. When St. Paul listed what he considered gifts of the Spirit, he included things that we do feeling very ordinary, like teaching or administering or caring for the sick. For the most part, we can know the Spirit is working within us simply by observing that we are more concerned with caring for people and the things that make people's lives better spiritually than with caring for ourselves or gaining praise. God is with us even when we are not excited or feeling special but even when we are down or depressed or feeling needy and unappreciated. It isn't our feelings that tell us of the Spirit's presence and working within us but our steady concern for the welfare, in every sense of the word, of others.

On Pentecost Day the first disciples experienced something marvelous and extraordinary. But that only lasted for a few hours. Their lives of service, however, lasted many years, except for those who were martyred. Such lives involve many trials and sufferings. The Spirit's presence doesn't exclude bearing a cross but makes us see bearing one as an opportunity for love and service, to God and to one another.

Wednesday

THE HEALING OF OUR HOPE

A Reflection by Fr. Ansfried Hulsbosch

"After Jesus left the synagogue, he entered the house of Simon. Simon's mother-in-law was afflicted with a severe fever, and they interceded with him about her." (Lk4:38) Our health depends on our relationship with God, and yet our orientation to God depends on our contacts with others like ourselves. Recall what the Gospel says about this: *"If anyone who has enough to live on sees another in need and yet closes his heart against that person, how can the love of God be in such a one? Children, we must not make love a matter of mere words or talk. We must have a genuine love and show it in our deeds. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God dwells in us, and love is brought to perfection in us. Here is the proof that we dwell in God and God in us. God has given us the Holy Spirit."*

Now there is always an element of suffering in Christians' love for each other. This love is measured by the extent to which we give ourselves—our persons and our possessions. There is a struggle between such giving and our fallen nature. Dying to self is a full-time job, where our natural tendencies are concerned. This is suffering, and it comes from within. We can be a burden to others, as they can be burdens to us. Think of persecution for one's faith and the way it tests us as well as our love for those who persecute us. Dying for Christ is the highest form of self-affirmation and makes the greatest demands on our freedom, but also on our ability to continue to love those who harm us.

Trials can also come in the form of illness and misfortune and this demands a martyrdom that is our witness to hope for eternal life. Our daily existence demands a continual reaffirmation of this hope. When our hope is vivid, external things, or even internal trials, can't control us or harm us. They even become benefits. *"We know that in every way God works for good with those who love."* If we are genuinely upheld by hope in Christ, nothing can threaten us any longer. *"What can separate us from the love of Christ – affliction, or hardship, persecution, hunger, nakedness, or the danger of violent death? For God's sake, we are being killed all the time and are treated like animals set aside for slaughter. Yet in all this, we are more than mere conquerors, through Christ who loves us. I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or super-human powers, in the present world or that to come, in the forces of nature or in heights or depths – nothing in all creation, that can separate us from the love of God given us in Jesus Christ our Lord."*

We can endure every sort of test and trial, and emerge victorious because Jesus has already done so. He is our hope, and everything can be faced because he is with us. If you need your wounded hope healed, stretch out your hand like Peter's mother-in-law and take the hand of Jesus. He will raise you up.

Thursday

THE ESSENTIAL WORK THAT IS PATIENCE

A Reflection from On Pastoral Care by St. Pope Gregory the Great

All of us are sick, at least spiritually, and we need to be helped to learn patience. We need to think, for instance, of how great the evils our Redeemer had to bear at the hands of the very beings he had created out of love. Think of the horrible insults and criticisms he had to bear. How many slaps did he receive from scoffers? Yet what he was doing was snatching from the power of the ancient enemy the souls of those he held captive. We have to bear the pain of this process, and so we must look to Our Lord for an example of patience.

The Lord silently endured scourging as a way to set us free. He cleanses us with the water of salvation, but its power comes from the love that didn't screen his own face from the spittle of treacherous people. He freed us by the mediation of his torments so that we would not have to bear eternal torment. He endured blows to free us for everlasting honor enjoyed amid the choirs of angels. He offered his own head to bear a crown of thorns and didn't shrink even from this to free us. He drank bitter gall so that we might be inebriated with the wine of everlasting sweetness.

Think of the patience that enabled him to endure mocking adoration. He held his peace and in doing it he adored the Heavenly Father for us. Though he was equal to the Father in divinity and was life itself, he was willing to pass through death that he might prepare us for everlasting life and actually bring us to it. We were dead in spirit, but by his patience, we have been brought to life.

Why do we think it so difficult when he has to bear illness and pain? Aren't these simply punishments that God gives us by way of discipline? We have done evil and deserve what we get. But God himself was willing to bear the same for us when he didn't deserve it at all. If God endured such great evils, and it was as though they were a response to his good deeds on our behalf, then how could we be ungrateful? If we are grateful, how can we fail to patiently bear all that will bring us to our redeemer and eternal lover?

Everyone who would proclaim the Gospel, as our God has called us to, must do so by deeds more than by words. We must do this by our righteous way of life. When we do this, we leave footprints that others may follow and even walk in. If we are to do this, then we have to be awakened and stirred up by what we bear for the sake of others and follow the example of Christ. If the head languishes, the members of the body have neither vigor nor direction. Christ never languished and has always been ready to bear whatever might be necessary to lead us to the Heavenly Father and eternal salvation.

We can only follow in these footsteps if we allow ourselves to be corrected and set in order and on the right path. We should regard all we suffer as only penance done to make us ready to proclaim in our deeds the saving love of our God. We have to lead one another in patience if we are to do what God calls us to do. Let us, then, pray with all our heart to receive the grace by which we may become patient as the Lord was. That is what we can show daily in all we do, and especially in all we suffer.

Friday

BECOMING NEW SKINS FOR NEW WINE

A Reflection by Thomas Keating, OCSO

The disciples of John came to Jesus, asking: Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not? Jesus responded: The wedding guests can't mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak. The patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed. New wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.

New wine is a marvelous image of the Holy Spirit. As we move to the intuitive level of consciousness, using contemplative prayer, the energy of the Spirit cannot be contained by old structures. They are not flexible enough. They may have to be left aside or adapted. The new wine as a symbol of the Spirit tends to stir people up; for that reason, the Fathers of the Church said the Spirit's action results in "sober intoxication". Although exuberance may be subdued, it breaks out in forms that cannot be put into neat and ready-made boxes.

Jesus points out to John's disciples, and to us, that one can become too attached to good practice, such as fasting, as a structure for one's spiritual life. The wine of the Spirit that Jesus brings did not fit into such narrow ideas, as was indicated by their question. So they must expand inwardly; otherwise, the new wine of the Gospel will give them trouble. It bursts the narrow confines of one's mindset, and both what one has and what one is trying to receive are lost.

Jesus suggests a solution: Put the new wine into new wineskins. The new wine of the Gospel is manifested by the fruits of the Spirit, which St. Paul speaks of. There are nine aspects of the mind of Christ as he reaches out to others and accepts the gifts of the Spirit into his ministry. If the new wine is to be preserved, then new structures have to be found in the mind and heart; they must be ones more appropriate than the old to the new life Christ brings. Are we ready and willing to actively cooperate in letting this be done in us?

Saturday

ALL GENERATIONS WILL CALL HER BLESSED

From a sermon by Blessed Gueric of Igny

"Mary has chosen the best part." This was said of Mary, the sister of Martha, but it was realized... with greater fullness and holiness in Mary, Mother of the Lord. For... the blessed Virgin Mary chose the best part; or rather she entered... into unending possession of what she had chosen long before: to keep close to the Lord, to be inseparable from him, and to enjoy God's Word for all eternity.

After her Son ascended to where he was before, the mother, released from all temporal anxiety and more fully enlightened by the Holy Spirit, rejoiced to be still and see that Jesus is God. A vision of wholly ineffable joy and supreme delight for all who love Jesus, but before all others for her who gave birth to Jesus. As the grace of giving birth to God was conferred on her apart from all others, so was the privilege of glorying in him to whom she gave birth. Altogether her own and without comparison was the glory of the Virgin Mother, to see God the King of all in the diadem of the flesh with which she crowned him, so as to recognize God and adore him in her own body and see her own body glorified in God. These are the truths which in the meantime Mary rejoiced to contemplate; this is the best part which she has chosen, which... has not been taken away from her but brought to perfection in her. For since she was not careless or remiss in Martha's work, she has not been left without Mary's fruit. Toil is in action, fruit or reward in contemplation.

We say these things to you, brethren, so that if you feel a desire for that best part which is praised in Mary, you may know that it is the reward of the one who cannot be reproached for failing to do Martha's part: it is not right that reward should be sought before merit. It behooves Jacob first to be united with Leah before enjoying Rachel's embraces; and he himself has to be called and to be Jacob before becoming Israel. *"If they will make you master of the feast,"* says the Wise Man, *"make good provision for the guests, and so take your place among them; your duty done, recline at ease and rejoice on their account and receive the crown that marks their favor."* The toil involved in work or the anxieties of administration are seeds of justice, through which joys are to be reaped from the fruit of consoling mercy. For so the Prophet says: *"Sow for yourselves in justice, reap from the fruit of mercy"*. But one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly; and one who sows with a blessing will also reap with a blessing.

No one, to be sure, sowed with so generous a blessing as she who was blessed among women and brought forth blessed seed from her womb. So let Mary reap her blessings; let her who sowed the blessing of all nations receive in a way all her own the blessing of all nations. *"All generations,"* she says, *"will call me blessed."*