

TWENTY-FIFTH WEEK OF ORDINARY TIME – A

September 20 – 26, 2026

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Sunday

THE 11th HOUR

From a Commentary by St. Augustine

The gospel story about the vineyard workers is appropriate to this time of year, the season of the earthly grape harvest. But there is also another harvest, the spiritual one, at which God rejoices in the fruits of his vineyard.

The kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out to hire men to work in his vineyard. In the evening he gave orders for all to be paid, beginning with the last comers and ending with the first. Now why did he pay the last comers first? Will not everyone be rewarded at the same time? We read in another gospel passage how the king will say to those placed on his right hand: Come, you whom my Father has blessed: take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. If all, then, are to receive their wages together, how should we understand this statement about those who arrived at the eleventh hour being paid first, and those who had been working since daybreak being paid last? If I can say anything to further your understanding, thanks be to God. Give thanks to him who teaches you through me, for my own knowledge is not the source of my teaching.

To take an example, then, let us ask which of two workers receives his wages sooner, one who is paid after an hour, or one who is paid after twelve hours? Anyone will answer: "One who is paid after an hour." So also in our parable. All the workmen were paid at the same time, but because some were paid after an hour and others after twelve hours, the former, having had a shorter time to wait, may be said to have received their wages first.

The earliest righteous people, like Abel and Noah, called, as it were, at the first hour, will receive the joy of resurrection at the same time as we do. So also will others who came later, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and those contemporary with them, called, as we may say, at the third hour; Moses and Aaron and those called with them at the sixth hour; and after them the holy prophets, called at the ninth hour. At the end of the world all Christians, called at the eleventh hour, will receive the joy of resurrection together with those who went before them. All will be rewarded at the same time, but the first comers will have had the longest to wait. Therefore, if they receive their reward after a longer period and we after a shorter one, the fact that our reward is not delayed will make it seem as though we were receiving it first, even though we all receive it together.

In that great reward, then, we shall all be equal-the first to the last and the last to the first. For the denarius stands for eternal life, in which all will have the same share. Although through diversity of merit some will shine more brilliantly than others, in the possession of eternal life there will be equality. What is endless for all will not be longer for one and shorter for another. What has no bounds will have none either for you or for

me. Those who lived chastely in the married state will have one kind of splendor; virgins will have another. The reward for good works will differ from the crown of martyrdom; but where eternal life is concerned, there can be no question of more or less for anyone. Whatever may be the individual's degree of glory, each one will live in it eternally. This is the meaning of the denarius.

Monday

A MAN CALLED MATTHEW

From a Homily by St. Bede the Venerable

Jesus saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him: Follow me. Jesus saw Matthew, not merely in the usual sense, but more significantly with his merciful understanding of men.

He saw the tax collector and, because he saw him through the eyes of mercy and chose him, he said to him: *Follow me.* This following meant imitating the pattern of his life – not just walking after him. Saint John tells us: *Whoever says he abides in Christ ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*

And he rose and followed him. There is no reason for surprise that the tax collector abandoned earthly wealth as soon as the Lord commanded him. Nor should one be amazed that, neglecting his wealth, he joined a band of men whose leader had, on Matthew's assessment, no riches at all. Our Lord summoned Matthew by speaking to him in words. By an invisible, interior impulse flooding his mind with the light of grace, he instructed him to walk in his footsteps. In this way Matthew could understand that Christ, who was summoning him away from earthly possessions, had incorruptible treasures of heaven in his gift.

As he sat at table in the house, behold many tax collectors, and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. This conversion of one tax collector gave many men, those from his own profession and other sinners, an example of repentance and pardon. Notice also the happy and true anticipation of his future status as apostle and teacher of the nations. No sooner was he converted than Matthew drew after him a whole crowd of sinners along the same road to salvation. He took up his appointed duties while still taking his first steps in the faith, and from that hour he fulfilled his obligation and thus grew in merit.

To see a deeper understanding of the great celebration Matthew held at his house, we must realize that he not only gave a banquet for the Lord at his earthly residence, but far more pleasing was the banquet set in his own heart, which he provided through faith and love. Our Savior attests to this: *Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him, and he with me.*

On hearing Christ's voice, we open the door to receive him, as it were, when we freely assent to his promptings and when we give ourselves over to doing what must be done. Christ, since he dwells in the hearts of his chosen ones through the grace of his love, enters so that he might eat with us and we with him. He ever refreshes us

by the light of his presence insofar as we progress in our devotion to and longing for the things of heaven. He himself is delighted by such a pleasing banquet.

Tuesday

DON'T LOSE YOUR HOPE, NO MATTER WHAT!

A Reflection by Hilda Graef

All of us have been called to a prophetic office. We were told this at the very beginning of our life of faith – when we were baptized. The framework for every prophetic vocation is the antinomy between God's holiness and human unworthiness. Think of the call of the prophet Isaiah. He had a vision of the Lord seeking someone to carry a message of destruction and of salvation. What had been was to perish, and it would be replaced by something that would bring new closeness to God. Angels cry out "Holy! Holy! Holy!" and, knowing this, Isaiah grasped his unworthiness and need to be cleansed. But he realized that he was not alone in unworthiness. His people and community stood before God as unworthy and needing God to cleanse them. But what does that involve?

At the very beginning of Scripture, God says it is not good for us to be alone; we need a community, but one that points us toward God. Prophets have to live the message they proclaim and let go of many things to accept a new way of life. God sent an angel to symbolically purify Isaiah for this, and in accepting it, he was made worthy and given the gifts needed to prophesy – as we are.

The difficult part of this is that we have to call on our friends and neighbors to turn from their own projects and accept whatever God calls them to do. No one likes to let go of the projects they have constructed; these things are supposed to bring them a good life! But we have to remind them that only God can give us a life that is worth living, one that genuinely brings good – to us and to many others. Are we willing to pay the price of letting God do this?

The scary fact is that if we don't let go of our own projects and plans, God will take them away to make room for the ones he wants to give us. Think of what Isaiah had to prophesy; he had to tell people that their entire community and nation were going to be destroyed. We like to believe that nothing like that will happen in our case. But what about the Christian believers called to declare that the Nazi project was going to lead everyone involved to lose everything? What of those sent to prison camps in Soviet Russia? What is there about our own community or our country that leads people away from God's Kingdom and toward a vision of the future that ignores God? Perhaps we have to say what won't be welcomed or even believed.

The prophets of Israel in ancient times proclaimed a new hope. But to accept that hope, to allow it to be realized, they would have to watch what they were working so hard at come to nothing. We often think of them as prophets of destruction. But

that is not what they were. They were prophets sent to clear away everything that was getting in the way of renewal. God's compassion and mercy and love are the driving and forming forces renewing communities. We are called to just such tasks. But we can only do what God asks if we trust God, no matter what happens to us and our community. Don't try to call others to what you aren't willing to do.

Wednesday

I WANT TO LOVE JESUS AS I SHOULD

A Letter from Padre Pio to his Spiritual Director

I reply to your last letter after a slight delay, not because I felt less need to speak to my father, but solely on account of the exceptional state of my health... Your own letter... brought some slight relief to my poor soul, sufficient to make it possible to bear - I do not say lightheartedly, but at least steadfastly - the cross to which the Lord in his mercy has been pleased to subject me. For this may the goodness of the heavenly Father ever be blessed. To you my most heartfelt thanks and infinite blessings, while I solemnly promise before the Lord to continue to raise my voice to heaven for you and with greater fervor than before.

In order that God may more readily hear my poor prayers, I will make every effort with the assistance of divine grace to be a good religious priest, so that I may be able to say one day with the Apostle: "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ". I promise myself this much with Jesus' assistance. Unfortunately I don't deserve his assistance, but I am led to hope for it by his inexhaustible charity towards all of us.

I told you, Father, that your letter, thank heaven, brought me a little relief. But I submit to you also the very great terror I experienced when I learned that you consider suspect those threats which I mentioned in my last. As you know, Father, I would not wish to be a victim of the devil in anything whatsoever and although I am more certain of the reality of those locutions than I am of my own existence, I am still struggling against myself and protest that I want to believe nothing of all this, for the sole reason that you, my director, have cast a doubt upon it. Am I right or wrong in this?

You must know, moreover, Father, that Jesus has not shown offense by any means at my failure to attach importance to what he said and to give my accidental assent to it. I say accidental to distinguish it from that deep and substantial conviction which still endures after all the efforts of my soul not to believe it. I am not free to divest myself of this conviction. What am I to do, Father? Am I unwittingly a victim of the enemy? Enlighten me, for pity's sake, on this point, which I too would prefer to remain obscure.

How difficult, dear Father, is the way of Christian perfection for a soul as ill-disposed as mine! My wickedness makes me fearful at every step I take: may the good God sustain me and prevent me from betraying him! You know, Father, that I attach no importance at all to this extraordinary state of mine. For this reason I never stop asking Jesus to lead me by the ordinary path followed by everyone else, for I am well aware that the way by which divine mercy is leading me is not suitable for my soul, accustomed as it is to very material food. What I say to the Lord is that I am seeking the amendment of my life, my spiritual resurrection, true and substantial love, the sincere conversion of my whole self to him.

Speak to me at length, my dear Father, about all this and if you find me at fault, do not keep silence. Raise your voice, punish me again: I want to love Jesus as I should. I desire this love; I know I love him, but - dear God! - how inferior my love is to my desire to love! Ought it not be the opposite, that my love should surpass the desire for it? Speak to me about this, knowing as you do that it is one of the many thorns which contribute to my spiritual martyrdom... I kiss your hand and ask you not to refuse me your fatherly blessing.

Thursday

HOLINESS

A Talk by Dom Helder Camara

Very often people-particularly poor people, humble people- imagine that you are better, more virtuous, than you really are, and want to canonize you, even when you are still alive. There is a story about St. Francis of Assisi that I am very fond of, and that I find helpful. One day Francis and Brother Leo were out walking together. Suddenly Brother Leo called out: "Brother Francis! ". "Yes, I am Brother Francis." "Be careful, Brother Francis! People are saying remarkable things about you. Be careful!" And Francis of Assisi replied: "My friend, pray to the Lord that I may succeed in becoming what people think I am." It is a beautiful reply.

There is a danger of losing your head when people begin to think of you as an extraordinary person, as a saint. But there are fortunately ways of guarding against it. For example, when I am about to go out and face a huge audience that is applauding me and cheering me, I turn to Christ and say to him simply: "Lord, this is your triumphal entry into Jerusalem! I am just the little donkey you are riding on!" And it is true.

Holiness....Holy is the Lord. He is the only saint. There is only one Lord. But shared holiness is not a privilege reserved for exceptional individuals. It is a duty for all of us. Through baptism we receive grace, the grace which brings us holiness. It is very naïve to think that being holy means seeing visions, performing miracles, living a life that is hard and very extraordinary!

There is no single definition of holiness, but there is one I am particularly fond of: being holy means getting up immediately every time you fall, with humility and joy. It does not mean never falling into sin. It means being able to say: "Yes, Lord, I have fallen a thousand times. But thanks to you, I got up again a thousand times." That is it. I like thinking about that.

When you are approaching death, it is very tempting to count your weaknesses and your failings and your sins, and perhaps to lose courage. I think it is better not to count them at all. Better still not to talk about them. It is good to say"

Yes! My weaknesses and my failings and my sins are many, and very serious! But there is something greater than all my weakness and failings and sins: the mercy of God." There are so many wonderful things I could tell you about the mercy of God.

Friday

CHRIST IS IN ALL OF THEM

An Excerpt from Cosmic Dance by Sr. Joyce Rupp

The beauty and variety of people consistently bring joy and challenge to our lives, filled with diverse philosophies and values, filled with diverse philosophies and values. I have come to discover that it is mainly on the surface that we are different. We are merely as separate as we sometimes feel ourselves to be. All I need to do is sit where people are gathered to know that there are people of all sizes, shapes, and skin colors, filled with diverse philosophies and values. It is mainly on the surface that we are different. We are not nearly as separate as we sometimes feel ourselves to be. Underneath our supposed differences we experience many different emotions, longings, hopes, and dreams. The cosmic dance goes on in each of us.

I was on a tram at Dallas airport one day, and all of us were standing or sitting quietly, avoiding eye contact and conversations with one another. Then an elderly man, who was holding his wife's hand, spoke. He told us they were traveling to celebrate the birthday of a special granddaughter. One person wished them well, then another spoke about it being her 40th birthday. Many "Happy Birthdays" rang through the air. In a brief space of time, we had discovered our oneness.

Thomas Merton had a moment of glimpsing the true oneness of humanity. Merton was standing on a street corner in Louisville, Kentucky, when he suddenly saw the people surrounding him as a great body of life. He felt deeply and intimately connected with them in a vast oneness of spirit. They were his brothers and sisters. A similar thing happened when the writer, artist, and mystic Caryl Houselander was traveling on a crowded underground train in London. She looked around her, and she saw the Christ in all of them. But she saw even more than that. She had a profound sense that she was one with every person who had ever lived and ever would live, that there was an immense bond between them because of their mutual existence in time and in eternity.

Christian theologians present this oneness as humankind's participation in the Body of Christ. Buddhists speak of it as the practice of compassion, which views all things as one. Native Americans approach this same oneness in their understanding, as Merton did too, that each person is a brother, a sister.

The cosmic dance helps us to recognize the sacredness in the people of my world, to view them as part of an eternal movement of love. We are one vast web of intimate connections, all sailing on the same planet, in a universe threaded with the wonder of enriching diversity.

Saturday

THE SHEPHERD'S FLUTE

From a Letter of Catherine De Hueck Doherty

Have you ever heard a shepherd's flute in Scotland, or in Jerusalem? It is so haunting, so enticing, so irresistible that you have to follow the sound and go to see where it comes from. The Good Shepherd's flute is constantly playing. If we close our ears to it, life will be miserable indeed. Our Madonna House is like a monastery, and it has an apostolate of music. We are listening to the Shepherd's flute, of which all music is but an echo.

The story of Madonna House is the story of prayer. Everything that happens to us involves prayer. Ours is the story of two words, "fiat" and "alleluia". To say fiat is to say yes to God, and this yes is often painful.

We cannot live these words without constant prayer. It is inconceivable to think we can live them by ourselves, but this has always been humankind's greatest temptation. Throughout the ages, we have tried to build our Tower of Babel that we might reach up to heaven. But we cannot do it on our own. Every day we need to listen to the words of Jesus: "Cut off from me, you can do nothing".

These words, spoken two thousand years ago, have still not penetrated our hearts. We are reluctant to accept them. "No!" we say. We protest. "It is not true! I can do lots of things without you- just watch me. I can earn your approval, your grace, your salvation. You don't have to give me gifts all the time; I don't want to recognize you as the creator of everything. I want to put in my own two cents' worth."

We can, of course, contribute our own two cents' worth if we realize that nothing is possible without God. Once we acknowledge this, we can give him a million dollars. We can allow the idea of total dependence to permeate our lives until, like sugar dissolved in boiling water, the two become indistinguishable.

Prayer is my total faith in God as my creator. I am his image, his icon, and without him I can do nothing. Prayer is my recognition of who I really am: a saved sinner, capable of breaking my friendship with God at any given moment and even likely to revel in its breaking. When I recognize this, prayer is not something optional in my life. Prayer becomes a basic necessity. Prayer is the only answer to the

restlessness that we all feel from time to time. So, listen to the Shepherd's flute and follow him.