

TWENTY-SIXTH WEEK OF ORDINARY TIME – A

September 27 – October 3, 2026

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Sunday

IMITATING JESUS

A Reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

The first reading today confronts us with the Christ Hymn, as it is called. We are told we need to allow the grace of God to reshape us so that we too are ready to let go of whatever special dignity or status we may have and let ourselves be for others only what we are for our God. This is a picture of humility given us by the one who was divine but never asked: "Don't you know who I am?" All Jesus is concerned with is helping others draw close to God. He begins by showing us practically how loving and caring God really is. So the first challenge posed is that of becoming humble like our Lord. "He humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death".

Jesus is showing us how to be "truly" human; i.e., human as our God understands this. Further, he shows us that no matter what that may require of us, God will give us more than we could ever lose by following Christ. That is why St. Paul can say, "Do nothing out of selfishness or out of an effort to gain "empty" glory". In Paul's day, as in ours, status seemed supremely important. That is why humility seems so extreme a demand, because it ignores this. The second challenge we face is that of really stepping away from social rankings, even in our family or our community of faith.

Now think of the parable of the two sons. One simply refuses to do as he is asked and so publicly insults his father – none of this would have been done in private, you see. The second one says, "Yes, sir!" but doesn't do anything. This is hypocrisy! The one who insults his father isn't a hypocrite, and actually ends up repenting and doing what he was asked. Which state is better? I think Jesus makes it clear that hypocrisy is worse – yet is there one of us who has accepted the call to do God's will and then not done it? So we lie if we refuse to face the fact that we too have been, and maybe still are, living out hypocrisy. The most important challenge today's reading poses is that of repenting practically. You can't stop playing the hypocrite only in your intention! Isn't that what we have often enough done? The only way to face this situation is by living in humility.

Monday

DEATH AND THE MONK

An Excerpt from The Meaning of the Monastic Life by Fr. Louis Bouyer

It is not purely and simply by dying that we shall live, but by dying such a death that it kills death itself – and it is only the death of Christ that can do that. For it is not the life of the mortal body which has injured the life of the soul. It is, on the contrary, the death of the soul which has injured the body and made it mortal. Life will be won back by the resurrection, not of the soul alone, but of the human being in its unity, inseparably body and soul. And if the passage through death can lead to the resurrection, it is only in as much as the soul, which has become alive again in Christ, has been made capable of burning away the death of the body as with a red-hot iron and of causing it to evaporate in its own flame.

The monk goes forward to meet death because he believes that this miracle, the greatest of all, has been accomplished in the death of Christ: because he believes that Christ was Life, the very Life of God, and that in making physical death his own, he has robbed the evil one of all his power and all his empire, which are annihilated by this very act. Again he goes forward to meet death because he believes that Christ now and for the future lives in him: and finally, because he believes that what has taken place in Christ will be reproduced in himself, in the same manner.

The death of the monk, so desired and sought after day after day, is then only the supreme evidence of his faith, his faith in Christ vanquishing death in himself, his faith in Christ present in his followers to vanquish it in them. The monk's mortification is ultimately nothing more than his witness given to Christ, the witness of his faith, which makes it clear that it is not only an intellectual thing but an engagement of the whole being.

Tuesday

THE ANGELS

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church

St. Augustine says: "Angel' is the name of their office, not of their nature. If you seek the name of their nature, it is 'spirit'; if you seek the name of their office, it is 'angel': From what they are, 'spirit'; from what they do, 'angel'. With their whole beings the angels are servants and messengers of God. Because they 'always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven', they are the "mighty ones who do his word, harkening to the voice of his word."

As purely spiritual creatures, angels have intelligence and will: they are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures, as the splendor of their glory bears witness.

Christ is the center of the angelic world. They are his angels: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him..." They belong to him because they were created through and for him: "for in him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - all things were created through him and for him." They belong to him still more because he has made them messengers of his saving plan: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?"

Angels have been present since creation throughout the history of salvation, announcing this salvation from afar or near and serving the accomplishment of the divine plan: they closed the earthly paradise; protected Lot; saved Hagar and her child; stayed Abraham's hand; communicated the law by their ministry; led the People of God; announced births and callings; and assisted the prophets, just to cite a few examples. Finally, the angel Gabriel announced the birth, and the Precursor and that of Jesus himself.

From the Incarnation to the Ascension, the life of the Word incarnate is surrounded by the adoration and service of angels. When God "brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him". Their song of praise at the birth of Christ has not ceased resounding in the Church's praise: "Glory to God in the highest!" They protect Jesus in his infancy, serve him in the desert, strengthen him in his agony in the garden, when he could have been saved by them from the hands of his enemies as Israel had been. Again, it is the angels who "evangelize" by proclaiming the Good News of Christ's Incarnation and Resurrection. They will be present at Christ's return, which they will announce, to serve at his judgment.

In the meantime, the whole life of the Church benefits from the mysterious and powerful help of angels. In her liturgy, the Church joins with the angels to adore the thrice-holy God. She invokes their assistance... in the funeral liturgy's "May the angels lead you into Paradise". Moreover, in the "Cherubic Hymn" of the Byzantine Liturgy, she celebrates the memory of certain angels, more particularly St. Michael, St. Gabriel, St. Raphael, and the guardian angels.

From infancy to death, human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession. "Besides each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life." Already here on earth, the Christian life shares by faith in the blessed company of angels and humanity united in God.

Wednesday

ON THE LOVE OF SCRIPTURE

A Letter from St. Jerome to Paulinus

You see how, carried away by my love of the scriptures, I have exceeded the limits of a letter yet have not fully accomplished my object. We have heard only what it is that we ought to know and to desire, so that we too may be able to say with the psalmist: *"My soul breaks out with the fervent desire it always has had for your judgments"*. But the saying of Socrates about himself - "I only know this: that I know nothing" - is fulfilled in our case also.

The New Testament I will briefly deal with. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are the Lord's team of four, the true cherubim or store of knowledge. [Like the description in the prophet Ezekiel,] with them the whole body is full of eyes, they glitter as sparks, they run and return like lightning, their feet are straight feet, and lifted up, their backs also are winged, ready to fly in all directions. They hold together each by each and are interwoven one with another: like wheels within wheels they roll along and go wherever the breath of the Holy Spirit wafts them. The apostle Paul writes to seven churches (for the eighth epistle, that to the Hebrews, is not generally counted in with the others). He instructs Timothy and Titus; he interceded with Philemon for his runaway slave. Of him I think it better to say nothing than to write inadequately.

The Acts of the Apostles seem to relate a mere unvarnished narrative, descriptive of the infancy of the newly born church; but when once we realize that their author is Luke the physician whose praise is in the gospel, we shall see that all his works are medicine for the sick soul. The apostles James, Peter, John and Jude have published seven epistles at once spiritual and to the point, short and long, short that is in words but lengthy in substance so that there are few indeed who do not find themselves in the dark when they read them. The apocalypse of John has as many mysteries as words. In saying this, I have said less than the book deserves. All praise of it is inadequate; manifold meanings lie hid in its every word.

I beg of you, my dear brother, to live among these books, to meditate upon them, to know nothing else, to seek nothing else. Does not such a life seem to you a foretaste of heaven here on earth? Let not the simplicity of the scripture or the poorness of its vocabulary offend you: for these are due either to the faults of translators or else to deliberate purpose: for in this way it is better fitted for the instruction of an unlettered congregation, as the educated person can take one meaning and the uneducated another from one and the same sentence. I am not so dull or so forward as to profess that I myself know it, or that I can pluck upon the earth the fruit which has its root in heaven, but I confess that I should like to do so. I put myself before the man who sits idle and, while I lay no claim to be a master, I readily pledge myself to be a fellow-student. *"Every one that asks, receives; and those that seek, find; and to those that knock, it shall be opened"*.

Let us learn upon earth that knowledge which will continue with us in heaven.

Thursday

TRUE LOVE

An Excerpt from The Story of a Soul by St Thérèse of Lisieux

At the beginning of my religious life, Jesus wanted to have me experience how sweet it is to see Him in the souls of His brides. When I was guiding Sister St. Pierre, I did it with so much love that I could not possibly have done better had I been guiding Jesus Himself. The practice of charity... was not always so sweet for me, and to prove it to you, I am going to recount certain little struggles which will certainly make you smile. For a long time at evening meditation, I was placed in front of a Sister who had a strange habit... during meditation. This is what I noticed: as soon as this Sister arrived, she began making a strange little noise which resembled the noise one would make when rubbing two shells, one against the other. I was the only one to notice it because I had extremely sensitive hearing (too much so at times). Mother, it would be impossible for me to tell you how much this little noise wearied me. I had a great desire to turn my head and stare at the culprit who was very certainly unaware of her "click." This would be the only way of enlightening her. However, in the bottom of my heart I felt it was much better to suffer this out of love for God and not to cause the Sister any pain. I remained calm, therefore, and tried to unite myself to God and to forget the little noise.

Everything was useless. I felt the perspiration inundate me, and I was obliged simply to make a prayer of suffering; however, while suffering, I searched for a way of doing it without annoyance and with peace and joy, at least in the interior of my soul. I tried to love the little noise which was so displeasing; instead of trying not to hear it (impossible), I paid close attention to hear it well, as though it were a delightful concert, and my prayer (which was not the Prayer of Quiet) was spent in offering this concert to Jesus.

Another time, I was in the laundry doing the washing in front of a Sister who was throwing dirty water into my face every time she lifted the handkerchiefs to her bench; my first reaction was to draw back and wipe my face to show the Sister who was sprinkling me that she would do me a favor and be more careful. But I immediately thought I would be very foolish to refuse these treasures which were being given to me so generously, and I took care not to show my struggle. I put forth all my efforts to desire receiving very much of this dirty water, and was so successful that in the end I had really taken a liking to this kind of aspersion, and I promised myself to return another time to this nice place where one received so many treasures.

My dear Mother, you can see that I am a very little soul and that I can offer God only very little things. It often happens that I allow these little sacrifices which give such peace to the soul to slip by; this does not discourage me, for I put up with having a little less peace and I try to be more vigilant on another occasion. Ah! The Lord is so good to me that it is quite impossible for me to fear Him. He has always given me what I desire, or rather, He has made me desire what He wants to give me; thus, a short time before my trial against the faith began, I was saying to myself: Really, I have no great exterior trials, and for me to have interior ones, God would have to change my way... what means, then, will Jesus find to try me? The answer was not long in coming, and it showed me that the One whom I love is not at a loss as to the means He uses.

Friday

LEARNING MINISTRY FROM THE ANGELS

A Reflection by St. Albert the Great

The Lord himself says: "See to it that you do not treat one of these little ones with contempt; I tell you that their angels in heaven behold the face of my Heavenly Father continually." Christ means, more or less: Be attentive; watch that you look down on no one simple, weak, or poor. He tells us that he holds them in such high esteem as to have placed angels at their service. And these angels are very great, like officers in the palace of God.

These angels see the face of God for four reasons. The first is that it is their duty to present to God the good works people do. Raphael said to Tobiah: I was all the time offering your prayer to the Lord". In Revelation, we read: "There was another angel who came and stood by the altar with a golden censer with which he offered before God's throne the prayers of all the saints". The altar is the symbol of the heart of one who is faithful to God. We stand before God in this way and place in the censer our joys, our thoughts, our prayers, our words, and our actions. We present them before God. It is well, then, to have something good always ready to put in the censer for the offering which rises toward the Son in the bosom of the Father. We learn this from the angels.

The angels, second, stand before the face of God to receive God's commands. They do them with alacrity, especially when given a mission for the salvation of someone. The angel said to Tobiah: "Now, for your healing, and the deliverance of your son's wife, Sarah, from the fiend's attack, God has selected me as messenger". The text goes on to list the benefits received. The Psalm says: "God has entrusted you to the angels, to guard you in all your ways". We learn from these guardians and companions on the journey to do God's will right away and with joy, and to devote ourselves, especially to the help and healing of others.

Now, the third reason why the angels see the face of God the Father is that they praise God for the glory given by the conversion of sinners. They sing the joy that they themselves experience. So our Lord says in Luke's Gospel: "So it is, I tell you, that in heaven there will be more rejoicing over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine souls who are justified and have no need of repentance". This is our joy as much as it is the angels' joy.

The final reason that causes the angels such a great desire and rejoicing is their contemplation of the face of the Father in heaven. Such contemplation is for them the source of happiness that they taste but never get enough of. The Apostle Peter speaks to us of this as a deep mystery: "And now the angels can satisfy their eager gaze". We, too, are called to imitate their contemplation by our own and by our insatiable desire to behold the Father's face.

Pray, then, and ask our Lord to grant to us also the grace of serving faithfully and to merit, one day, to be carried by the holy angels to eternal joy. Minister these gifts which the angels mirror for us and do so faithfully, and to all, most especially to God's "little ones". Thus, we too may stand among the angels serving and glorifying God in joy without end.

Saturday

THE JOY OF HAVING A MOTHER

A Reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

No authentic text of Sacred Scripture tells us directly about Mary's birth. This very ancient feast is born of the Church's childlike love for its mother. It marks the beginning of the liturgical year in the Eastern Church and, in parts of the West, the beginning of the pastoral year. Thus, the entire Church lovingly celebrates this feast as children celebrate their mother's birthday – even though they have no exact idea of the circumstances of her birth. One might say we are drawing attention to the fact that there is a mother, and she is this mother through whom the divine design became real for us. The Church exults with joy at the thought that it has a mother and that it has this mother!

Mary is the one who made Jesus part of the people. From Abraham through David and the long genealogy of Jesus' ancestors, she made him part of a people, of a tribe, and placed him in the context of a real place in Israel, Bethlehem. She placed him in a specific set of surroundings. She made God human and incarnated God in time.

The divine design, according to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, is expressed in five great stages – awareness, predestination, call, justification, and glorification. They include everyone destined to share in God's design, which becomes a detailed and precise reality and assumes a local color and geography. That design becomes part of a culture and is worked out within precise historical limits. We might say that through Mary, the divine design passes from the abstract to the concrete.

The Messiah and our salvation come from a great story – glorious as well as wretched, painful, and humiliating. The genealogy shows this. It also comes through a simple and humble story. How does this help us grasp the meaning of the birth of Mary? Ask: What are we celebrating?

The reply is Mary's personal and free gesture. We are celebrating her being generated, her birth in the love of God, and that of her parents. All is done with the simplicity of those who have nothing and receive everything.

The birth of Mary is totally gratuitous. It is a pure and radical act of receiving. This infant, this little girl called Mary, doesn't accomplish anything in her birth. She is simply given the destiny of being the object of God's working. From this point on – yes – her actions will be personal, courageous, and definitive commitments. But her birth prefigures the approach Mary will consciously cultivate, and we must cultivate.

She is dependent on God's actions, on God's initiative, and God's love. Her birth is the triumph of God's free initiative of tenderness, of compassion, and love. God bends down to us and, in pure love, calls us to a mysterious alliance. Our task is to be alert today to the challenges due to today's history and respond by depending wholly on God, but doing all God gives us to do. We incarnate God's design in our time.