

Pondering the Word...

THE ANAWIM WAY

Daily Liturgical Meditations

*Seventeenth to Twenty-Second Week
in Ordinary Time*

*July 24 to September 3, 2022
Cycle C - Year 2*

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What is the Anawim Spirituality?

Our spirituality has three essential characteristics:

Liturgical

The Liturgy is the source of our formation. Daily, we draw inspiration from the readings and prayers of the Liturgy, which we understand to be the ponderings of Mary's heart. For this reason, we honor Mary under the title of Our Lady of the Liturgical Life.

Eucharistic

Jesus in the Eucharist is the center of our spirituality. By faithful participation in Holy Mass and frequent Eucharistic Adoration, we are empowered by the Presence of Jesus to go forth to serve the people of God in all the circumstances of life.

Marian

We entrust ourselves to Mary, the mother and model of every Christian. She continually forms us in her spirit of humility, compassion and reconciling love, transforming us into the likeness of Jesus. She shares with us her spiritual motherhood as we are called to bring forth the life of Jesus in others.

If you would like to explore the Anawim Community further, we invite you to contact us.

Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time

***“... ask and you will receive;
seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you.”***

Luke 11:9

Theme for the Week

Our prayer – all our asking, seeking, and knocking – when united with Christ, touches the heart of the Father. God our Father, whose love and mercy are inexhaustible, hears all our prayers and knows what is best for us and how best to give us what we need. In response to his boundless love and mercy, let us be persistent and persevering in prayer, with total trust in him.

**THE NOVELTY OF CHRISTIAN PRAYER:
A DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHILDREN AND THEIR FATHER**
A Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis

In today's Gospel passage (cf. Lk 11:1-13), Saint Luke narrates the circumstances in which Jesus teaches the "Lord's Prayer." They, the disciples, already know how to pray by reciting the formulas of the Jewish tradition, but they too wish to experience the same "quality" of Jesus' prayer because they can confirm that prayer is an essential dimension in their Master's life. Indeed, each of his important actions is marked by long pauses in prayer. Moreover, they are fascinated because they see that he does not pray like the other teachers of the time, but rather his prayer is an intimate bond with the Father, so much so that they wish to be a part of these moments of union with God, in order to completely savor its sweetness.

Thus, one day they wait for Jesus to finish praying in a secluded place and then they ask him: "Lord, teach us to pray" (v. 1). In responding to the disciples' explicit question, Jesus does not provide an abstract definition of prayer, nor does he teach an efficient technique to pray in order to "obtain" something. Instead, he invites his own to experience prayer, by putting them directly in communication with the Father, causing them to feel nostalgic for a personal relationship with God, with the Father. Herein lies the novelty of Christian prayer! It is a dialogue between people who love each other, a dialogue based on trust, sustained by listening and open to a commitment to solidarity. It is the dialogue of a Son with his Father, a dialogue between children and their Father. This is Christian prayer.

Hence, he delivers the "Lord's Prayer" to them, perhaps the most precious gift left to us by the Divine Master during his earthly mission. After revealing to us his mystery as Son and brother, with that prayer Jesus allows us to enter into God's paternity. I want to underscore this: when Jesus teaches us the "Our Father," he allows us to enter into God's paternity and he points the way to enter into a prayerful and direct dialogue with him, through the path of filial intimacy. It is a dialogue between a father and his son, of a son with his father. What we ask in the "Our Father" is already fulfilled for us in his Only-begotten Son: the sanctification of the Name, the advent of the Kingdom, the gift of bread,

of forgiveness, and of delivery from evil. As we ask, we open our hand to receive; to receive the gifts that the Father has shown us in his Son. The prayer that the Lord taught us is the synthesis of every prayer and we address it to the Father, always in communion with our brothers and sisters. Sometimes distractions can occur in prayer, but we often feel the need to stop at the first word, “Father,” and feel that paternity in our heart.

Jesus then recounts the parable of the importune friend and Jesus says: “we must persevere in prayer.” My thoughts turn to what children do when they are three-and-a-half years old: they begin to ask about things they do not understand. In my country, it is called “the ‘why’ age”; I think it is also the same here. Children begin to look at their father and ask: Why Dad? Why Dad? They ask for explanations. Let us be careful: when the father begins to explain why, they come up with another question without listening to the entire explanation. What is happening? Children feel insecure about many things that they are only partially beginning to understand. They only wish to attract the father’s gaze, and thus the “why, why, why?” If we pause on the first word of the “Our Father,” we will be doing the same as when we were children: attracting the Father’s gaze upon us: saying, “Father, Father” and also asking, “why?” and he will look at us.

Let us ask Mary, woman of prayer to help us pray the “Our Father” in unity with Jesus in order to live the Gospel guided by the Holy Spirit.

Pope Francis, Angelus Message, July 28, 2019
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July 24, 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly



First Reading: Genesis 18:20-32

In those days, the LORD said: “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave, that I must go down and see whether or not their actions fully correspond to the cry against them that comes to me. I mean to find out.”

While Abraham’s visitors walked on farther toward Sodom, the LORD remained standing before Abraham. Then Abraham drew nearer and said: “Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty? Suppose there were fifty innocent people in the city; would you wipe out the place, rather than spare it for the sake of the fifty innocent people within it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to make the innocent die with the guilty so that the innocent and the guilty would be treated alike! Should not the judge of all the world act with justice?” The LORD replied, “If I find fifty innocent people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.” Abraham spoke up again: “See how I am presuming to speak to my LORD, though I am but dust and ashes! What if there are five less than fifty innocent people? Will you destroy the whole city because of those five?” He answered, “I will not destroy it, if I find forty-five there.” But Abraham persisted, saying “What if only forty are found there?” He replied, “I will forbear doing it for the sake of the forty.” Then Abraham said, “Let not my Lord grow impatient if I go on. What if only thirty are found there?” He replied, “I will forbear doing it if I can find but thirty there.” Still Abraham went on, “Since I have thus dared to speak to my Lord, what if there are no more than twenty?” The LORD answered, “I will not destroy it, for the sake of the twenty.” But he still persisted: “Please, let not my Lord grow angry if I speak up this last time. What if there are at least ten there?” He replied, “For the sake of those ten, I will not destroy it.”



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 138:1-2, 2-3, 6-7, 7-8

Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.

I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with all my heart,
for you have heard the words of my mouth;
in the presence of the angels I will sing your praise;
I will worship at your holy temple
and give thanks to your name.

R. Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.

Because of your kindness and your truth;
for you have made great above all things
your name and your promise.

When I called you answered me;
you built up strength within me.

R. Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.

The LORD is exalted, yet the lowly he sees,
and the proud he knows from afar.

Though I walk amid distress, you preserve me;
against the anger of my enemies you raise your hand.

R. Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.

Your right hand saves me.

The LORD will complete what he has done for me;
your kindness, O LORD, endures forever;
forsake not the work of your hands.

R. Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.



Second Reading: Colossians 2:12-14

Brothers and sisters: You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And even when you were dead in transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he brought you to life along with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions; obliterating the bond against us, with its legal claims, which was opposed to us, he also removed it from our midst, nailing it to the cross.

Gospel Acclamation: Romans 8:15bc

Alleluia, alleluia. You have received a Spirit of adoption, through which we cry, Abba, Father. **Alleluia, alleluia.**



Gospel: Luke 11:1-13

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread
and forgive us our sins

for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us,
and do not subject us to the final test.”

And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have

nothing to offer him,' and he says in reply from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked and my children and I are already in bed. I cannot get up to give you anything.' I tell you, if he does not get up to give the visitor the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence.

"And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"



Meditation:

This Sunday's readings are all about prayer. As we know, there are many kinds of prayer, such as formal prayer like Liturgy of the Hours and the Rosary, and more informal prayer like our spontaneous petitions for others in need or our personal expressions of the pressing desires of our hearts. In today's Gospel from St. Luke, Jesus teaches us the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father.

Pope Francis in this week's Spiritual Reflection tells us that the disciples of Jesus "are fascinated because they see that he does not pray like the other teachers of the time, but rather his prayer is an intimate bond with the Father, so much so that they wish to be a part of these moments of union with God, in order to completely savor its sweetness." Jesus brings them into this intimacy with the Father by the very first word in the prayer he teaches them, "Father." Pope Francis tells us that Jesus "allows us to enter into God's paternity and he points the way to enter into a prayerful and direct dialogue with him, through the path of filial intimacy." This is, indeed, extraordinary and beautiful. Jesus is always bringing us closer and closer to the Father. He knows the Father and desires that we come to know him as well.

How do we draw closer to the Father? Through love, expressed and strengthened by prayer. When we spend time in prayer, we begin to know God better and love him more. When we experience how he hears and answers our prayers, we grow in trust. This growth leads to prayers of praise and thanksgiving.

In the reading from Genesis, we see other types of prayer as well. First, a prayer that rises from hearts that suffer injustice in the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Lord refers to this as “the cry against them that comes to me.” God hears and responds to the cries of the innocent, the poor, and the helpless who call out to him.

The second kind of prayer displayed in the first reading is a prayer of intercession. Abraham asks the Lord, “Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty?” He prays for the innocent with a remarkable combination of boldness and humility. Abraham realizes that he is in no position to question the Lord or tell him what to do. “See how I am presuming to speak to my Lord, though I am but dust and ashes!” Yet he is not afraid to challenge the limits of God’s mercy as he gradually reduces the number of innocents that would be enough to save Sodom. Abraham stops at ten innocent people. While he does not discover any limit to divine mercy, he learns that even a tiny faithful remnant is somehow enough for God’s mercy to reign over his own justice.

The Psalm today is another beautiful prayer, a prayer of thanksgiving, praise, and worship. “I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with all my heart... I will sing your praise; I will worship at your holy temple...” As Catholic Christians, we recognize that the highest form of worship takes place at every Mass, but we also worship God in the temple of our own hearts.

The reading from Colossians tells us that faith is the gift that allows us to pray. Faith is a free gift from God, given to us in Baptism. It is also our free response to God; without faith we would not pray. In this reading also, the greatest prayer of intercession is revealed: offered by Jesus on the Cross. His intercession to the Father on our behalf brought us to new life. “And even when you were dead in transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he brought you to life along with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.”

Prayer requires both patience and persistence, not because God does not hear us, but because we need space for spiritual growth. The time between our prayer and God’s answer is a time of growing in trust and love. Persevering in faith throughout the “waiting period” is itself a prayer of surrender and trust in God’s love and mercy. Even if we cannot perceive anything happening, the Holy Spirit is active in us when

we pray, teaching us how to pray as we ought, and even making intercession for us, praying in us on our behalf. God, who wants an ever-deeper communion of love with us, fills us with his Spirit to bring it about. When we ask, seek, and knock in prayer, the Holy Spirit assures that we will find, receive, and have the door opened for us – the door to the heart of our loving Father.

*How do I experience Jesus bringing me closer to the Father?
How do patience and perseverance in prayer enable me to grow spiritually? In what ways have I experienced the fruits and graces of intercessory prayer?*

Mary, walk with me in my faith journey of life.

In 2021, Pope Francis instituted the Church-wide celebration of a **World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly**. It is held annually on the fourth Sunday of July, close to the liturgical memorial of Saints Joachim and Anne, the grandparents of Jesus. The Holy Father said he instituted the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly because “grandparents are often forgotten.” Recalling the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple - when the elderly Simeon and Anna encountered the child Jesus and recognized Him as the Messiah - Pope Francis said, “the Holy Spirit even today stirs up thoughts and words of wisdom in the elderly.” The voice of the elderly “is precious,” he said, “because it sings the praises of God and preserves the roots of the peoples.” The elderly, he continued, “reminds us that old age is a gift and that grandparents are the link between the different generations, to pass on to the young the experience of life.”

Notes

July 25, Monday, Feast of Saint James, Apostle



First Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:7-15

Brothers and sisters: We hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being given up to death for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

So death is at work in us, but life in you. Since, then, we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, *I believed, therefore I spoke*, we too believe and therefore speak, knowing that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and place us with you in his presence. Everything indeed is for you, so that the grace bestowed in abundance on more and more people may cause the thanksgiving to overflow for the glory of God.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 126:1bc-2ab, 2cd-3, 4-5, 6

Those who sow in tears shall reap rejoicing.

When the LORD brought back the captives of Zion,
we were like men dreaming.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with rejoicing.

R. Those who sow in tears shall reap rejoicing.

Then they said among the nations,
“The LORD has done great things for them.”

The LORD has done great things for us;
we are glad indeed.

R. Those who sow in tears shall reap rejoicing.

Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like the torrents in the southern desert.

Those that sow in tears
shall reap rejoicing.

R. Those who sow in tears shall reap rejoicing.

Although they go forth weeping,
carrying the seed to be sown,

They shall come back rejoicing,
carrying their sheaves.

R. Those who sow in tears shall reap rejoicing.

Gospel Acclamation: see John 15:16

Alleluia, alleluia. I chose you from the world, to go and bear fruit that will last, says the Lord. **Alleluia, alleluia.**



Gospel: Matthew 20:20-28

The mother of the sons of Zebedee approached Jesus with her sons and did him homage, wishing to ask him for something. He said to her, “What do you wish?” She answered him, “Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your Kingdom.” Jesus said in reply, “You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?” They said to him, “We can.” He replied, “My chalice you will indeed drink, but to sit at my right and at my left, this is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” When the ten heard this, they became indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus summoned them and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”



Meditation:

St. James, whom we honor today, is one of the most prominent of the Apostles, along with Peter and John. He was present at some of the most significant events in Jesus’ public life, including the Transfiguration and the Agony in the Garden. James has the distinction of being the first of the Apostles to be martyred, and his martyrdom is the only one among the Apostles recorded in the New Testament.

Considering his prominence, we might naturally expect that great moments from his life will be highlighted on his feast day. But it is not so. In today’s readings there is no reference to James’ presence at those major events, and we do not read the account of his martyrdom. Neither can we find any mention of him doing any great thing. There is a tradition that James went to Spain to evangelize, encountered difficulties there, and received a personal apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of the Pillar. But none of these things is mentioned in today’s liturgy. Rather, the Gospel recounts his spirit of worldly ambition, when he asked, together with his brother John, for a prime spot in Jesus’ Kingdom.

Instead of the promotion they sought, the two brothers received a correction and an instruction, culminating in a statement that seems to be the complete reversal of their request: "...whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." But first, Jesus tries to help them understand what they are really asking for. He describes their share in his Kingdom using an image that sounds positive but represents suffering: "Can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?" They assure him that they can. Do they understand right then and there what he means? No, but at least their spirit is willing. How often we find ourselves doing the same! We ask the Lord for things that we may not really understand. Jesus asks us as well, "Can you drink the chalice...?"

"My chalice you will indeed drink..." Jesus affirms the deeper desire of James. Eventually, the Apostle will achieve greatness, not as the world defines it, but as Jesus himself reveals and exemplifies it. While we have no record of any of James' "great" works, his life points to the fundamental principle of greatness in the Christian life. It is not like the so-called greatness of the world, where those in authority dominate and even oppress others. Instead, true greatness is lived by putting oneself at the service of others, making a gift of oneself for the good of others – following the perfect model of greatness: Jesus, who gave his life as a ransom for many, who paid the price for others even though he himself did not owe anything.

James did drink the chalice offered to him, the chalice of suffering: he died a martyr of zealous love for his Master and Lord. He learned his lesson very well. His zeal for the Lord must have been so prominent that Herod took notice and picked him out as an example to discourage others from following Jesus (cf. Acts 12:1-2). Herod was correct to identify James as an example, but he was wrong in his assumption; James' greatness in his martyrdom only encouraged Jesus' followers all the more.

Like St. James, our own following of Jesus may not at first be animated by the best motives. But we can learn from him. Anyone who continues to follow Jesus can obtain the greatness James asked for. While we may not fully understand everything we ask for, as we persevere in the path of discipleship, we soak in Jesus' words and actions, and we find ourselves yielding more readily to his grace. He is

constantly at work configuring us to himself. The deepest reason for our following him is that it is his will, not our own. As our zeal grows and is purified, we focus not so much on what we will gain but on what others can gain by coming to know and follow him too, “so that,” as the first reading says, “the grace bestowed in abundance on more and more people may cause the thanksgiving to overflow for the glory of God.” Herein lies our true greatness – in humble service, in living a life for others, all for the glory of God.

How can I identify with St. James’ spirit of worldly ambition? What is the “cup of suffering” in my life? Why do I find it difficult to live a life of humble service for others, all for the glory of God?

Mary, Queen of the Apostles, enkindle in me the fire and love of the Apostles.

St. James, pray for us.

St. James, brother of John, is called "the Greater" to distinguish him from the other Apostle James. According to tradition, he was either taller or older than the other James rather than more important. Distinguished as being in Jesus' innermost circle, James was present with Jesus at the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead, Jesus' Transfiguration, and Jesus' Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. He preached the Gospel across the Holy Land and Spain. Later, he returned to Jerusalem and was martyred for his faith by King Herod Agrippa, who decapitated him in AD 44. As he was not allowed to be buried in Jerusalem, his remains were taken to Compostella, Spain. He was the first of the Apostles to be martyred and the only Apostle whose martyrdom is recorded in the New Testament (Acts 12:2). James is the patron saint of pilgrims and Spain.

Notes

July 26, Tuesday, 17th Week in Ordinary Time
Saints Joachim and Anne, Parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary



First Reading: Jeremiah 14:17-22

Let my eyes stream with tears
day and night, without rest,
Over the great destruction which overwhelms
the virgin daughter of my people,
over her incurable wound.
If I walk out into the field,
look! those slain by the sword;
If I enter the city,
look! those consumed by hunger.
Even the prophet and the priest
forage in a land they know not.
Have you cast Judah off completely?
Is Zion loathsome to you?
Why have you struck us a blow
that cannot be healed?
We wait for peace, to no avail;
for a time of healing, but terror comes instead.
We recognize, O LORD, our wickedness,
the guilt of our fathers;
that we have sinned against you.
For your name's sake spurn us not,
disgrace not the throne of your glory;
Remember your covenant with us, and break it not.
Among the nations' idols is there any that gives rain?
Or can the mere heavens send showers?
Is it not you alone, O LORD,
our God, to whom we look?
You alone have done all these things.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 79:8, 9, 11 and 13

For the glory of your name, O Lord, deliver us.

Remember not against us the iniquities of the past;
may your compassion quickly come to us,
for we are brought very low.

R. For the glory of your name, O Lord, deliver us.

Help us, O God our savior,
because of the glory of your name;
Deliver us and pardon our sins
for your name's sake.

R. For the glory of your name, O Lord, deliver us.

Let the prisoners' sighing come before you;
with your great power free those doomed to death.
Then we, your people and the sheep of your pasture,
will give thanks to you forever;
through all generations we will declare your praise.

R. For the glory of your name, O Lord, deliver us.

Gospel Acclamation:

Alleluia, alleluia. The seed is the word of God, Christ is the sower; all who come to him will live for ever. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Matthew 13:36-43

Jesus dismissed the crowds and went into the house. His disciples approached him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." He said in reply, "He who sows good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed the children of the Kingdom. The weeds are the children of the Evil One, and the enemy who sows them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. Just as weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his Kingdom all who cause others to sin and all evildoers. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears ought to hear."



Meditation:

Today the Church honors the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the grandparents of Jesus, Sts. Joachim and Anne. They are unknown to history and are not mentioned in the Bible, but the hidden seeds of their faith and love bore immeasurable fruit, long after their death. They remind us that what looks fruitless to us does not look fruitless to God. He brings forth good from every one of our seemingly insignificant decisions, preserving what is valuable and disposing of what is not.

It happens that on this feast, we read Jesus' interpretation of the parable of the weeds in the field, which we heard last Saturday. The Lord offers us a very thorough explanation, taking each detail and explaining what it means: what is the good seed, who sows it, what is the field, what is the bad seed and the one who sows it. He even explains that at the end of time, "the harvesters are angels."

One of the reasons we treasure the word of God is that it reveals the truth to us, truth that we need to understand the condition of the world and of our own lives. We cannot rely on our own understanding alone because we cannot see clearly; our view is distorted. Our tendency is to go to one extreme or the other. When things go well and we feel happy, we say, *Everything is good and everything is going to work out and everybody can get along*. But when we encounter evil, corruption, violence, injustice, and it happens again and again, we tend to say, *Everything is bad; everything is such a mess that there is no hope. It will never get any better*. The truth is that we live in a world that has a complex mixture of weeds and wheat – so intertwined that sorting them out is beyond our capability.

The parable assures us of some things that we would not know otherwise and could not have figured out. The time of mixing good and evil together will come to an end, and the wheat and the weeds will one day be properly sorted out. We do not have to fear that injustice will triumph and that evil will have the last word. No, justice will have the last word; mercy will have the last word; God will have the last word. So, as we pass through the trials of life in this world, we do not get discouraged. Neither do we get unrealistically optimistic. We do not believe that a better government or more money or a better computer will solve all our problems.

It is very helpful to have a balanced understanding of our real situation, especially when we get hit with new experiences of weeds. Certainly we have had in recent times plenty of news about weeds, both in civil society and in the Church. We hear about weeds even among the bishops and the priests. If the Church herself is full of weeds, what hope is there for the world? It is all very discouraging unless we recall the message of today's parable. Our faith assures us that our hope is in the Lord who plants good seeds and who separates the weeds and the wheat.

Although the parable is about the field of the world, it also applies to us personally. In our own lives we have a complex mixture of good and evil. Wheat and weeds are sown in our hearts, and it is our responsibility to recognize and to deal with this reality. Listening to our own feelings, reflecting on our own experiences, opening ourselves to God's interpretation of what is happening in our lives, inside and out, makes it possible for his Kingdom to reign. Prayer, pondering, disciplining ourselves, and serving others are all essential for the health of our spiritual life.

Yet even when we seem to have done all the essentials, we still find ourselves daunted by weakness and sin, lack of fruit, slow progress, and failure to love some neighbor or another. Living with a continual mix of wheat and weeds really does not come easy! The prophet Jeremiah's lament in the first reading applies to our experience of both the world and our own fallen condition: "We wait for peace, to no avail; for a time of healing, but terror comes instead."

What do we do in the meantime? We look not to ourselves or to worldly solutions but to the Lord. "Is it not you alone, O LORD, our God, to whom we look?" With the light of his grace, we continually make the distinction between weeds and wheat in our lives. The more we do it, the better we get at it. We do not learn discernment in one day. We learn it by continually submitting our inner life to God, opening ourselves to him, allowing him to guide us, saying "Yes" to what is good, saying "No" to what is bad, and allowing the Kingdom of God to reign in us. The fruit of this is that – in the end – what is evil will be thrown into the fire. We are detached from it and so we want it to be burnt up. What is good – that is, what God wants to grow in us – will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of our Father.

What are some of the weeds and wheat in my life? How do I deal with them? How can I live by the example of Sts. Joachim and Anne?

Mary, enable me to be a good seed planted in the world to bear fruit for all.

Sts. Joachim and Anne, pray for us.

In the Scriptures, both Matthew and Luke furnish a legal family history of Jesus, tracing his ancestry to show that he is the culmination of great promises. Not only is his mother's family neglected, we also know nothing factual about them except that they existed. Even the names **Joachim and Anne** come from a legendary source written more than a century after Jesus died. The heroism and holiness of these people, however, is inferred from the whole family atmosphere around Mary in the Scriptures. Whether we rely on the legends about Mary's childhood or make guesses from the information in the Bible, we see in her a fulfillment of many generations of prayerful persons, herself steeped in the religious traditions of her people. Joachim and Anne – whether these are their real names or not – represent that entire quiet series of generations who faithfully perform their duties, practice their faith, and establish an atmosphere for the coming of the Messiah, but remain obscure. It was their faith that laid the foundation of courage and strength that enabled Mary to stand at the foot of the Cross as her Son was crucified and to still trust God.

Notes



First Reading: Jeremiah 15:10, 16-21

Woe to me, mother, that you gave me birth!
a man of strife and contention to all the land!
I neither borrow nor lend,
yet all curse me.
When I found your words, I devoured them;
they became my joy and the happiness of my heart,
Because I bore your name,
O LORD, God of hosts.
I did not sit celebrating
in the circle of merrymakers;
Under the weight of your hand I sat alone
because you filled me with indignation.
Why is my pain continuous,
my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?
You have indeed become for me a treacherous brook,
whose waters do not abide!
Thus the LORD answered me:
If you repent, so that I restore you,
in my presence you shall stand;
If you bring forth the precious without the vile,
you shall be my mouthpiece.
Then it shall be they who turn to you,
and you shall not turn to them;
And I will make you toward this people
a solid wall of brass.
Though they fight against you,
they shall not prevail,
For I am with you,
to deliver and rescue you, says the LORD.
I will free you from the hand of the wicked,
and rescue you from the grasp of the violent.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 59:2-3, 4, 10-11, 17, 18

God is my refuge on the day of distress.

Rescue me from my enemies, O my God;
from my adversaries defend me.
Rescue me from evildoers;
from bloodthirsty men save me.

R. God is my refuge on the day of distress.

For behold, they lie in wait for my life;
mighty men come together against me,
Not for any offense or sin of mine, O LORD.

R. God is my refuge on the day of distress.

O my strength! for you I watch;

for you, O God, are my stronghold,

As for my God, may his mercy go before me;

may he show me the fall of my foes.

R. God is my refuge on the day of distress.

But I will sing of your strength

and revel at dawn in your mercy;

You have been my stronghold,

my refuge in the day of distress.

R. God is my refuge on the day of distress.

O my strength! your praise will I sing;

for you, O God, are my stronghold,

my merciful God!

R. God is my refuge on the day of distress.

Gospel Acclamation: John 15:15b

Alleluia, alleluia. I call you my friends, says the Lord, for I have made known to you all that the Father has told me. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Matthew 13:44-46

Jesus said to his disciples: “The Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the Kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it.”



Meditation:

Jeremiah is one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament. He is also the prophet who reveals the most about himself. All the prophets reveal God; they speak the word of God. But part of the word of God we receive through Jeremiah is the sharing of his own struggles. Sometimes the scholars speak about the “confessions of Jeremiah,” meaning his declarations of his own difficulties. Complaining does not fit our conventional picture of prophets, but Jeremiah complains – a lot – and with good reason. He has been given a most difficult mission. From the start he was opposed and persecuted by practically everyone. He feels like he has been set up for failure.

Today's reading is a great example of Jeremiah complaining and the Lord responding. His complaints are always raised up to the Lord; he does not close himself off in self-pity and close his heart to what God wants to say. He acknowledges openly what he is suffering, that everybody is rejecting him, and that it seems as if the Lord himself is not being fair. Yet at the same time he speaks of the joyful privilege of having received the word of God: "When I found your words, I devoured them; they became my joy and the happiness of my heart."

Anyone who has discovered the word of God as a source of life and of joy understands what Jeremiah is talking about. We may not be able to claim that we devour the word every single day, but we would not be putting such effort into pondering the word frequently if we did not know that it is a source of deep joy for us. The word is our daily spiritual nourishment. Yet, like Jeremiah, we also tend to complain. It comes very naturally to us. We have a lot of complaints. Perhaps this is why the Lord gives us a prophet like Jeremiah to help us understand ourselves and how the Lord deals with our complaining nature.

The Lord's response to Jeremiah is instructive. He does not say, "You should not have complained." Rather, he calls him to repentance. "If you repent, so that I restore you, in my presence you shall stand." "Repent." For what? Not for complaining in prayer but for allowing his sufferings to interfere with his mission and divert him from the joy of bearing God's word. God calls him to repentance because he has allowed his own idea of what the outcome of his ministry should be to get in the way of faithful and persevering service. The Lord reminds the prophet that once he turns back to mission, he will indeed be an effective "mouthpiece" of the Lord. Although God has given Jeremiah his mission, it does not follow that people will listen to him and he will be "successful." But he will not be defeated either, for the Lord will make him like "a solid wall of brass," strong enough to overcome anybody or anything.

The Gospel can give us another perspective on the business of complaining and the need for perseverance. What if the man who found the treasure and went off to sell everything had begun to say as he was doing so, *I have to sell this. I have to sell that. I'm losing so much! Why does it have to be this way? Would not we say to him, Wait a minute! You're missing the point. All these steps, difficult though they may be, are part of gaining the treasure.*

It is important for us to listen to our own complaints because these can indicate to us that we are missing the point. We must focus our attention on the treasure which is the source of our joy. Our greatest treasure is the Lord himself, our relationship with him. What he gives us is worth more than we can ever own or sell. This is why anyone who finds this buried treasure goes forth – not complaining but “out of joy” – to do whatever is necessary to obtain it.

Jeremiah knows this joy. He is reminded of it when the Lord calls him to repentance. Even to hear the Lord say, “If you repent, so that I restore you...” gives him joy. The call to repentance gives us joy because this is also part of the treasure. The knowledge that we can be set free from the grip of sin and from the turmoil of our human condition – this is a joy.

The treasure is not success. It is not a matter of getting people to follow us or admire us or agree with us. It is not achievement or possessions or power. Even if we have lots of opposition or struggles or weaknesses, none of that matters as long as we get the treasure, the pearl of great price. When we encounter challenges that are more than we can handle, we do well to remember today’s Responsorial Psalm: “God is my refuge on the day of distress.”

What are some of my experiences that I feel were set up for failure by God? Searching my heart, where does my treasure lie? How do I face the struggles of life that seem to overwhelm me?

Mary, free me from discouragement in my daily struggles as I follow the Lord.

Notes



First Reading: Jeremiah 18:1-6

This word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: Rise up, be off to the potter's house; there I will give you my message. I went down to the potter's house and there he was, working at the wheel. Whenever the object of clay which he was making turned out badly in his hand, he tried again, making of the clay another object of whatever sort he pleased. Then the word of the LORD came to me: Can I not do to you, house of Israel, as this potter has done? says the LORD. Indeed, like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, house of Israel.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 146:1b-2, 3-4, 5-6ab

Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob.

or *Alleluia*.

Praise the LORD, O my soul;

I will praise the LORD all my life;

I will sing praise to my God while I live.

R. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob.

or *Alleluia*.

Put not your trust in princes,

in the sons of men, in whom there is no salvation.

When his spirit departs he returns to his earth;

on that day his plans perish.

R. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob.

or *Alleluia*.

Blessed he whose help is the God of Jacob,

whose hope is in the LORD, his God.

Who made heaven and earth,

the sea and all that is in them.

R. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob.

or *Alleluia*.

Gospel Acclamation: see Acts 16:14b

Alleluia, alleluia. Open our hearts, O Lord, to listen to the words of your Son. **Alleluia, alleluia.**



Gospel: Matthew 13:47-53

Jesus said to the disciples: "The Kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What

is bad they throw away. Thus it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.”

“Do you understand all these things?” They answered, “Yes.” And he replied, “Then every scribe who has been instructed in the Kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old.” When Jesus finished these parables, he went away from there.



Meditation:

Today’s first reading gives us a beautiful image of God as a potter working with the clay. It is an indication to us of what we are supposed to be like in the hands of God: like clay. Clay is soft and pliable; it can easily be shaped or changed according to the will of the potter. It is quite different from the image used in yesterday’s reading from Jeremiah, where the Lord told the prophet that he would make him into “a solid wall of brass.” Now, a wall of brass is strong and solid, not like clay at all. What does this mean for us? Are we supposed to be like brass or like clay? How can we know which of these two images applies to us and when?

We cannot use the standards of the world with its upside-down mentality to determine the time or situation when each image is applicable. The current trend of gender ideology is a perfect example of the world’s confusion. According to this erroneous ideology, gender is a purely social and psychological construct, with no biological foundation. Therefore a girl who thinks she is a boy is really a boy and has the right to impose her false identity on others. When people do not go along with her claim, she may seek the backing of the law and the courts. However, one’s gender is a reality not a preference. We cannot simply go along with what is unreal, nor can we reject the work of God, who creates every human person either male or female. Understandably, persons with gender dysphoria face difficult struggles and need loving support, but their difficulties do not prove “gender fluidity.” The claim that gender is like clay and that each person is his or her own potter is false. This ideology is itself a pseudo clay that is resistant in the hands of the Father.

When it comes to standing up against error, we are to be a wall of brass, with the strength that comes from God. The Lord told Jeremiah, who was complaining about being mistreated for proclaiming the word

of God, “I will make you toward this people a solid wall of brass. Though they fight against you, they shall not prevail.” When we are strong in defense of truth and in opposition to error, people will accuse us of rigidity, intolerance, and prejudice. Our strength is not to be based on ourselves; it is not stubbornness. It comes from the Lord who is truth and love.

Whom will we allow to shape us? The world or the Lord? If we want to be the person God has made us to be, in his hands we must be clay, soft and pliable. He is the one who shapes us, so before him we must work to be really freed from the rigidity, self-will, and self-glorification that tends to reign in our nature. When we are called to stand up for the truth, we must be strong with the strength that comes from God. When it comes to presenting our will before God, we must be clay.

The Gospel presents us with still another image, that of a fishnet. A net thrown into the sea catches a great variety of things. We are like this net. Our senses and our minds are thrown into the world with its cacophony of ideas. So many things attract our attention, telling us to be this or that, to follow this or that. Now, of all that we have collected over the years, or even in the past twenty-four hours, what is really worthwhile? We have to sit down and sort it all out, separating what is good from what is bad. What is good we keep firmly, with determination. What is bad we throw away. We do not have to accept and tolerate error and evil as if they are good. But we do have to open ourselves completely to the good that God has revealed to us and planted in our hearts. We do well to let today’s Gospel Acclamation echo in our souls: “Open our hearts, O Lord, to listen to the words of your Son.”

In what areas of my life do I live in unreality and not in the plan of God for me? When I speak in truth, how do I react if I am accused of rigidity, prejudice, and intolerance? What do I have to let go of so that the Lord can form me into his likeness?

Mary, open my heart to allow the Lord to form me, as a potter forms the clay.

July 29, Friday, 17th Week in Ordinary Time
Saints Martha, Mary, and Lazarus



First Reading: Jeremiah 26:1-9

In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah, this message came from the LORD: Thus says the LORD: Stand in the court of the house of the LORD and speak to the people of all the cities of Judah who come to worship in the house of the LORD; whatever I command you, tell them, and omit nothing. Perhaps they will listen and turn back, each from his evil way, so that I may repent of the evil I have planned to inflict upon them for their evil deeds. Say to them: Thus says the LORD: If you disobey me, not living according to the law I placed before you and not listening to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I send you constantly though you do not obey them, I will treat this house like Shiloh, and make this the city to which all the nations of the earth shall refer when cursing another.

Now the priests, the prophets, and all the people heard Jeremiah speak these words in the house of the LORD. When Jeremiah finished speaking all that the LORD bade him speak to all the people, the priests and prophets laid hold of him, crying, “You must be put to death! Why do you prophesy in the name of the LORD: ‘This house shall be like Shiloh,’ and ‘This city shall be desolate and deserted?’” And all the people gathered about Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 69:5, 8-10, 14

Lord, in your great love, answer me.

Those outnumber the hairs of my head
who hate me without cause.

Too many for my strength
are they who wrongfully are my enemies.
Must I restore what I did not steal?

R. Lord, in your great love, answer me.

Since for your sake I bear insult,
and shame covers my face.

I have become an outcast to my brothers,
a stranger to my mother’s sons,

Because zeal for your house consumes me,
and the insults of those who blaspheme you fall upon me.

R. Lord, in your great love, answer me.

But I pray to you, O LORD,
for the time of your favor, O God!
In your great kindness answer me
with your constant help.

R. Lord, in your great love, answer me.

Gospel Acclamation: John 8:12

Alleluia, alleluia. I am the light of the world, says the Lord; whoever follows me will have the light of life. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: John 11:19-27

Many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother [Lazarus, who had died]. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise.” Martha said to him, “I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and anyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.”

or ***Luke 10:38-42***

Jesus entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary who sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak. Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me.” The Lord said to her in reply, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her.”



Meditation:

It was two Sundays ago that we read the Gospel passage about Jesus being hosted in the house of Martha and Mary. So, when we come to today’s feast of Sts. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, the first thing we might recall is Martha’s being anxious and upset about many things. We remember her complaining to Jesus that her sister was not doing her share of the household chores. That is one dimension of Martha’s journey, which was our focus then. But today we honor

Martha as a Saint, reigning gloriously in Heaven, so she certainly made progress since that day. Recalling the story of how Martha was anxious and upset and her sister was sitting at Jesus' feet, we might think, "Oh, Mary is the holy one. She should have the feast day." Yet our calendar of Saints honors all three of the siblings of Bethany together; their differences in temperament and experience did not prevent their growth in holiness.

If we look at the Scripture passages that mention Martha, we discover that the final remark about her describes her as serving at the table, at the meal that the family held for Jesus after Lazarus was raised from the dead. Exteriorly, there does not seem to be much of a change: she is still serving, as she was when we first saw her. She is the eldest sister, probably the one responsible for the house, and the more active type of person. So, her growth in holiness is not reflected merely by a change in her outward duties, but by the transformation that took place within her. Her responsibilities and circumstances are much the same, but she is different. She is no longer complaining, and no longer "anxious and worried about many things."

This is important for us because if we think that, in order to grow holy, our circumstances must change, we will never grow holy. Do we really think that we can abandon our families, jobs, and responsibilities to go off to a mountain somewhere? Not many people are called to do that. Exterior changes are not essential to the path of holiness. What is required of all of us, regardless of our circumstances, is interior change – so that we can embrace the will of God as it is present today. We must learn how to serve with love and with joy; how to forgive; how to be present to God; and how to be present to him in the people who are in our own household. This is where holiness grows. And Martha grew in holiness as she stopped complaining and continued to serve.

The other Gospel option, taken from St. John, describes the moment when Jesus arrived in Bethany. Lazarus had died four days earlier, and Jesus had deliberately delayed his visit. When he finally got there, Martha came to greet him. If she was anxious and upset before, we might imagine that she would be more upset now that her brother has died, for the loss of a loved one is a time of great emotional turmoil. But we do not see that. We do not observe any anxiety or emotional distress. Instead, Martha shows a willingness to abandon herself and her deep loss into the hands of God.

She does not understand why Jesus delayed and she expresses it, “If you had been here, he would not have died.” At the same time, she declares her confidence that God will give Jesus whatever he asks. The difference in Martha is remarkable! When Jesus challenges her to trust in him, she does! “Your brother will rise again.” And she replies, “I know he will rise again.” Her demeanor reveals that she is not upset. She knows God is in charge; he is the Lord of life. She adds, “He will rise in the resurrection on the last day.”

Then Jesus reveals something about himself that had not yet been said: “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and anyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” To be dead or alive physically is not the issue here, but being alive in the spirit, in faith. That is why Jesus can speak of never dying right in front of the tomb of his dead friend. He turns to Martha and asks her, “Do you believe this?” And Martha, rising to the occasion says, “Yes, Lord! I believe!” Now we see where her holiness is – in her ability to let go of her preferences and her emotional turmoil and say “yes” to God: “Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.” This is why Martha is a model for us, because of her faith.

What we believe is also what we are called to proclaim and to live. Like Martha confessing faith in the resurrection while her brother is still lying in the tomb, and like Jeremiah prophesying in the court of the temple, we too are called to bear witness to what we believe. The Lord’s instruction to Jeremiah is his word to us today: “Whatever I command you, tell them, and omit nothing.” What does the Lord want us to tell his people, without omitting anything? Today’s Gospel Acclamation sums it up: “I am the light of the world, says the Lord; whoever follows me will have the light of life.”

Why do I tend to be anxious and worried about many things? How has my life of complaining like Martha changed to be more peaceful and accepting? How am I striving to embrace the will of God in my life?

Mary, may your life of complete trust in the will of God free me from all anxiety.

Sts. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, pray for us.

Today the Church honors the siblings **Martha, Mary, and Lazarus** of Bethany, who were close friends of Jesus. The Memorial of St. Martha (July 29) was already on the Church's liturgical calendar. On February 2, 2021, Pope Francis added to it Sts. Mary and Lazarus.

When **Martha** is first mentioned in the Gospels (Lk 10:38), she is concerned about the details of hospitality. Sometime later she stands out as a woman of strong faith, announcing her firm conviction that Jesus is the Son of God (Jn 11). After her brother Lazarus was raised from the dead, Martha's presence is noted by the simple statement: "Martha served" (Jn 12:2).

When we first see **Mary**, she is at the feet of Jesus and he commends her for choosing the better part. Later, just a few days before his death, Jesus visited their home, and while he was there Mary anointed his feet with precious perfume and wiped them with her hair. She may have had a premonition of his death. Mary was not afraid of what others thought as she "wasted" this costly oil.

The Scriptures do not say much about **Lazarus**, but because Jesus raised him from the dead many people began to believe that Jesus was the Son of God. By this miracle, he showed his disciples and the world that he had power even over death.

The decree of the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments establishing this feast notes that the Lord Jesus experienced the family spirit and friendship of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, and, as the Gospel of John states, Jesus loved them (Jn 11:5). This decree also declares that the siblings offer an "important evangelical witness" in "welcoming the Lord Jesus into their home, in listening to him attentively, in believing that he is the resurrection and the life."

Notes

July 30, Saturday, 17th Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Peter Chrysologus, Bishop and Doctor of the Church



First Reading: Jeremiah 26:11-16, 24

The priests and prophets said to the princes and to all the people, “This man deserves death; he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears.” Jeremiah gave this answer to the princes and all the people: “It was the LORD who sent me to prophesy against this house and city all that you have heard. Now, therefore, reform your ways and your deeds; listen to the voice of the LORD your God, so that the LORD will repent of the evil with which he threatens you. As for me, I am in your hands; do with me what you think good and right. But mark well: if you put me to death, it is innocent blood you bring on yourselves, on this city and its citizens. For in truth it was the LORD who sent me to you, to speak all these things for you to hear.”

Thereupon the princes and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, “This man does not deserve death; it is in the name of the LORD, our God, that he speaks to us.”

So Ahikam, son of Shaphan, protected Jeremiah, so that he was not handed over to the people to be put to death.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 69:15-16, 30-31, 33-34

Lord, in your great love, answer me.

Rescue me out of the mire; may I not sink!

may I be rescued from my foes,
and from the watery depths.

Let not the flood-waters overwhelm me,
nor the abyss swallow me up,
nor the pit close its mouth over me.

R. Lord, in your great love, answer me.

But I am afflicted and in pain;

let your saving help, O God, protect me.

I will praise the name of God in song,
and I will glorify him with thanksgiving.

R. Lord, in your great love, answer me.

“See, you lowly ones, and be glad;

you who seek God, may your hearts revive!

For the LORD hears the poor,

and his own who are in bonds he spurns not.”

R. Lord, in your great love, answer me.

Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 5:10

Alleluia, alleluia. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Matthew 14:1-12

Herod the tetrarch heard of the reputation of Jesus and said to his servants, “This man is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why mighty powers are at work in him.”

Now Herod had arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, for John had said to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.” Although he wanted to kill him, he feared the people, for they regarded him as a prophet. But at a birthday celebration for Herod, the daughter of Herodias performed a dance before the guests and delighted Herod so much that he swore to give her whatever she might ask for. Prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.” The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and the guests who were present, he ordered that it be given, and he had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who took it to her mother. His disciples came and took away the corpse and buried him; and they went and told Jesus.



Meditation:

We began this week reflecting on prayer. Jesus taught us that authentic prayer is based on our relationship with God; we are children of our Father who loves us. When we reject this relationship, we cannot pray. We cannot even tolerate hearing the word of God. This is the grave problem we see on display in today’s readings. God speaks the truth to his people through his servants the prophets – Jeremiah in the first reading, and John the Baptist in the Gospel – but the people refuse to listen. They reject both the message of God and his messengers. They go so far as to seek to silence the words of truth by killing the prophets. Jeremiah is saved by Ahikam, but John the Baptizer is put to death at Herod’s command.

The story of Herod shows us quite clearly how the attitude of rebellion and rejection of God’s word leads to a spiritual regression. At some point in the past Herod felt an attraction to Herodias, his sister-in-law. He knew from the beginning that they could not get married because Herodias was already married to his brother Philip. Herod’s

initial attraction to Herodias was not in itself a sin. But he made a sinful decision: to reject God's law and commit adultery. He took Herodias in to live with him. He committed himself to living in sin. God, full of compassion for this man caught in slavery to sin, prompted John the Baptist to speak the truth to Herod: "It is not lawful for you to have her." God wanted to awaken Herod's conscience and move him to repentance. But the king hardened his heart, deciding to persist in his sin. In this condition, he found the truth spoken by John to be intolerably disturbing. It was a constant reminder of his sinfulness. He sought to silence the voice of truth by killing John.

The people of Jeremiah's time have a similar reaction to the disturbing words of the prophet. He has prophesied against the evils being committed in the city, and the people in reply want to kill him. In their self-righteousness, they try to make their opposition to Jeremiah look good by claiming that he "deserves death." They want to blame *him* for the evil *they* intend to do. Jeremiah, speaking the truth in love, lays out for them the real situation: God sent him to prophesy; the right response is to listen and repent; and if they put him to death, they will bear the full blame for shedding innocent blood. Jeremiah's prophesies are not against the people but for them. He speaks in the name of God who loves his people and does not want to destroy them. If they refuse to listen to the prophet, it is evidence that they are refusing to submit to God.

The readings alert us to the prominent role of the *conscience* in our lives. Our conscience is God's gift, the capacity to hear his voice, convicting us of our guilt and supporting us in our innocence. When we choose sin, even if we do not literally kill our opponent, we are in effect "killing" our own conscience. Sin is a kind of moral suicide. The conscience does not die easily, however. Herod's conscience still troubles him even after the death of John. When he hears about Jesus, he immediately fears that John may have been raised from the dead to torment him.

We all face the temptation to suppress the voice of our conscience. When some truth is very disturbing or challenging – a word from Scripture, a correction, a courageous witness, or some other prompting from God – our nature would prefer to avoid it. We try not to hear. Or

sometimes we conveniently “forget” a challenging word. We have many ways of trying to dull our conscience, and if we persist in these self-destructive ways, we can get to the point where the conscience is quite deadened.

The Lord, however, never gives up on us! He continues to speak, even when we do not want to listen and refuse to hear. He reminds us that we can still stop and make a good Confession. He teaches us to return to him in prayer, to let his life-giving word penetrate all our defenses and change us.

When have I experienced being silenced for openly speaking the truth? In what circumstances in my life have I not listened to my conscience? Like John the Baptist and Jeremiah, how do I give witness to the light which is Christ the Lord?

***Mary, sustain me in my call to uphold the truth of God’s word.
St. Peter Chrysologus, pray for us.***

Peter Chrysologus was born in Italy around 406. Little is known about his family or his early years. As a deacon he accompanied Bishop Cornelius of Ravenna to Rome in 433. Before they arrived, Pope Sixtus III had a vision of Peter standing with St. Peter the Apostle and St. Apollinaris. St. Peter said, “See this man whom we have chosen and who stands between us. Consecrate him and no other.” When they arrived, the pope saluted Peter and he was consecrated bishop of Ravenna. As bishop he pastured his flock with diligence and care. His sermons were inspiring, simple, clear, practical, and rather short, as he was afraid of boring his flock. He spoke with unusual clarity on the Incarnation, the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and the Mystical Body. Before his sermons Peter often said, “May our God deign to give me the grace of speaking and you the desire of hearing.” He was a good pastor, a good teacher of morals, and a guide for the spiritual life. He is known as a Doctor of Homilies. He is called Chrysologus, “golden-worded,” for his exceptional preaching ability. Only 176 of his homilies are extant. He died in 450.

Notes