



Pondering the Word...

THE ANAWIM WAY

Daily Liturgical Meditations

*Twenty-Third to Twenty-Eighth Week
in Ordinary Time*

*September 7 to October 18, 2025
Cycle C - Year 1*

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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.

Twenty-Third Week in Ordinary Time

***“Whoever does not carry his own cross
and come after me cannot be my disciple.”***

Luke 14:27

Theme for the Week

A true disciple of Jesus must dedicate himself to the Lord absolutely, above anyone or anything else. Our priority must be to love and follow him. Let us keep our hearts focused on him, renounce our attachments, take up our cross each day, and follow him.

***Disciples of Jesus Must Follow His Style:
Not Self-Interest, but Generous Self-Giving Love***
A Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis

Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem, and today's Gospel tells us that "large crowds were travelling with him" (*Lk* 14:25). To travel with Jesus means to follow him, to become his disciples. Yet, the Lord's message to those people was not exactly appealing; in fact, it was quite demanding: whoever does not love him more than his or her own family, whoever does not carry the cross, whoever remains attached to earthly goods, cannot be his disciple (cf. vv. 26-27, 33). Why does Jesus say these things to the crowds? What do these admonitions mean? Let us try to answer these questions.

First, we see a great crowd of people following Jesus. We can imagine that many were attracted by his words, astonished at the things he did, and saw him as a source of hope for the future. What would any teacher of that time or, for that matter, what would any astute leader do, seeing that his or her words and charisma attract crowds and increase his or her popularity? The same thing happens today, at times of personal or societal crisis, when we are especially prey to feelings of anger or we fear things that threaten our future. We become more susceptible and thus, on the tide of emotion, we look to those who can shrewdly take advantage of the situation, profiting from society's fears and promising to be the "savior" who can solve all its problems, whereas in reality they are looking for wider approval and for greater power, based on the impression they make, their ability to have things in hand.

The Gospel tells us that this is not Jesus' way. God's style is different. It is important to understand God's style, how he acts. God acts according to a style, and God's style is different from that of certain people, since he does not exploit our needs or use our vulnerability for his own aggrandizement. He does not want to seduce us with deceptive promises or to distribute cheap favors; he is not interested in huge crowds. He is not obsessed with numbers; he does not seek approval; he does not idolize personal success. On the contrary, he seems to be worried when people follow him with giddy excitement and enthusiasm. As a result, instead of yielding to the allure of popularity – for popularity is alluring – he asks each person to discern carefully their

reason for following him and the consequences that it will entail. For many in those crowds might have been following Jesus because they hoped he would be a leader who could set them free from their enemies, someone who, once in power, could share that power with them, or someone who by performing miracles could make hunger and disease disappear.

We can follow the Lord for any number of reasons. Some of these, it must be acknowledged, are worldly. A perfect religious exterior can serve to hide the mere satisfaction of one's own needs, the quest of personal prestige, the desire for a certain social status, or to keep things under control, the thirst for power and privilege, the desire for recognition and so on. This happens even nowadays among Christians. Yet that is not the style of Jesus. That cannot be the style of his disciples and of his Church. If anyone follows Jesus with this kind of self-interest, he or she has taken the wrong path.

The Lord demands a different attitude. To follow him does not mean to become part of a court or a triumphal procession, or even to receive a lifetime insurance policy. On the contrary, it means "carrying one's cross" (*Lk* 14:27): shouldering, like him, one's own burdens and those of others, making one's life a gift, not a possession, spending it in imitation of his own generous and merciful love for us. These are decisions that engage the totality of our lives. For this reason, Jesus desires that his disciples prefer nothing to this love, even their deepest affections and greatest treasures.

To do this, we need to look to him more than to ourselves, to learn how to love, and to learn this from the Crucified One. In him, we see the love that bestows itself to the very end, without measure and without limits. The measure of love is to love without measure...

Pope Francis, Homily
Beatification of the Servant of God, Pope John Paul I, September 4, 2022
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September 7, 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly (USA)



First Reading: Wisdom 9:13-18b

Who can know God's counsel,
or who can conceive what the LORD intends?

For the deliberations of mortals are timid,
and unsure are our plans.

For the corruptible body burdens the soul
and the earthen shelter weighs down the mind that has many
concerns.

And scarce do we guess the things on earth,
and what is within our grasp we find with difficulty;
but when things are in heaven, who can search them out?

Or who ever knew your counsel, except you had given wisdom
and sent your holy spirit from on high?

And thus were the paths of those on earth made straight.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 90:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14, 17

In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

You turn man back to dust,
saying, "Return, O children of men."

For a thousand years in your sight
are as yesterday, now that it is past,
or as a watch of the night.

R. In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

You make an end of them in their sleep;
the next morning they are like the changing grass,
which at dawn springs up anew,
but by evening wilts and fades.

R. In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

Teach us to number our days aright,
that we may gain wisdom of heart.

Return, O LORD! How long?

Have pity on your servants!

R. In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

Fill us at daybreak with your kindness,
that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days.

And may the gracious care of the LORD our God be ours;
prosper the work of our hands for us!

Prosper the work of our hands!

R. In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.



Second Reading: Philemon 9-10, 12-17

I, Paul, an old man, and now also a prisoner for Christ Jesus, urge you on behalf of my child Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment; I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I should have liked to retain him for myself, so that he might serve me on your behalf in my imprisonment for the gospel, but I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that the good you do might not be forced but voluntary. Perhaps this is why he was away from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a brother, beloved especially to me, but even more so to you, as a man and in the Lord. So if you regard me as a partner, welcome him as you would me.

Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 119:135

Alleluia, alleluia. Let your face shine upon your servant; and teach me your laws. *Alleluia, alleluia.*



Gospel: Luke 14:25-33

Great crowds were traveling with Jesus, and he turned and addressed them, “If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if there is enough for its completion? Otherwise, after laying the foundation and finding himself unable to finish the work the onlookers should laugh at him and say, ‘This one began to build but did not have the resources to finish.’ Or what king marching into battle would not first sit down and decide whether with ten thousand troops he can successfully oppose another king advancing upon him with twenty thousand troops? But if not, while he is still far away, he will send a delegation to ask for peace terms. In the same way, anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.”



Meditation:

Jesus sometimes makes statements which sound quite harsh to our ears. Today’s Gospel gives us a striking example: “If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” How can he tell us to *hate* our relatives and our own lives, when he tells us repeatedly throughout the Gospels that our most fundamental call is to *love*? “This is my commandment: love one another as I love you”

(Jn 15:12). Here Jesus is stressing his point, as the rabbis of the time sometimes did, by speaking in exaggerated language (using a figure of speech known as hyperbole); and the point is that following him must take priority over *everything else*.

Jesus immediately follows this strong statement with another one: “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” The Cross – with all its contradiction, mystery, and power – is at the center of Jesus’ mission, and is therefore an essential part of our life as disciples. All week we will be reflecting on the Cross, culminating in next Sunday’s great feast, the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (Sept. 14).

We must remember that the people of his time would not have heard the word “cross” as we do today. Today, a cross is a symbol of Christianity. Many people wear crosses as jewelry, and we see crosses in many places such as churches and cemeteries. But in Jesus’ day, a cross was a horrific instrument used by the Romans to execute their enemies. It was reserved for the most serious crimes. The only ones who “picked up crosses” and carried them were those condemned to death.

Jesus, however, was not guilty of any crime at all, not even the slightest sin. He came to be executed, not for his own crimes, but for the sins of all humanity. All the teaching and healing which he did during his ministry led up to this one central event: his freely chosen sacrifice of his own life on the Cross to redeem the world.

In today’s Gospel, then, Jesus is teaching us who he is and why he is giving his life. And he is revealing to us what it means – and what it will cost – for us to follow him. He wants us to “sit down and calculate the cost” of being his disciple. A disciple is one who learns from the master how to do what the master does. A master painter teaches his disciples to paint. A master singer teaches her disciples to sing. Our Lord is the Master of reconciling the world to his Father by giving his life in sacrificial love, and this is what he teaches his disciples to do. He says that if this is not what we are trying to do, then we are not his disciples. Jesus surely loved his life, and he loved his relatives, particularly his own mother. But above all he was focused on loving the Father and doing the Father’s will. He was ready to give up everything, even his own life, in order to carry out his mission.

Knowing Jesus gives us insight into the very mind and heart of God – which, as today’s first reading shows, humanity has often struggled to understand. How can we know what God is like, or what his intentions

are, left to ourselves? “Scarce do we guess the things on earth... but when things are in heaven, who can search them out?” However, we are not left to ourselves. We have been given wisdom by the Holy Spirit who has been sent to us from on high! We have been taught by the very Son of God himself what God is like and what he intends. He loves us with selfless love. He intends to bring us into a joyful, eternal union with himself, and he is willing to give everything he has to make that happen. He is a God of mercy!

St. Paul was well-schooled in God’s way of selfless, sacrificial love; he is a good example for us of a disciple of Jesus. In today’s second reading, Paul writes to his friend Philemon. Though he is in prison for proclaiming the Gospel, Paul is not concerned with his own comfort or advantage. Rather, he is sending his beloved helper Onesimus back to Philemon, Onesimus’s former master. Paul does not want to force anyone’s generosity. He sacrifices himself for the sake of his two friends and urges Philemon to freely welcome Onesimus back not as a slave but as a brother.

The Lord invites us to find the wisdom and to experience the joy of living with this kind of love. Truly we have only a very short span of days upon the earth. What are we doing with our days? Are we simply loitering amid the “great crowds” that travel with Jesus? Or are we his committed disciples? Will we take up our cross and follow him, offering ourselves in love to reconcile the world to God? With the power of the Holy Spirit, we say “yes!” to Jesus’ invitation to follow him as his disciples.

What is Jesus saying to me in his instruction about “hating” my family and even my own life? When have I experienced the crosses in my life as truly gifts from God? What hinders me from embracing these daily crosses with faith and love?

Mary, help me always to say “yes” to Jesus’ invitation to be his disciple.

World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly – see p. 14 of Volume 21.6.

The U.S. bishops have approved the transfer of the celebration of World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly in the U.S. [from the fourth Sunday in July] to the first weekend after Labor Day (September 6 and 7, 2025) to coincide with National Grandparents (and the Elderly) Day in the United States as many local communities, schools, and parishes have celebrated for some time. (<https://www.usccb.org/topics/marriage-and-family-life-ministries/grandparents-elderly>)

September 8, Monday, the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary



First Reading: Micah 5:1-4a

The LORD says:

You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah,
too small to be among the clans of Judah,
From you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel;
Whose origin is from of old,
from ancient times.
(Therefore the Lord will give them up, until the time
when she who is to give birth has borne,
And the rest of his brethren shall return
to the children of Israel.)
He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock
by the strength of the LORD,
in the majestic name of the LORD, his God;
And they shall remain, for now his greatness
shall reach to the ends of the earth;
he shall be peace.

or **Romans 8:28-30**

Brothers and sisters: We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined he also called; and those he called he also justified; and those he justified he also glorified.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 13:6ab, 6c

With delight I rejoice in the Lord.

Though I trusted in your mercy,
let my heart rejoice in your salvation.

R. With delight I rejoice in the Lord.

Let me sing of the LORD, "He has been good to me."

R. With delight I rejoice in the Lord.

Gospel Acclamation:

Alleluia, alleluia. Blessed are you, holy Virgin Mary, deserving of all praise; from you rose the sun of justice, Christ our God. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Matthew 1:1-16, 18-23 (Short Form: Matthew 1:18-23)

The Book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse, Jesse the father of David the king.

David became the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon became the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asaph. Asaph became the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Uzziah. Uzziah became the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amos, Amos the father of Josiah. Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the Babylonian exile.

After the Babylonian exile, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok. Zadok became the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud, Eliud the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ.

Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,*

which means “God is with us.”



Meditation:

On the festive birthday of Mary, the Gospel focuses on “how the birth of Jesus Christ came about.” This is entirely fitting, since Mary’s whole life is focused on Jesus. The arrival of Mary the Mother of God is one of the most important steps in preparing the world for the arrival of her Son Jesus, the Word made flesh.

There are countless other steps in the divine preparation process. Today’s Gospel recounts some of the ancestors of Jesus according to the line of Mary’s husband Joseph. This is “the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” It spans many generations and many centuries, always leading up to the appointed time when Jesus the Messiah would appear, and to the appointed family in which he would appear, the Holy Family built on the marriage of Mary and Joseph. This genealogy includes great saints and great sinners, and many other people about whom we know nothing – except that they are ancestors of Jesus. The plan of God gradually unfolded, despite the weaknesses and sins of men. God never thought that sin was a good reason to abandon the human family; he continued to work with us and through us, generation after generation, with our eternal salvation ever in mind. He reveals that he is determined that “all things work for good” for our sake.

The center and highpoint of the whole plan is Jesus Christ. God calls everyone to be like him, “conformed to the image of his Son.” For this he calls us, justifies us, and glorifies us, entirely conquering the reign of sin in us. And this was his plan for our lives before we were even born. No action of God is random or without purpose. No person conceived is random or without purpose. Every person is, in the Father’s plan, a new icon of his Son. Every birthday is an occasion to give thanks and praise to him for the extraordinary mercy and love he has shown us.

Our thanksgiving and praise are all the greater as we ponder the birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She was conceived without sin – the Immaculate Conception – in the womb of St. Anne. Nine months later she was born: the first appearance since the fall of Adam and Eve of a human person without sin. God, who had been preparing ever since that fall for his Son to be born into the world, now had a woman whom he could ask to serve as the mother of his Son. Mary comes forth as a new Eve, a new and worthy tabernacle for the Son of God Most High.

Mary has a unique place in the divine plan, but as we celebrate her birth, we come to understand better that we too are chosen by God. Each one of us has been born for a purpose, placed here at this moment in history and given an opportunity and an invitation to participate in God's great work of salvation. Will it be our task to bear the Son of God as Mary did? Not in precisely the way Mary did, but in a sense, yes. Jesus himself said that "those who hear the word of God and act on it" are his mother and his brothers (Lk 8:21). We are all called to be like Mary in putting flesh on the word of God – by our example, our compassion, our perseverance in faith, our sacrificial love. We bring forth the life of Jesus for the sake of those to whom God sends us – our spouse, our children, our neighbors, and our co-workers.

We can feel very insignificant and unworthy of doing anything for God, even for playing a hidden supporting role in the building of his Kingdom. We may feel something like little Bethlehem, "too small to be among the clans of Judah." It is good to recall that Mary too was keenly aware of her lowliness. However, her full acceptance of being the Lord's "lowly handmaid" is what made her fully available for the Lord to "do great things" for her and through her. Following her example, we are called to abandon ourselves to God in all things. On Mary's birthday, may we each respond to God's invitation to cooperate in his plan as she did: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

*How have I experienced God working all things for my good?
What is the purpose of my life as I participate in his great work
of salvation? How am I called to be more like Mary in putting
flesh on the word of God?*

Mary, form me to be joyful, gentle, and humble, always seeking to do the will of God.

Nine months after the celebration of the Immaculate Conception (December 8), the Church celebrates the **Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary**, a feast that has been observed since the sixth century. The feast days of most Saints are celebrated on the day of their death, their return to the Lord, but we celebrate the day Mary was born because of her singular mission in the plan of God. The birth of Mary takes on a significance that transcends her own person, explained in the context of the history of salvation. Mary's birth lies at the coming together of the Old and the New Covenants – bringing to an end the stage of expectation and promises, and inaugurating the new time of grace and salvation in Jesus Christ.

September 9, Tuesday, 23rd Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Peter Claver, Priest (USA)



First Reading: Colossians 2:6-15

Brothers and sisters: As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to the tradition of men, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ.

For in him dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily, and you share in this fullness in him, who is the head of every principality and power. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not administered by hand, by stripping off the carnal body, with the circumcision of Christ. 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; despoiling the principalities and the powers, he made a public spectacle of them, leading them away in triumph by it.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 145:1b-2, 8-9, 10-11

The Lord is compassionate toward all his works.

I will extol you, O my God and King,
and I will bless your name forever and ever.

Every day will I bless you,
and I will praise your name forever and ever.

R. The Lord is compassionate toward all his works.

The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and of great kindness.

The LORD is good to all
and compassionate toward all his works.

R. The Lord is compassionate toward all his works.

Let all your works give you thanks, O LORD,
and let your faithful ones bless you.

Let them discourse of the glory of your Kingdom
and speak of your might.

R. The Lord is compassionate toward all his works.

Gospel Acclamation: John 15:16

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



Gospel: Luke 6:12-19

Jesus departed to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God. When day came, he called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose Twelve, whom he also named Apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called a Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

And he came down with them and stood on a stretch of level ground. A great crowd of his disciples and a large number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and even those who were tormented by unclean spirits were cured. Everyone in the crowd sought to touch him because power came forth from him and healed them all.



Meditation:

This week's Theme begins, "A true disciple of Jesus must dedicate himself to the Lord absolutely, above anyone or anything else." In today's first reading, St. Paul gives us a similar exhortation: "As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving." We are to *walk in him* and be *rooted in him*. Our lives are to be *built upon him*. Jesus Christ must be the center of our whole life.

St. Paul goes on to say, "in him dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily." That is to say, in Christ, the fullness of God has taken on human flesh. God himself has walked among us in the Person of Jesus Christ! This is an astounding statement which we perhaps pass over all too quickly, since our familiarity with it tends to rob it of its wonder. We do well to pause and ponder this anew, even though we know it well. Jesus is not merely another noteworthy historical figure. His words and actions are the very words and actions of God himself!

And so when Jesus says to us, "I chose you from the world, that you may go and bear fruit that will last" (Gospel Acclamation), this too is astounding! He has called us as he called the Twelve in today's

Gospel, to be his disciples, to learn from him and be empowered by the Spirit, to do what he does and to become like him. St. Paul, after identifying Christ as containing “the whole fullness of the deity,” says that we “share in this fullness in him.” When Christ reigns in us, we become, like him, “incarnations” of God in the world, speaking his words and carrying out his actions.

Of course this is the very last thing that our enemy wants to see, so he does all that he can to hinder our transformation in Christ. One of his main weapons in this regard is distraction. Satan is constantly tempting us to divert our eyes from Christ. He often uses what are good things in themselves. For example, we may be tempted to focus too much on our relationships with our family members or our friends. We might put too much effort into our jobs. We might get caught up in any number of good causes. Then there are many other things which are not so good, such as temptations to gluttony or lust or avarice. The enemy’s word to us is not usually, *Don’t focus on Christ*, but rather, *Focus instead on this other thing*. As long as he can get us to put anything else at the center of our lives, he succeeds in keeping us from putting Christ there, and God’s grace is not able to work freely in us.

St. Paul warns us about this: “See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to the tradition of men, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ.” Later Paul reminds us that we have stripped off the carnal body and were buried with Christ in Baptism, to be “raised with him through faith in the power of God.” So we are not to live by the flesh and its desires, but by the power of the Spirit.

It is good to reflect on the value of what Christ is offering us compared to what the evil one and the world are offering us. If someone were to say to us, “I will give you a million dollars if you can keep your eyes fixed on this object for one full hour,” surely we would ignore all else and focus on that thing with all our attention. If someone were to try to distract us with some other interesting thing, we would not allow our focus to be drawn away from the object, judging that whatever is being offered could never be more valuable than the reward of a million dollars. In the same way, if we truly take to heart the infinite value of knowing Jesus Christ, we will properly judge that nothing else should ever be allowed to take his place in our hearts. We recall Jesus’ parable

of the merchant who sold everything he owned to purchase the “pearl of great price” (Mt 13:46). If we are not putting Christ first in our lives, then we do not truly appreciate the value of what he is offering us.

Before choosing the Twelve Apostles, Jesus spends the whole night in prayer, communing with his Father. He does not call his followers casually or by accident. When Christ, in perfect union with the Father, calls us, it is a deliberate, personal choice, and we can be certain that he has not made a mistake. “I chose you from the world, that you may go and bear fruit that will last.” He says, “*I chose you.*” We are *chosen ones*, and the One who has chosen us has the power to bring us into the fullness of what he has called us to be – other Christs in the world – and ultimately to be united with him eternally in Heaven.

Let us resolve today to keep the Lord always at the center of our hearts and our lives. We can take as our prayer the words of today’s Psalm: “I will extol you, O my God and King, / and I will bless your name forever and ever. / Every day will I bless you, / and I will praise your name forever and ever.” Amen!

*What is preventing me from putting Christ first in my life?
When have I lived by the flesh and its desires and not by the
power of the Spirit? What is my inner response when I realize
that God has chosen me from the world?*

***Mary, help me to keep the Lord always at the center of my heart.
St. Peter Claver, pray for us.***

Peter Claver was born in Spain in 1580 to very poor parents. Following a call to the missions, he was ordained a Jesuit priest in 1616 in Cartagena, Colombia, which was then the center of the slave trade in South America. Black slaves were brought there from Africa by the thousands each year. Fr. Peter dedicated himself to the care of the slaves, giving them food, clothing, and medicine, and instructing them in the faith. Critics looked with scorn on his work, calling his zeal indiscreet and his energy wasted, but he heroically continued to serve the most abused, rejected, and lowly. During his ministry he baptized over 300,000 people. Fr. Peter called himself the “slave of the slaves forever.” He often said, “We must speak to them with our hands before we try to speak to them with our lips.” After suffering from a paralyzing illness for the last four years of his life, Peter died in 1654. He was canonized by Pope Leo XIII in 1888.



First Reading: Colossians 3:1-11

Brothers and sisters: If you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.

Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry. Because of these the wrath of God is coming upon the disobedient. By these you too once conducted yourselves, when you lived in that way. But now you must put them all away: anger, fury, malice, slander, and obscene language out of your mouths. Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 145:2-3, 10-11, 12-13ab

The Lord is compassionate toward all his works.

Every day will I bless you,
and I will praise your name forever and ever.
Great is the LORD and highly to be praised;
his greatness is unsearchable.

R. The Lord is compassionate toward all his works.

Let all your works give you thanks, O LORD,
and let your faithful ones bless you.
Let them discourse of the glory of your Kingdom
and speak of your might.

R. The Lord is compassionate toward all his works.

Making known to men your might
and the glorious splendor of your Kingdom.
Your Kingdom is a Kingdom for all ages,
and your dominion endures through all generations.

R. The Lord is compassionate toward all his works.

Gospel Acclamation: Luke 6:23ab

Alleluia, alleluia. Rejoice and leap for joy! Your reward will be great in heaven. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Luke 6:20-26

Raising his eyes toward his disciples Jesus said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for the Kingdom of God is yours.
Blessed are you who are now hungry,
for you will be satisfied.
Blessed are you who are now weeping,
for you will laugh.
Blessed are you when people hate you,
and when they exclude and insult you,
and denounce your name as evil
on account of the Son of Man.

“Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way.
But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.
But woe to you who are filled now,
for you will be hungry.
Woe to you who laugh now,
for you will grieve and weep.
Woe to you when all speak well of you,
for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way.”



Meditation:

This week we are reflecting on our call to focus our whole lives on Jesus Christ, before and above anything else. In today’s first reading, St. Paul exhorts us to do exactly that: “Seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” In Baptism we died with Christ. The world’s way of life, which is concerned with the pursuit of power, glory, comfort, and riches, is no longer our way of life. Our life is now hidden with Christ. It is hidden from the world because the worldly cannot see or understand the way of Christ. And it is somewhat hidden even from us, for while we are in this world we cannot see clearly our true, heavenly life. “At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known” (1 Cor 13:12).

Christ calls us as his disciples to follow him. When we accept his invitation and begin by his grace to walk with him, we gradually come to know him better and better. As we come to know him, so we come to love him, and we naturally desire to know and love him more and more. Our longing to be closer to him only grows stronger, a longing that can never be fully satisfied in this life.

Keeping this in mind, we can gain a deeper insight into what the Lord is saying to us in the Beatitudes. At first it seems quite strange to us for the Lord to say that those who are poor, who are hungry, who are weeping, are the blessed ones. But if our greatest desire in life is to know and love Christ, then we will feel ourselves to be poor and hungry, and we will weep. As we come to know even a little of the vastness of the love and mercy abounding in the heart of Christ, we are immediately aware of how very little love we have, and how poor our attempts to love are. We are not satisfied with the grace we have received so far. We want to love far more than we do, so we hunger for ever more of God's love to fill our hearts. We weep for our own failure to love, and we weep at the tragic state of the world and the suffering of those with whom we live and work. Mankind's rejection of God has brought us so much misery!

On the other hand, Jesus warns those who feel themselves to be rich and full in this life. If they feel so satisfied with what they have acquired or achieved in the world, then clearly they have filled themselves with something other than God. They have spent their time and effort pursuing things which will only fail them in the end. They are like the rich man in the parable who built larger grain bins to store his harvest, thinking that now he was surely set up for a long life of comfort and ease (cf. Lk 12:16-21). The Lord called him a fool because he was going to die that very night, and what good would his abundant supply of grain do him then?

Jesus is urging us to keep our eyes fixed on him and warning us not to let ourselves be distracted by the pursuit of the things of this world. St. Paul says it this way in the first reading: "Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry." While we are in this life there is a war going on in our hearts and minds, between the voice of the enemy leading us towards sin and death, and the voice of God leading us to the fullness of life with him. We need to constantly choose to reject the

voice of the enemy – that is, to put to death any inclinations to follow him, and refuse to allow him any space in our minds and hearts. And we need to cling to the voice of the Lord, given to us in Scripture, in prayer, at Mass, in spiritual reading, and in many other ways.

The Psalm refers to one way in which we can put this into practice in our daily lives: “Let your faithful ones bless you. / Let them discourse of the glory of your Kingdom / and speak of your might.” Do we do this? Let us examine ourselves to see what we spend our time talking about with our friends and family. We tend to spend a lot of time talking about worldly things: what things we want to buy next when we get some money; what promotion we hope to get at work; the flaws of our neighbors or co-workers; the latest movies and trends; the popular singers, or actors, or sports stars, and so on. Do we spend any time “discoursing” about the Lord and the good things he has done for us, and what his word is saying to us today? If we are striving to keep our focus on Jesus Christ, it will help if we make the effort to speak about him when we can and to pray in common with our brothers and sisters.

What prevents me from focusing my whole life on Jesus, before and above anything else? When have I tried to fill myself with something other than God? What are the topics of my conversations with others? Are they about worldly things or about the things that really matter?

Mary, help me to be more grateful that God has called me personally to share in his holiness.

Notes



First Reading: Colossians 3:12-17

Brothers and sisters: Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one Body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 150:1b-2, 3-4, 5-6

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

Praise the LORD in his sanctuary,
praise him in the firmament of his strength.
Praise him for his mighty deeds,
praise him for his sovereign majesty.

R. Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

Praise him with the blast of the trumpet,
praise him with lyre and harp,
Praise him with timbrel and dance,
praise him with strings and pipe.

R. Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

Praise him with sounding cymbals,
praise him with clanging cymbals.
Let everything that has breath
praise the LORD! Alleluia.

R. Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

Gospel Acclamation: 1 John 4:12

Alleluia, alleluia. If we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Luke 6:27-38

Jesus said to his disciples: “To you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, and get back the same amount. But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as also your Father is merciful.

“Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.”



Meditation:

A common idea in the world today is that we should each strive simply to be a “good person.” Most people, if asked to describe themselves, say something like: “I try to be kind and loving. I help people. I lend them money, and I spend time with them when they need it. I’m a good person.” Jesus makes it clear in today’s Gospel that the call to follow him is much more demanding than this. He questions us: *Whom do you help? To whom do you lend money? Whom do you love?* If the answer is that we love only those who love us, and help only those who help us, then we deserve no credit; there is nothing to distinguish us from everyone else. Such behavior is not the fullness of love. It is simply the common way people treat each other, for their mutual benefit: *I’ll give you this if you give me that.*

Jesus tells us that his disciples are called to do what he does, which is also what his Father does. The Father loves everyone, always, completely and without reservation, regardless of how they relate to

him. Jesus teaches us that we must do the same if we want to be counted as children of God: “Love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as also your Father is merciful.”

Be as merciful as the Father? How merciful *is* the Father? He is so merciful that he gave us his only Son to take our place and reconcile us to himself. He did this even though we had done nothing to merit such a gift. In our sin condition, we were *enemies* of God; our relationship with him was broken (cf. Rm 5:10). But he did not treat us as enemies. He acted like the father of the prodigal son, running out to greet us and bring us home, ready to restore our status as his children (cf. Lk 15:20). This is the divine love Jesus reveals throughout his earthly life. He acts only to save and restore everyone, even those who oppose him. We remember his words from the Cross about those who were crucifying him: “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34). Even as they were killing him, he was praying for them. He put perfectly into practice the instruction he gives in today’s Gospel.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we strive to follow his example. As he was the perfect image of his Father in the world, so we are to be images of Christ in the world, loving both friend and enemy, just as he did. This is truly a challenge, for it is very hard indeed to love an enemy! In fact, left to ourselves, it is impossible. But we are *not* left to ourselves. The secret to following Jesus is to depend not on our own strength, but on God’s grace at work in us. As the Gospel Acclamation for today tells us: “If we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us.” When we love as best we can, God who lives in us will do the rest, bringing his love to perfection in us.

St. Paul gives us a similar exhortation in the first reading, telling us, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.... Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” We let the word of Christ dwell in us when we give it first place in our hearts and in our lives. This includes pondering his word in the daily readings, attending Mass and participating in the Sacraments, and striving to put into practice the word that we ponder. All that we do in our daily lives, in fact, is to be done “in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

What do our lives look like when the word of Christ is dwelling richly in us? Paul describes it for us, telling us to put on “heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another. . . . And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one Body. And be thankful.” This is what a follower of Jesus looks like – not merely a “good person,” but truly “another Christ” in the world, carrying on the Father’s work of reconciliation and healing, by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit.

How does my love and respect for others differ from that of worldly people? What enables me to be an image of Christ, loving others without reservation? What is preventing me from truly being another Christ in the world?

Mary, teach me to love as Jesus loves.

Notes

September 12, Friday, 23rd Week in Ordinary Time
The Most Holy Name of Mary



First Reading: 1 Timothy 1:1-2, 12-14

Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy, my true child in faith: grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

I am grateful to him who has strengthened me, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he considered me trustworthy in appointing me to the ministry. I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and an arrogant man, but I have been mercifully treated because I acted out of ignorance in my unbelief. Indeed, the grace of our Lord has been abundant, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 16:1b-2a and 5, 7-8, 11

You are my inheritance, O Lord.

Keep me, O God, for in you I take refuge;

I say to the LORD, "My Lord are you."

O LORD, my allotted portion and my cup,
you it is who hold fast my lot.

R. You are my inheritance, O Lord.

I bless the LORD who counsels me;
even in the night my heart exhorts me.

I set the LORD ever before me;
with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed.

R. You are my inheritance, O Lord.

You will show me the path to life,
fullness of joys in your presence,
the delights at your right hand forever.

R. You are my inheritance, O Lord.

Gospel Acclamation: John 17:17b, 17a

Alleluia, alleluia. Your word, O Lord, is truth; consecrate us in the truth.
Alleluia, alleluia.



Gospel: Luke 6:39-42

Jesus told his disciples a parable: "Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? No disciple is superior to the teacher; but when fully trained, every disciple will be like his teacher. Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive

the wooden beam in your own? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me remove that splinter in your eye,’ when you do not even notice the wooden beam in your own eye? You hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother’s eye.”



Meditation:

All week we have been pondering Jesus’ call to us to follow him as his disciples. In the first reading today, St. Paul gives St. Timothy a personal description of how he himself was called. He freely admits that he “was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and an arrogant man.” Not only was he *not* following Christ, he was actually persecuting those who did follow him. But God treated him mercifully, calling him to be “an Apostle of Christ Jesus,” and pouring out upon him abundant grace, “along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” As Paul responded to the grace which God gave him, he became so conformed to the likeness of Christ that he could say, “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). And just as Christ raised up followers to carry on his work, Paul likewise raised up followers, as we see for example when he refers to Timothy as “my true child in faith.”

Each of us has been personally called by God and, like Paul, rescued from slavery to sin. We, too, can say with him, “I was once _____ (proud, greedy, envious, lustful, slothful, angry... *choose any that fit*), but I have been mercifully treated.” Through God’s mercy, we too can come to maturity in Christ and bear much fruit for the Kingdom of God.

How do we stay on track in this journey of faith and not lose our way? We have seen this week that we must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and not allow anything to take his place in our hearts. The Psalm for today shows us the disposition that we want to develop, that of setting the Lord ever before our hearts: “Keep me, O God, in you I take refuge; / I say to the LORD, ‘My Lord are you.’ / O LORD, my allotted portion and my cup, / you it is who hold fast my lot.”

Jesus warns us in the Gospel to be careful about whom we are following. Only he is the Light of the World. Only he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Any other guide which the world offers us, if it is contrary to his word, is a blind guide who will only lead us into a pit.

But Jesus is not a blind guide. He is the one who knows the way to the Father. As he told Nicodemus, he is the only one who knows the way to Heaven because he is the only one who has come down from Heaven: “Amen, amen, I say to you, we speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen.... No one has gone up to Heaven except the one who has come down from Heaven, the Son of Man” (Jn 3:11, 13).

The psalmist says to God, “You will show me the path to life, / fullness of joys in your presence, / the delights at your right hand forever.” God *has* shown us the path to life: Jesus, our faithful guide. If we accept Jesus’ invitation to follow him, not only does he lead us to Heaven, he actually transforms us into a likeness to himself. This is what he means when he says, “When fully trained, every disciple will be like his teacher.” What an astounding promise! If we pick up our cross and follow him, we will become like him, not because of who we are, but because of the power of his love working within us.

The Gospel goes on to warn us about one way in which we can become distracted from following Jesus, which is that we begin to look around at our brothers and sisters and make rash judgments about the ways that we think they are falling short. This is a common tendency of our fallen nature, to compare ourselves with others and to be critical of them. We might do this in the secret of our own thoughts, or we might fall into gossiping about others. It is always easier to focus on the weaknesses of others than to examine our own thoughts and actions. Jesus warns us to be on guard against this type of behavior. The “splinters” we see in others do not compare with our own “wooden beams.” We do better to humbly ask the Lord to show us our own faults than to look at those of others. We can recall the advice Jesus gave to Peter after the Resurrection, when he called Peter to follow him and Peter asked him about John. Jesus’ short and clear answer: “What concern is it of yours? You follow me” (Jn 21:22). We need to keep our eyes fixed on our faithful guide, not on the performance of those around us.

As we celebrate today the feast of the Holy Name of Mary, let us ask her intercession, calling on her Holy Name, so that we can persevere as faithful disciples of her Son Jesus Christ. Mary, a most trustworthy guide, always reminds us, “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5).

What is my response to being personally called by God like Paul? On my journey of faith, what interferes with my efforts to keep my eyes fixed on Jesus? When have I compared myself with others and been critical of them?

Mary, help me to see my own faults and not focus on those of others.

The memorial of the **Most Holy Name of Mary** is the counterpart of the memorial of the Most Holy Name of Jesus (January 3). It commemorates all the privileges which God bestows on Mary, the Mother of God and the holiest of all creatures. The Church encourages us to invoke her Holy Name, mentioned twice in the *Hail Mary*, to receive grace through her intercession. The name “Mary” (*Maria* in Greek; *Miryam* in Hebrew) has been given a wide variety of interpretations, such as “beloved,” “bitterness,” and “star of the sea.” When one invokes the Name of Mary, the devils flee from it, the angels rejoice on hearing it, saints smile at it, and the souls in Purgatory find relief in it. There is wisdom in the longstanding practice of honoring her Name, because our spiritual Mother always leads us to her Son Jesus, whose Name is above every other name. This feast was placed on the Church’s calendar in honor of the remarkable victory of the Christian army at the Battle of Vienna, September 12, 1683. After invoking the intercession of Mary, they defeated the much larger army of Ottoman Turks and saved Christian Europe from being conquered. The feast was removed from the calendar after Vatican II but restored by Pope St. John Paul II in 2002.

Notes

September 13, Saturday, 23rd Week in Ordinary Time
Saint John Chrysostom, Bishop and Doctor of the Church



First Reading: 1 Timothy 1:15-17

Beloved: This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of these I am the foremost. But for that reason I was mercifully treated, so that in me, as the foremost, Christ Jesus might display all his patience as an example for those who would come to believe in him for everlasting life. To the king of ages, incorruptible, invisible, the only God, honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 113:1b-2, 3-4, 5 and 6-7
Blessed be the name of the Lord for ever.

Praise, you servants of the LORD,
praise the name of the LORD.
Blessed be the name of the LORD
both now and forever.

R. Blessed be the name of the Lord for ever.

From the rising to the setting of the sun
is the name of the LORD to be praised.
High above all nations is the LORD;
above the heavens is his glory.

R. Blessed be the name of the Lord for ever.

Who is like the LORD, our God,
and looks upon the heavens and the earth below?
He raises up the lowly from the dust;
from the dunghill he lifts up the poor.

R. Blessed be the name of the Lord for ever.

Gospel Acclamation: John 14:23

Alleluia, alleluia. Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Luke 6:43-49

Jesus said to his disciples: "A good tree does not bear rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For people do not pick figs from thornbushes, nor do they gather grapes from brambles. A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good, but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil; for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks.

“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ but not do what I command? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, listens to my words, and acts on them. That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when the flood came, the river burst against that house but could not shake it because it had been well built. But the one who listens and does not act is like a person who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, it collapsed at once and was completely destroyed.”



Meditation:

In today's Gospel, Jesus asks us a penetrating question: “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ but not do what I command?” Perhaps our first response to this question is to assume that he is talking to someone else. *After all, I pray every day. I go to Mass. I try to follow Jesus' teachings.* But let us look more carefully, especially considering what Jesus told us in Sunday's Gospel: “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

Pope Francis elaborates on this command of Jesus in the Spiritual Reflection for this week:

“We can follow the Lord for any number of reasons. Some of these, it must be acknowledged, are worldly. A perfect religious exterior can serve to hide the mere satisfaction of one's own needs, the quest of personal prestige, the desire for a certain social status or to keep things under control, the thirst for power and privilege, the desire for recognition and so on....

“The Lord demands a different attitude. To follow him means ‘carrying one's cross’ (Lk 14:27): shouldering, like him, one's own burdens and those of others, making one's life a gift, not a possession, spending it in imitation of his own generous and merciful love for us For this reason, Jesus desires that his disciples prefer nothing to this love, even their deepest affections and greatest treasures.

“To do this, we need to look to him more than to ourselves, to learn how to love, and to learn this from the Crucified One. In him, we see the love that bestows itself to the very end, without measure and without limits.”

This is the command of Jesus: “As I have loved you, so you also should love one another” (Jn 13:34). We will see this total love of Jesus displayed for us most vividly in tomorrow’s celebration of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Out of pure and total love for us, Jesus gave his life on the Cross, to win for us forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with the Father. His way was all *for us*, not seeking any gain for himself except that we would choose to love him in return.

Now we can look at Jesus’ question in today’s Gospel with deeper insight. Why *do* I call him “Lord” but not do what he commands? Why do I not pick up my cross and imitate his love for others? Why do I seek my own pleasure, comfort, and security instead of seeking to pick up my cross and join Jesus in his sacrificial offering? As we ponder this honestly, we are led to cry out, *Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner*. Yes, Jesus’ judgement is true: we are not very faithful disciples.

Yet, as St. Paul assures us in the first reading, our condition is far from hopeless, for he declares, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” Left to ourselves, we are indeed unable to follow Jesus faithfully; we are unable to fulfill all that he commands. But he came into the world precisely to release the grace which empowers us to do what we are unable to do by ourselves. If we put aside our pride and depend totally on Jesus’ mercy, we *can* be empowered to take up our cross and follow Jesus faithfully.

On Monday we will celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. Mary shows us what the true heart that Jesus speaks about in today’s Gospel looks like. She is a “good tree” who bore the best fruit. Out of the “store of goodness” in her heart, she was able to stand at the foot of the Cross of Jesus and make her offering with him, showing herself to be the first and most excellent of his followers. Let us ask Mary today to take us by the hand and lead us to cooperate ever more fully with God’s transforming grace, so that we too may be numbered among Jesus’ faithful and fruitful followers.

Why do I call Jesus, “Lord, Lord,” but do not do his will? Why do I seek my own pleasure and comfort instead of picking up my cross and following Jesus? How does my pride interfere with the action of God’s mercy in my heart?

Mary, take me by the hand and lead me to cooperate more fully with the loving plan of God.

St. John Chrysostom, pray for us.

One of the great Doctors of the Church, **John Chrysostom** was born in 347 in Antioch, Syria, and was educated for a career in law. After his Baptism at age twenty-three, he decided to abandon law to serve God. He entered a monastery to prepare for the priesthood and was ordained in 386, becoming a renowned preacher. John was called *chrysostom* – “golden-mouthed” – because of his powerful homilies that converted many. He found ways to translate the lofty theology he knew into everyday language that people could apply in their daily lives. In 397 John was elected Bishop of Constantinople. He began a courageous reform of the clergy and a crusade against the ills of his time. The bitter Empress Eudoxia drove him into exile, but the faithful demanded his return. He continued to preach forcefully the narrow and holy way of Christianity, resulting in his permanent exile to remote parts of Armenia, where he endured great sufferings until he died in 407. Along with St. Basil, St. Gregory Nazianzen, and St. Athanasius, St. John Chrysostom is one of the four great Eastern Doctors of the Church. He is a powerful patron to call upon when we find it hard to forgive, for he teaches us not to look backward in bitterness, but to keep looking forward with hope. In 1901, Pope St. Pius X made John the special patron of all those who preach the word of God.

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