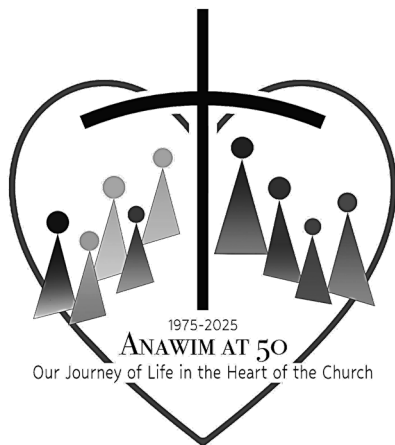




Pondering the Word...

THE ANAWIM WAY

Daily Liturgical Meditations

*Twenty-Ninth to Thirty-Fourth Week
in Ordinary Time*

*October 19 to November 29, 2025
Cycle C - Year 1*

Scripture Texts: Excerpts from the *Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition* © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970
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ENDORSEMENT

A good homily should have, at least, these two important qualities: it should be faithful to the Gospel proclaimed, and it should speak to people in the context of their respective life-situations.

In all my years of preaching to the people of all ages and social backgrounds. I have found **“Pondering the Word”** published by the Anawim Community, a great help. Not only does it present the Word of God in its simplicity and richness, it likewise offers points for prayer, meditation and sharing which speak to the hearts of modern men and women as they move about in our fast-paced world.

I wish to recommend the Anawim Community for this truly blessed endeavor, and may the Spirit of God continue to touch the readers of their publication and allow them to encounter the Living Word in their busy world.

+ Jesse E. Mercado

+ **JESSE E. MERCADO, DD**
Bishop of Parañaque

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-Ninth Week in Ordinary Time

***“When the Son of Man comes,
will he find faith on earth?”***

Luke 18:8

Theme for the Week

Jesus calls us to persevere in faith and prayer without losing heart. With gratitude, let us open our hearts to God’s loving mercy at every moment and remain strong in our faith and constant in our prayer.

Daily Prayer is Necessary for Our Life of Faith

A Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis

The Gospel from today's Liturgy concludes with a troubling question posed by Jesus: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (*Lk* 18:8); as if to say: "when I come again at the end of time" — but we could also think, even now, at this time of life — "will I find a bit of faith in you, in your world?" This is a serious question. Let us imagine that the Lord came on earth today. Unfortunately, he would see many wars, much poverty, and many inequalities, and at the same time, tremendous technical achievements, modern means, and people who are always rushing, who never stop. But would he find someone who dedicates time and affection to him, someone who would put him in first place? Above all, let us ask ourselves, "What would he find in me, if the Lord were to come today? What would he find in me, in my life, in my heart? What priorities would he see in my life?"

We often focus on so many urgent but unnecessary things. We occupy and preoccupy ourselves with so many secondary realities. And perhaps without even realizing it, we neglect what matters most, and we allow our love for God to grow cold, to grow cold bit by bit. Today, Jesus offers us the remedy to rekindle a tepid faith. And what is the remedy? Prayer. Prayer is the medicine for faith; it is a tonic for the soul. However, it needs to be *constant prayer*. If we must undergo a treatment to get better, it is important to follow it well, to take the medicine consistently and regularly in the right way and at the right times. This is necessary in all of life. Let us think of a houseplant: we have to water it consistently every day. We cannot soak it and then leave it without water for weeks! Even more so with prayer. We cannot live only on strong moments of prayer or occasional intense encounters, and then "go into hibernation." Our faith will dry up. We need the daily water of prayer; we need time dedicated to God, so that he can enter into our time, into our lives; consistent moments in which we open our hearts to him so that he can daily pour out on us love, peace, joy, strength, hope, thus nourishing our faith.

This is why Jesus says to his disciples today — to everyone, not only to some! — "that they ought *always to pray* and not lose heart" (v. 1). Now someone might object: "But how can I do that? I don't live in a convent. I don't have much time to pray!" Perhaps a wise spiritual

practice which is a bit forgotten today, and which our elderly, especially the grandmothers, know well, can come to our aid with this real difficulty. These are so-called *aspirations*. The name is a bit outdated, but the substance is good. What are they? They are very short, easy to memorize prayers that can be repeated often throughout the day, in the course of various activities, to remain “in tune” with the Lord. For example, as soon as we awaken, we can say: “Lord, I thank you and I offer this day to you.” This is a short prayer. Then, before an activity, we can repeat, “Come, Holy Spirit.” Between one thing and another, we can pray thus, “Jesus, I trust in you. Jesus, I love you.” Really short prayers that help us stay in contact with the Lord. How often we send text messages to the people we love! Let us do this with the Lord as well, so that our hearts remain connected to him. And let us not forget to read his responses. The Lord always responds. Where do we find them? In the Gospel, which should always be kept at hand and should be opened several times every day, to receive a Word of life directed to us.

And let us go back to the advice I have given many times — carry a pocket-size Gospel in your pocket, in your purse. So that when you have a minute, open it and read something, and the Lord will respond.

May the Virgin Mary, faithful listener, teach us the art of praying always, without losing heart.

Pope Francis, Angelus Message, October 16, 2022
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October 19, 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time
World Mission Sunday

*Today is **World Mission Sunday**. Together with the whole Church, let us pray and work for the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every heart, nation, and people.*



First Reading: Exodus 17:8-13

In those days, Amalek came and waged war against Israel. Moses, therefore, said to Joshua, “Pick out certain men, and tomorrow go out and engage Amalek in battle. I will be standing on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.” So Joshua did as Moses told him: he engaged Amalek in battle after Moses had climbed to the top of the hill with Aaron and Hur. As long as Moses kept his hands raised up, Israel had the better of the fight, but when he let his hands rest, Amalek had the better of the fight. Moses’ hands, however, grew tired; so they put a rock in place for him to sit on. Meanwhile Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other, so that his hands remained steady till sunset. And Joshua mowed down Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 121:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

Our help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

I lift up my eyes toward the mountains;
whence shall help come to me?

My help is from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

R. Our help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

May he not suffer your foot to slip;
may he slumber not who guards you:
indeed he neither slumbers nor sleeps,
the guardian of Israel.

R. Our help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

The LORD is your guardian; the LORD is your shade;
he is beside you at your right hand.

The sun shall not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.

R. Our help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

The LORD will guard you from all evil;
he will guard your life.

The LORD will guard your coming and your going,
both now and forever.

R. Our help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.



Second Reading: 2 Timothy 3:14–4:2

Beloved: Remain faithful to what you have learned and believed, because you know from whom you learned it, and that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingly power: proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching.

Gospel Acclamation: Hebrews 4:12

Alleluia, alleluia. The word of God is living and effective, discerning reflections and thoughts of the heart. *Alleluia, alleluia.*



Gospel: Luke 18:1-8

Jesus told his disciples a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary. He said, “There was a judge in a certain town who neither feared God nor respected any human being. And a widow in that town used to come to him and say, ‘Render a just decision for me against my adversary.’ For a long time the judge was unwilling, but eventually he thought, ‘While it is true that I neither fear God nor respect any human being, because this widow keeps bothering me I shall deliver a just decision for her lest she finally come and strike me.’” The Lord said, “Pay attention to what the dishonest judge says. Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night? Will he be slow to answer them? I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”



Meditation:

In this week’s Theme, we read, “Jesus calls us to persevere in faith and prayer without losing heart.” The word *persevere* is key. Taking up our cross and following Jesus is a long and often difficult journey. We face many disappointments, setbacks, and trials. We face opposition – often from the world, at times also from our friends and loved ones, and most tiresome of all, from our own broken nature. Jesus

never promised us a peaceful life on this earth. He warned us that we will experience division, even in our closest relationships. Throughout our journey, we experience a struggle between the spirit and the flesh, between the good that we want to do and the sin that we sometimes end up doing instead (cf. Rm 7:15).

In today's first reading, the Israelites are journeying through the desert, and are therefore experiencing all the hardships of life in a hostile land. Now, to make matters worse, the Amalekites come and try to destroy them. Moses tells Joshua to go out and engage the enemy, while he will be praying on the mountaintop. As Moses prays, lifting up his hands to God, Israel gains the advantage. But as the battle drags on, he grows tired and lets down his hands, and Amalek begins to get the better of Israel. With the help of his two companions, Moses perseveres in prayer, and Israel finally defeats Amalek.

We can learn much from this story about our own struggles with our enemy. First of all, we *are* in a struggle; we are being attacked by our enemy continually. Our situation is comparable to that of the Israelites. Right before this passage, the Israelites were complaining to Moses about being tired and thirsty. They were happy to be free from slavery in Egypt and to begin a journey through the desert, but as the journey dragged on, they grew weary. Then they come under attack and must fight for their lives. This is what life is sometimes like. When we experience some blessing from God, some freedom from the sin condition which was enslaving us, we initially rejoice and are happy to follow as God leads us. But we soon grow tired and begin to complain as we find that the journey to true transformation in Christ is not a quick or easy one.

Too often we act like sprinters, eager to dash off a quick victory and be done. But the spiritual life is more like a marathon. We need to take on a different mindset. What God offers us is wonderful beyond our understanding – eternal life united with him in Heaven! We cannot bring it about with a short burst of effort and fervor. St. Paul exhorts us in the second reading, “Remain faithful to what you have learned and believed.” He also tells us to “be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient.” Like *persevere*, the words *remain faithful* and *be persistent* are telling; they teach us that we should expect the journey to be a long and arduous one.

Knowing our own weakness, how can we not be discouraged when we see the difficult path which we are called to walk? How can we fight the temptation to give up? The actions of Moses give us some clues. He knew that victory could only come from the Lord, and that the key was perseverance, so he did everything he could to persevere. We must do the same. We must be diligent about obtaining for ourselves whoever and whatever supports our life of prayer. We need friends who will pray with us and for us. The whole Church is a family united in prayer, but we also need a few close companions who can help us when we grow tired. We also need a rock to sit on. The rock represents all the physical and practical aspects of our spiritual life – where we pray, what books we use, what posture we take, the schedule and setting and disciplines that help us remain focused on the Lord and dependent on him. A rock is not necessarily comfortable, but it is solid and reliable.

Scripture is an especially valuable tool for fortifying our Christian life. Today's Gospel Acclamation affirms that God's word is "living and effective." It is able to support us and sustain us – and can even transform our hearts. Paul reminds Timothy that "all Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work." Therefore we do well to nourish ourselves daily on the word of God.

Jesus assures us in the Gospel that God *will help us* to win a complete victory over sin and death, and to gain our "rights" as his adopted children. But he says that we must "call out to him day and night," as the widow continually pleaded with the judge. We pray for the faith to believe that the One who has called us as his children can and will bring us home to himself if we but persevere in faith. Our Psalm for today assures us of God's constant help and protection:

*The LORD is your guardian; the LORD is your shade;
he is beside you at your right hand.
The sun shall not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The LORD will guard you from all evil;
he will guard your life.
The LORD will guard your coming and your going,
both now and forever.*

*When do I find it most difficult to persevere in faith and prayer?
To follow Jesus? In my daily life, how do I experience the
struggle between the spirit and the flesh? As I strive to
persevere in faith, who and what supports me in my life of
prayer?*

Mary, our model of faith, sustain me in my daily struggles.

World Mission Sunday, initiated by Pope Pius XI in 1926, is celebrated annually on the next-to-last Sunday in October. It is a day to recall that the Church's mission is to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and make disciples throughout the whole world, exactly as Jesus commanded (cf. Mk 16:15; Mt 28:19-20). The work of the Church did not cease when the original disciples died; it continues to this day through all of us. The theme for World Mission Sunday 2025 is, "*Missionaries of Hope Among all Peoples.*"

Notes

October 20, Monday, 29th Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Paul of the Cross, Priest (USA)



First Reading: Romans 4:20-25

Brothers and sisters: Abraham did not doubt God's promise in unbelief; rather, he was empowered by faith and gave glory to God and was fully convinced that what God had promised he was also able to do. That is why *it was credited to him as righteousness*. But it was not for him alone that it was written that *it was credited to him*; it was also for us, to whom it will be credited, who believe in the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over for our transgressions and was raised for our justification.



Responsorial Psalm: Luke 1:69-70, 71-72, 73-75

***Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel;
he has come to his people.***

He has come to his people and set them free.

He has raised up for us a mighty savior,
born of the house of his servant David.

R. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come to his people.

Through his holy prophets he promised of old
that he would save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all who hate us.

He promised to show mercy to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant.

R. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come to his people.

This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
free to worship him without fear,
holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life.

R. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come to his people.

Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 5:3

Alleluia, alleluia. Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Luke 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me." He replied to him, "Friend, who appointed me as your judge and arbitrator?" Then he said to the crowd,

“Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one’s life does not consist of possessions.”

Then he told them a parable. “There was a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest. He asked himself, ‘What shall I do, for I do not have space to store my harvest?’ And he said, ‘This is what I shall do: I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones. There I shall store all my grain and other goods and I shall say to myself, ‘Now as for you, you have so many good things stored up for many years, rest, eat, drink, be merry!’” But God said to him, ‘You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?’ Thus will it be for the one who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich in what matters to God.”



Meditation:

The readings this week speak to us about the need to persevere in faith throughout the long and often difficult journey of our Christian life in this world. In this regard, St. Paul offers us the figure of Abraham as an example and inspiration. In today’s first reading he tells us that “Abraham did not doubt God’s promise in unbelief; rather, he was *empowered by faith*.” Abraham was called by God to leave his homeland and travel to an unknown land. Along the way he faced many trials and hardships. We recall in particular the episode in which God asked him to sacrifice his son, Isaac, through whom he naturally expected God’s promises to be fulfilled. Even in the terrible darkness of this test, Abraham still trusted that God would be faithful, and he followed him in obedient faith. Paul tells us that Abraham “was fully convinced that what God had promised he was also able to do.”

This is the kind of faith which we must cling to and beg God to strengthen in us – the firm belief that God is able to do in us and for us what he has promised. We have good reason to believe this, for he has shown us countless times that he is both powerful and faithful. We know from the witness of the disciples of Jesus that God raised him from death to life, as Paul reminds us. Surely, the One who was able to raise Jesus’ dead body back to life is able to raise our broken human natures up to a likeness to Christ!

At times our experience of our own limitations and sinfulness can tempt us to doubt that God will indeed transform us in holiness to be united with him in love for eternity. When we fall into this doubt, we

are focusing too much on our weakness and not enough on God's greatness. Surely the One who created the earth and the heavens; the One who sustained Abraham, the prophets, and the leaders of Israel throughout the Old Testament; the One who has raised up saints throughout history; the One who has sustained the Church against all of the attacks of the enemy even until today – surely he is able to do what he has promised for us! Do we think that our transformation is the one thing that is too hard for God to accomplish?

We are assured by today's Psalm – actually the Canticle of Zechariah from the Gospel of St. Luke – that God *does* keep his promises to his people: “He *promised* of old that he would save us from our enemies”; “he *promised* to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant”; and “this was the *oath he swore* to our father Abraham: to set us free from the hands of our enemies.” Zechariah had struggled with doubts nine months earlier, when he was told that his wife would bear a son. Now, as he celebrates the birth of John the Baptist, he is able to see how God fulfills his promises, and he praises God for his faithfulness: “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come to his people.”

At times we struggle with faith because we find that God is not living up to our expectations. We may fall into the error of blaming God for not fulfilling promises which he never made in the first place. For example, he has never promised us that we will have a comfortable and prosperous life in this world. In fact Jesus often warned his disciples to expect quite the opposite. God does not promise to fulfill all *our* plans for ourselves. He promises to fulfill *his* plan to transform us in the likeness of his Son and bring us to a complete union with him. If we expect God to do something different for us, we will be disappointed.

The man in today's Gospel seems to have a misplaced expectation. He does not want to learn what Jesus is teaching; he simply wants him to help him secure his share of his inheritance. Since that is not Jesus' mission, he refuses to get involved, and he turns to the crowd to warn them not to spend their lives chasing possessions.

Jesus then tells the parable about a rich man who makes plans to enjoy “the good life” for years to come. God calls him a “fool,” because he spends his time and energy working to make a comfortable life for

himself, instead of focusing on “what matters to God.” The fact that the man is rich and has many possessions is not the problem. His mistake is in looking at all his riches and thinking only of how he can use them to benefit himself. He would have been much better off looking to God, asking him to show him how to use his riches in a way that would be a blessing to those around him.

The readings today, then, encourage us to persevere in faith that God can and will do for us what he has promised, and they remind us to cooperate with his grace by putting foremost in our minds and hearts “what matters to God,” rather than getting caught up in the passing attractions of the world. Let us seek the aid of Mary, the faithful one who always trusted completely in God. May she lead us in her way, so that at the end of our lives here on earth it may be said of us, as it was said of her: “Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”

How does my faith compare with the faith of Abraham? When have I doubted that God will transform me in holiness despite my unworthiness? When have I struggled with faith because God was not living up to my expectations?

***Mary, help me to remain focused on what matters to God.
St. Paul of the Cross, pray for us.***

Paul of the Cross was born in 1694 in northern Italy. Son of a wealthy merchant, he experienced a conversion to a life of prayer at age 19. His reading of the *Treatise on the Love of God* by St. Francis de Sales and direction from priests of the Capuchin Order taught him the primacy of love and the need to go beyond our own images of God. It became St. Paul’s lifelong conviction that God is most easily found in the Passion of Jesus Christ, being the most overwhelming sign of God’s love for us. His life was devoted to bringing this message to all and founding a community (the Passionists) whose members would do the same. He died in 1775 and was canonized in 1867. In 1869, his feast day was inserted in the General Roman Calendar.

October 21, Tuesday, 29th Week in Ordinary Time
Feast of St. Pedro Calungsod, Martyr (Philippines)

Note: Readings for the Feast of St. Pedro Calungsod may be chosen from the Common of Martyrs.



First Reading: Romans 5:12, 15b, 17-19, 20b-21

Brothers and sisters: Through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned.

If by that one person's transgression the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many. For if, by the transgression of the one, death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one Jesus Christ. In conclusion, just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so, through one righteous act acquittal and life came to all. For just as through the disobedience of one man the many were made sinners, so, through the obedience of the one the many will be made righteous. Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through justification for eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 40:7-8a, 8b-9, 10, 17

Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.

Sacrifice or oblation you wished not,
but ears open to obedience you gave me.
Burnt offerings or sin-offerings you sought not;
then said I, "Behold I come."

R. Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.

"In the written scroll it is prescribed for me,
To do your will, O my God, is my delight,
and your law is within my heart!"

R. Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.

I announced your justice in the vast assembly;
I did not restrain my lips, as you, O LORD, know.

R. Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.

May all who seek you
exult and be glad in you,
And may those who love your salvation
say ever, "The LORD be glorified."

R. Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.

Gospel Acclamation: Luke 21:36

Alleluia, alleluia. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you may have the strength to stand before the Son of Man. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Luke 12:35-38

Jesus said to his disciples: “Gird your loins and light your lamps and be like servants who await their master’s return from a wedding, ready to open immediately when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival. Amen, I say to you, he will gird himself, have them recline at table, and proceed to wait on them. And should he come in the second or third watch and find them prepared in this way, blessed are those servants.”



Meditation:

We saw in yesterday’s readings that God is always faithful to his promises. He can and will do what he has promised. St. Paul speaks to us in today’s first reading about what it is that God has promised to do for us. To all who put their faith in Christ and strive to live by his way, God will give an “abundance of grace” and “the gift of justification.” By the grace of Christ’s sacrifice, we are freed from sin and death, acquitted of any condemnation due to sin, and brought into “eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” This is God’s plan for us.

We have our part to play in bringing to fulfillment God’s promises to us. That is, we need to cooperate with his grace, following him as best we can in the way that he leads us, with firm faith in him. What does it look like when we open our hearts to cooperate with God’s plan? The Psalm for today expresses beautifully the generous, grateful attitude of one who is ready to welcome God’s blessings: “Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.... To do your will, O my God, is my delight, / and your law is within my heart!”

The Gospel Acclamation for today urges us: “Be vigilant at all times and pray that you may have the strength to stand before the Son of Man.” The vigilance and prayer that we need are implied in the straightforward statement of the Psalm, “Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.” *Lord, I want nothing more than to love you with my whole heart, mind, and strength, and to love my brothers and sisters as you love them. You have the power to bring this about in me, and you alone know the best way to do it. I give myself completely to you, Lord, that*

you might accomplish your plan in me. I love you and I trust you. If we persevere in this kind of prayer, we can be assured that we will indeed have the strength to stand before the Son of Man when the time comes, not because of who we are, but because of what he will have done in us.

How does God respond to us when we come before him with this kind of prayer? We saw on Sunday that he certainly will not refuse us if we persist in pleading for his mercy and grace. But in today's Gospel, Jesus goes even further in revealing to us God's response to persevering prayer. Clearly, we are represented by the servants in the parable, and God is the master. We would expect Jesus to warn us that we should be ready for the master's return, and we probably expect that the master will be generous with his servants, if we are indeed faithful in remaining vigilant. But instead Jesus says that the master will have his faithful servants recline at table, and *he* will wait on *them*. This is astounding! No human master would wait on his servants, no matter how faithfully they awaited his return. At the most he might give them a special bonus or some such thing. But to reverse the roles, and act as servant to his own servants – this is a kind of generosity that we could never have expected!

We are continually taken by surprise by the overwhelming love and mercy shown to us by God. It is so amazing that it is hard for us to believe it. We tend to think of God in our own image. Knowing how limited our love, our forgiveness, our generosity, and our mercy are, we begin to put those same limitations on God. But Jesus shows us in many of his teachings that God's love for us is without limit, beyond anything we can imagine. Paul proclaims that "where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more." Given such a loving God, we can only come before him in humility and gratitude, asking him to help us make a return to him by giving ourselves ever more generously to him, who gives himself completely for us.

Why do I find it difficult to cooperate with God's grace and to follow his will? What prevents me from truly saying, "Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will"? When have I had the surprising discovery that where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more?

Mary, help me to be grateful to God for his great generosity to me.

St. Pedro Calungsod, pray for us.

Pedro Calungsod was born in the Visayas region of the Philippines in 1654. He was one of the young catechists who went with some Spanish Jesuit missionaries from the Philippines to evangelize the Chamorros in Guam in 1668. Life was hard for the missionaries, but the mission was blessed with many conversions. A Chinese exile named Choco, envious of the prestige that the missionaries were gaining among the Chamorros, started to spread rumors that the baptismal water of the missionaries was poisonous. Since some infants died after they were baptized, some of the natives believed him and apostatized. The father of one infant was enraged that Blessed Fr. Diego Luis de San Vitores, assisted by Pedro, had baptized his child. When he hurled spears at them, Pedro would have been able to escape, but did not want to abandon Padre Diego. The priest and the young catechist were hacked to death and their bodies were thrown into the sea on April 2, 1672. Both were beatified by John Paul II on March 5, 2000; Pedro was canonized by Benedict XVI on October 21, 2012. In 2024, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines moved his memorial from April 2 to October 21 and elevated it to the rank of a Feast.

Notes

October 22, Wednesday, 29th Week in Ordinary Time
Saint John Paul II, Pope



First Reading: Romans 6:12-18

Brothers and sisters: Sin must not reign over your mortal bodies so that you obey their desires. And do not present the parts of your bodies to sin as weapons for wickedness, but present yourselves to God as raised from the dead to life and the parts of your bodies to God as weapons for righteousness. For sin is not to have any power over you, since you are not under the law but under grace.

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? Of course not! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, although you were once slaves of sin, you have become obedient from the heart to the pattern of teaching to which you were entrusted. Freed from sin, you have become slaves of righteousness.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 124:1b-3, 4-6, 7-8

Our help is in the name of the Lord.

Had not the LORD been with us,
let Israel say, had not the LORD been with us—
When men rose up against us,
then would they have swallowed us alive;
When their fury was inflamed against us.

R. Our help is in the name of the Lord.

Then would the waters have overwhelmed us;
The torrent would have swept over us;
over us then would have swept the raging waters.
Blessed be the LORD, who did not leave us
a prey to their teeth.

R. Our help is in the name of the Lord.

We were rescued like a bird
from the fowlers' snare;
Broken was the snare,
and we were freed.
Our help is in the name of the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

R. Our help is in the name of the Lord.

Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 24:42a, 44

Alleluia, alleluia. Stay awake! For you do not know when the Son of Man will come. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Luke 12:39-48

Jesus said to his disciples: “Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour when the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.”

Then Peter said, “Lord, is this parable meant for us or for everyone?” And the Lord replied, “Who, then, is the faithful and prudent steward whom the master will put in charge of his servants to distribute the food allowance at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master on arrival finds doing so. Truly, I say to you, he will put him in charge of all his property. But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, to eat and drink and get drunk, then that servant’s master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour and will punish the servant severely and assign him a place with the unfaithful. That servant who knew his master’s will but did not make preparations nor act in accord with his will shall be beaten severely; and the servant who was ignorant of his master’s will but acted in a way deserving of a severe beating shall be beaten only lightly. Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.”



Meditation:

The Gospel Acclamation today exhorts us: “Stay awake! For you do not know when the Son of Man will come.” This exhortation is in line with our theme for the week, that of persevering in faith and in prayer as we follow the Lord day by day. Today’s Gospel continues where yesterday’s left off, with Jesus warning us to be prepared for his coming. He tells us that he will come at an hour we do not expect. Therefore we must not become complacent and begin to “take it easy,” assuming that we have plenty of time. It is common for the enemy to tempt us to put off prayer and other good spiritual works. *You’re so busy right now. You’ll have time for that later.* If we begin to think that way, we should remember God’s words to the rich man in Monday’s Gospel: “You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you!”

One correct way to read today’s Gospel is as a warning: since we truly have no way to know when our life will end, we should do all that we can to be ready to meet the Lord when that moment arrives. However, we can also read this passage in another way, not only as a

preparation for death, but also as a guide for daily life. If we are awake to God's presence, we find that he is coming to us in each moment, with inspiration and grace. Throughout the day, as we go about our normal routines, he is present to us in ordinary events and activities. He is in the cry of a child for comfort. He is in the sadness of a lonely person, longing for a kind word. He is in the silence of a peaceful moment. He is in the neighbor who needs assistance, and in the co-worker struggling with a deadline. He is present to us in all the joys and sorrows of life. God is with us in each moment, ready to teach us and empower us to love more fully. But we are often not "awake" to his presence. So this Gospel urges us to open our eyes and hearts to God, to be on the lookout for him as he comes to us throughout the day.

As we ponder the first reading, we become aware that there is another reason for us to remain vigilant, namely, that the enemy also comes to us continually throughout the day. He seeks to tempt us to cooperate with *his* plan of sin, death, and destruction. And because our fallen nature already tends toward sin, we are vulnerable to his temptations. St. Paul warns us, "Do not present the parts of your bodies to sin as weapons for wickedness." If we are not vigilant, it is easy for us to get pulled gradually into sinful actions and habits. We watch shows which arouse lust, anger, and fear in us. We listen to news which causes anxiety. We read magazines which stir up envy and worldliness. We drink more than we should and end up doing things which we might not have done if we were sober. There are many ways in which we can "present the parts of our bodies to sin as weapons for wickedness." Therefore we must remain vigilant for this reason as well, to guard against the tactics of the enemy and not cooperate with his attempts to draw us into sin.

How can we persevere in remaining present to the Lord and on guard against the temptations of the evil one? By ourselves, in our weakened condition, we cannot. The Psalm teaches us the right attitude to keep: "Our help is in the name of the Lord." The psalmist spells out all the terrible things which would have happened to Israel if the Lord had not helped them. They would have been swallowed alive, overwhelmed, and drowned beneath the raging waters. In the Old Testament, deep water is often thought of as the abode of evil, and so the "raging waters" symbolize the furious attack of the evil one, seeking

to destroy us. Israel experienced the gift of being rescued by God, like a bird set free from a snare. In the same way, Paul assures us, we have been freed by the power of Christ's sacrifice: "sin is not to have any power over you, since you are not under the law but under grace."

We who know Jesus Christ, who have been called as his followers, are the ones who have been "entrusted with much," as Jesus says in the Gospel. Therefore we cannot allow ourselves to become complacent. Considering all the many blessings he has showered upon us, he is expecting more from us than from those in the world who do not yet know him. Indeed, he is expecting us to serve in the world as witnesses of his love and mercy. With confidence in his help, then, let us ask him for the grace to remain present to him throughout the day, and to be on guard against the temptations of the enemy.

How can I be more vigilant in resisting sinful actions and habits? How can I remain more aware that God is present to me at every moment and in all that I do? As a servant entrusted with much, how can I practice greater generosity and dedication to the Lord?

Mary, help me to be a faithful and prudent steward of the Lord.

St. John Paul II, pray for us.

Born Karol Józef Wojtyła on May 18, 1920, in Wadowice, Poland, **Pope John Paul II's** early life was marked by the loss of his mother when he was nine years old and his older brother and father by age twenty-one. He studied philology in Kraków's Jagiellonian University and was active in theater groups. The Nazi occupation of Poland closed the university in 1939, and Karol had to work in a quarry to earn a living. In 1942, he entered the clandestine seminary of Kraków where he was ordained in 1946. Karol was appointed bishop and then archbishop of Kraków and was considered one of the Church's leading thinkers and contributors to Vatican II. He was made cardinal in 1967 by Pope Paul VI. On October 16, 1978, Karol was elected the 263rd successor of Peter, becoming the first non-Italian pope in more than 400 years. His inauguration was on October 22, which is now the date of his feast day. As Pope, John Paul II demonstrated his deep love for the young, the poor, the sick, the marginalized, and those persecuted for their faith, through many and tireless journeys throughout the world. His deep love and dedication to prayer and to Our Blessed Mother was clearly evident in his journeys. Pope John Paul II died on the evening of Saturday, April 2, 2005, the vigil of the Feast of Divine Mercy. He was canonized on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 27, 2014, by Pope Francis.

October 23, Thursday, 29th Week in Ordinary Time
Saint John Capistrano, Priest



First Reading: Romans 6:19-23

Brothers and sisters: I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your nature. For just as you presented the parts of your bodies as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness for lawlessness, so now present them as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free from righteousness. But what profit did you get then from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit that you have leads to sanctification, and its end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 1:1-2, 3, 4 and 6
Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

Blessed the man who follows not
the counsel of the wicked
Nor walks in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the company of the insolent,
But delights in the law of the LORD
and meditates on his law day and night.

R. Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

He is like a tree
planted near running water,
That yields its fruit in due season,
and whose leaves never fade.
Whatever he does, prospers.

R. Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

Not so the wicked, not so;
they are like chaff which the wind drives away.
For the LORD watches over the way of the just,
but the way of the wicked vanishes.

R. Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

Gospel Acclamation: Philippians 3:8-9

Alleluia, alleluia. I consider all things so much rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in him. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Luke 12:49-53

Jesus said to his disciples: "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!"

Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”



Meditation:

This week’s readings have been urging us to persevere in prayer and faith every day, so that our lives might be centered on God. The Psalm for today describes the blessings which are enjoyed by those who live in this way: “Blessed the man who ... delights in the law of the LORD / and meditates on his law day and night. / He is like a tree / planted near running water, / That yields its fruit in due season, / and whose leaves never fade. / Whatever he does, prospers.”

This gives us a good insight into *why* it is so important for us to cling to the Lord and come before him in prayer: because his grace is like a flowing river which provides water for the plants along its banks. Without enough water, plants wither and die. If a plant is located far from a water source, its life is always at risk; it depends on getting some rain, which is never guaranteed. But a tree located near a river has no such problem. Even in a dry season it flourishes, because it can draw all the water it needs from the river. In the same way, our prayer and sacramental life root us deeply in the abundant spring of God’s grace, so that his life in us can be continually nourished and we can bear fruit.

At times we can get caught up in busyness and activity, and question whether time spent in prayer is really necessary. But prayer is our spiritual food and drink. When it comes to eating, we do not say, *I have too much to do today, so I’m not going to take the time to eat*. In an emergency we might go without eating for a time, but we know that we need to eat in order to live, and we find time to eat no matter how busy we are. The same principle applies to prayer. We need prayer in order to survive. Without spiritual nourishment, our interior life will soon begin to wither.

The Psalm warns us that “the wicked” are “like chaff which the wind drives away. / For the LORD watches over the way of the just, / but the way of the wicked vanishes.” The Lord loves the wicked every bit as much as he loves the just, and he desires nothing more than to watch

over them and bless them. But the wicked ignore him and distance themselves from him. In doing so they cut themselves off from his life-giving grace, and so they wither spiritually, and their interior life gradually vanishes.

The first reading is a continuation from yesterday. St. Paul is again urging us not to allow ourselves to get caught in the temptations to sinfulness which our fallen nature finds so attractive. He reminds us that “the end of those things is death.” What God has planned for us is quite different – “eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” That life with Jesus begins anew *right now*. We are either nourishing his life within us by sinking our “roots” deep into the stream of his grace, or we are cutting ourselves off from his life by ignoring him and following our own way. Life in Christ is not just something that we look forward to in the future; it is our way of life today. We grow more and more in this life as we persevere in prayer and faith day by day, until one day God brings his life to fullness in us in eternity.

St. Paul knows that life in Christ is the most important thing there is, the pearl of great price, to which nothing else can be compared. Today’s Gospel Acclamation is from his Letter to the Philippians, in which he declares, “I consider all things so much rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in him.” The way to be “found in him” is to persevere day by day in faith and prayer.

In Monday’s Gospel Jesus called the rich man a “fool” because he was not concerning himself with “what matters to God.” In today’s Gospel Jesus makes very clear what matters to God. We can feel his passion as he declares, “I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!” Jesus came to give all that he had, to sacrifice himself completely, in order to set hearts on fire with his love, and to baptize – that is, immerse – all humanity into his life of grace. This is what matters to him! Too often we are more concerned with having a peaceful, comfortable life. But Jesus tells us that that is *not* what matters to him. That is not why he came. He came to make it possible for us to grow in his life. If we value any other concern over this, then we are acting like fools.

Let us ask the Lord today to give us a deeper hunger for prayer, so that we might drink deeply of the water of his grace, that his life may flourish within us.

Why is daily prayer so important for my spiritual life? How has giving in to temptations caused my interior life to wither? Is my life in Christ the most important thing for me – the pearl of great price? If not, why not?

***Mary, foster in me a deeper hunger for prayer.
St. John Capistrano, pray for us.***

John of Capistrano was born in Italy in 1386. In 1412, he became magistrate of Perugia and later was imprisoned for trying to bring peace to two warring factions. During his imprisonment, he discerned that his life's journey would be devoted to God. He entered the Franciscans in 1416 and became a very great preacher of missions, fostering devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus throughout Europe. John worked to end the great schism between East and West. He also promoted resistance against the Turks at the battle of Belgrade and is now the patron of military chaplains. He died in 1456 and was canonized in 1724.

Notes

October 24, Friday, 29th Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Anthony Mary Claret, Bishop



First Reading: Romans 7:18-25a

Brothers and sisters: I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh. The willing is ready at hand, but doing the good is not. For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. So, then, I discover the principle that when I want to do right, evil is at hand. For I take delight in the law of God, in my inner self, but I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind, taking me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Miserable one that I am! Who will deliver me from this mortal body? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 119:66, 68, 76, 77, 93, 94
Lord, teach me your statutes.

Teach me wisdom and knowledge,
for in your commands I trust.

R. Lord, teach me your statutes.

You are good and bountiful;
teach me your statutes.

R. Lord, teach me your statutes.

Let your kindness comfort me
according to your promise to your servants.

R. Lord, teach me your statutes.

Let your compassion come to me that I may live,
for your law is my delight.

R. Lord, teach me your statutes.

Never will I forget your precepts,
for through them you give me life.

R. Lord, teach me your statutes.

I am yours; save me,
for I have sought your precepts.

R. Lord, teach me your statutes.

Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 11:25

Alleluia, alleluia. Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth; you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the Kingdom. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Luke 12:54-59

Jesus said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west you say immediately that it is going to rain—and so it does; and when you notice that the wind is blowing from the south you say that it is going to be hot—and so it is. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky; why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”

“Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? If you are to go with your opponent before a magistrate, make an effort to settle the matter on the way; otherwise your opponent will turn you over to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the constable, and the constable throw you into prison. I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny.”



Meditation:

In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells us that if we have a quarrel with someone, we should try to resolve it ourselves rather than appeal to a judge or some other outside party. Let us consider what is in the heart and mind of a person who insists on bringing a quarrel to a judge before even attempting to reconcile the matter with his opponent. Clearly, he must be sure that he is in the right. He must be confident that the judge will favor his side. If he was not convinced of his case, he would be more hesitant, out of fear that the judge might decide in favor of his opponent. In fact, Jesus warns us that this is exactly what *will* happen if we act in such an arrogant manner – the judge will find that *we* are the one at fault and will hand us over to punishment.

The better way for us to proceed is indicated in the Gospel Acclamation: “Blessed are you, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth; you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the Kingdom.” “Little ones” are not convinced of their own righteousness. In fact, they are humble; they know well their weaknesses and failings. They do not seek to triumph over their opponents, but to reconcile with them, aware that, as others have offended them, they too have caused offense and need to seek forgiveness.

This is the kind of humble heart which Jesus came to give us. Today he rebukes his listeners because, although they are able to interpret signs in nature, they are not open to seeing the great gift which he is offering them. At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus

proclaimed, “This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel” (Mk 1:15). So the “present time” which he mentions in this passage is the “time of fulfillment,” the time to repent, the time to change our minds and begin to see things as God sees them. God has no interest in defeating those who oppose or offend him. Rather, he wants us all to be reconciled with him, to be brought back into union with him, and he will even sacrifice himself to bring this about.

In the first reading, St. Paul gives us a good understanding of why we should never sit in arrogant assurance of our own righteousness. He knows himself well; he knows that there is in his flesh always the temptation and the tendency to sin: “I take delight in the law of God, in my inner self, but I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind, taking me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.” Like all of us, Paul wants to do what is good and right before God, but he often finds himself doing just the opposite, despite his best intentions. He cries out, “Miserable one that I am! Who will deliver me from this mortal body?” He knows that he needs a deliverer; he certainly cannot deliver himself. His humility is quite different from the arrogant attitude of one who assumes that he is always right.

St. Paul knows that his hope is in God alone, as he acknowledges: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” With a similar spirit, the psalmist expresses his total dependence on God to help him know and do what is right. He pleads with God, “Teach me wisdom and knowledge.... teach me your statutes.... Let your kindness comfort me.... Let your compassion come to me.... I am yours; save me.”

We have in our fallen nature a tendency to think, in any argument or dispute, that we are the ones in the right. Anyone who does not agree with us or act the way we do must be wrong. It is hard for our pride to admit that *we* might be the ones who have done wrong, or who have failed to understand. Only the grace of God can overcome this tendency and bring us to a blessed humility. Our sinful pride is something that we contend with every day, so we need to turn to the Lord for his help every day, persevering in prayer before him, never tiring, like the widow in Sunday’s Gospel. The Lord hears and blesses “his chosen ones who call out to him day and night” (Lk 18:7).

Why do I think that I am right and whoever opposes me is wrong? How can I be more like the “little ones” who are humble and know well their weaknesses and failings? Why do I still sometimes rely on my own efforts rather than depend on God?

***Mary, help me to persevere, never wearying in my daily prayer.
St. Anthony Mary Claret, pray for us.***

Anthony Mary Claret was born in Spain in 1807, the son of a weaver. He desired to be a Jesuit, but his ill health prevented him. At age 28 he was ordained a diocesan priest and became known as a gifted preacher. He spent ten years preaching missions throughout Spain, focusing especially on the Eucharist and devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. In 1849, he founded the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, popularly known as the Claretians. In 1850, Anthony was made Bishop of Santiago, Cuba, where he suffered opposition from those attached to their immoral lives and from the advocates of slavery. In 1857, he was called back to Spain to become the chaplain of Queen Isabella. In this position he was able to work toward the recognition of religious orders in Spain, and to exert some influence in the naming of bishops. He followed Queen Isabella into exile in France and died under house arrest in a Cistercian monastery in 1870. Pope Pius XII canonized him on May 7, 1950.

Notes



First Reading: Romans 8:1-11

Brothers and sisters: Now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the law of sin and death. For what the law, weakened by the flesh, was powerless to do, this God has done: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for the sake of sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous decree of the law might be fulfilled in us, who live not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh are concerned with the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit with the things of the Spirit. The concern of the flesh is death, but the concern of the Spirit is life and peace. For the concern of the flesh is hostility toward God; it does not submit to the law of God, nor can it; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the Spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 24:1b-2, 3-4ab, 5-6

Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face.

The LORD's are the earth and its fullness;
the world and those who dwell in it.
For he founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the rivers.

R. Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face.

Who can ascend the mountain of the LORD?
or who may stand in his holy place?
He whose hands are sinless, whose heart is clean,
who desires not what is vain.

R. Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face.

He shall receive a blessing from the LORD,
a reward from God his savior.
Such is the race that seeks for him,
that seeks the face of the God of Jacob.

R. Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face.

Gospel Acclamation: Ezekiel 33:11

Alleluia, alleluia. I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked man, says the Lord, but rather in his conversion that he may live. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Luke 13:1-9

Some people told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices. He said to them in reply, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were greater sinners than all other Galileans? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did! Or those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!”

And he told them this parable: “There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard, and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none, he said to the gardener, ‘For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree but have found none. So cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil?’ He said to him in reply, ‘Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future. If not you can cut it down.’”



Meditation:

One of the biggest obstacles to our transformation in Christ is complacency. Because of our fallen nature, it is hard for us to persevere in keeping our lives centered on Christ and doing all that we can to follow him. We have a constant tendency to take it easy, cut some corners, relax a bit, and begin to compromise with the values and ways of the world. We say to ourselves, *I’m not trying to be a saint, just a pretty good person. I don’t have to pray all the time. I can catch up later. It’s not so bad...* If we let ourselves follow this line of thinking, we gradually wander farther and farther away from Jesus. We skip our prayer time; we let worldly ways creep into our life; and soon we are not faithful to his call to follow him.

To counteract this tendency, Jesus gives us a warning in today’s Gospel. Presumably his listeners are normal, everyday people, not the worst sinners in the area. They are probably following the Jewish law, more or less, doing as much as they are comfortable doing without causing themselves too much trouble. In other words, most of them are probably living their faith the way we often do. They bring to Jesus

news of some Galileans who were killed by Pilate. It seems they expect Jesus to say that the victims suffered this tragic fate because they were great sinners. Then the listeners could relax, thinking to themselves, *Well, that wouldn't happen to me, because I'm not a sinner like they were.*

Jesus' response, however, is surprising: "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were greater sinners than all other Galileans? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!" He goes on to repeat the message, referring to a group of people who were killed by a falling tower. Then Jesus tells a parable about a fig tree which is in danger of being cut down because it is not bearing fruit.

What is Jesus trying to tell us? Why is he warning us that we will be cut down and perish if we do not repent? We can gain insight into his message by pondering it together with the first reading. St. Paul describes the difference between those who live according to the Spirit and those who live according to the flesh. Life according to the flesh means pursuing pleasure, comfort, power, honor, and material possessions, with no concern for the ways of God. It means slavery to the urgings and desires of our fallen nature. Paul says this about such a way of life: "The concern of the flesh is hostility toward God; it does not submit to the law of God, nor can it; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God." On the other hand, the concern of the Spirit is always to follow the way of Christ and fulfill his plan in the world, with the goal of eternal life with him.

The point is that the spirit and the flesh are directly opposed. If we are concerning ourselves with the desires of the flesh, we are *not* concerning ourselves with following Christ. And we are placing ourselves in harm's way – worse than a falling tower. Every shortcut we take, every way in which we bypass or ignore his word to us, is a step against God's plan in our lives. We are actually being *hostile* toward God and toward his life in us. This is why it is so important to persevere in faith and prayer. In the end, there is no middle ground. We either follow the concerns of the flesh to our own condemnation and destruction, or we follow the concerns of the Spirit to eternal life, joy, and love. In the language of the Gospel, we either repent or we perish, like the victims of disasters. Jesus is warning us to *repent* – that is, to

change our way of thinking, to stop trying to find a compromise between his call and the pull of the flesh, to stop trying to give God some sort of minimum requirement while keeping the rest of our time, energy, and money for our own selfish use.

Today we cry out to the Lord, “Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face.” When we are truly concerned with the things of the Spirit, we *long* to see the face of the Lord. We cannot tolerate being lukewarm, following the Lord’s word only as far as it is comfortable or convenient. No, when we ardently long to see the Lord, we “make no provision for the desires of the flesh” (Rm 13:14), because we know that giving in to the flesh, even a little, will hinder our journey toward God. Let us open our hearts to God today and ask him to give us a deep longing to see his face.

How is my complacency hindering my transformation in Christ? When am I most prone to live according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit? Why is it very important for me to persevere in faith and prayer?

Mary, open my heart and give me a deep longing to see the face of God.

Notes