

Pondering the Word...

THE ANAWIM WAY

Daily Liturgical Meditations

*Fifteenth to Twenty-First Week
in Ordinary Time*

*July 12 to August 29, 2026
Cycle A - Year 2*

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
Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC.

Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Used with permission from the Episcopal Commission on Liturgy of
the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

Meditations: Anawim Community, © Copyright 2026.

All rights reserved.

CONTENTS

Endorsement.....	4
What is the Anawim Spirituality	5
Fifteenth Week in Ordinary Time	7
Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis	
<i>The Word of God is Like a Seed that Produces Abundant Life</i>	
<i>When Planted in a Sincere Heart</i>	8
Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time	41
Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis	
<i>Our Life's Journey of Cultivating Goodness</i>	
<i>in Ourselves and Others.....</i>	42
Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time.....	72
Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis	
<i>Let Us Seek Jesus,</i>	
<i>The Precious Pearl Who Transforms Our Lives</i>	73
Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time	103
Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis	
<i>The Compassion and Tenderness of Jesus</i>	
<i>Reflects Our Responsibility to Serve Others.....</i>	104
Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time	138
Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis	
<i>The Divine Invitation to Trust the Lord</i>	
<i>Who Walks Over the Powers of Fear</i>	139
Twentieth Week in Ordinary Time	173
Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis	
<i>The One Who Loves is Not Rigid and is Open to Change</i>	174
Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time	207
Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis	
<i>Jesus is Alive, Living In the World</i>	
<i>and Accompanies Us In Our Daily Life</i>	208
List of Outlets and Distributors	237
Subscription Forms	239



The Roman Catholic Bishop of Parañaque

34 A. Aguirre Ave. cor J. Cruz St., B F Homes Phase III
Parañaque City

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.

Fifteenth Week in Ordinary Time

***“... blessed are your eyes, because they see,
and your ears, because they hear.”***

Matthew 13:16

Theme for the Week

The Lord comes to us in the power of his word, with expectation that we will be fertile ground for his grace to flourish. Let us exert constant efforts to make our hearts good soil where his word can bear abundant fruit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, and much more – and eternal life!

***The Word of God is Like a Seed that Produces Abundant Life
When Planted in a Sincere Heart***
A Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis

Today, the Gospel presents us with the parable of the sower (cf. *Mt* 13:1-23). “Sowing” is a very beautiful image, and Jesus uses it to describe the gift of his Word. Let us imagine a seed: it is tiny, barely visible, but it makes fruit-bearing plants grow. The Word of God is like this: think of the Gospel, a small book, simple and within everyone’s reach, that produces new life in those who receive it. Thus, if the Word is the seed, we are the soil: we can receive it or not. But Jesus, the “good sower,” *does not tire of sowing it generously*. He knows our terrain, he knows that the stones of our inconstancy and the thorns of our vices (cf. vv. 21-22) can suffocate the Word, yet he hopes, he always hopes that we can bear abundant fruit (cf. v. 8).

This is what the Lord does, and this is what we too are called to do: to *sow tirelessly*. But how can one do this, sow continually without tiring? Let us take a few examples.

Firstly, parents: they sow goodness and faith in their children, and they are called to do so without being discouraged if at times they seem not to understand or to appreciate their teachings, or if the mentality of the world is against them. The good seed remains. This is what counts, and it will take root in due time. But if, giving in to mistrust, they give up sowing and leave their children at the mercy of trends and mobile phones, without dedicating time to them, without educating them, then the fertile soil will be filled with weeds. Parents, never grow tired of sowing in your children!

Let us look, then, at the young: they too can sow the Gospel in the furrows of everyday life; for example, with prayer: it is a small seed that you cannot see, but with which you entrust all your experiences to Jesus, and then he can make it ripen. But I am also thinking of the time to dedicate to others, to those who are most in need. It may seem wasted. Instead it is holy time, while the apparent satisfactions of consumerism and hedonism leave one empty-handed. And I am thinking of those who study: it is true, [studying] is tiring and not immediately fulfilling, like sowing, but is essential to building a better future for all.

We have looked at parents, we have looked at the young; now let us look at the sowers of the Gospel: many good priests, religious and laypeople engaged in proclamation, who live and preach the Word of God, often without immediate success. Let us never forget when we proclaim the Word, that even where it seems that nothing is happening, in reality the Holy Spirit is at work, and the Kingdom of God is already growing, through and beyond our efforts. Therefore, go ahead joyfully, dear brothers and sisters! Let us remember the people who placed the seed of the Word of God in our life: each one of us, let us think: “How did my faith begin?” Perhaps it germinated years after we encountered their examples, but it happened thanks to them!

In light of all this, we can ask ourselves: do I sow goodness? Do I only care about reaping for myself, or do I also sow for others? Do I sow some seeds of the Gospel in everyday life: study, work, free time? Do I get discouraged or, like Jesus, do I continue to sow, even if I do not see immediate results? May Mary, whom we venerate today as the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel, help us to be generous and joyful sowers of the Good News.

Pope Francis, Angelus, July 16, 2023

© Copyright 2023 - *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*



First Reading: Isaiah 55:10-11

Thus says the LORD:
Just as from the heavens
the rain and snow come down
and do not return there
till they have watered the earth,
making it fertile and fruitful,
giving seed to the one who sows
and bread to the one who eats,
so shall my word be
that goes forth from my mouth;
my word shall not return to me void,
but shall do my will,
achieving the end for which I sent it.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 65:10, 11, 12-13, 14

The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

You have visited the land and watered it;
greatly have you enriched it.
God's watercourses are filled;
you have prepared the grain.

R. The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

Thus have you prepared the land: drenching its furrows,
breaking up its clods,
softening it with showers,
blessing its yield.

R. The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

You have crowned the year with your bounty,
and your paths overflow with a rich harvest;
the untilled meadows overflow with it,
and rejoicing clothes the hills.

R. The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

The fields are garmented with flocks
and the valleys blanketed with grain.
They shout and sing for joy.

R. The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.



Second Reading: Romans 8:18-23

Brothers and sisters: I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us. For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

Gospel Acclamation: Is 3:9, Jn 6:68

Alleluia, alleluia. The seed is the word of God, Christ is the sower. All who come to him will have life forever. **Alleluia, alleluia.**



Gospel: Matthew 13:1-23 (Short Form: Matthew 13:1-9)

On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood along the shore. And he spoke to them at length in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold. Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

The disciples approached him and said, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” He said to them in reply, “Because knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted. To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because *they look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand*. Isaiah’s prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says:

*You shall indeed hear but not understand,
you shall indeed look but never see.*

*Gross is the heart of this people,
they will hardly hear with their ears,
they have closed their eyes,*

*lest they see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their hearts and be converted,
and I heal them.*

“But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

“Hear then the parable of the sower. The seed sown on the path is the one who hears the word of the kingdom without understanding it, and the evil one comes and steals away what was sown in his heart. The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away. The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word, but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word and it bears no fruit. But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.”



Meditation:

Our readings today bring us to the world of nature and farming. The prophet Isaiah opens with the image of snow and rain, sent from heaven to earth to water it. They do not return until they have made the earth fertile and fruitful so that it can provide us with nourishment. The word of God too is sent with an even greater purpose – to accomplish his will – and it does not fail to achieve this end.

The emphasis in the first reading is on the unfailing power of the divine word. The Gospel, however, brings up another factor: the condition of the one who receives the word. Like the sower in the parable, God does not discriminate in the planting of his powerful word. He offers it to everyone. The size of the harvest depends not only on the sower and his seeds but also on the kind of soil that receives the seeds. This tells us that the effect of the seed of God’s word depends on us, on what kind of soil our heart is. To help us reflect on how we receive God’s word in our hearts, Jesus describes four kinds of soil.

The Path. This is the part of field which is commonly used as the right of way. The soil may be good, but it is hard. The seeds that fall here never germinate. Even if they survive being trampled by passers-

by, they cannot escape the eyes of hungry birds always looking for something to feast on. The Path represents people with closed hearts and minds. They choose not to hear and not to believe. Their prejudice against the teachings of Jesus has made a hardened barrier between them and God. One thing that can make our hearts like this path is *pride*. When we are proud, we do not look to God for anything because we act as if we do not need anything from him. *Fear* can also make us like the path. Fear prevents us from heeding the word of God because if we have grown attached to some immoral behavior or attitude, we are afraid that God's word might challenge us to change.

The Rocky Ground. In this shallow soil, the seed begins to grow, but eventually it dies. The Rocky Ground represents people with shallow minds. They are always looking for something new; they always want to be "in" with the latest fad or fashion. They may start a new hobby simply because it is the trend, without thinking much about why they are doing it. Eventually, they find that it takes more effort than they are willing to give; they grow weary and drop the project without accomplishing anything. We ourselves become Rocky Ground when we easily and enthusiastically accept the message of Jesus, but without thought or depth or commitment. We like to hear a dynamic preacher or visit a miraculous shrine, but we do not give the seed of faith any room to grow. When difficulties arise and the fire of our first emotion starts to wane, we forget what we have heard and go back to our former way of life.

The Thorny Ground. Lots of things can grow in fertile soil, good seeds as well as thorns. But if there is a mixture, the thorns choke off the fruitfulness of the good seeds. Most people who consider themselves committed disciples of Jesus can be likened to this Thorny Ground. We have faith and we really listen to the word of God, but we fail to put God first in our life. We let other things get planted in our hearts, so we are easily overwhelmed with distractions and worries. We desire to follow him totally, but we get choked by our temporal affairs – too busy to pray, too busy to listen, too busy to ponder and to live the word of God in our life. Seeds cannot grow well in this kind of soil.

The Rich Soil. This soil is ready for planting; it is soft and fertile. Here the seed can grow and flourish and produce an abundant harvest. This can be compared to those whose hearts are totally open to the word

of God. Their openness, interest, humility and willingness to change make them receive the seed of faith with enthusiasm and joy. These people do not stay at the level of emotion. With open minds, they strive to understand the message of God, giving the soil of their hearts enough depth for the faith to grow. They also do their part to nourish their faith by putting it into practice – with regular prayer, frequent acts of self-denial, and constant readiness to serve others. This is clearly the kind of soil God wants us to provide for his word, so that, by his grace, we can produce abundant fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.

This Gospel is the word that God is planting in our hearts today. It has the power to do his will, achieving the end for which he is sending it. God has not created us simply to wander about on this earth; he gives us a mission, and he wants us to be fruitful. St. Paul, reflecting on the plan of God, tells us that the trials we go through in the process of becoming good and fruitful soil – what he calls “the sufferings of this present time” – “are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed in us.” God sees beyond the futility, the slavery to corruption, the groaning of the present, and looks forward to the revelation of a glory that is now still hidden like a seed in the ground. In time the “glorious freedom of the children of God” will be made manifest.

Meanwhile, our task is to persevere. We have the “firstfruits of the Spirit” already planted in us, but we “groan within ourselves,” with spiritual labor pains, as we wait and work for the full flowering of the Lord’s work of redemption. Let us keep welcoming and nourishing and sharing our faith so that his word may bring about its intended goal, a glorious life with him forever.

In what ways do I hinder the Word of God from accomplishing his will in my life? How can fear prevent me from heeding the word of God? Why is perseverance necessary to welcome and nourish the word in my soul?

Mary, walk with me in my sufferings to obtain the glory to be revealed in the next life.

July 13, Monday, 15th Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Henry



First Reading: Isaiah 1:10-17

Hear the word of the LORD,
princes of Sodom!
Listen to the instruction of our God,
people of Gomorrah!
What care I for the number of your sacrifices?
says the LORD.
I have had enough of whole-burnt rams
and fat of fatlings;
In the blood of calves, lambs and goats
I find no pleasure.

When you come in to visit me,
who asks these things of you?
Trample my courts no more!
Bring no more worthless offerings;
your incense is loathsome to me.
New moon and sabbath, calling of assemblies,
octaves with wickedness: these I cannot bear.
Your new moons and festivals I detest;
they weigh me down, I tire of the load.
When you spread out your hands,
I close my eyes to you;
Though you pray the more,
I will not listen.
Your hands are full of blood!
Wash yourselves clean!
Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes;
cease doing evil; learn to do good.
Make justice your aim: redress the wronged,
hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 50:8-9, 16bc-17, 21 and 23
To the upright I will show the saving power of God.

“Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you,
for your burnt offerings are before me always.
I take from your house no bullock,
no goats out of your fold.”

R. To the upright I will show the saving power of God.

“Why do you recite my statutes,
and profess my covenant with your mouth,
Though you hate discipline
and cast my words behind you?”

R. To the upright I will show the saving power of God.

“When you do these things, shall I be deaf to it?
Or do you think you that I am like yourself?
I will correct you by drawing them up before your eyes.
He that offers praise as a sacrifice glorifies me;
and to him that goes the right way I will show the salvation of God.”

R. To the upright I will show the saving power of God.

Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 5:10

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



Gospel: Matthew 10:34–11:1

Jesus said to his Apostles: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have come to bring not peace but the sword. For I have come to set

a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
and one’s enemies will be those of his household.

“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever receives a righteous man because he is righteous will receive a righteous man’s reward. And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because he is a disciple — amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward.”

When Jesus finished giving these commands to his Twelve disciples, he went away from that place to teach and to preach in their towns.



Meditation:

Yesterday's Gospel showed us four kinds of soil that can be compared to our heart's disposition in receiving the word of God. One kind was the thorny ground, which represents people who do not make God the top priority in their life. They have a lot of interests that crowd God out of his rightful place. Today's Gospel teaches us even more clearly that we must put God before anything and anyone else. Jesus shows that making this choice will radically affect our personal life and our relationships with others.

At first it sounds quite disturbing to hear the Prince of Peace say that he has come "to bring not peace but the sword." We readily accept the need to remove thorns and weeds from the garden of our soul, but we are not so ready to apply this imagery to members of our own family. Jesus calls us to be countercultural; he calls us to warfare; and he makes it clear that contradictions await those who will answer his call. Not everyone will understand and support our decision to dedicate our life to God. Sadly, sometimes those who are near and dear to us can be the biggest hindrance to our answering the call of God.

Our family relationships can become "thorny ground" in two ways. First, our loved ones might not support our decisions of faith and may even directly oppose what God wills for us. Second, our own over-attachment to them can hinder us from doing what God wants us to do. We can be tempted to make the love of family and friends our priority, putting God in second place. Jesus declares this unacceptable; it is "not worthy" of him. When we must choose between God and our family and friends, the right choice is total dedication to God – even though this choice will bring "not peace but the sword" to our household. In the difficulties that arise, we discover a deeper peace. The peace that we find in the will of God is far greater than the peace that comes from harmonious human relationships. The love that God plants in our hearts enables us to love others with an even greater love – not natural love, but supernatural love.

The challenge Jesus sets before us affects not only our relationships but our very self. He calls us to take up our cross and follow him, to lose our life for his sake in order to find it. Carrying the cross has countless practical implications for us. It means sacrificing our comforts and conveniences. It means putting God before our ambitions and careers. When God's will takes priority over our will, we must be ready to give up our plans and to face hardships, humiliation, and even death.

Being a follower of Christ is no easy job! Being good soil requires the removal of many rocks and thorns. It is not simply a matter of performing a few rituals and reciting some prayers. As today's first reading and psalm teach us, we must go beyond mere external sacrifices. God takes no pleasure in gestures that do not come from a sincere heart. He loves a contrite, humble heart more than countless burnt offerings and sacrifices. Isaiah reminds us that our love of God must find expression in love of neighbor: "Cease doing evil; learn to do good. Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow." We cannot call ourselves followers of God if we fail to care for his loved ones in our midst.

When we put God and his will before everyone and everything; when our worship and our sacrifices bring us closer to God and to our neighbor in need; when we are courageous in living and professing our faith – then we will surely not 'lose our reward,' eternal life. In Heaven, there is no more war, but only lasting peace in communion with God and his family.

Why do I not make God the top priority in my life? Who in my life has been a big obstacle in my answering the call of God? In what ways do I find it difficult to take up my cross and follow Jesus and to lose my life for his sake in order to find it?

Mary, guide me as I make God's will a priority in my life and to be ready to give up everything.

St. Henry, pray for us.

Henry II was born in Bavaria in 972 and received an excellent education under the care of St. Wolfgang, Bishop of Ratisbon. In 995 he succeeded his father as Duke of Bavaria, and in 1002 he became King of Germany and was crowned King of Italy in 1004. Firmly grounded in his Catholic faith, which the practice of meditation kept alive in his heart, he sought in all things the greater glory of God. In 1014 he was crowned Emperor of Rome by Pope Benedict VIII. He respected the Church's freedom, fostering ecclesiastical and monastic reform, and persuaded the pope to authorize the Creed to be recited on Sundays and major feasts. His ultimate purpose was to establish a stable peace in Europe. He and his wife, St. Cunegunda of Luxembourg, lived in perpetual chastity, to which they bound themselves by a vow. He died in 1024. Canonized by Pope Eugene III in 1146, he remains the only king of Germany to have been declared a saint.

July 14, Tuesday, 15th Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Camillus de Lellis, Priest
Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, Virgin (USA)



First Reading: Isaiah 7:1-9

In the days of Ahaz, king of Judah, son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, Rezin, king of Aram, and Pekah, king of Israel, son of Remaliah, went up to attack Jerusalem, but they were not able to conquer it. When word came to the house of David that Aram was encamped in Ephraim, the heart of the king and the heart of the people trembled, as the trees of the forest tremble in the wind.

Then the LORD said to Isaiah: Go out to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway of the fuller's field, and say to him: Take care you remain tranquil and do not fear; let not your courage fail before these two stumps of smoldering brands, the blazing anger of Rezin and the Arameans, and of the son Remaliah, because of the mischief that Aram, Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, plots against you, saying, "Let us go up and tear Judah asunder, make it our own by force, and appoint the son of Tabeel king there."

Thus says the LORD:

This shall not stand, it shall not be!

Damascus is the capital of Aram,

and Rezin is the head of Damascus;

Samaria is the capital of Ephraim,

and Remaliah's son the head of Samaria.

But within sixty years and five,

Ephraim shall be crushed, no longer a nation.

Unless your faith is firm

you shall not be firm!



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 48:2-3a, 3b-4, 5-6, 7-8

God upholds his city for ever.

Great is the LORD and wholly to be praised
in the city of our God.

His holy mountain, fairest of heights,
is the joy of all the earth.

R. God upholds his city for ever.

Mount Zion, “the recesses of the North,”
is the city of the great King.
God is with her castles;
renowned is he as a stronghold.

R. God upholds his city for ever.

For lo! the kings assemble,
they come on together;
They also see, and at once are stunned,
terrified, routed.

R. God upholds his city for ever.

Quaking seizes them there;
anguish, like a woman’s in labor,
As though a wind from the east
were shattering ships of Tarshish.

R. God upholds his city for ever.

Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 95:8

Alleluia, alleluia. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.
Alleluia, alleluia.



Gospel: Matthew 11:20-24

Jesus began to reproach the towns where most of his mighty deeds had been done, since they had not repented. “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have repented in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And as for you, Capernaum:

Will you be exalted to heaven?

You will go down to the netherworld.

For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”



Meditation:

“Unless your faith is firm, you shall not be firm.” *Faith* is one of the theological virtues that we need to practice and nourish as we journey in this world. Theological virtues are “infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life. They are the pledge of the presence and

action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being” (CCC 1813). By faith we believe in God and in all that he has said and revealed to us.

In the Old Testament, God often awakens faith in the hearts of his people through the prophets, who call on them to return to God and to trust in him. People do not always respond; some have hearts like a footpath. There are many accounts of how they suffer the consequences when they do not believe in God. In the first reading the prophet Isaiah brings the message of God to King Ahaz. He tells him to have faith and not to be afraid. This reading gives us a message as well: our strength in dealing with the challenges of life depends on the firmness of our faith. Firm faith enables us to overcome fear.

In the Gospels, it is Jesus himself, God made man, who calls us to live by faith. What Jesus did in the short time of his earthly ministry was largely intended to move people to faith, and in this way receive the gift of salvation. The people who lived in his time were blessed to be able to witness his miracles, hear him preaching and even touch their Savior personally. However, not everyone welcomed his ministry, just as not everyone welcomed the ministry of the prophets. Some rejected the messengers of God, and some rejected the Son of God. The Scriptures show us the consequences that these people faced.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus’ gives a strong warning to the citizens of Chorazin and Bethsaida, towns near the Sea of Galilee where he performed many of his miracles and proclaimed the way of salvation. Even Capernaum, where he chose to stay while in Galilee, did not accept the invitation to faith. Jesus says that on the day of the judgment, the sentence for the people of Sidon, Tyre and even the notorious Sodom will be lighter than for these towns. Why? Because Jesus himself has come to them with the good news of salvation and they refused to accept it. Indeed, with every privilege given comes greater responsibility.

For our part, we too must face the frightening possibility of rejection of the gift of faith. Jesus is not visibly among us, but he remains present with us. He speaks to us through the Scriptures, touches us in the Sacraments and guides us by means of the Magisterium. But many still reject him. Rejection of faith is not limited to those who deliberately choose not to believe in God and his Church. It is also a danger for us

who already belong to the Church and profess the Creed. We reject the faith, for example, when we do not put into action the faith which we profess. St. James says that faith that is not put into practice is dead (cf. Jm 2:26).

How are we to practice our faith? When we decide to change our lives because we are followers of Christ, we practice our faith. When we trust in the goodness of God and do not despair even amid difficulties, sickness and uncertainties, we practice our faith. When we set aside our preferences to serve the needs of others, we practice our faith. Internal acts of faith naturally radiate externally. Preaching is a good and necessary way of sharing our faith, but not all are touched by preaching. People want to see and feel. Thus, love in action is more effective than words alone. The ultimate proof of our faith is not how well we speak about it but how well we follow the example of Jesus who gave his life for others.

What distractions are currently hardening my heart to God's word? In what specific way today can I move my faith from a spoken creed to a concrete action? What is one worry I can hand over to God today?

Mary, lead me to follow your Son in all I do.

St. Camillus de Lellis, pray for us.

St. Kateri Tekakwitha, pray for us.

Camillus de Lellis was born in Italy in 1550. His mother died when he was a child, and afterward he was neglected since his father was an officer in both the Neapolitan and French Royal armies. He grew up with an excessive love for gambling. He joined the Venetian army while still a youth. While in battle, he suffered an injury to his leg that never fully healed. By age 24, Camillus had gambled away everything he had and was forced to accept work at a Capuchin friary. One day he was greatly moved by a sermon which brought about a conversion that changed his whole life. He became a Capuchin novice but was not accepted for profession because of his diseased leg. With the advice of his confessor, St. Philip Neri, he was ordained a priest at the age of 34. He began serving the sick (though incurably ill himself), and after gathering others to this work, he founded the Camillians (official name: "Order of Clerics Regular, Ministers to the Sick"), a congregation which cared for the sick with great affection. The members bound themselves to serve prisoners and persons infected by the plague, as well as those dying in private homes. Camillus died on July 14, 1614 and was canonized by Pope Benedict XIV in 1746. He was named the patron of the sick and hospitals by Pope Leo XIII in 1886.

Kateri Tekakwitha, daughter of a Mohawk Indian chief and an Algonquin mother, was born in Auriesville, New York, in 1656. She became an orphan in 1660, when a smallpox epidemic nearly destroyed the entire village. The disease also attacked Kateri and left her face scarred. She was adopted by an uncle who had a great hatred for the Christian people. After the epidemic she moved to Kahnawake, and for the first time she saw the Catholic priests who were spreading the Faith among the natives. She was drawn to the Faith but feared her uncle's reaction. On Easter in 1676, at the age of twenty, in spite of the disapproval of her family, Kateri was baptized. Because of increasing hostility, she left her village in 1677 to live in a Catholic Mission in Quebec, Canada, and dedicated her life to prayer, penance, and care for the sick and aged. She died on April 17, 1680 at the young age of 24. Her last words were "Jesos Konoronkwa" (Jesus, I love you"). Those who were with her when she died said that her scars disappeared and she became very beautiful. Kateri, called the "Lily of the Mohawks," is the first Native American Saint. She was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on October 21, 2012.

Notes

July 15, Wednesday, 15th Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Bonaventure, Bishop and Doctor of the Church



First Reading: Isaiah 10:5-7, 13b-16

Thus says the LORD:

Woe to Assyria! My rod in anger,
my staff in wrath.

Against an impious nation I send him,
and against a people under my wrath I order him
To seize plunder, carry off loot,
and tread them down like the mud of the streets.
But this is not what he intends,
nor does he have this in mind;
Rather, it is in his heart to destroy,
to make an end of nations not a few.

For he says:

“By my own power I have done it,
and by my wisdom, for I am shrewd.
I have moved the boundaries of peoples,
their treasures I have pillaged,
and, like a giant, I have put down the enthroned.
My hand has seized like a nest
the riches of nations;
As one takes eggs left alone,
so I took in all the earth;
No one fluttered a wing,
or opened a mouth, or chirped!”

Will the axe boast against him who hews with it?
Will the saw exalt itself above him who wields it?
As if a rod could sway him who lifts it,
or a staff him who is not wood!
Therefore the Lord, the LORD of hosts,
will send among his fat ones leanness,
And instead of his glory there will be kindling
like the kindling of fire.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 94:5-6, 7-8, 9-10, 14-15

The Lord will not abandon his people.

Your people, O LORD, they trample down,
your inheritance they afflict.

Widow and stranger they slay,
the fatherless they murder.

R. The Lord will not abandon his people.

And they say, "The LORD sees not;
the God of Jacob perceives not."

Understand, you senseless ones among the people;
and, you fools, when will you be wise?

R. The Lord will not abandon his people.

Shall he who shaped the ear not hear?
or he who formed the eye not see?

Shall he who instructs nations not chastise,
he who teaches men knowledge?

R. The Lord will not abandon his people.

For the LORD will not cast off his people,
nor abandon his inheritance;
But judgment shall again be with justice,
and all the upright of heart shall follow it.

R. The Lord will not abandon his people.

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: Matthew 11:25-27

At that time Jesus exclaimed: "I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him."



Meditation:

Humility is rare on the world stage nowadays. The world generally teaches us that we should continually boost our ego, make ourselves number one. Humility seems to be a hindrance to self-

improvement, success and happiness. Occasionally, however, science points out advantages to being humble. For example, in her 2014 study on humility, psychologist Dr. Pelin Kesebir gives evidence that humility, which she calls “a quiet ego,” far from being a hindrance to success, is actually a good tool for a better life.

This is not a new idea to us Christians. From the time of the Old Testament, and even more clearly from Jesus and his Church, we have been taught that humility is a much-needed virtue not just for a better life but for a holier one. God reveals that he loves the humble and humbles the proud. In her canticle, the *Magnificat*, Mary our Mother, the model of humility, sums up this truth when she exclaims “... He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty....” (Lk 1:51-53).

But what is *humility*? It is to accept the truth of our nothingness before God. It is to recognize that everything that we have and come from him who loves us and generously provides for our needs.

This theme shines out in our readings today. In the first reading God expresses his anger at the pagan nation of Assyria. God used Assyria as his instrument to humble his chosen people, who had been acting like an “impious nation.” But the Assyrians themselves became proud in the process. They thought that they won their battles purely by their own strength. The axe began to boast against the axman.

Oftentimes, we are also guilty of this kind of pride. We take too much credit to ourselves, forgetting to thank God and give glory to him, the giver of all that is good. No matter how great our achievement, we are never more than a willing instrument in his hands. We creatures are never higher than the One who created us. An axe has no business boasting against the One who hews with it. Every time we accomplish something worth boasting about, we must remember that it is due to the goodness and love of God at work in us. Gratitude is a great antidote to the poison of pride.

Little children live in what we might call a forced humility. They have no choice but to depend totally on their parents. This is not difficult as long as they trust that the will of their parents is always good for them.

The humility to which we are called cannot be forced on us. We must choose to be childlike, to live in total dependence on our Heavenly Father. It is not a foolish choice but the wisest way to live, for God favors the humble, the childlike, the poor in spirit, the *anawim*. It is to the little ones that God reveals the mysteries of his Kingdom.

Jesus distinguishes between the “childlike” and the “wise and learned.” He deliberately turns our expectations upside down. We naturally consider the experts to be the ones who see and understand more, while children know very little. But Jesus, speaking not about worldly matters but about the spiritual life, tells us the Father hides things from the wise that he reveals to the childlike. A disposition of openness to receive from God is better than a degree in theology. What humility can see clearly is hidden from the proud. C.S. Lewis expresses this beautifully in his book *Mere Christianity*. He wrote, “As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down you cannot see something that is above you” (Bk 3, Ch 8).

Humility is the disposition of the good soil in Sunday’s parable. The soil does not produce fruit on its own; it does not think of itself at all. Growth comes when nothing interferes with the natural process of the seed’s growth. When we are receptive to God’s word and respond with complete trust, when we come before him “empty” of self, then we can be filled with the wisdom and knowledge he wants to give us. But when we think that our jar of knowledge is already full, or that we fill it ourselves, we leave no room for what the Father wants to reveal. Our God is a humble God; this is part of his perfection. We who are called to be perfect as he is perfect, are also called to be humble, so that he can reveal to us the mysteries of the Kingdom.

When have I been proud by taking credit for what I do and forgetting to thank God who gave me the gift? In my pride, what specific preconception am I holding onto that prevents God from teaching me something new? In what area of my life today can I stop trying to be in control and instead act like a dependent child of the Father?

***Mary, help me to remain humble and little before God.
St. Bonaventure, pray for us.***

Bonaventure was born in Italy in 1221. As a boy he was cured of a serious illness through the prayers of St. Francis of Assisi. Later he studied in Paris and then entered the Franciscan Order to become a priest. Bonaventure's writings were admired for being imbued with the presence of God, especially his most renowned work, *The Soul's (or Mind's) Journey into God*. An exceptionally gifted person in soul, intellect, and personality, Bonaventure was always kind, even to unkind people, and eventually became the Minister General of the Franciscans. He is sometimes referred to as the second founder of the order due to his huge influence. Bonaventure died in 1274, was canonized by Pope Sixtus IV on April 14, 1482, and declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Sixtus V in 1557. He is known as the "Seraphic Doctor" because of his burning love for God and the Franciscan mission.

Notes

July 16, Thursday, 15th Week in Ordinary Time
Our Lady of Mount Carmel



First Reading: Isaiah 26:7-9, 12, 16-19

The way of the just is smooth;
the path of the just you make level.
Yes, for your way and your judgments, O LORD,
we look to you;
Your name and your title
are the desire of our souls.
My soul yearns for you in the night,
yes, my spirit within me keeps vigil for you;
When your judgment dawns upon the earth,
the world's inhabitants learn justice.
O LORD, you mete out peace to us,
for it is you who have accomplished all we have done.

O LORD, oppressed by your punishment,
we cried out in anguish under your chastising.
As a woman about to give birth
writhes and cries out in her pains,
so were we in your presence, O LORD.
We conceived and writhed in pain,
giving birth to wind;
Salvation we have not achieved for the earth,
the inhabitants of the world cannot bring it forth.
But your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise;
awake and sing, you who lie in the dust.
For your dew is a dew of light,
and the land of shades gives birth.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 102:13-14ab and 15, 16-18, 19-21
From heaven the Lord looks down on the earth.

You, O LORD, abide forever,
and your name through all generations.
You will arise and have mercy on Zion,
for it is time to pity her.
For her stones are dear to your servants,
and her dust moves them to pity.
R. From heaven the Lord looks down on the earth.

The nations shall revere your name, O LORD,
and all the kings of the earth your glory,
When the LORD has rebuilt Zion
and appeared in his glory;
When he has regarded the prayer of the destitute,
and not despised their prayer.

R. From heaven the Lord looks down on the earth.

Let this be written for the generation to come,
and let his future creatures praise the LORD:
“The LORD looked down from his holy height,
from heaven he beheld the earth,
To hear the groaning of the prisoners,
to release those doomed to die.”

R. From heaven the Lord looks down on the earth.

Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 11:28

Alleluia, alleluia. Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest, says the Lord. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus said: “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”



Meditation:

The postmodern world offers us many things that make our life more convenient. Gadgets are getting better and better each day. Everything seems faster now. The trend is toward what is “instant.” However, all these things do not necessarily save us from being exhausted. Coping with the fast pace of life makes us tired; the constant noise of technology wears us down; and running through our days with no meaning and direction is terribly exhausting.

This tiredness is not merely a physical need. If it were, we could easily meet the need simply by getting more rest or sleep. No, much of our sense of weariness springs from a deeper need. We suffer from *spiritual* exhaustion, which cannot be eased by what the world can offer. On the contrary, the world’s solutions just make it worse. Spiritual exhaustion needs a spiritual remedy.

This is what today's readings offer to us. The prophet Isaiah helps us recognize that what we really long for is God himself. Our souls yearn for intimacy with God: "Your name and your title are the desire of our souls. My soul yearns for you in the night, yes, my spirit within me keeps vigil for you." This intimacy with the Lord is what gives rest to our weary hearts. As St. Augustine said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

Jesus addresses our need for rest when he says to us, "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." We come to Jesus through prayer. In prayer, we talk to him and listen to him; we simply enjoy his presence and his loving embrace. When we are in communion with the Lord, we can unload the burdens of the day, cry our heart out, and regain the strength that was consumed by the labor and worries of life. As we go to the Lord in prayer, we truly find rest.

Prayer, like any relationship of love, is a two-way process. It takes time, energy and commitment in order for it to flourish. God is entirely committed to us; we for our part must be entirely committed to him. Jesus describes this commitment as the 'taking of his yoke' upon us. To take God's yoke is to follow the way, the example and the teachings of Christ. We naturally shy away from any yoke; it strikes us as simply one more burden among many. But he promises that his yoke is easy. It is not easy according to the standard of our flesh; it is easy in the sense that it is tailor-made for us, always precisely what is best for our flourishing. When we listen to him in prayer, we learn what he wants us to do and how we are to follow his teachings in our daily life.

Moreover, Jesus tells us that his burden is light. Again, it is not light to our flesh, which finds any burden too heavy. It is light in the sense that God never gives us a weight that is too much for us to carry. The burden he places on us is the commandment of love, love of God and love of neighbor. Love itself is what makes the burden light! In prayer, where we encounter the love God has for us, our hearts learn the ways of love, so that we can love in everything we do. Not only does love make his burden light, it also makes our actions Christ-like, for he is the model of love, and he invites us, "Learn from me."

Compared to the burden of life in the busy and noisy world, carrying the easy yoke and light burden of Jesus is already an experience of rest. However, in his goodness, God has more and greater rest in mind

for us. He promises in this life a peace which the world cannot give, a peace that surpasses all human understanding, and in the next life, eternal rest (cf. Jn 14:27; Phil 4:7). The more we remain in communion with God through prayer, the more his peace can reign in our hearts.

As we celebrate today the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, we learn a lesson in prayer and love from the Carmelites, whose charism it is to contemplate the mysteries of Jesus. Following the example of Mary, who always ponders in her heart all that Jesus reveals, the Carmelites dedicate themselves to remain in the company of Jesus. They answer his call, “Come to me,” not only for themselves but for the benefit of all those for whom they pray, including all of us – as their motto says, “On Carmel’s height, by day and night, someone prays for you.” All of us who daily ponder the word of the liturgy are also being trained by Mary our Mother. She is teaching us to allow the seed of the word of God to grow in our hearts day by day, and to find our rest in the Lord.

How do I deal with my spiritual exhaustion? What have I experienced when I truly go to the Lord and unload all my burdens of the day to him in prayer? How has my spiritual life grown when I go to him and place all my trust in him alone?

Mary, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, lead me to the silence of your heart to find rest in your Son.

Notes



First Reading: Isaiah 38:1-6, 21-22, 7-8

When Hezekiah was mortally ill, the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, came and said to him: “Thus says the LORD: Put your house in order, for you are about to die; you shall not recover.” Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD:

“O LORD, remember how faithfully and wholeheartedly I conducted myself in your presence, doing what was pleasing to you!” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: “Go, tell Hezekiah: Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will heal you: in three days you shall go up to the LORD’s temple; I will add fifteen years to your life. I will rescue you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; I will be a shield to this city.”

Isaiah then ordered a poultice of figs to be taken and applied to the boil, that he might recover. Then Hezekiah asked, “What is the sign that I shall go up to the temple of the LORD?”

Isaiah answered: “This will be the sign for you from the LORD that he will do what he has promised: See, I will make the shadow cast by the sun on the stairway to the terrace of Ahaz go back the ten steps it has advanced.” So the sun came back the ten steps it had advanced.



Responsorial Psalm: Isaiah 38:10, 11, 12abcd, 16

You saved my life, O Lord; I shall not die.

Once I said,

“In the noontime of life I must depart!
To the gates of the nether world I shall be consigned
for the rest of my years.”

R. You saved my life, O Lord; I shall not die.

I said, “I shall see the LORD no more
in the land of the living.

No longer shall I behold my fellow men
among those who dwell in the world.”

R. You saved my life O Lord; I shall not die.

My dwelling, like a shepherd’s tent,
is struck down and borne away from me;
You have folded up my life, like a weaver
who severs the last thread.

R. You saved my life O Lord; I shall not die.

Those live whom the LORD protects;
yours is the life of my spirit.
You have given me health and life.
R. You saved my life, O Lord; I shall not die.

Gospel Acclamation: John 10:27

Alleluia, alleluia My sheep hear my voice, says the Lord; I know them, and they follow me. **Alleluia, alleluia**



Gospel: Matthew 12:1-8

Jesus was going through a field of grain on the sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “See, your disciples are doing what is unlawful to do on the sabbath.” He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry, how he went into the house of God and ate the bread of offering, which neither he nor his companions but only the priests could lawfully eat? Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests serving in the temple violate the sabbath and are innocent? I say to you, something greater than the temple is here. If you knew what this meant, *I desire mercy, not sacrifice*, you would not have condemned these innocent men. For the Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath.”



Meditation:

In today’s Gospel, Jesus gives us a key to understanding the readings. He quotes Hosea 6:6, saying, “*I desire mercy, not sacrifice*.” In the Old Testament, God introduced himself as a merciful God: “The LORD, the LORD, a God gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love and fidelity” (Ex 34:6). He reveals himself more fully in the New Testament, where, in fact, mercy is given a face: “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy” (Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus* 1). Not only does Jesus give mercy a face, but he also shows us how to live it, concretely and radically.

In the first reading, King Hezekiah has a personal experience of the mercy of God. Suffering from a terminal illness, and told by the prophet that he is about to die, Hezekiah humbles himself and turns to the Lord with prayer and tears; he submits himself to God’s will. God for his part tells him that not only will he be healed, he will live for another fifteen years. Going far beyond the prayer of the king, the Lord also tells him

that he will rescue the city from the threat of the Assyrians. When the Lord calls us to be merciful, he first shows us that he himself is the most merciful. Prayer opens our heart to experience his great mercy.

Jesus has an opportunity to teach a lesson in mercy in today's Gospel. His hungry disciples were picking the heads of the grain and eating them. The Pharisees were scandalized at this behavior because the disciples were 'harvesting' on the sabbath. The Pharisees were even more scandalized because Jesus was allowing this violation of the law. Jesus quickly nullifies the accusation. It is the Pharisees who are misunderstanding the law and who are condemning innocent men. The examples of David and his men eating the sacred bread, and of the priests serving in the temple, show that the letter of the law is not the highest standard. What God desires is mercy, not merely the legally stipulated sacrifices. Mercy puts the life and needs of the human person before the legal observances. Love has precedence over the law since it is the foundation of all laws. As Jesus taught in another passage, "the sabbath is made for man, not man for the sabbath" (Mk 2:27).

Like the Pharisees, we all have the tendency to judge people according to the letter of the law. This is a bigger temptation for those who know the law better. It is easy to use knowledge as a weapon, and to forget the example of Jesus, who always favored persons over laws and rituals.

Does this mean that the law and its rituals have no more importance? No, in the first reading we see that the Lord expected Hezekiah, fully healed, to worship in the temple in three days. Public worship, prayer rituals and law are still important expressions of faith, but the essence of worship is not found in its exterior forms. Rather, as Jesus tells the Samaritan woman, those who worship God "must worship him in Spirit and in truth" (Jn 4:24). Worship is not mere form but a response of love to the love and mercy that God has shown us.

Learning the truths of our faith and being able to attend the Church's liturgies are great gifts for which to thank God, not reasons to be proud and to judge others who have not discovered these gifts. Our practice of our faith is not simply a set of obligations to follow but expressions of love. As disciples of Christ, we are called to follow his example. When we are confused about what should or should not be

done, instead of starting with judgment like the Pharisees, we should ask this question: “What would Jesus do?” Jesus would always choose mercy over legal observances. He calls us to be, like him, the face of mercy for others, and to do our part in making this world a more merciful place to live in.

How have I experienced God as gracious and merciful? In what ways can I transform my daily prayers from a duty into a gift of love for God? How does my behavior toward others change when I focus on their needs instead of their mistakes?

Mary, soften my heart to see others as your Son sees them.

Notes

July 18, Saturday, 15th Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Camillus de Lellis, Priest (USA)



First Reading: Micah 2:1-5

Woe to those who plan iniquity,
and work out evil on their couches;
In the morning light they accomplish it
when it lies within their power.
They covet fields, and seize them;
houses, and they take them;
They cheat an owner of his house,
a man of his inheritance.
Therefore thus says the LORD:
Behold, I am planning against this race an evil
from which you shall not withdraw your necks;
Nor shall you walk with head high,
for it will be a time of evil.

On that day a satire shall be sung over you,
and there shall be a plaintive chant:
“Our ruin is complete,
our fields are portioned out among our captors,
The fields of my people are measured out,
and no one can get them back!”
Thus you shall have no one
to mark out boundaries by lot
in the assembly of the LORD.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 10:1-2, 3-4, 7-8, 14

Do not forget the poor, O Lord!

Why, O LORD, do you stand aloof?
Why hide in times of distress?
Proudly the wicked harass the afflicted,
who are caught in the devices the wicked have contrived.

R. Do not forget the poor, O Lord!

For the wicked man glories in his greed,
and the covetous blasphemes, sets the LORD at naught.
The wicked man boasts, “He will not avenge it”;
“There is no God,” sums up his thoughts.

R. Do not forget the poor, O Lord!

His mouth is full of cursing, guile and deceit;
under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.
He lurks in ambush near the villages;
in hiding he murders the innocent;
his eyes spy upon the unfortunate.

R. Do not forget the poor, O Lord!

You do see, for you behold misery and sorrow,
taking them in your hands.

On you the unfortunate man depends;
of the fatherless you are the helper.

R. Do not forget the poor, O Lord!

Gospel Acclamation: 2 Corinthians 5:19

Alleluia, alleluia. God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,
and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Matthew 12:14-21

The Pharisees went out and took counsel against Jesus to put him to death.

When Jesus realized this, he withdrew from that place. Many people followed him, and he cured them all, but he warned them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through Isaiah the prophet:

*Behold, my servant whom I have chosen,
my beloved in whom I delight;
I shall place my Spirit upon him,
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.
He will not contend or cry out,
nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.
A bruised reed he will not break,
a smoldering wick he will not quench,
until he brings justice to victory.
And in his name the Gentiles will hope.*



Meditation:

Yesterday we focused on God who is “rich in mercy.” We reflected on how his judgment differs from that of the Pharisees. The Pharisees, judging according to their limited understanding, tend to focus more on legal rituals and requirements, forgetting the element of mercy and compassion. God, however, sees the whole situation of people, and he gives importance to what they truly need. “For the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord on the heart” (1Sm 16:7).

Today, we reflect on another attribute of God, his justice – in particular, his concern for justice for the poor and oppressed. The Bible often speaks of God as a God who brings justice to his people. Justice here means giving to each person and to all people what is due to them. This principle is fulfilled perfectly by God, from whom flows all justice and goodness. In God, justice and mercy are one. The same God who shows mercy to the oppressed and the poor also justly brings punishment to their oppressors. Even when oppressors are punished, the punishment that they receive is also an expression of divine mercy, for it is intended for their benefit, to help them recognize their wrongdoing and to bring them to conversion.

Today's first reading exposes the thinking of wicked people who are intent on oppressing the poor. They devise evil plots and then execute their ideas as soon as they can. The prophet Micah is sent to correct the wrongs of the wicked and the greedy, those who are ready to grab the little that the poor people have. The problems Micah addresses are not unique to his time. In our own day as well there are still people who use their cleverness to deceive and their power to exploit others. There are always people who are intent not on serving but on gaining for themselves at the expense of the poor and the powerless. This is the crookedness of human nature on display!

However, the wicked, though they seem to succeed at first, will not get away with their evil deeds. In time they will feel the wrath of the God of justice. Though to the poor it can appear for a time as if God is absent, in truth he does not let the poor suffer forever at the hands of their oppressors. God does not forget the poor! Thus the poor are always right to persevere in trust in the Lord and never to lose hope.

How does God reveal his justice? Ultimately in the sending of his Son Jesus. Jesus who is Justice himself came to overcome injustice by becoming a victim himself. He submitted himself to the same sort of treatment that the poor suffered in the time of Micah. Jesus was unjustly treated by the Pharisees, whose evil plots eventually led to his death on the Cross. Yet the tomb is not where the story ends. Jesus rose again on the third day to show that justice prevails and that the victims of injustice will not suffer forever.

The way that Jesus brings justice was prophesied by Isaiah, whom Matthew quotes at length in today's Gospel (cf. Is 42:1-4). Jesus is the Servant who does his saving work of justice in a peaceful, gentle and quiet manner. "He will not contend or cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets." For Jesus, justice is not established by shouting but by sacrificial love. Most of his ministry took place in hiddenness and silence. He was secretly liberating people from what oppressed them, without attracting attention to himself.

What kind of justice is this? It often does not look like justice at all, since it is justice brought about by love and not by the desire for revenge. It is not human justice but a justice that encourages. The "bruised reed" and the "smoldering wick" represent us all, weak people, both the oppressed and the oppressors, all weak due to our common sin condition. Our faith may be bruised and shaky, and our love may be barely smoldering, but God does not break us or quench us with the force of his justice. On the contrary, because of his love, he encourages us to stand firm; he enkindles us once more with the flame of his love.

The Resurrection of Jesus shows us that, no matter what evil or oppression may arise, in the end God's justice triumphs. His Resurrection is the manifestation of the victory of the poor and the oppressed. It is the victory of justice. This good news is the hope not of one nation only but of all people. From time immemorial, injustice is present in the world due to the greed of the rich and the powerful; but the Resurrection of Christ gives us sure hope for a better tomorrow. We are invited to accept this hope alongside with his love. In the midst of suffering, let us continue to hope and believe that Jesus has already defeated the enemy. Let us live in this hope and be bearers of hope to others, to show the world the hope that God's justice brings.

*When have I judged others by their outward appearances?
How do I take advantage of the poor and powerless? In what
ways do I show mercy and justice to those whom I encounter?*

Mary, guide me to trust in God's justice and to be a source of hope for those who suffer.