

## SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away  
the sin of the world. (John 1:29)*

### **The Love of the Bridegroom for His Bride**

How would John the Baptist's proclamation of Christ as "the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:29) have sounded to his Jewish audience? Lambs were animals ritually sacrificed to God. They were *slain*. Christ is the Lamb who has been "slain from the foundation of the world" (Rv 13:8). The love revealed in Christ's sacrifice on the Cross is eternal: beyond time but poured out in time to reach us *here and now*. And this eternal love that has pierced through the time barrier to reach our concrete, time-bound lives is the love of the Bridegroom for his Bride. The sacrifice of "the Lamb" consummates the "marriage of the Lamb" (Rv 19:7). As St. Augustine put it, Christ "came to the marriage bed of the cross, a bed not of pleasure, but of pain, united himself with the woman [his Bride, the Church], and consummated the union forever." All of this nuptial potency is contained in the words of John the Baptist—the best man who stands by the Bridegroom

(see John 3:29) when he says in awe, “Behold, the Lamb of God.”

*Scripture:* Isaiah 49:3, 5–6; Psalm 40:2, 4, 7–8, 8–9, 10; 1 Corinthians 1:1–3; John 1:29–34

## THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

*One thing I ask of the Lord; this I seek:  
To dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,  
That I may gaze on the loveliness of the Lord  
and contemplate his temple. (Psalm 27:4)*

### **The Body Reveals the Loveliness of the Lord**

“One thing I ask of the Lord; this I seek . . . that I may gaze on the loveliness of the Lord and contemplate his temple.” The thesis statement of St. John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* beautifully illuminates this Sunday’s psalm: “The body . . . was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus be a sign of it” (TOB 19:4). Our bodies are that temple (see 1 Corinthians 6:19). And it is by contemplating them with

purity of heart that we come to “gaze on the loveliness of the Lord.” For purity, as John Paul II taught us, “is the glory of God in the human body” (TOB 57:3). “Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God” (Mt 5:8). If we desire to “see God,” to “gaze upon his loveliness,” we must be willing to pass through some very painful fires of purification. It can be a daily struggle. Slowly, but surely, as we walk through those “fires,” we come to see the human body—in all its glory as male and female—as a sign of the Lord’s loveliness.

*Scripture:* Isaiah 8:23b–9:3; Psalm 27:1, 4, 13–14; 1 Corinthians 1:10–13, 17; Matthew 4:12–23

## FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is  
the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3)*

### **Opening Our Poverty to God’s Riches**

We repeat this passage several times as the response to today’s psalm and we encounter it yet again in the gospel, at the start of the beatitudes. It must be important! Everyone

is poor before God. But the “poor in spirit” are those who realize and humbly accept their poverty, confident that God desires to fill it with his riches. As finite creatures, our poverty is the only thing that approaches something infinite. Our infinite poverty, in fact, is like a reverse image of God’s infinite richness. It’s the “chalice” into which he can pour his infinite love. This is why the Church is always feminine, she’s always the Bride, and God is always the Bridegroom. It can’t be the other way around. The Bridegroom is the one who *fills* and the Bride is the one who is *filled*. To be empty, needy, weak, and open: this is just where we need to be if we want to inherit the Kingdom. This is foolishness, however, to a world where survival of the fittest, self-sufficiency, and self-glorification are the name of the game. But soon and very soon we will all face the reckoning of which St. Paul speaks in the second reading: “God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no human being might boast before God”(1 Cor 1:27–29). If we are to boast, let us boast only in our weakness (see 2 Cor 12:9).

*Scripture:* Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12–13; Psalm 146:6c–7, 8–9a, 9b–10; 1 Corinthians 1:26–31; Matthew 5:1–12a

## FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

*Share your bread with the hungry,  
shelter the oppressed and the homeless;  
clothe the naked when you see them, and do not  
turn your back on your own. (Isaiah 58:7)*

### **Mercy for Our Own Bodies and for Every Body**

The words of the first reading command us to take the corporal works of mercy seriously. (The corporal works of mercy are feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead.) Corporal, from the Latin word *corpus*, means “of or relating to the human body.” The Latin word for mercy, *miserericordia*, means “a heart that gives itself to those in misery.” Our hemorrhaging world is crying out for this merciful love. The need couldn’t be more urgent: we live in a veritable wasteland of human misery and woundedness because of our failure to understand

the meaning of our bodies. We must not fear to throw our wounded selves wide open to Christ, to invite his healing, merciful love to come into all the diseased images we have of our bodies and our sexuality, so that he can touch our wounds and transform us into the men and women we are truly created to be. For such a time as this have we been given St. John Paul II's Theology of the Body. Take up a study of it, and let Christ's mercy ever more deeply into your own wounded humanity so you can become a living witness of corporal mercy to others. When we practice the corporal works of mercy, the Lord promises, among other things, that our wounds "shall quickly be healed."

*Scripture:* Isaiah 58:7–10; Psalm 112:4–5, 6–7, 8–9; 1 Corinthians 2:1–5; Matthew 5:13–16

## SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

*I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that  
of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter  
the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:20)*

## The Spirit Gives New Form to Our Desires

What would Jesus' declaration about righteousness have sounded like to the Jews who first heard it? The scribes and the Pharisees were considered the most righteous of all. The problem was, in St. John Paul II's language, while they conformed to the ethic, their ethos was far from God. An *ethic* is an external norm or rule. *Ethos* refers to a person's inner world of values, what attracts and repulses us deep in the heart. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ is not only confirming God's ethical code; he is calling us to a new ethos. We could read Christ's words about adultery, for example, as follows: "You've heard the ethic not to commit adultery, but the problem is your *ethos* is off: you desire to commit adultery." So what are we supposed to do? This is precisely where the gospel becomes the Good News: We are not left to our own flaws, weaknesses, and sinfulness. In the "Sermon on the Mount . . . the Spirit of the Lord gives new form to our desires, those inner movements that animate our lives" (CCC 2764). Come, Holy Spirit! Come give new form to our desires!

*Scripture:* Sirach 15:15–20; Psalm 119:1–2, 4–5, 17–18, 33–34; 1 Corinthians 2:6–10; Matthew 5:17–37

## SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

*But I say to you, love your enemies and pray  
for those who persecute you. (Matthew 5:44)*

### **Lord, Save Us from Self-Reliance!**

This Sunday's readings offer challenging directions for our lives. In the first reading, God commands us, "Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy." And in the gospel, Jesus says we have to love even our enemies. Our response is usually one of being willing but not so able to follow through. The problem is that if all we have heard is *what* we're called to without hearing *how* we're called to it, we still have yet to hear the *good news* of this gospel. As St. John Paul II boldly proclaims in *Veritatis Splendor*, "Love and life according to the Gospel cannot be thought of first and foremost as a kind of precept, because what they demand is beyond man's abilities. They are possible only as a result of a gift of God who heals, restores, and transforms the human heart by his grace." Living the Gospel, then, according to John Paul II, is "*a possibility opened to man exclusively by grace, by the gift of God, by his love.*" At times the demands of the Gospel can feel incredibly burdensome. And yet, Jesus insists that "my



yoke is easy, and my burden light” (Mt 11:30). Likewise, St. John insists that God’s “commandments are not burdensome” (1 Jn 5:3). If they *feel* burdensome, chances are we are relying on our own strength to carry them out. Lord, forgive us of the sin of self-reliance. Teach us to rely on you.

*Scripture:* Leviticus 19:1–2, 17–18; Psalm 103:1–2, 3–4, 8, 10, 12–13; 1 Corinthians 3:16–23; Matthew 5:38–48

## EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

*Learn from the way the wild flowers grow.  
They do not work or spin. But I tell you that  
not even Solomon in all his splendor was  
clothed like one of them. (Matthew 6:28b–29)*

### **How We Learn to Trust God from the Flowers**

When Jesus says, “Learn from the way the wild flowers grow,” what mystery might he be inviting us into with these words? Why are we so attracted to flowers? Why do we love to see them, smell them, and display them everywhere, especially in our homes and our churches? Why does a