

Monday

Loving God through prayer

We have to learn to pray: as it were learning this art ever anew from the lips of the Divine Master himself, like the first disciples: “Lord, teach us to pray!” (Luke 11:1). Prayer develops that conversation with Christ which makes us his intimate friends: “Abide in me and I in you” (John 15:4). This reciprocity is the very substance and soul of the Christian life.... Yes, dear brothers and sisters, our Christian communities must become genuine “schools” of prayer, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion, until the heart truly “falls in love.”

— John Paul II, “At the Beginning of the Third Millennium”

Scripture

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, ‘In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, “Grant me justice against my opponent.” For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, “Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.” ’ And the Lord said, ‘Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?’ (Luke 18.1-8)

Prayer

Lord, teach me how to pray. As with any relationship, ours too requires communication. Remind me that I do not have to do all the talking and that prayer involves putting myself in your presence and listening to you. Make me mindful that in my prayer I need not only ask for my wants and needs, but that I also need to praise you. May the communication of my prayer strengthen our friendship so that I may come to love you more deeply.

Tuesday

Happy in “poverty” of spirit

There is no joy equal to that which is shared by the truly poor in spirit. If they ask with detachment for something necessary, and not only is it refused, but an attempt is made to take away what they already possess, they are following the Master’s advice: “If any man will take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also” (Matthew 5:40). To give up one’s cloak is, it seems to me, to renounce every right, and to regard oneself as the servant, the slave, of all. Without a cloak it is easier to walk or run, and so the Master adds: “And whosoever shall force thee to go one mile, go with him other two” (Matthew 5:41).

—Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Story of a Soul*

Scripture

Then someone came to him and said, ‘Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?’ And he said to him, ‘Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.’ He said to him, ‘Which ones?’ And Jesus said, ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ The young man said to him, ‘I have kept all these; what do I still lack?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions. (Matthew 19.16-22)

Prayer

Good and generous God, you give me everything I need. I want for nothing, as you care for me moment to moment. I am left empty when I rely on those things that have nothing to do with you. When I concern myself with power and prestige, when I focus on possessions that have nothing to do with true fulfillment, I am lost at sea without a guiding light. Move me to live poor, dear Lord, in the best and most fulfilling sense of the word. Move me to rely on only your grace and not upon those things that are illusions of security and are but temporary in their standing—power, approval of others, riches, attractiveness, possessions, and pride. Move me to invest my life in love, that is, love for you, love for others, and love for every good thing that brings me closer to you,

Wednesday

The joy of the gospel

The church continues in history the mission which Jesus entrusted to the Apostles: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matthew 28:19-30). This is what Jesus told us to do! I insist on this missionary aspect, because Christ invites all to “go out” and encounter others, he sends us, he asks us to move in order to spread the joy of the Gospel!

— Pope Francis, “Francis’s General Audience, 2013”

Scripture

Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15.4-5)

Prayer

O God, it is only through you that I am able to do anything. Any talent I have is a gift from you, any inclination to do good is inspired by your grace. Your love is my love, and I am called to be a missionary to the world. Use me as you will; I am your instrument.

Thursday

Taking up our cross

If we wish absolutely to live in honor and to be held in esteem by our neighbors, we can never be solidly rooted in God our Lord, and it will be impossible for us to remain unscathed when we meet with [insults]....

— Ignatius of Loyola, “Letter to Isabel Roser”

Scripture

About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach.

Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, ‘Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.’ Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, ‘You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.’ Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. (John 7. 14, 25-30)

Prayer

Lord, help me to be like you in caring deeply and warmly about people and their goodness, but not needing their appreciation and approval for our own sense of worth. Grant me unshakable faith in your total and eternal affirmation so that I need live only in your eyes, and not in the eyes of others.

Friday

Walking the walk

The twelfth degree of humility is when they are not only humble of heart, but always let it appear also in their whole exterior to all that see them; namely, at the Work of God, in the garden, on a journey, in the field, or wherever they may be, sitting, walking, or standing....

— Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*

Scripture

*For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him of no account.*

*Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed. (Isaiah 53.2-5)*

Prayer

O God who humbled yourself to share in our humanity through Jesus, help me to have a peaceful heart and a demeanor that demonstrates it. Make me an example of holiness at all times and in all circumstances. May I daily be more conformed to your will and keep my life in honest perspective. Let my every action and every moment be one seamless act of praise.

Saturday

The law of love

What is the law of the People of God? It is the law of love, love for God and love for neighbor according to the new commandment that the Lord left to us (see John 13.34). It is a love, however, that is not sterile sentimentality or something vague, but the acknowledgement of God as the one Lord of life and, at the same time, the acceptance of the other as my true brother [or sister], overcoming division, rivalry, misunderstanding, selfishness; these two things go together.... To pray for those with whom we are angry is a beautiful step towards that law of love.

— Pope Francis, “Francis’s General Audience, 2013”

Scripture

‘I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’ (John 13.34-35)

Prayer

Lord, while we love you we are sometimes confused how to show that love for you. Help us to remember that we are made in your image, that you abide in us. If we cannot see you in another, then we have failed to love you. Help us love you by serving our neighbor, who we must love as if they were ourselves.