

Fortnight for Freedom 2016: Daily Homily Notes and Commentaries

Weekday Masses from June 21 to July 4, 2016

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Tuesday, June 21, 2016

Memorial of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga

- Hezekiah, the king of Judah, was mocked for his loyalty to “your God on whom you rely.” He prayed to God with humility and sincerity, and his prayer was heard. There will always be enemies of truth and goodness in this world. They take different forms, and they come and they go; but we must remain steadfast and loyal to the Lord.
- Jesus says “Do to others whatever you would have them do to you.” We rightly expect for ourselves the unhindered rights of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” This implies that we also have the duty to participate in the struggle to insure that others enjoy these rights as well, that ours be a nation where justice truly prevails.
- Saint Aloysius Gonzaga was not interested in the wealth or status he stood to inherit by his birth into the nobility. Rather, he pursued a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and lost his life while caring for victims of the plague. He teaches us important lessons about our priorities in this life.

Wednesday, June 22, 2016

Wednesday, 12th Week in Ordinary Time; Optional Memorial of Saints John Fisher and Thomas More

- The king, Josiah, is characterized in today’s reading as a listener, open to the Word of the Lord. He realized that good government must include the voice of religion. He himself listened to all the law of the Lord and likewise summoned all the people to listen to it, and then acted in good conscience to renew the covenant.
- Jesus calls us to be discerning listeners who test what we are told. This implies a balance: we must be open to the other, but careful not to believe just anything. True freedom enables us to discern the right by the light of God’s grace... and God also grants us the grace to *do the right!*
- Saints John Fisher and Thomas More refused to cooperate with the unjust law of an earthly king. For their fidelity they lost their lives, but for their fidelity they were also rewarded by the heavenly King. May their prayers and example give us courage.

Thursday, June 23, 2016

Thursday, 12th Week in Ordinary Time

- The second Book of Kings suggests that the terrible disaster struck Judah and Jerusalem – including the destruction of the Temple and exile of many of the people – to have been connected to the sins of the leaders and the people. Sin has consequences. The good news is that God did not abandon his people in their exile, but used it as a means to conversion of heart.
- Jesus reserves severe condemnation for those who would pay him lip service and then do the opposite in their actions. A genuine disciple of Christ must remain faithful and true in every aspect of life, even if it leads to persecution.

- Christ himself is the rock on which we build and to which we cling. In the midst of contrary teachings in a secular culture that blow like powerful storms, we can trust the Church founded on him to stand strong and to provide sure guidance.

Friday, June 24, 2016

Solemnity of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist

- “From [his] mother’s womb” Isaiah had a transcendent calling: to gather back to God his scattered people. This is one of the main missions of the Church as well: to gather all the nations into the peace of God’s kingdom. We do not belong to the politics of division, but to the one House of God.
- The preaching of the Baptist is a powerful example for us of the proper way to gather God’s people: we must proclaim a message of repentance – which is essentially a message of hope. Knowing our unworthiness and our limitations opens the door for the Holy Spirit to work through us.
- In the Gospel, Zechariah was set free by his obedience, following the angel’s command to name his son John, contrary to the customs of the time. Formed by the example of his parents’ humble obedience, John the Baptist became a holy prophet, and the “hand of the Lord” was able to work great things through him.
- Religious freedom is necessarily yoked to obedience to the Word of God. For freedom to avoid the mutation into the slavery of license, it needs to be in obedient service to the truth.

Saturday, June 25, 2016

Saturday, 12th Week in Ordinary Time

- The reading from the Book of Lamentation conveys the grief of God’s people at the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. But things don’t really change: there is still so much to weep for, even in our own times. The tears and prayers of his people are precious to our heavenly Father. Innocent victims and perpetrators of crimes need our intercession.
- A Roman Centurion, who, we can presume, worshipped the pantheon of Roman gods instead of the one true God, nonetheless finds the faith to approach Jesus in a time of dire need. Jesus himself is clearly impressed by the Roman official’s faith. It can be easy to make presumptions about the lack of faith of our own elected officials when they support policies contrary to God’s law. But do we pray sincerely for those with whom we have differences?
- At the house of Peter’s mother-in-law, Jesus cured the sick and drove out demons from those brought to him. Let us pray that the Lord will continue to drive out the many demons of indifference – indifference to the sanctity of human life, indifference to respect for the proper role of human sexuality, indifference to the shocking number of our brothers and sisters who go without basic essentials. Relief from these demons of indifference is an important step to take in the direction of true freedom.

Monday, June 27, 2016

Monday of the 13th Week in Ordinary Time; Optional Memorial of Saint Cyril of Alexandria

- A central preoccupation of the prophet Amos was Israel’s failure to take care of its poor. The rich and the powerful became successful because God opened the path before them, but they now close that path to their fellow countrymen. Amos is reminding them that they live by God’s power and not their own.

- Jesus gives discipleship priority over personal physical needs (a place to sleep) and over personal social duties (burying one's parent). However, these responsibilities – appropriate love of self and love of neighbor – find their most profound fulfillment in the context of true discipleship. To reverse them ultimately leads to the neglect of the dignity of the human person. Without love of God, love of man will wither; when love of God takes first place, love of our fellow man becomes stronger.
- The struggle for religious liberty is driven by a constant awareness that we must obey God rather than men. Indeed, our service to our neighbor is shaped and inspired by our obedience to God.

Tuesday, June 28, 2016

Memorial of Saint Irenaeus

- “The Lion roars – who will not be afraid! The Lord God speaks – who will not prophesy!” With such marvelous images, Amos reminds us of our duty to heed the voice of the Lord, who speaks in the prayer of our hearts, who instructs our consciences, who enlightens us in countless ways every day. We, too, must speak the truth in accord with what we learn from the Lord!
- In the Gospel, the Lord questions his disciples – why do they fear death in the presence of the resurrection and the life? The Lord of all creation speaks a word of rebuke to his creatures wind and sea, which are more obedient than the disciples, who respond less in faith than in amazement.
- In the Church's struggle for religious liberty, the winds and the sea of secularism will undoubtedly try to provoke us to rely on our own powers, which can only lead to frustration and fear. Faith reminds us that we ever stand in the presence of the Lord of all, and we need not fear anything.
- Saint Irenaeus was a missionary to southern France in the second century, and became the second bishop of Lyon. During his lifetime, the Christians in his region not only suffered persecution from the Roman Empire, but also faced a disheartening struggle against the false teachings of Gnostic Christians. Saint Irenaeus was a courageous bishop who strengthened his flock amidst these tribulations.

Wednesday, June 29, 2016

Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul

- Paul speaks of himself as “being poured out,” “competing well,” “finishing the race,” “keeping the faith,” and “longing for the Lord's appearance.” In all of these, Paul is striving – but it is the Lord who brings about success. We must do all that we can in our longing for the Lord, while turning over any accomplishments completely to the Lord. Notice that the images Paul uses imply effort, even struggle. Living out our own faith is rarely a passive, relaxed event. If we wish to draw others into our faith and way of life, we must be sure that we ourselves are striving to live the whole of our faith, not just the comfortable and easy parts.
- Peter's profession of faith comes not from “flesh and blood” but from Jesus' own “heavenly Father.” Our faith is not dependent on human opinion, but on God. There is still need to use human reason to make the important decisions in our world, but the faith which purifies that reason is divine. We need both.

- Matthew's Gospel reminds us that Peter, who died a martyr's death in the Roman persecution, is the rock upon which the Lord built his Church. In that case, the willingness to embrace and undergo struggle in the face of opposition is part of the foundational fabric of the Church. If we live our faith fully, like Peter, it will always demand more of us than an hour a week.
- Our action for religious liberty begins with freeing ourselves from sin and falsehood. It must continue with proclaiming that freedom – won by Christ – to the rest of the world.

Thursday, June 30, 2016

Thursday, 13th Week in Ordinary Time; Optional Memorial, First Martyrs of the Holy Roman Church

- Amos was a humble man, no one important in the eyes of the world. But God chose him to be a prophet, and Amos fulfilled his calling courageously. Do not underestimate the mysterious ways of divine providence: you, too, can be an effective prophet.
- Not all are able to recognize God's handiwork in their midst. In today's Gospel, Jesus performs a miraculous cure. The scribes, however, as religious authority figures of the time, saw evil afoot instead of good, blasphemy instead of a compassionate miracle. There are those in our world today who would label the Church's activities and stances on many issues as violations of freedom, rather than the affirmation of freedom which they truly are. May we have the wisdom and patience to point out God's goodness to those who disagree with us.
- Jesus recognized that the paralytic's suffering had its roots in sin. In forgiving the paralytic's sins, Jesus also enabled him to be mobile once again, and to rejoin the community. Perhaps our society's inability to affect positive change in so many areas is rooted in the sinful attachments that anchor us down. For all of us, and for those around us, Christ offers forgiveness. He also offers us the graces to identify and free ourselves from whatever forces render us immobile.
- This day after the great solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, the Church honors the early Roman martyrs killed during Nero's persecution. Most of their names are unknown to us, but their courageous witness laid the groundwork for the eventual flowering of the faith in the territory of the Roman Empire. This ought to give us inspiration and hope.

Friday, July 1, 2016

Friday, 13th Week in Ordinary Time; Optional Memorial of Saint Junípero Serra

- Through the prophet Amos, God reveals his contempt for hypocrisy, for a minimalistic attitude towards his law, for an absence of justice to the poor. This should lead us to examine our own consciences carefully, and to strive also in the civil sphere for laws and policies that will adequately defend the weakest among us.
- To preach the full truth of the Gospel – to bring mercy to sinners – is the essential mission of the Church. When Jesus himself preached this truth there were some who resented him, but he did not cower under their intimidation. No authority on earth has the right to prevent the spread of the Gospel.
- Saint Junípero Serra, canonized here in the United States by Pope Francis just last fall, had a great love for the people of the new world. May his prayers and his example of zeal for souls inspire in us the same love for the people of our country.

Saturday, July 2, 2016

Saturday, 13th Week in Ordinary Time

- Over the course of the years recounted in the Old Testament, God's chosen people saw many ups and downs. God reassures his people through the prophet Amos in one of those times of great distress. As Christians, we know that our true home is in heaven – but we also know that God never forgets his children during their earthly sojourn. Amos' words should give us hope and confidence in the face of discouragement.
- Jesus is clear that his followers will practice self-discipline. Do we make voluntary acts of self-sacrifice? Offered to God with the right intention, these sacrifices not only strengthen our own souls for virtue, but they can bring down from heaven many graces for our brothers and sisters and for our country.

Friday, July 4, 2016

In the Dioceses of the United States of America: Independence Day

(readings are taken from among several options from Masses for Various Needs and Occasions)

- The orations for this day focus our prayer on justice and peace. In the scriptures, justice is first of all the work of God: "Let justice descend, you heavens, like dew from above" (Is. 45:8a). Because of our fallen nature, earthly justice will always be imperfect. We need the grace, the wisdom, the "dew" from above.
- Peace, likewise, is first of all a gift. The risen Christ says, "My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you" (Jn. 14:27). True peace is the fruit of reconciliation, which comes from the Cross.
- Neither justice nor peace are realities that we can construct effectively on our own. They come from faith, from repentance and conversion, and from surrender to the truth of Christ's kingdom.
- On this Independence Day, it is precisely our dependence on God that enables true freedom, true independence. What are the fears that continue to enslave us? We need to beg the Lord for his justice and his peace to free us from our fears, and to enable us to live by faith in the freedom of the children of God. Freedom is not freedom **from** obligations, but freedom **for** service to our brothers and sisters.