

*Twenty-third Sunday
in Ordinary Time*

September 6, 2020

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Where two or three
are gathered together in my name,
there am I in the midst of them.

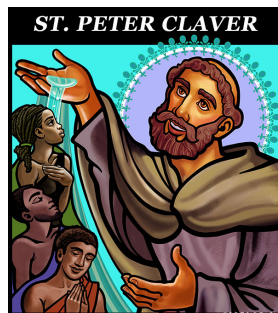
— Matthew 18:20

Saint Peter Claver (1581-1654)

September 9

Nearly two hundred years before the Declaration of Independence proclaimed “that all men are created equal,” two hundred fifty years before the Emancipation Proclamation mandated an end to slavery, three hundred fifty years before Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream,” and four hundred years before the election of an American president boasting African heritage, Peter Claver left his native Spain behind to volunteer for the Jesuit missions in Colombia. There, he was horrified both by slavery as an institution and by the inhuman brutality inflicted upon the slaves. He solemnly vowed to become “the slave of the slaves,” and lived that vow heroically for close to forty years. Not knowing their language, Peter began his ministry among the slaves by using the universal language of practical charity, providing medical care and a tangible though wordless assertion of their human dignity: “We spoke to them not with words but with our hands, kneeling beside them, bathing their faces and bodies, encouraging them with friendly gestures” (see *Liturgy of the Hours*, Volume 4, p. 2018). Then came evangelization and baptism. Holiness as human wholeness: Peter Claver’s enduring witness.

—Peter Scagnelli, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.



Readings for the Week

Monday:	1 Cor 5:1-8; Ps 5:5-7, 12; Lk 6:6-11, or, for Labor Day, any readings from the Mass “For the Blessings of Human Labor,” nos. 907-911
Tuesday:	Mi 5:1-4a or Rom 8:28-30; Ps 13:6; Mt 1:1-16, 18-23 [18-23]
Wednesday:	1 Cor 7:25-31; Ps 45:11-12, 14-17; Lk 6:20-26
Thursday:	1 Cor 8:1b-7, 11-13; Ps 139:1b-3, 13-14ab, 23-24; Lk 6:27-38
Friday:	1 Cor 9:16-19, 22b-27; Ps 84:3-6, 12; Lk 6:39-42
Saturday:	1 Cor 10:14-22; Ps 116:12-13, 17-18; Lk 6:43-49
Sunday:	Sir 27:30 — 28:7; Ps 103:1-4, 9-12; Rom 14:7-9; Mt 18:21-35

Saints and Special Observances

Sunday:	Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Monday:	Labor Day
Tuesday:	The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Wednesday:	St. Peter Claver
Friday:	Patriot Day
Saturday:	The Most Holy Name of Mary; Blessed Virgin Mary

Labor

A truly American sentiment recognizes the dignity of labor and the fact that honor lies in honest toil.

—Grover Cleveland

A Message Of Love

In the final verses of today’s Gospel reading Jesus says that when two or three are gathered in his name, “there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). So we understand that fraternal correction is always undertaken with Jesus present to us.

Likewise, encouraging the good in others is not only the right thing for us to do, it is a necessity. The Lord tells the prophet Ezekiel that if he “does not speak out” to dissuade a person from evil, then he too will be held responsible. We live in a “do your own thing” age when moral objectivity is often ignored. Clearly when the message we share with others is one of love, our motives cannot ever be misinterpreted. As St. Paul writes, “Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10).

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Today’s Readings

First Reading — Warn the wicked and try to turn them from their ways (Ezekiel 33:7-9).

Psalms — If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts (Psalm 95).

Second Reading — Owe nothing to anyone, except mutual love (Romans 13:8-10).

Gospel — If two agree about anything for which they pray, it shall be granted to them (Matthew 18:15-20).

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“If two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father.”

—Matthew 18:19

Treasures From Our Tradition

In the early years of the church, most people never availed themselves of once-in-a-lifetime penance. Yet penitents were highly visible. They wore distinctive garments or chains, and they were relegated to special zones in the church. They might be dismissed from the Sunday assembly after the Word, forbidden to join in the Prayer of the Faithful or the Eucharist. This dismissal was done with great affection and tenderness as the bishop laid his hands on the heads of the sinners. During Lent almost everyone would identify with penitents by clothing, insignia, or by following the penitents' regular diet. Rather than sit in judgment over them, the church desired to intercede for them before the Lord. “Let Mother Church weep for you and wash away your sins with her tears,” said St. Ambrose to his penitents in Milan. Ambrose liked to think of them as Jonah in the whale, meditating on his errors. In a letter to his sister he said that Jonah is also a sign of Christ in the tomb, and so he had great faith in the penitents' future proclamation of the Resurrection with their reclaimed status in the assembly.

—Rev. James Field, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.

If you ever thought that living as a Christian was always going to be easy, today's readings will convince you that this is not so. In the first reading from Ezekiel, the prophet was sent to convince the people in Jerusalem to return to God and God's ways; he bore rejection as a result of fulfilling his mission. In today's Gospel, Jesus instructs his followers to work toward reconciliation when we have been wronged, rather than remaining caught in anger or disappointment. Saint Paul captures what lies behind these instructions—love. “Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law.” When we are tempted to walk away from a friend or co-worker with whom we disagree, or even more so when we worry that the person has turned away from the Lord, we are instead called to reach out in love.

Love As Christ Calls

The truth is, love is sometimes wonderfully charged with light and life, but it also often requires us to confront wrongdoing and injustice, to be patient and forgiving, and to work for peace and reconciliation. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to reflect the love of God which desires the best for every person and for all of humanity. Jesus was so committed to this mission of God's love that he gave himself as an offering of pure

sacrifice. This is not easy love. It is compelling love, the sort of love that transforms and draws us toward the light and life that in our hearts we know we seek, and which we are called to share.

If Today You Hear His Voice

Where does this leave us when we experience conflict with others? As in all times and seasons, the best place to begin is in prayer. Listen for the voice of God in personal prayer, at Mass, in sacred scripture and other devotional reading, with trusted faithful and faith-filled friends. Listen with the compassion of the Lord in mind. And when you hear God's voice, pay attention! This sounds self-evident, yet how many of us hear God's voice but ask that we not be called to the challenge and discomfort of the situation, desiring instead to hope that things will simply get better? Perhaps they will, but perhaps you are called to bring the light and life of Christ to the situation, in love, for love, and through love, just as Jesus did. “If today you hear [God's] voice, harden not your hearts,” says today's psalm. We often know the depth of love to which we are called. Today's readings invite us to listen and to act, to love our neighbor as ourselves, to desire the best for every person as God desires, and to be assured that God is in our midst.

Today's Readings: Ez 33:7–9; Ps 95:1–2, 6–7, 8–9; Rom 13:8–10; Mt 18:15–20

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