

The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

The Word on the Road Home

Missale Romanum 1962 · Proper of Time · 11 October 2026

A homily

“Go thy way. Thy son liveth.”

Those words were all a man was given to carry home. He was a royal official from Capharnaum, and his son was dying of a fever. He went to find Jesus at Cana, and he went with a plan: Jesus would come down with him, stand by the bed, and heal the boy. He came home without Jesus, with nothing in his hands but a sentence.

That is today’s Gospel, and it asks a question many of us have lived. What do you do when you have asked God to come, and he sends you a word instead?

Listen to what the man asked. “Lord, come down before that my son die.” The first answer he receives is hard. “Unless you see signs and wonders, you believe not.”

The Fathers did not agree how hard to take that. St Augustine took it at full weight: the Lord, he says, “shows us a man lukewarm, or cold in faith, or of no faith at all.” St Gregory the Great is gentler. No one, he says, asks to be saved by someone he does not believe can save; so the man believed. But he believed and doubted. He asked the Lord to come down. He was looking for the Lord’s bodily presence, when the Lord is absent nowhere.

St John Chrysostom hears mercy in the rebuke: “Here He healeth the father, sick in mind, no less than the son.” There were two patients in this story. One lay in bed at Capharnaum. The other stood in front of Jesus, asking.

So the man asks again: “Lord, come down.” And Jesus does not come down. He says, “Go thy way. Thy son liveth.”

Christ refuses the man’s plan, and he grants the man’s prayer. The father asked for two things, a presence and a life. He is given the life at once. And he is given the presence too, though not in the shape he imagined. He is given it as a word. St Gregory says that the one who made all things by

his will gave the boy health by his command alone. That word was not less than Christ’s coming. It was the power that made the world, and for that power there is no distance between Cana and Capharnaum.

This is what the Gospel changes in us. We tend to think that where we cannot see God, he is absent; that if he has not come the way we asked, he has not come. The father thought so too. But what looked like Christ staying away was Christ at work, by a word.

Then comes one of the bravest sentences in Scripture. “The man believed the word which Jesus said to him and went his way.”

He went. He had no proof. For all he knew, the fever was still burning. Faith here is not a feeling. It is walking on a word. St Thomas Aquinas says that on God’s road not to go forward is to go back. This man’s faith grew as he walked.

His servants met him on the road and told him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour, the fever left him.” Yesterday. The word had done its work before he knew it. He spent a night between the word and the news.

The Gradual speaks of such a night. “The eyes of all hope in thee, O Lord: and thou givest them meat in due season.” St Augustine explains “due season” from the sickroom: whoever tends a sick man gives him food “when he ought to receive.” And to anyone who has prayed and not yet seen the answer he says, “let his eyes wait for the food, which He giveth in due season.... Thou delayest, not deniest.”

But we must be honest, because this Gospel is honest. Some here have prayed for a son or a daughter, a husband or a wife, as this man prayed, and the answer was not his. The Gospel does not promise that every prayer will be answered in the shape we name. St John Chrysostom, preaching on this passage, saw people give thanks when a child recovered. But they ought, he said, “even if they

obtain it not, to persist just the same in giving thanks, in glorifying God.” That is also the word of today’s Epistle: “Giving thanks always for all things.”

How can we give thanks when we have not been given what we asked? Not because loss is good. Because of who has spoken. The Communion prays, “Be thou mindful of thy word to thy servant, in which thou hast given me hope.” God does not need reminding, Augustine says; to ask him to remember is to say, “fulfil Thy promise to Thy servant.” And the psalm goes on, in words the Communion leaves out: “because thy word hath enlivened me.” Thy word hath given me life; thy son liveth. The deepest promise of God’s word is not that this fever will break tomorrow. It is life, the life God gives that does not end. That promise stands over every prayer we make, the prayers answered as we asked and the prayers that were not.

We are where the father stood. Many of us came here carrying someone, and have said in one way or another: Lord, come down before it is too late. And the Mass does what Christ did at Cana. It gives us a word, the Gospel we have heard. Then, over the gifts, the priest will ask, “May these mysteries, O Lord, we beseech thee, procure us a heavenly remedy, and cleanse away the vices of our hearts.” The Latin word for that remedy is medicine. The one who heals in these mysteries is the one who healed by a word at Capernaum.

The Church believes even more than that father dared to ask. On this altar Christ does come down: his Body and Blood are truly here. But he comes as he came to Capernaum, by a word, hidden from our eyes. What we see is bread and wine. What we are asked is what the father was asked: to believe the word, and to go our way.

This Mass began with words from the prayer of Azarias in the furnace at Babylon. “Whatever thou hast done to us, O Lord, thou hast done by a just judgment: for we have sinned and disobeyed thy commandments: but glorify thy name, and deal with us according to thy great mercy.” St Augustine says that the saints pray in that order, God’s justice

first and his help after: “First they praised Him scourging, and so they felt Him feeding.” The father had to learn that order: not first my plan and then God, but first God, and then my need, placed in his hands.

The Collect asked that we may “serve thee with secure minds.” “Secure” has its old meaning here: free from care, at rest. It is the mind of that man on the road in the dark. He was not sure what he would find. He was sure who had spoken.

And the last prayer of this Mass will answer the first. We confessed that we “disobeyed thy commandments.” At the end we shall ask, “grant, we beseech thee, we may always obey thy commandments.” Between the two stands the word we receive. The word received becomes the word obeyed. “Go thy way” was a command, and the father obeyed it.

So here is something for this week. When you have prayed for someone, go your way, as the father did. Do not stand at Cana, refusing to move until God acts as you planned. Take the Communion verse with you, and say it each morning: “Be thou mindful of thy word to thy servant, in which thou hast given me hope.” Then do the next thing God asks of you: the work in front of you, the person in your house, the apology you owe. And give thanks before you see the answer.

The Offertory will sing of exiles weeping by the rivers of Babylon, remembering Sion. Preaching on that psalm, St Augustine told his people, “whither your hope goeth before, let your life follow.” That is the father’s road. His hope went home ahead of him, carried by a word, and his feet followed.

At the end of that road, the evangelist says, “himself believed, and his whole house.” The faith he brought home was larger than the faith he set out with. It filled a household.

We are on that road now, between the word and the sight. Christ has spoken, and his word gives life. And the Gospel tells us what to do on the way: “The man believed the word which Jesus said to him and went his way.”

Note on Sources and Delivery

Audience and occasion. An adult parish assembly, at the Mass *Dominica vigesima post Pentecosten*, II classis, of the 1962 *Missale Romanum*, editio typica, pp. 412–413, nos. 1689–1698, for the occurrence of 11 October 2026. The orations of the Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, commemorated on that date in a low or conventual Mass, belong to another formulary and are not used.

Length and pace. The spoken body runs to 1,469 words, about 11.3 to 12.2 minutes at an unhurried 120 to 130 words a minute by arithmetic alone; no one has delivered or timed it. It was read through in full, silently, for sense and ease of speech.

Relation to the reviewed readings. The homily follows the first of the full study’s three readings of the whole Mass, *The Word That Heals from Afar*: Gregory’s bodily presence sought from one absent nowhere and his healing by command, Chrysostom’s father healed with the son, Aquinas’s faith growing on the road, Augustine’s due season and his “fulfil Thy promise”, Chrysostom’s thanks “even if they obtain it not”, the Secret’s medicine, and the Communion’s unsung *vivificavit me* beside *Filius tuus vivit*. It speaks the disagreement the study keeps on the ruler’s first faith, Augustine’s “of no faith at all” against Gregory’s belief mixed with doubt. From the second reading, *The Song of the Exiles*, it takes Augustine’s order of prayer for the Introit, which the first and second readings share, the Epistle’s thanks for all things, and the Offertory’s exiles with Augustine’s “whither your hope goeth before”. The third reading, *The Dying Son and the Two Peoples*, is left to the studies. The joins are the homily’s own and credited to no Father: the plan refused and the prayer granted, the father learning the Introit’s order, the Collect’s secure mind as his on the road, the Postcommunion’s obedience as his going, and the exiles’ hope as his road home. So are the sentences on the altar, the Church’s faith in the preacher’s own voice; no Father is said to join this Gospel to the Secret. The Alleluia is left to the studies.

Texts quoted, and their route. Scripture is the Douay–Rheims, Challoner’s revision, at the canonical verses. The Communion is quoted in that version of Ps 118:49 (119:49), which reads “Be thou mindful” for the Missal’s *Memento* and lacks its added *Domine*; the verse commended for daily prayer is that exact Douay wording. The Introit’s antiphon, the Collect, the Secret and the Postcommunion are quoted in the anonymous English printed by Eugene Cummiskey at Philadelphia in 1861, a historical study aid and not an approved liturgical translation of the 1962 Missal; the antiphon gathers words of Azarias’s prayer (Dan 3) and is not a continuous verse. Augustine and Chrysostom are quoted in the English of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Gregory and Aquinas are reported in English paraphrase of their Latin, and their words are not quoted.

Exact loci. Introit, no. 1689; Collect, no. 1690; Epistle, Eph 5:20, no. 1691; Gradual, Ps 144:15 (145:15), no. 1692; Gospel, Jn 4:48–50, 52–53, no. 1694; Offertory, Ps 136:1 (137:1), no. 1695; Secret, no. 1696; Communion, Ps 118:49–50 (119:49–50), no. 1697; Postcommunion, no. 1698. Chrysostom, *Homilies on St John* 35, 2 (the father healed with the son) and 3 (thanks “even if they obtain it not”). Augustine, *Tractates on John* 16, 3; *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 144, on vv. 15–17; 118, sermo 15, on v. 49; 136, 13. Gregory, *Homiliae in Evangelia* 28, 1. Aquinas, *Super Ioannem* c. 4, lect. 7.

References

- *Missale Romanum ex decreto Sacrosancti Concilii Tridentini restitutum, Summorum Pontificum cura recognitum*, editio typica (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1962), CMAA facsimile, pp. 412–413, nos. 1689–1698.
- *The Roman Missal, Translated into the English Language for the Use of the Laity* (Philadelphia: Eugene Cummiskey, 1861), pp. 448–450 (XX Sunday after Pentecost, Introit, Collect, Secret, Postcommunion).
- The Holy Bible, Douay–Rheims version, Challoner’s revision: Ps 118:49–50 (119:49–50); 136:1 (137:1); 144:15 (145:15); Jn 4:48–53; Eph 5:20.
- St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St John* 35, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 1st ser., vol. 14 (New York, 1889), pp. 124–125.
- St Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 16, 3, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 1st ser., vol. 7. *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 118, sermo 15, on v. 49; 136, 13; and 144, on vv. 15–17 (Psalms CXIX, CXXXVII and CXLV in that translation), 1st ser., vol. 8.
- St Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelia* 28, 1, Latin Wikisource transcription of Migne’s text; Migne, PL 76, cols. 1210–1213; paraphrased, not quoted.
- St Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura* c. 4, lect. 7, in *Opera*, editio altera Veneta, vol. 3 (Venice, 1745); paraphrased, not quoted.

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