

NT-MT23

12.29.19

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by St. John Chrysostom ¹

Today, as a firstborn son, Christ went down into Egypt to end the mourning its ancient bereavement had brought upon that land. Instead of plagues he brought joy, instead of night and darkness he gave the light of salvation.

Of old the river's water had been polluted by the untimely deaths of murdered infants. Therefore he who long ago had stained the waters red went down into Egypt and purified those waters by the power of the Holy Spirit, making them the source of salvation. When the Egyptians were afflicted they raged against God and denied him. Therefore he went down into Egypt, filled devout souls with the knowledge of God and made the river more productive of martyrs than it was of ears of grain.

What more shall I say of this mystery? I see a carpenter and a manger, an infant and swaddling clothes, a virgin giving birth without the necessities of life; nothing but poverty and complete destitution. Have you ever seen wealth in such penury? How could he who was rich have become, for our sake, so poor that he had neither bed nor bedding but was laid in a manger? O immeasurable wealth concealed in poverty! He lies in a manger, yet he rocks the whole world. He is bound with swaddling bands, yet he breaks the bonds of sin. Before he could speak he taught the wise men and converted them. What else can I say? Here is the newborn babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. With him are Mary, virgin and mother, and Joseph who was called his father.

Joseph was only betrothed to Mary when the Holy Spirit overshadowed her; so he was at a loss as to what he should call the child. While he was in this perplexity a message from heaven came to him by the voice of an angel: *Do not be afraid, Joseph. It is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived this child.* In her virginity the Holy Spirit overshadowed her.

Why was Christ born of a virgin, and her virginity preserved inviolate? Because of old the devil had deceived the virgin Eve, Gabriel brought the Good News to the Virgin Mary. Having fallen into the trap, Eve spoke the word that led to death. Having received the good News, Mary gave birth to the incarnate Word who has brought us eternal life.

¹Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY – 1997 – pg 26

He must increase and I must decrease ; a reading from a sermon by Meister Eckhart.1

[It says in the Gospel according to St. John that] God has sent his Only-Begotten Son into the world. @ You must not by this understand the external world in which the Son ate and drank with us, but understand it to apply to the inner world. As truly as the Father in his simple nature gives his Son birth naturally, so truly does he give him birth in the most inward part of the spirit, and that is the inner world. Here God=s ground is my ground, and my ground is God=s ground. Here I live from what is my own, as God lives from what is his own. Whoever has looked for an instant into this ground, to such a one a thousand marks of red, minted gold are no more than a counterfeit penny. It is out of this inner ground that you should perform all your works without asking, Why? I say truly: So long as you perform your works for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, or for God=s sake, or for the sake of your eternal blessedness, and you work them from without, you are going completely astray. You may well be tolerated, but it is not the best. Whoever is seeking God by ways is finding ways and losing God, who in ways is hidden. But whoever seeks for God without ways will find him as he is in himself, and that one will live with the Son, and he is life itself.

Where the creature stops, there God begins to be. Now God wants no more from you than that you should in creaturely fashion go out of yourself and let God be God in you. The smallest creaturely image that ever forms in you is as great as God is great. Why? Because it comes between you and the whole of God. As soon as the image comes in, God and all his divinity has to give way. But as the image goes out, God goes in. God wants you to go out of yourself in creaturely fashion as much as if all his blessedness consisted in it. O my dear one, what harm does it do you to allow God to be God in you? Go completely out of yourself for God=s love, and God comes completely out of himself for love of you. And when these two have gone out, what remains there is a simplified One. In this One the Father brings his Son to birth in the innermost source. Then the Holy Spirit blossoms forth, and then there springs up in God a will that belongs to the soul. So long as the will remains untouched by all created things and by all creation, it is free. Christ says: ANo one comes into heaven except him who has come from heaven@ (Jn 3.13). All things are created from nothing; therefore their true origin is nothing, and so far as this noble will inclines toward created things, it flows off with created things toward their nothing. Why do you not stay in yourself and hold on to your own good? After all, you are carrying all truth in you in an essential manner.

That we may so truly remain within, that we may possess all truth, without medium and without distinction, in true blessedness, may God help us to do this. Amen.

¹ Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises. From the Classics of Western Spirituality. Paulist Press, New York, 1981., p. 183.

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12.31.2019

A farewell to a year of the Lord's grace, from the book *Everyday Faith* by Karl Rahner.¹

Let us bid farewell to the old year thankfully so that it may become what it ought to be, the gift of the grace of God. For God has given us all the days of this year. And if we have truly accepted them as gifts of his love and it is always within our power to do this they have been blessed days, days of grace and salvation. We must never think of ourselves so sullenly, wearily, skeptically or morosely that this brooding actually becomes a mistrustful way of thinking about God himself. If we were only to say that we have been poor, failures, burdened, weary, afraid, that we have been adequate neither to our life nor to God's call, then we would perhaps have said something true. But if as Christians we were to say no more than this about ourselves and our past year, we should be unjust to God. Has he not preserved us in his grace? Has he not repeatedly given us the blessed Body of his Son? Isn't his Holy Spirit in our hearts? Have we not after all borne God's burden through the year, though perhaps only with difficulty and groaning under it? Has God's grace not done well to others even through us?

For that matter we cannot say that the good that we did not find difficult to do was no true goodness in the eyes of God; and it is not even necessarily true that we have often or mostly omitted the good which we found difficult, except when it was forced from us by God through the hardships of life. Have we not resigned ourselves even after some grumbling and protest too much that we found hard, and accepted it? And that means, even if we do not very explicitly realize it, that we have accepted God, because it is only possible calmly to accept what is deadly by reaching out to true unlimited life. If we had not done that we should not now, on the last day of the year, have come before the face of God at all, and in that case we should certainly not be able to look back on this year, and could not bless it.

But because by God's grace it was what it was as we lived through it, because despite everything it was more God's gracious deed in us than our failure, we can bless it, we must and may do so. We can take leave of this year gratefully and entrust it to the grace and love of God, the love of the God who is eternity and who preserves for us for our eternity what we are taking our leave of today and tomorrow. What we give in gratitude, God receives in grace, and what is so accepted by him is redeemed and made holy, blessed and set free. And so it remains for eternity: a year of ours which is saved and acquired forever.

¹ Herder & Herder, 1968, pp. 49-50.

And then we go on and we take with us from this past year our old selves with the old tasks, the old cares, the old burdens and anxieties, the old fear which stands somewhere in our souls too, with the feeling of being poor and of having to ask everyday for bread and for strength to endure at least for a day. If we take with us into the New Year the burden of our past, ourselves with all our cares, with all our weakness and weariness, God, faithful and good, goes with us. And the burden, which we go on carrying into the New Year, is not greater than we can bear. Even if it were to crush us, God would receive us into his own blessed happiness. And what seemed the ultimate pain and ultimate torment, in reality would simply be relief from all burdens and entry into God's incomprehensible life.

So let us bid farewell to the past year. It was a year of the Lord, a year of his grace, even a year of growth in the interior life, even if we did not perceive this, because it is in our weakness that God's strength must triumph. And so at the end of the year we can all truly praise God and thank and glorify him, for he is good and his mercy endures forever.

MY-60

01.01.20

From a Sermon by Saint Sophronius, bishop.¹

"Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you." What joy could surpass this, O Virgin Mother? What grace can excel that which God has granted to you alone? What could be imagined more dazzling or more delightful? Before the miracle we witness in you, all else pales; all else is inferior when compared with the grace you have been given. All else, even what is most desirable, must take second place and enjoy a lesser importance.

"The Lord is with you." Who would dare challenge you? You are God's mother; who would not immediately defer to you and be glad to accord you a greater primacy and honor? For this reason, when I look upon the privilege you have above all creatures, I extol you with the highest praise: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you." On your account joy has not only graced us, but is also granted to the powers of heaven.

Truly, "You are blessed among women. " For you have changed Eve's curse into a blessing; and Adam, who hitherto lay under a curse, has been blessed because of you.

Truly, you are blessed among women. Through you the Father's blessing has shone forth on humankind, setting them free of their ancient curse.

Truly, you are blessed among women, because through you your forebears have found salvation. For you were to give birth to the Savior who was to win them salvation.

Truly, you are blessed among women, for without seed you have borne, as your fruit, him who bestows blessings on the whole world and redeems it from that curse that made it sprout thorns.

Truly, you are blessed among women, because, though a woman by nature, you will become, in reality, God's mother. If he whom you are to bear is truly God made flesh, then rightly do we call you God's mother. For you have truly given birth to God.

Enclosed within your womb is God himself. He makes his abode in you and comes forth from you like a bridegroom, winning joy for all and bestowing God's light on all.

You, O Virgin, are like a clear and shining sky, in which God "has set his tent." From you "he comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber." Like a giant running his course, he will run the course of his life which will bring salvation for all who will ever live, and extending from the highest heavens to the end of them, it will fill all things with divine warmth and life-giving brightness.

[1Oratio 2, in sanctissimae Deipararæ Annuntiatione, 21-22.26: PG 87, 3, 3242, 3250](#)

01SN0202

01/02/20

From a Letter of St Basil on the Incarnation ²

You have written that there are some among you who are doing away with the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, as much as they are able, and rejecting the grace of the great mystery kept secret from eternity but manifested in His own time, when the Lord, after having gone through all things pertaining to the care of the human race, in addition to all else bestowed upon us His own sojourn among us. For He aided His own creature, first through the patriarchs, whose lives have been set forth as examples and rules for those desiring to follow in the footsteps of the saints and through a zeal like theirs to arrive at the perfection of good deeds. Then, He gave a law for our assistance, delivering it by angels through Moses; then Prophets, who proclaimed beforehand the salvation that was to be, judges, kings and just men, who performed mighty works with hidden hand. After all these, in the last days, He Himself was manifested in the flesh, >born of a woman, born under the Law, that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons=.

If, therefore, the sojourn of the Lord in the flesh did not take place, the Redeemer did not pay the price for us, and He did not by His own power destroy the dominion of death. For, if that which is subject to death were one thing, and that which was assumed by the Lord were another, then death would not have ceased performing its own works, nor would the sufferings of the God-bearing flesh have become our gain; He would not have destroyed sin in the flesh; we who had died in Adam would not have been made to live in Christ; that which had fallen asunder would not have been restored; that which was shattered would not have been repaired; that which had been estranged through the deceit of the serpent would not have been again made God=s own. For, all these things are done away with by those who say that the Lord made His sojourn with a heavenly body. And what was the need of the blessed Virgin, if the God-bearing flesh was not to be assumed from the substance of Adam? But who is so bold as now to revive once more through sophistic words and the testimony, as they pretend, of the Scriptures the teaching of Valentinus which was silenced long ago? This impiety of the Appearance@, in fact, is not something new, but it was

²The Fathers of the Church - Letters of St Basil, vol. II, pg. 232 - New York - Fathers of the Church, Inc. - 1955

begun long ago by the weak-minded Valentinus, who, taking a few detached phrases of the Apostle, constructed the impious fiction for himself, saying that He had taken on the nature of a slave, and not the slave himself, and that the Lord had been made in the form, but that humanity itself had not been assumed by Him.

It is evident that the Lord took on the natural feelings for a confirmation of the true Incarnation and not of one according to the appearance, but rejected as unworthy of the undefiled Godhead the feelings arising from vice which soil the purity of our souls. For this reason it is said that He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, not, indeed, in the likeness of flesh, as these men think, but in the likeness of sinful flesh. Accordingly He took our flesh with its natural feelings, but He did not sin. Yet even as death in the flesh, which was handed down to us through Adam, was swallowed up by the Godhead, so also sin was utterly destroyed by the justice which is in Jesus Christ, so that in the resurrection we resume our flesh, which is neither liable to death nor subject to sin.

1/3/20

THE NATIVITY KERYGMA from a book by Thomas Merton³

In its prayers, the Church plunges us into the Light of God shining in the darkness of the world, in order that we may be illuminated and transformed by the presence of the newborn Savior, and thus that he may be born and truly live in us by making all our thoughts and actions light in himself. What joy, then, that he who dwells eternally in the inaccessible light and peace of the Father has left the throne of his glory and descended to be one of us! Or rather, without leaving the bosom of the Father, veiling the too brilliant light of his glory in the cloud of human nature, he who is enthroned above the cherubim takes up his abode among us in a poor manger. This Child who the shepherds, dazzled by the brilliance of the angelic host, can scarcely see in the darkness of the cave lit by Joseph's lantern, this Child is (by his divinity) the Ancient of Days, the Creator and Judge of Heaven and earth, of whom the prophet Daniel wrote: "I beheld till thrones were placed and the Ancient of Days sat, his garment was as white as snow, and the hair of his head like clean wool; his throne like flames of fire: the wheels of it like a burning fire. A swift stream of fire issued forth before him: thousands of thousands ministered to him and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before him." This, is Daniel's vision of the divinity of the Word Who, in his human nature, lies here helpless in the dark. But the Son of Man, who is here born, is himself the Word, consubstantial with the Father. To this only-begotten Son, who is equal to the Father in all things as God, but less than the Father in so far as he is human, all power is given by the Father. So, Daniel says again: "I beheld therefore in the vision of the night, and lo one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and he came even to the Ancient of Days and they presented him before him, and he gave him power and glory and a kingdom, and all peoples, tribes and tongues shall serve him, his power is an everlasting power that shall not be taken away and his kingdom that shall not be destroyed." This, then is the King promised from the beginning of the world and of whose Kingdom there shall be no end.

Do not be afraid of him. God has emptied himself and come to us as a child, in order that we who have not been saved by fear, but only destroyed by it, may now take heart and be saved by confidence. In "Emptying himself" and taking the form of a servant

³SEASONS OF CELEBRATION by Thomas Merton (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, NY 1965) pp. 108-08.

the Lord laid aside his majesty and his divine power, in order to dwell among us in goodness and mercy.

HOW GOD LEADS US IN THE WAY TO TRUE PEACE AND LIVE, by Elizabeth Seton⁴

How often have I felt my soul awakened by thy Light and warmed by the fire of thy Love--then I approach thee--I find Thee--but Alas instantly after I lose thee--often I think myself received--then fear I am rejected--and in this continual change of interior dispositions I walk in darkness and often go astray--I desire and know not how to desire, I love, and know not how to love,--nor how to find what I love.

Thus my soul loses itself without ceasing to hope in thee--It knows by its own experience that it desire much, and is unable to do anything--you see its trouble O lord--and in that happy moment when fatigued with so many vicissitudes it falls at last into entire diffidence of itself then you open its eyes and it sees the true way to Peace and Life--it knows you were nearer than it imagined--you instruct it all at once without Voice or Words, it thinks only of what possesses it, abandoning all things else it then possesses Thee--It sees without knowing what it sees, it hears, and is ignorant of what it hears, it knows only Who he is to whom it is attentive, it contents itself with loving HIM, it loves Him continually more and more--Words cannot express, nor the mind comprehend what it receives from THEE O MY GOD even in this place of Banishment.

How happy is that moment O divine Jesus! how pure is that Light, how ineffable is that communion of thy Blessings! You know O Lord how precious that gift is, and thy Creature that receives it knows also--Ah! if it were faithful, if it never departed from Thee--if it knew how to preserve the Grace it had received, how happy would it be! and yet this is but a drop of that infinite Ocean of Blessings which thou art one day to communicate to it--

O Soul of my Soul--what is my Soul and What Good can it have without possessing you--Life of my Life! What is my Life when I live not in you--Is it possible that my Heart is capable of possessing you--of enjoying you all alone--of extending and dilating itself in you--can thy creature thus be elevated above itself to repose in thy Breast, and after that depart from you? bury itself in the Earth?--Ah Lord I know not

⁴RICHER FARE, Ed. by Gail Ramshaw (Pueblo Publishing Co. NY 1990) pp. 116-117.

what I ought to say to You: but hear the voice of your love and of my misery; live always in me, and let me live perpetually in You and for You as I live only by You. Enlighten me, O Divine Light! Conduct me, O supreme Truth! Raise me again, O uncreated Life! Separate me from every thing that displeases Thee. Suffer me to remain at thy Feet!