

LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY  
VIGILS READINGS  
Second Week of Easter  
April 19-25, 2020

**SUNDAY, APRIL 19, 2020**

A Commentary on the Gospel of John by Cyril of Alexandria <sup>1</sup>

By his miraculous entry through closed doors Christ proved to his disciples that by nature he was God and also that he was none other than their former companion. By showing them his side and the marks of the nails, he convinced them beyond a doubt that he had raised the temple of his body, the very body that had hung upon the cross. He had destroyed death's power over the flesh, for as God he was life itself.

Because of the importance he attached to making his disciples believe in the resurrection of the body, and in order to prevent them from thinking that the body he now possessed was different from that in which he had suffered death upon the cross, he willed to appear to them as he had been before, even though the time had now come for his body to be clothed in a supernatural glory such as no words could possibly describe.

We have only to recall Christ's transfiguration on the mountain in the presence of his holy disciples, to realize that mortal eyes could not have endured the glory of his sacred body had he chosen to reveal it before ascending to the Father. Saint Matthew describes how Jesus went up the mountain with Peter, James and John, and how he was transfigured before them. His face shone light lightning and his clothes became white as snow. But they were unable to endure the sight and fell prostrate on the ground.

And so, before allowing the glory which belonged to it by every right to transfigure the temple of his body, our Lord Jesus Christ in his wisdom appeared to his disciples in the form that they had known. He wished them to believe that he had risen from the dead in the very body that he had received from the blessed virgin, and in which he had suffered crucifixion and death, as the Scriptures had foretold. Death's power was over the body alone, and it was from the body that it was banished. If it was not Christ's dead body that rose again, how was death conquered, how was the power of corruption destroyed? It could not have been destroyed by the death of a created spirit, of a soul, of an angel, or even of the Word of God himself. Since death held sway only over what was corruptible by

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<sup>1</sup> Ourney with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – 1992 – pg 58

nature, it was in this corruptible nature that the power of the resurrection had to show itself in order to end death's tyranny.

When Christ greeted his disciples with the words: *Peace be with you*, by peace he meant himself for Christ's presence always brings tranquility of soul. This is the grace Saint Paul desired for believers when he wrote: *The peace of Christ, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds*. The peace of Christ, which passes all understanding, is in fact the Spirit of Christ, who fills those who share in him with every blessing.

**MONDAY, APRIL 20, 2020**

**THE NEW AGE OF THE RESURRECTION, from a book by Thomas Merton<sup>2</sup>**

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The "new life," the life of the Spirit, life "in Christ," is communicated to the human spirit by the invisible Mission of the Holy Spirit--a direct consequence of the Resurrection of Jesus. Therefore the "new creation" instituted by the second Adam is in fact a prolongation of his Resurrection. The new world which is called the Kingdom of God, the world in which God reigns in us by his divine Spirit, the world of the Second Adam is, in fact, the Eon of the resurrection--the new age that begins to dawn with the rising of Christ from the dead, which reaches out to touch, with the pure spiritual light of that dawning, each soul newly incorporated into the Risen Christ, until all the elect are gathered together in him and the Kingdom is openly and definitively established without question and without opposition in the general resurrection of all the dead.

"If," says St Paul, "by reason of the one man's offense death reigned through the one man, much more will they who receive the abundance of grace ...reign in life through the one Jesus Christ."(Rom 5:17) That is exactly the Pauline concept of the Kingdom of God--a Kingdom of superabundant spiritual life, in which the saints "reign in life through the one Christ."

To reign in life is to have domination and autonomy by union with God as the source of life. It is to have and enjoy the sublime liberty of the children of God, the freedom of the Spirit by which Christ has come to make us free. The early Church was entirely penetrated with this doctrine of liberation, plenitude and life. Wherever the authentic Christian spirit has prevailed, it has always been marked by this same perfect liberty and vitality in the Spirit. For always and everywhere

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<sup>2</sup>THE NEW MAN, Thomas Merton (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, NY 1961) pp. 152-154.

the Spirit of Christ teaches this message to those who are his own: "For whoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God. Now you have not received a spirit of bondage so as to be again in fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption, by virtue of which we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself gives testimony to our spirit that we are the children of God." (Rom 8:14-17)

In this view of Christ's role as second Adam, establishing the final victory of life over death, we are still confronted with the ideas of death and life together. The liberation from sin and death is effected by the death of Christ. The communication of life to our souls is effected by the resurrection of Christ. "Jesus... was delivered up for our sins, and rose again for our justification." (Rom 4:25) We shall see that in order to enter fully into communion with the life brought to us by Christ we must in some sense--sacramentally, ascetically, mystically--die with Christ and rise with him from the dead. The whole life of the Kingdom of God consists then in the gradual extension of the spiritual effects of the death and resurrection of Jesus to one soul after another until Christ lives perfectly in all whom he has called to himself.

**TUESDAY, APRIL 21, 2020**

**PRAYER OF ST. ANSELM TO ST. BENEDICT<sup>3</sup>**

O holy and blessed Benedict, grace from on high richly endowed you with the blessing of virtues, not only in order to raise you up to the longed-for glory and blessed rest of heaven, but also in order that your admirable life should draw countless others to the same bliss, urging them on by your tender admonitions, instructing them with your sweetly reasonable doctrine, rousing them to action by the example of your miracles! I have recourse to you, O blessed one of God, whom the Lord blessed so abundantly. My soul prostrates itself before you in abjection and deep humility; it pours out its prayer with all the affection at its command; it implores your assistance with intense desire. For my soul's need is exceedingly great and unbearable.

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<sup>3</sup>-THE PRINCIPLES OF MONASTICISM, by Maurus Wolter (Trans. by Bernard A Sause, OSB B. Herder Book Co. St Louis, MO 1962) pp. 761-62

I professed the reformation of my life in monasticism. I vowed it, and proclaim this conversion by bearing the name and wearing the habit of the monk. But I am far removed from such a life. My conscience accuses me of lying before God and angels and mortals. Come to my aid, O kind Father! Hear my prayer! I beg you not to stand in horror of one who is so completely given to vicious habits and deception, but to look with favor upon him who humbly acknowledges his sin. Have mercy on my sorrow--far beyond anything I have deserved...

Thus you can see, O blessed Benedict, how courageously this soldier of Christ wages the combat under your leadership! Look at the great progress this student of yours is making in your school! Consider the good monk who, having subdued his vices and the pleasures of the flesh by mortification, desires nothing else and lives for nothing else than the practice of virtue! Alas, see rather the false monk, devoid of virtue, overwhelmed by a whole array of vices, crushed by the weight of his sins...

Be troubled, my spirit, be disturbed in the depths of your being, my heart. Rise up and cry aloud, my soul: "O Jesus, good Master, *put an end to my affliction and my suffering, and take away all my sins.* (Ps 24:18) Be my helper, O Lord! Do not abandon me, or despise me, but *teach me to do your will*, so that my life will give evidence of that which my heart and lips pronounce so readily. (Ps 142:10) *Heed my call for help, my king and my God*, through the merits and the intercession of your beloved St. Benedict, who is my kind leader and master." (Ps 5:3)

And you, my good leader, my gracious master, sweet and blessed father Benedict! I pray and beg you by the mercy that you have shown others and by that which God has shown you, have compassion on me in my misery, as I rejoice in your eternal blessedness.. O advocate of monks, act with the strength of that charity which made you solicitous as to how we should live; make it your concern

that we have the zealous desire and the efficacious will to live as we are bound to live by our profession, so that you may rejoice in our discipleship and we in your guidance, before God, who lives and reigns forever. Amen.

### **WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22, 2020**

#### **Blessed Maria Gabriella – from an article by Mother Martha Driscoll <sup>4</sup>**

Born in Sardinia on March 17, 1914, Maria Sagheddu grew up in a typical shepherd's family. Life was not easy, and the death of her father when she was only four accustomed her to poverty and hard work from earliest childhood.. A stubborn and willful child, she had a passion to win, both at school and at play, and a strong determination to overcome any challenge.

At the age of eighteen, Maria experienced some kind of conversion experience. At the same time, she voiced her desire to consecrate herself to God in religious life. She enrolled in Catholic Action and became active in teaching catechism, serving the poor, the sick, the unwanted. The most profound change, however, was in herself. "She became sweet and calm," was her mother's brief comment about a daughter who no longer lost her temper or became annoyed by the contradictions of life.

After two and a half years of determined conversion, her parish priest chose for her the hard and simple life of the Trappists. At the age of twenty-one, she entered the small, poor Trappist monastery of Grottaferrata, not far from Rome. She received the habit on April 13, 1936, made her first vows on the Feast of Christ the King in October, 1937, contracted tuberculosis in the spring of 1938, and died on April 22, 1939, at the age of twenty-five.

Sr. Maria Gabriella, as she was called in the monastery, became aware of prayer for Christian Unity through her Abbess, Mother Pia Gullini. She encouraged the movement of prayer for the unity of Christians as promoted by Abbe Paul Couturier in his Octave of Prayer. Mother Pia began to direct the entire community to the special vocation of prayer. Couturier's tract, calling for prayer, sacrifice, expiation and voluntary oblations was read at the community meeting on January 17, 1937, and Mother Pia offered some explanatory comments.

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<sup>4</sup> Maria Gabriella Sagheddu – by Martha E. Driscoll, OCSO – Cistercian Studies Quarterly – vol. 37 – 2002 – pg 181

Almost immediately an elderly Sister approached the Abbess and asked to offer her life for this cause. Exactly a month after the Novena, the seventy-eight year old Mother Immaculata died peacefully as a result of a stroke the week before. The community was informed of her offering, and fervor for the cause of unity grew. When Couturier's request for prayer and sacrifice during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was read again the next year, it was Sr. Maria Gabriella who felt called to offer her life. The Abbess told her: "I won't say yes or no. Offer yourself to the will of God."

Shortly afterward, Sr. Gabriella developed a cough and loss of energy. By Easter the abbess sent her for an x-ray. She spent forty days in a large public hospital in painful but futile attempts to cure the tuberculosis that had been diagnosed. When she returned to the monastery, she was taken to the infirmary, where she spent the remaining ten months of her life in peace, abandonment and growing joy as the definitive encounter with Christ grew near. Sr. Maria Gabriella went to the Lord on the evening of April 23, 1939. It was the fourth Sunday after Easter, the Sunday of the Good Shepherd, and the Gospel proclaimed: "I have other sheep as well that are not of this fold. I must lead these also so that there will be but one Shepherd and one fold". The circumstance was seen as a confirmation that the offering of her life had been a response to a divine inspiration.

On January 25, 1983, Maria Gabriella Sagheddu was proclaimed Blessed by Pope John Paul II during the annual ecumenical celebration in the basilica of St. Paul's Outside the Walls at the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

## **THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 2020**

### **The Second Sermon for Easter – by Bl Gueric of Igny <sup>5</sup>**

"Blessed and holy is he who has a share in the first resurrection". "I am the resurrection and the life", Jesus said. He indeed is the first resurrection; he is also the second resurrection. For rising from the dead as the first fruits of those who sleep, Christ both brings about for us the first resurrection by the mystery of his own resurrection and by the example of that same resurrection will bring about for us the second. The first is that of souls, when he raises them together with himself to newness of life; the second will be that of bodies, when he forms this

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<sup>5</sup> Liturgical Sermons - Gueric of Igny – vol 2 – Cistercian Fathers Series #32 – Cistercian Publications – Spencer, MA – 1971 – pg 86

humbled body of ours anew, molding it into the image of his glorified body. Christ does well then to proclaim himself the resurrection and the life since it is through him and into him that we rise in order to live according to him and with him; now according to him in holiness and justice, afterwards with him in happiness and glory. Now the first resurrection of our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the cause and the proof of the second resurrection, which will be that of his whole body. So also for each of us the first resurrection of the soul, by which it comes to life again from the death of sin, is the proof and the cause of its second resurrection, by which the body will be freed not only from corruption of death but also from every tendency to corruption and death. That the one is the proof and cause of the other St Paul shows clearly in the words: “If the Spirit of Christ who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he will give life also to your perishable bodies on account of his Spirit who dwells in you”.

It is well said then: “Blessed and holy is he who has a share in the first resurrection”. Holy, that is, on account of the first, which he has already obtained through the renewal of his soul; blessed on account of the second, which he happily awaits when his body is restored. The reason for his blessedness is indicated by the same passage of Scripture, which goes on: “Over these (who have a share, that is, in the first resurrection), the second death has no power, even if the first death has seemed to exercise its dominion over them for a passing hour. For death has reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin according to the likeness of Adam’s transgression. But as with Christ so with the Christian; rising from the dead, he dies no more; death has no more dominion over him. So over those blessed neither has the second death any power nor will the first keep the power, which it had for a time. For the one death of Christ triumphed over both of ours, setting free from the one those who were already its captives, from the other, those who would be its captives. It prevented us from falling into the one, from remaining in the other. How true, how devout and at the same time how magnificent is that threat he uttered as he died: “I will be your death, O death”. How fittingly and wonderfully he triumphed who tasted death on behalf of all and so swallowed up his own death and all the dying of all humanity. Free from fear he may mock at it, whomever that blessed man is who has a share in the first resurrection: “Where is your victory, death? Where is your sting, death?”

FRIDAY, APRIL 24, 2020

### **Continuing the Second Sermon for Easter – by Bl Gueric of Igny <sup>6</sup>**

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<sup>6</sup> Liturgical Sermons – Gueric of Igny – vol. 2 – Cistercian Fathers Series #32 - Cistercian Publications – Spencer, MA – 1971 – pg. 87

Thanks be to God who has given us the victory both over sin and over death, through Our Lord Jesus Christ. Wholly innocent of sin and therefore free from the debt of death, he yet paid it, dying of his own will on our behalf; and rising he has set us free from sin. For as St Paul says, "Christ died for our sins and rose for our justification". By dying he underwent the punishment due to our sins, and by rising he established for us the form and the cause of everlasting justification. Christ rising from the dead dies no more, death has no further dominion over him. So also the Christian rising together with Christ, should no longer commit deadly sin nor should sin have any further dominion over him.

This is that blessed and holy one who has a share in the first resurrection, over whom the second death will have no power; even the first death will be swallowed up in the victory of Christ's resurrection. This is the man who has not only recognized but has also taken hold of the power of Christ's resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings. He has been molded into the pattern of his death, so that he may arrive at resurrection from the dead. St. Paul was not mistaken when for the sake of this gain he not only wrote down as loss everything which had been gain to him, but also treated it as refuse, if only he might be found in Christ, molded alike into the pattern of his death and of his resurrection. It is indeed profitable trading to despise the things which weaken and defile you in order to gain Christ, and, if need be, to spend in addition not only your property but also yourself in order to recover yourself with such a generous interest of immortality and glory. Who would hesitate to regard it as a profitable trade to sow a body, mortal, natural, unhonored, that it might rise immortal, spiritual, glorious; to die to the world so as to be able to say: "For me to live is Christ and to die a gain"?

The owners of wealth will enter the kingdom of heaven only with difficulty, and those who treasure up money weigh it in their hands more readily than they spend it for bread – I mean the unleavened bread of purity and honest intent with which the Paschal Lamb should be eaten today. However you who are blessed in your poverty, sons of the poor Crucified, who have no money, come quickly, buy and eat. Those who have nothing buy these wares more readily and more easily than those who have great possessions. When money is lacking goodwill is enough to buy it, and of that those who are poor in material possessions usually have the greater store. Scripture does well to invite them: "Come, buy without money and without anything given in exchange, buy wine and milk". See, o happy pauper, only goodwill is demanded of you that alone is required for such profitable trading. Do not refuse ungratefully what is offered so freely; do not lose through an ungrateful will what you have already won by



blessed poverty. Realize what a profit it is to have no share in the world's ruin in order to have a share in Christ's resurrection.

**SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 2020**

**THE CHANGE FROM TIMIDITY TO BOLDNESS IN THE LIFE OF ST. MARK, from a Sermon by Card. John H. Newman<sup>7</sup>**

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The chief points of St. Mark's history are these: -first, that he was nephew to Barnabas, and taken with him and St. Paul on their first apostolic journey; next, that after a short time he deserted them and returned to Jerusalem; then, that after an interval, he was St. Peter's assistant at Rome, and composed his Gospel there principally from the accounts which he received from that Apostle; lastly, that he was sent by him to Alexandria, in Egypt, where he founded one of the strictest and most powerful churches of the primitive times.

The points of contrast in his history are as follows:-that first he abandoned the cause of the Gospel as soon as danger appeared; afterwards, he proved himself, not merely an ordinary Christian, but a most resolute and exact servant of God, founding and ruling the strictest Church of Alexandria.

And the instrument of this change was, as it appears the influence of St. Peter, a fit restorer of a timid and backsliding disciple.

The encouragement which we derive from these circumstances in St. Mark's history, is that the feeblest among us may through God's grace become strong. And the warning to be drawn from it is, to distrust ourselves; and again, not to despise weak brethren, or to despair of them, but to bear their burdens and help them forward, if so be we may restore them. Now let us attentively consider the subject thus brought before us.

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<sup>7</sup>PAROCHIAL AND PLAIN SERMONS, John H. Newman, (Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1987) pp.336-337.

Some are naturally impetuous and active; others love quiet and readily yield. The over-earnest must be sobered, and the indolent must be roused. The history of Moses supplies us with an instance of a proud and rash spirit, tamed down to an extreme gentleness of deportment. In the greatness of the change wrought in him, when from a fierce, though honest avenger of his brethren, he became the meekest of human beings on earth, he evidences the power of faith, the influence of the Spirit on the heart. St. Mark's history affords a specimen of the other, and still rarer change, from timidity to boldness. Difficult as it is to subdue the more violent passions, yet I believe it to be still more difficult to overcome a tendency to sloth, cowardice, and despondency. These evil dispositions cling about a person, and weigh him down. They are minute chains, binding him on every side to the earth, so that he cannot even turn himself or make an effort to rise. It would seem as if right principles had yet to be planted in the indolent mind; whereas violent and obstinate tempers had already something of the nature of firmness and zeal in them, or rather what will become so with care, exercise, and God's blessing. Besides, the events of life have a powerful influence in sobering the ardent or self-confident temper. Disappointments, pain anxiety, advancing years, bring with them some natural wisdom as a matter of course; and, though such tardy improvement bespeaks but a weak faith, yet we may believe that the Holy Spirit often blesses these means, however slowly and imperceptibly...

St. Mark's change, therefore, may be considered even more astonishing in its nature than that of the Jewish Lawgiver. "By faith," he was "out of weakness made strong," and becomes a memorial of the more glorious and marvelous gifts of the last and spiritual Dispensation.

**END OF READINGS**