

SUN

11.08.20

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by Anthony the Great ¹

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God, since purity of heart leads to perfection. Two things are contained within the heart – goodness which is natural to it and evil which is unnatural. The latter gives rise to such passions of the soul as murmuring, envy, detraction, and all the rest. Goodness, on the other hand, promotes knowledge of God and rids the soul of all of these passions. If people honestly try to root out vice and avoid evil. If they repent with tears and sighs, devoting themselves humbly to a life of prayer, fasting and watching, the Lord in his goodness will come to their aid and free them from all sinful inclinations.

Many who have lived a celibate monastic life for a long time have failed to learn what purity of heart is, because instead of studying the teaching of the Fathers, they have followed their own wayward desires, So evil spirits and rebel marauders of the air have prevailed against them, hurling invisible darts by day and night, and thus preventing them from finding rest anywhere. Moreover they fill their hearts with pride, vanity, jealousy, criticism, raging anger, strife, and any number of other passions.

Such people are to be reckoned with the five foolish virgins because they have spent their time foolishly. They have not controlled their tongues nor cleansed their eyes and bodies from concupiscence, neither have they purged their hearts of lust and other deplorable defilements. It was enough for them merely to wear a woolen garment signifying virginity. Consequently they lack the heavenly joy which would kindle their lamps, and the Bridegroom does not open the door to them but repeats what he said to the foolish virgins: *Truly I say to you, I know you not.*

My only reason for writing you this letter is my desire for your salvation. I want you to be free and faithful and pure brides of Christ, the Bridegroom of all holy souls; as Saint Paul says: *I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste bride to Christ.*

Let us awake, then, while we are still in this body, and grieve over ourselves, lamenting day and night from the bottom of our hearts, so that we may escape the bitter torment, the weeping, the wailing and remorse that will have no end. We must beware of entering through the wide gate and taking the easy road that leads to perdition, for many go that way. Instead we must enter by the narrow gate and take the path of sorrow and affliction that leads to life. Few people enter this gate, but those who do are real workers who will have the joy of receiving the reward of their labors and will inhabit the kingdom.

If any are prepared to set out I do beg them not to delay and waste time, for they may be like the foolish virgins and find no one willing to sell them oil. These virgins burst into tears and cried out, *Lord open to us.* But he answered: *Truly I say to you, I know you not.* And this happened to them simply because of their laziness.

¹ Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New city Press – 1992 – pg 140

I beg you by the grace of God to obey me as I also will obey you; and may we all obey the Lord who said by the tongue of the Prophet: *Who longs for life and desires to see good days? Keep your tongue from evil talk and your lips from deceitful speech. Turn away from evil and do good; seek and strive after peace.*

MON 11.09.20

A reading about the origins of the Basilica of Saint John the Baptist, commonly known as the Lateran. 1

The blessed Pope Sylvester I instituted the rites which the Roman Church observes in consecrating churches and altars. For although from the ages of the apostles places had been dedicated to God where assemblies were held every Sabbath, yet those places had not been consecrated by a solemn rite before this. Up to the time of Sylvester an altar was not erected under title, which, anointed with chrism, symbolizes our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Altar, our Victim, our Priest.

But when the Emperor Constantine obtained health and salvation through the sacrament of Baptism, then for the first time, by an edict published by him, the Christians throughout the world were permitted to build churches; he himself encouraged this holy building by his own example, as well as by this edict. For in his own Lateran palace he dedicated a church to the Savior and founded adjacent to it a Basilica, under the tile of St. John the Baptist, on the very spot where he had been baptized by St. Sylvester and cleansed from the leprosy of unbelief. This basilica the same Pope consecrated on November 9, and the memory of this consecration is celebrated today, when, for the first time, a church was publicly consecrated at Rome, and there appeared to the Roman people an image of the Savior depicted on the wall.

Although later on St. Sylvester decreed that from that time forward all altars should be built of stone, yet the altar of the Lateran Basilica was built of wood. This is not surprising. For since, from St. Peter down to Sylvester, because of persecutions, the Pontiffs could not dwell in any fixed abode, they offered the Holy Sacrifice [of the Mass] wherever necessity compelled them, whether in crypts or in cemeteries, or in the homes of the faithful, upon a wooden altar which was hollow like a chest.

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adapted from *The Lessons of the Temporal Cycle and the Principal feasts of the Sanctoral Cycle According to the Monastic Breviary*, compiled and adapted for the Office of the Brothers of St. Meinrad's Abbey, St. Meinrad, IN, 1943, pp. 508-509.

When this altar had been placed in the first church, the Lateran, St. Sylvester decreed that from that time on, no one except the Roman Pontiff should celebrate Mass upon it, in honor of the Prince of the Apostles and of the rest of the Popes who had been accustomed to use it. This same church, having been destroyed by fires, pillaging, and earthquakes, and repaired by the laborious effort of the Supreme Pontiffs, was afterwards rebuilt anew. Pope Benedict XIII, a Dominican, consecrated it on April 28, 1726, by a solemn rite.

TUE 11.10.2020

**A Reading about the Incarnation of the Son of God,
from a letter of St Leo the Great.**²

Although the Lord Jesus Christ is one and there is really one and the same person in Him, composed of true divinity and true humanity, the exaltation with which God exalted Him (as the Teacher of the Gentiles says) and gave to Him a name superior to every other name--this exaltation, as we know, took place in that same nature which needed enrichment by the increase of so great a glorification. Indeed, in His nature as God the Son was equal to the Father; and there was no distinction of essence between the Father and the Only-begotten, no difference in majesty; and through the mystery of the Incarnation the Word did not lose anything which the Father might restore to Him as a gift. But the servile form through which the non-sentient God fulfilled the mystery of great and fatherly concern, is human lowliness, which was carried up to the glory of divine power. The divinity and humanity were bound together in so great a unity from the very time of conception by the Virgin that divine acts were not done without the man and human acts were not done without God. For that reason, just as the lord of Majesty is said to have been crucified, so He who from all eternity is equal to the Father is said to have been exalted. For, since the unity of person remains inseparable, He is one and the same--wholly the Son of Man because of the flesh, and wholly the Son of God because of the divinity He has in common with the Father. Hence, whatever Christ received in time He received in his humanity, on which are bestowed the things it did not have. As regards the power of the Godhead, all that the Father has belongs also to the

²Letter 165. Trans. "Fathers of the Church" # 34. NY 1957, pp 270-271.

Son without distinction. According to His divine nature, *as the Father has life in himself, even so he has given to the Son also to have life in himself.* But in His servile state, His soul is sad even unto death. As the Apostle teaches, he is at once both poor and rich: *rich* because, as the Evangelist says: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God: and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing.* But he was *poor* because on our account *the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.*

WED 11.11.20

A Reading About St. Martin of Tours, from a letter of Pope John 23rd.³

If St. Martin was a bishop and a zealous pastor who can well be imitated in the practice of charity, he was also and first of all a monk. You might even say that the only reason he was such a marvelous man of action was that he was first of all a man of prayer. And from this point of view too, he has a great lesson to give to the Christians of today.

Eager for solitude and union with God, this giant of the apostolate lived in constant prayer: "he never turned his mind away from prayer," according to the expression -later picked up by the liturgy- of his contemporary and first biographer Sulpicius Severus, who adds that once he was elevated to the episcopacy, the servant of God "remained what he had been before and bore the dignity of bishop without abandoning the design of life and the virtue of a monk."⁴

Was not his principal means of evangelization to found churches and monasteries everywhere?...And thus it was that, thanks to him, monasticism was introduced into France.

Throwing light on this side of the activity of the great convert-maker is a way of reminding us of the immense benefits that the monks brought to their country; it is a

³Letter to the Archbp. of Tours on the occasion of the French "Martin of Tours Year," Dec. 10, 1960. Cf. Christian Readings II, p.312.

⁴PL 20, 166.

way of drawing their attention, which is so easily distracted at the present time by the agitated pace of modern life, back to the lasting greatness and beauties of monastic life; it is a way of inviting them to hold this form of life, and, in general, the grace of a religious vocation, high in their esteem...

The example of St. Martin, which has been confirmed by the experience of centuries, shows what invaluable instruments for spiritual elevation cloisters are in Christian society and what an effective contribution they make to the apostolate of the Church....

May the great Bishop, model of the monk and the pastor, succeed in stirring up a new spirit of fervor for the service of God.

THUR 11.12.20

The Severe and Just Sentence of God on King Ahab for the Murder of Naboth - From a Commentary of St Ambrose ⁵

By this is God's justice moved and it condemns the miser with befitting severity, saying: "You have killed and you have taken possession of his inheritance. Therefore in this place where the dogs have licked the blood of Naboth, in this place the dogs shall lick your blood and harlots shall wash in your blood." How just, how severe a sentence, that he should be prevented from separating from the horror of his own death the same bitterness of death that he had inflicted on Naboth! God beholds the poor man unburied and therefore decrees that the rich man also be without burial; hence even dead, Ahab may atone for the tribulation of his iniquity, who thought that not even the dead should be spared. Thus his corpse, sprinkled with the gore of his wound, after the manner of a violent death disclosed the cruelty of his life. When the poor man suffered these things, the rich man was blamed; when the rich man experienced them, the poor man was vindicated. But what does it signify that harlots washed in his blood, unless perhaps that a kind of meretricious perfidy of bloody luxury should be proclaimed to have in the cruelty of the king, who was so fond of his luxury that he desired herbs, he killed a man. A fitting penalty destroyed the miser, a fitting penalty for his avarice. Finally also, the dogs and the birds of heaven devoured Jezebel, so that it should be made manifest that the spoil of spiritual wickedness becomes the grave of the rich. Flee therefore a death of this kind, O rich person. But you will flee a death of this kind only if you flee this kind of crime. Do not be an Ahab and covet the neighbor's possessions. Let not Jezebel dwell with you, that deadly avarice that persuades you to bloody deeds; that restrains not your desires but urges you on; that makes you sadder even when you gain possession of

⁵ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture – O.T. V – InterVarsity Press – Downers Grove, IL – 2008 – pg 130

what you desire and that makes you destitute when you are rich. But rich people grow angry and calumniate so that they may do injury if they do not obtain what they desire. But when by their calumny they do cause injury, they pretend they are sorry; yet sad and grief stricken, as it were, not in heart but in countenance, they set out for the place of the stolen estate and take possession by their unjust and violent procedure.

FRI 11.13..20

A reading from *The Golden Epistle* of William of St. Thierry in praise of the monastic vocation. 1

Surely it is right to feast in the Lord and rejoice because the fairest part of the Christian religion, which seemed to come into close contact with heaven, has returned to life after having died, has been found after being lost.

Our ears had heard tell of it, but we did not believe, we read in books of it and marveled at the ancient glory of the solitary life and at the great grace of God manifested in it; when suddenly we found it in the clearings of a wood, on God's mountain, on the fertile mountain, where the fair places of the desert now wax fat on its richness and the hills are girt with exultation.

For there, through you it now offers itself to all and in you it displays itself. Hitherto unknown, it stands revealed in a few simple men. He who brings it among us is the same who by means of a few simple men subjected the whole world to himself, to the amazement of that world. *Do not be afraid then, you, my little flock, says the Lord, Abut show utter trust, because your Father has determined to give you his kingdom* (Lk 12.32)... It is not for you to concern yourselves feebly with the ordinary commandments nor to give your attention only to what God lays down as of obligation; you must seek his desires, fulfill in yourselves what is God=s will, the good thing, the desirable thing, the perfect thing.

It is for others to serve God, it is for you to cling to him; it is for others to believe in God, know him, love him and revere him; it is for you to taste him, understand him, be acquainted with him, enjoy him.

This is no slight matter, no easy goal; but he who, in his love, makes you such promises is almighty and good. He will be faithful in fulfilling them and untiring in giving help. To those who in their great love for him pledge themselves to great things and, believing and trusting in his grace, undertake what is beyond their own strength, he imparts both

the will and the desire; and he follows up the grace to will by bestowing also the power to achieve. Let the calumniator calumniate as he will: if a person faithfully does what is humanly possible for him to do, God himself in his mercy will give judgment for his poor one, will champion his cause, because the person did what he could.

Yet, brethren, let all exaltation be far from the opinion you have of yourselves. Y Consider [others] as being far above you in strength and admire their glory, those who are mighty with both hands who use their left hand as readily as their right. As long as they are allowed, they love to stay inside and devote their leisure with all devotion to the contemplation of truth in charity; then when necessity summons or duty impels, they go out without a moment=s hesitation to give themselves to the practice of charity in truth.

Rather, in fear and trembling work out your own salvation. Do not wonder what others are like but, to the best of your ability, what they may become through your influence; not only those who are now alive but also those who will come after you and take you as their models in the pursuit of their vocation. For it is from you, from your example, from your authority that all the future of this holy Order in these parts will derive its character.

SAT 11.14.20

The Marian Experience of God, by Hans Urs von Balthasar⁶

The Incarnation of the Word occurs in the faith of the Virgin. She relies not so much on the appearance of the angel as wholly on his word, which is a Word from God. The future tense 'thou wilt conceive' contains a promise to Israel, and her maidenhood is the faith of Zion. The lightning-flash of the miracle has no counterpart in her human experience; this experience begins afterwards, as a temporal echo of that miracle. It begins with a blind sense of touch, with the bodily sensing of a presence, in the words of Gregory of Nyssa, the sense of touch as the fundamental, unerring sense, and this experience intensifies first within its own particular kind before it extends to embrace also the experience of seeing and hearing which comes with the birth. The gradual separation into two of the one natural consciousness of the body at that stage when the mother's consciousness still embraces both bodies, is like an imitation, within the

⁶The Glory of the Lord. Hans Urs von Balthasar. Ignatius Press, 1982, 338-339.

economy of salvation, of the mystery of the Trinity, and, no less, like an imitation of the mystery of the two natures in the one Person. The mother is still both herself and her child. and her feeling of the child still wholly encompasses within itself her being felt by the child - just as the believer's vision of God presupposed his being seen by God. Seen in the light of Mary's simple experience of motherhood, which in her has become a function of the archetypal act of faith, all closed consciousness of self and all closed experience of self become problematic: the experience of self must open out, through faith, to an experience that encompasses both oneself and the other - oneself and the burgeoning Word of God, which at first seems to be growing in the self until in this growth it becomes evident that it is rather the other way around and that is the self that is contained in the Word of God. And yet this reversal does not occur by virtue of any sudden break, because even the first phase was already a function of faith, which from the outset is God's almighty Word in humankind; but at that stage faith was still not felt in all its true dimension. This state of non-feeling is not a guilt which is gradually atoned for; it is nature, which is good in its radical otherness to God and which is intended to experience the goodness of God by submitting to the patient process of becoming according to Irenaeus.

The experience of the THOU both among human beings and between God and individuals grows up out of the realm of the body and the senses into the sphere of the spirit; but in such a way that an original relationship of spirit is the prerequisite for this growth. Between the spiritual presuppositions and the beginnings of the physical process comes the lightning-bolt of miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit. This act of overshadowing by the Holy Spirit stands beyond the dichotomies of "physical" and "personal", of "corporeal" and "spiritual". For this reason, with the overshadowing of the Virgin begin the mysteries of the Mystical Body, which are above all mysteries of the Holy Spirit, generated in the womb of the virginal Church.