

NT-JN29

05.14.17

A Commentary on the Gospel of John by St. Ambrose [↕](#)

Let us march forward intrepidly to meet our Redeemer, Jesus, pursuing our outward course without swerving until we come to the assembly of the saints and are welcomed by the company of the just. It is to join our Christian forebears that we are journeying, to those who taught us our faith – that faith which comes to our aid and safeguards our heritage for us even when we have no good works to show. In the place we are making for the Lord will be everyone's light; the true light which enlightens every human person will shine upon all. In the house where we are going the Lord Jesus has prepared many dwelling places for his servants, so that where he is we also may be, for this was his desire. Hear his own words about them: *In my Father's house are many dwelling places*, and about his desire: *I will come again*, he says, *and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be*.

“But he was speaking only to his disciples” you say, “and so it was to them alone that the many dwelling-places were promised.” Do you really suppose it was only for the eleven disciples they were prepared? And what of the saying about people coming from all corners of the earth to sit at table in the kingdom of heaven? Do we doubt that the divine will will be accomplished? But with Christ, to will is to do! Accordingly he has shown us both the way and the place: *You know where I am going*, he said, *and you know the way*. The place is where the father is; the way is Christ, according to his own declaration: *I am the way, and the truth and the life; no one comes to the father except through me*. Let us set out on this way, let us hold fast to truth, let us follow life. It is the way that leads us, the truth that strengthens us, the life that is restored to us through him.

To make sure that we really understand his will, Christ prays later on: *Father, it is my desire that those whom you have given me may be with me where I am, so that they may see my glory*. How graciously he asks for what he had already promised! The promise came first and then the request, not the other way around. Conscious of his authority and knowing the gift was at his disposal, he made the promise; then, as if to show his filial submission, he asked the father to grant it. He promised first to make us aware of his power; he asked afterwards to show us his loving deference to his Father.

Yes, Lord Jesus, we do follow you, but we can only come at your bidding. No one can make the ascent without you, for you are our way, our truth, our life, our strength, our confidence, our reward. Be the way that receives us, the truth that strengthens us, the life that invigorates us.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY – 1999 – pg 64

**A Reading about Pachomius' ministry to the brothers in the *Koinonia*, from the Bohairic Life of Pachomius.<sup>1</sup>**

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Theodore began to tell the brothers of the life of our father Pachomius from his childhood on and of all the labors he underwent from the beginning when he established the holy *Koinonia*. He told them of the temptations of demons and how he snatched away from them the souls which the Lord gave him and of the revelations which the Lord disclosed to him. And he told them everything he had heard from that saint's mouth as well as those things he had seen with his own eyes.

He spoke to them as follows: 'Listen to me, my brothers, and understand well the things I am telling you. For the man whom we are exalting is truly the father of us all after God. God established a covenant with him to save a great many souls by means of him. And us also the Lord has saved through his holy prayers. For he--I am speaking of our righteous father Pachomius--is also one of the holy people of God and one who did his will always and everywhere. I am fearful that we may forget his labors and actually be unmindful of who it was who made this multitude one spirit and one body. It was accomplished by means of him and of our other holy fathers who aided him in the establishment of this holy institution. We believe that the blessing of our father will remain with us and with those who come after us before God forever. Now then, let us not be negligent and forget his laws and his commandments, which he gave us while he was still with us in the body.

'Pachomius pursued in its entirety the way of life of the prophets and the way of service in which, according to the Gospel, our Lord walked. He was without blame before all, as you yourselves bear witness. You are also not unaware how he used to teach us frequently with tears, as Paul said in the book of the Acts of those whom he was teaching. You know how he used to gather us together daily and speak to us about the holy commandments so that we might observe each of the commandments in the holy Scriptures of Christ, and how he used first to put them into practice before giving them to us. It is through our contact with such a righteous man that we have learned the will of God even in such details as the manner of stretching our hands upward to the Lord and how one should pray to God. It is he who taught it to us. Is it not right for us to bless him next after the Lord who created us? Indeed, did God not say to Abraham, who had done his will, *I will bless him who blesses you and I will curse him who curses you?* Now then, my brothers, let us all say, "Blessed be God and our righteous father Pachomius who through the labors of his prayers has become for us a guide to eternal life" '.

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<sup>1</sup>*Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol One, Trans., Armand Veilleux, Kalamazoo, 1980; pp 237-8.

## A Sermon of St Aelred of Rievaulx for Easter 1

As our Lord Jesus Christ deigned to be born for us, to be tempted for us, to be beaten for us, and to die for us, so also did he deign to rise for us. Yet his temptation, scourging, death and entombment belong to our redemption, his resurrection strengthens our hope. For by the former he paid for us what we owed, by the latter he showed us what to hope for. Just as by the death of his flesh he freed our soul from death, so by the scourging he took he freed us from the scourging of our soul. For without a doubt, we were in the scourging and we were in the tomb, and whatever he himself suffered in the body is what we have suffered in the soul.

For we were betrayed by a kind of deceitful kiss. Listen to the kiss: *Taste and you will be like gods*. This kiss had sweetness and delight on the outside, but poison lay concealed within. After this kiss, we were bound. How? Without a doubt by our own inordinate desires. For as Scripture says, *the woman, seeing that the tree was beautiful to see and sweet to eat, took and ate from it*. At first, therefore, she was as if seduced by a kind of sweet kiss – certainly it tasted sweet to the soul to be *like gods*. But afterwards she was so bound by her *inordinate desires* that she could not restrain herself, even if she hoped for no other advantage from it.

Thus bound, humanity was handed over to Caiphas, that is, to cupidity, whose servants and attendants *veiled his face*. For who are the servants of cupidity except the vices themselves, which veiled humans' face so that they could not perceive the true sun, true justice? They were veiled as if by two bonds, that of ignorance and that of inordinate desire. For these two make a human totally blind.

After this he was handed over to Pilate, that is, to the devil, prince of this world. In a marvelous way the demons themselves ridiculed the human species in their midst when a man being mocked by one devil was handed over to another for mockery. He was thus crowned with thorns, because his glory and honor were in his own iniquities. For the more prone he was to perverse and crude things, and the more he leaned toward all vices, the more he appeared to glory in himself.

At last he died and was buried. He died because he was separated from God. He was buried because he had reached a point of contempt for God. Even if people are vicious and sinful, inasmuch as they confess and recognize their sin, they are not punished by death. When, however, they advance so far in their evil life that they neither recognize nor confess their sin, then they are dead from deep within. As it is written, *confession is as far from death as if it were not*. Moreover, if they go so far as to be oblivious of God and hold him in contempt, even despairing of his mercy, they are buried. About this point Scripture says: *the impious man when he comes into the depths of evil was contemptuous.*”

Because we had suffered all these things in the soul, our Lord Jesus Christ wished to suffer all of them in his body and through the sufferings of his body to cure the sufferings of our soul. And because Christ suffered all these things for us, so that he then rose from the dead, without doubt where he rose we too have been risen. *If therefore you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above*. But we must see to whom the apostle spoke, undoubtedly to those who have risen with Christ. And who are those who rise with Christ except those who share in all that Christ suffered?

I am silent about other people, but I wonder whether the apostle speaks especially to you – to you who have certainly suffered many temptations, as if you were being beaten with Christ; to you who die with Christ through daily labors and tribulations; to you who are, as it were, buried in this cloister and in this silence for Christ. For now you have risen in the soul; afterward you will arise in your body. Therefore *seek the things that are above*.



Continuation of the Serrmon of St Aelred of Rievaulx on Easter <sup>1</sup>

Since not all those who share in the resurrection are the same in perfection, let us briefly see how all ought to seek the things that are above, all according to their own way. For there are the beginners, the advanced, and the perfect. The beginners are those newly come from the world, who are a great deal plagued by carnal desires. The advanced, those who have already gained a certain calm in regard to their carnal vices, are vehemently attacked by spiritual vices. We call fornication, extragagance, gluttony, drunkenness, and others of this kind carnal vices. These are customarily the first to assail people when they leave the world. Afterward spiritual vices like pride and vainglory immediately begin to assail the one who starts advancing in virtue.

It is necessary therefore that beginners, who have already risen with Christ through confession, seek the things that are above. The virtues are above, the vices below. Above is chastity, which belongs to heaven; below, lust, which belongs to hell. Above is moderation, which raises the mind to heavenly things; below is gluttony, which drives the mind toward the belly. Below is the love of temporal things, beautiful garments, and the like, for eample; above is contempt for the world, because the one who condemns the world is superior to the world, while the one who *loves the world* surrenders to the world.

Therefore those who are beginning ought always to despise those things that are below, namely, vice and sin, and always keep before their eyes the virtues which are above. Those, however, who have already made progress in virtues and are tempted by pride, ket them see why they take pride in themselves. If it is because of the virtues that they have, let them know that these are already no longer virtues. For proud virtues are not virtues. Let them understand that those who are proud are from below, not from above. For if they grow proud, whether because they seek some praise from another or because they glory in themselves,

each attitude is from below, not from above, because both are of human origin. Therefore if they have already risen with Christ, let them seek the things that are above, not by faith alone but also by good works, so that they may fulfill what the apostle said: *He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.*

Those who have already made such progress in perfection that after the mortification of all their vices they also think humbly of themselves in good and perfect works, let them truly ascend higher and seek the things that are above. Let nothing suffice for them except always to aim higher. Let them begin to raise their hearts from every earthly thought, close their eyes to all visible reality, and be zealous to surmount every creature so that they may see *the king in all his beauty.*

Therefore let beginners strive toward virtue; those making progress, toward true humility; the perfect, toward contemplation. Thus what the apostle said will be fulfilled: *If you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above.* And he adds: *Savor the things that are above, not the things on earth.* What is the difference between seeking something and savoring it? A very great difference, brothers. Would that those who seek the truth would all savor the truth itself! How many people today seek the truth and find it! Nevertheless they do not savor the truth itself when they have found it.

Many say, "O, if only I knew where I could serve Christ in an honest life, no one would deter me from it." Yet after they have found the pure, evangelical life, many have no taste for it but have, rather, a greater taste for the sweetness of the world. Therefore, brothers, it is not enough if you have sought the truth, it is not enough if you have sought and found the things that are above; also savor the things that are above.

Savor, that is, frequently meditate upon and thoroughly consider how great is the excellence of truth, what security there is in purity, what happiness in the service of God. Contemplate this and reject whatever your flesh might say to you. Follow reason and weigh carefully how great are the things of heaven and eternity



measured against those sweet temporal and earthly things. By frequent meditation, acquire not only the knowledge of truth, as many evil people have done, but also the taste for the truth. If this we have arisen and raised ourselves above the earth in mind, intention, zeal and love, then we will truly share in the resurrection of the Lord. But since our effort is too little unless his grace also assist us, let us pray for his most gentle mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns as God, forever. Amen.

TM-EST90

05.18.17

A Second Sermon by St Aelred of Rievaulx on Easter 1

Today we can say, “Abundance has made us poor, not an abundance of understanding, but an abundance of subject matter.” For who is adequate to speak of the glory, sweetness and joy of this day? Who knows what to talk about? *This is the day the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it.* This day feeds the hungry and heals the sick; it is life and resurrection for the dead. The one who is tired can rest on this day. The one who is sick can be cured on this day. The one who is dead can arise on this day. *This is the day that the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

This is the day of eternity, in which the Creator lives eternally. It is the day of creation, in which God has created all things. It is the day of perdition, in which humanity fell into damnation. It is the day of restoration, in which God had redeemed humanity. It is the day of restoration, in which God has redeemed humanity. It is the day of resurrection, in which God has glorified humanity. *And it is the day that the Lord has made.* The day of eternity has no morning; it has no evening. It has no beginning or end. The day of eternity is God Himself, who has no beginning nor end, who does not vary or change but is always in the same condition, to which point the prophet says: *You are always the same, and the years do not decrease you.*

It is a day of mutability in which God created all things, because he made all things out of nothing, and all things are mutable. That day has a morning and an evening, that is, a beginning and an end. For there is no doubt that time began, and it has been written about the end of the world, *Because time will be no more.* But that day does not have a night, because had all things remained in the same state in which they were created, there would be no terrible night of eternal

damnation nor any exterior darkness into which are sent those who, of their own accord, rush into interior darkness.

It is the day of perdition that humanity created for itself when it sinned, to which Saint Job says, *Let the day on which you were born perish*. For on that day we were all born, because we all come forth from the mass of perdition. On that day we also shall die, because *through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death entered into all*. That day has a morning and an evening. The morning is the day of a person's birth' the evening, his death. From the beginning of his birth up to the end of his life, he experiences the pain of perdition that he first incurred. As Scripture says: *There is a heavy yoke upon all the sons of Adam, from the day they went forth from their mother's womb until the day they returned into the womb of the mother of all*.

Whoever does not follow that sun, which on this day was born for us, will after that day undoubtedly rush into that unhappy night in which there is the darkness of evil, the exterior darkness. Therefore the saint who knew how to recognize the evil and misery of that day and how to fear the unhappiness of that night, justly desired that the day of perdition perish, because he longed for the day of human restoration to arise. That is the day on which the Lord was made, *when the word was made flesh and dwelt among us*. This day had a morning in the Lord's nativity, a noontime in the display of his miracles, an evening in his passion. Thus the words of the Psalmist were fulfilled: *In the evening, weeping enters in*.

But this weeping does not remain for long, because immediately *joy breaks out in the morning*, when the day of glorification begins because of the sublime resurrection of the Lord. *This is the day the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it*. For we await the fullness of glory on the day of our own resurrection, when this mortal flesh shall put on immortality, and corruption become incorruption, when the word that was written shall come to pass: *death will be swallowed up in victory*.

But why do we exert ourselves to express in words what is ineffable? *For eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor does it enter into the human heart.* See already, brothers, that the whole of our glory will be in God and from God, in our neighbor and from our neighbor, in us and from us. And both love and vision make up this glory. In a wonderful way, love increases vision and vision love, because as much as we love, that much shall we see, and as much as we see, that much will we love.

As the Apostle says, *insofar as we have believed in Christ, we have put on Christ.* But Christ is our Head, and we are his Body. Today Christ has risen. This is the beginning of our glory. *This is the day that the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

A Continuation of the Second Sermon of St Aelred of Rievaulx on the Resurrection

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Now let us consider when God the Father with his Son began not to create but to restore the world. And let us note the six days of its re-creation, as we read of them in its creation. Let us consider that the first day is the nativity of the Lord, the second, the institution of the sacraments, the third, his preaching, the fourth, the choosing of the disciples, the fifth, the demonstration of miracles, the sixth, his passion. Now may it please you to pay attention to how this second operation fits those works he did in the first six days.

For on the first day he created the light. God said: Let there be light. And there was light. Do you not see how clearly this work signifies the birth of Christ? In the birth of Christ *the people who walked in darkness saw a great light*. For just as Our Lord, the Son of God himself, was made wisdom and justice for us, so he was made the light.

On the second day, God *made the firmament and divided the waters above the firmament and those that were below the firmament*. The firmament that the Lord made on the second day of restoration is the excellence of the sacraments, which the Lord instituted in baptism, in anointing, and in the reception of his body and blood. *The waters are the people*. We who are the waters below, dwelling in this exile and on this pilgrimage, we are absolutely in need of submitting to this firmament, that is to say, to the sacraments of Christ.

On the third day, *the earth produced green plants bearing seed and trees bearing fruit that contain seeds*. This creation signifies the preaching of the Lord. For at

first the people were like a land empty and without fruit, but when the Lord preached, they immediately brought forth the fruit of penitence, the fruit of good works.

On the fourth day God made the sun, moon and stars. God did this spiritually by the choosing of the disciples. There the order of the apostles is like the sun, the society of lesser clergy like the moon; there the numerous followers are like stars. They are the lights of the world.

On the fifth day he created the birds and fish. The miracles of the Lord can be called the birds because they suggest contemplation, the fish because they suggest profundity. For whoever wishes to consider well the miracles of the Lord ought to fly with the wings of contemplation so as to know how exalted they are, and to go down into the depths, as it were, to know how profound they are.

On the sixth day, the human persons were created *according to the image of God*, and, in the passion of the Lord, we were reformed in the same image. Man has recovered his ancient dignity, because he has returned to Paradise, from which he had been expelled. The Lord indicates this return, saying o the thief, *Thus day you will be with me in Paradise*. By this time the Sabbath followed, and *the Lord rested from all his labord*, lying down in the tomb until the eighth day, on which he rose from the dead. And *this is the day that the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it*. Mark this well: there is work for six days, rest on the seventh, and glory on the eighth. Therefore this is more excellent than all other days, more glorious, happier. Justly, *this is the day that the Lord has made*,

Understand, brothers, where our exultation and joy ought to be: on the eighth day. Happy are those who exult on this day, happy those who have such a good conscience that not only do they not fear for the eighth day, that is, for the resurrection of the dead, but rather exult in it. But in the meantime, brothers, because we have seen the very resurrection of the Head, let us live as *soberly, justly and devoutly* as we are able, through humble obedience and sincere love, so that we may truly be as members of his Body. And let us exult in his resurrection

today, so that on that day we deserve also to exult in our own, through the sweet benevolence of the one who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, God, forever and ever. Amen.

[1](#)Aelred of Rievaulx – The Liturgical Sermons – CF Series #77 – Liturgical Press – Collegeville, MN – 2016 – pg 113

TM\_EST86

05.20.17

From a Sermon by St. Gregory of Nyssa [1](#)

The reign of life has begun, the tyranny of death is ended. A new birth has taken place, a new life has come, a new order of existence has appeared, our very nature has been transformed! This birth is not brought about by *human generation, by the will of human beings, or by the desire of the flesh, but by God.*

If you wonder how, I will explain in clear language. Faith is the womb that conceives this new life, baptism the rebirth by which it is brought forth into the light of day. The Church is its nurse; her teachings are its milk, the bread from heaven is its food. It is brought to maturity by the practice of virtue; it is wedded to wisdom; it gives birth to hope. Its home is the kingdom; its rich inheritance the joys of paradise; its end, not death but the blessed and everlasting life prepared for those who are worthy.

*This is the day the Lord has made* – a day far different from those made when the world was first created, and which are measured by the passage of time. This is the beginning of a new creation. On this day, as the prophet says, God makes a new heaven and a new earth. What is this new heaven? You may ask. It is the firmament of our faith in Christ. What is this new earth? A good heart, a heart like the earth, which drinks up the rain that falls on it and yields a rich harvest.

In this new creation, purity of life is the sun, the virtues are the stars, transparent goodness is the air, and the *depths of the riches of wisdom and knowledge*, the sea. Sound doctrine, the divine teachings, are the grass and plants that feed God's flock, the people whom he shepherds; the keeping of the commandments is the fruit borne by the trees.

On this day is created the true human person made in the image and likeness of God. *For this day the Lord has made* is the beginning of this new world. Of this day the prophet says that it is not like other days, nor is this night like other nights. But still we have not spoken of the greatest gift it has brought us. This day destroyed the pangs of death and brought to birth the firstborn from the dead.

*I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God.* O what wonderful good news! He who for our sake became like us in order



to make us his brothers and sisters, now presents to his true Father his own humanity in order to draw all his kindred up after him.

[1](#)A Word in Season – vol. III – Exordium Books – 1983 – pg 133