

NT-MT34

07.30.17

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by Origen ¹

To the seeker after fine pearls may be applied the words, *Seek and you will find*, and *Everyone who seeks will find*. If you ask what is to be sought, and what will be found by everyone who seeks for it, I say with confidence: pearls – especially that pearl which will be acquired by those who give their all, who sacrifice everything for it, the pearl Paul meant when he said: *I have accepted the loss of everything in order to gain Christ*. *Everything* means beautiful pearls; *to gain Christ* refers to the one pearl of great price.

Admittedly, a lamp is precious to people in darkness, and they need it until sunrise. Precious too was the radiance on the face of Moses – and I believe on the faces of the other prophets also. It was a sight of beauty leading us to the point of being able to see the glory of Christ, to whom the Father bore witness in the words: *This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased*. But *compared with this surpassing glory, what formerly was glorious now seems to have no glory at all*. We need at first a glory destined to be outshone by an all-surpassing glory, just as we need the partial knowledge which *will be superseded when that which is perfect has come*.

Thus everyone beginning to live a spiritual life and growing toward maturity needs tutors, guardians, and trustees until the fulness of time arrives for him, so that after all this, he who at first was *no different from a slave although he owned the whole estate*, may on his emancipation receive his patrimony from his tutor, guardians, and trustees.

This patrimony is the pearl of great price, and the coming of what is perfect to supersede what is imperfect when, after acquiring the forms of knowledge, if we may call them so, which are inferior to the knowledge of Christ, one becomes able to understand the supreme value of knowing Christ. The law and the prophets fully comprehended are the preparation for the full comprehension of the gospel and the complete understanding of the acts and words of Christ Jesus.

¹Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY – 1999 – pg 110

RULES FOR THE DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS by St Ignatius Loyola¹

1. In the case of those who go from one mortal sin to another, the enemy is ordinarily accustomed to propose apparent pleasures. He fills their imagination with sensual delights and gratifications, the more readily to keep them in their vices and increase the number of their sins.

With such persons the good spirit uses a method which is the reverse of the above. Making use of the light of reason, he will rouse the sting of conscience and fill them with remorse.

2. In the case of those who go on earnestly striving to cleanse their souls from sin and who seek to rise in the service of God to greater perfection, the method pursued is the opposite of that mentioned in the first rule.

Then it is characteristic of the evil spirit to harass with anxiety, to afflict with sadness, to raise obstacles backed by fallacious reasonings that disturb the soul. Thus he seeks to prevent the soul from advancing.

It is characteristic of the good spirit, however, to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations, and peace. This he does by making all easy, by removing all obstacles so that the soul goes forward in doing good.

3. **Spiritual Consolations:** I call it consolation when an interior movement is aroused in the soul, by which it is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and as a consequence, can love no creature on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the Creator of them all. It is likewise consolation when one sheds tears that move to the love of God, whether it be because of sorrow for sins, or because of the sufferings of Christ our Lord, or for any other reason that is immediately directed to the praise and service of God. Finally, I call consolation every increase of faith, hope and love, and all interior joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one's soul by filling it with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord.

4. **Spiritual Desolation:** I call desolation what is entirely the opposite of what is described in the third rule, as darkness of soul, turmoil of spirit, inclination to what is low and earthly, restlessness rising from many disturbances and temptations which lead to want of faith, want of hope, want of love. The soul is wholly slothful, tepid, sad, and separated, as it were, from its Creator and Lord. For just as consolation is the opposite of desolation, so the thoughts that spring from consolation are the opposite of those that spring from desolation.

¹THE TREASURY OF CATHOLIC WISDOM, Ed by John A. Hardon, S.J. (Doubleday NY, 1987) pp. 408-409.

5. In time of desolation we should never make any change, but remain firm and constant in the resolution and decision which guided us the day before the desolation, or in the decision to which we adhered in the preceding consolation. For just as in consolation the good spirit guides and counsels us, so in desolation the evil spirit guides and counsels. Following his counsels we can never find the way to a right decision.

Though in desolation we must never change our former resolutions, it will be very advantageous to intensify our activity against the desolation. We can insist more upon prayer, upon meditation, and on much examination of ourselves. We can make an effort in a suitable way to do some penance.

From a sermon by Saint Alphonsus Ligouri, bishop 2

All holiness and perfection of soul lies in our love for Jesus Christ our God, who is our Redeemer and our supreme good. It is part of the love of God to acquire and to nurture all the virtues that make one perfect.

Has not God in fact won for himself a claim on all our love? From all eternity he has loved us. And it is in this vein that he speaks to us: "O consider carefully that I first loved you. You had not yet appeared in the light of day, nor did the world yet exist, but already I loved you. From all eternity I have loved you."

Since God knew that we are enticed by favors, he wished to bind us to his love by means of his gifts: "I want to catch mortals with these snare, these chains of love in which they allow themselves to be entrapped, so that they will love me." And all the gifts which he bestowed on us were given to this end. He gave us a soul, made in his likeness, and endowed with memory, intellect and will; he gave us a body equipped with the senses; it was for us that he created heaven and earth and such an abundance of things. He made all things out of love for us, so that all creation might serve us, and we in turn might love God out of gratitude for so many gifts.

But God did not wish to give us only beautiful creatures; the truth is that to win for himself our love, he went so far as to bestow upon us the fullness of himself. The eternal Father went so far as to give us his only Son. When he saw that we were all dead through sin and deprived of his grace, what did he do? Compelled, as the Apostle says, by the superabundance of his love for us, he sent his beloved Son to make reparation for us and to call us back to a sinless life.

By giving us his Son, whom he did not spare precisely so that he might spare us, he bestowed on us every good: grace, love and heaven; for all these goods are certainly inferior to the Son: *He who did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for all of us; how could he fail to give us along with his Son all good things?*

A reading about the impatience of Jeroboam, from a sermon by John Henry Newman. ¹

That Jeroboam was an instrument in God's hand to chastise Solomon's sin is plain; and there is no difficulty in conceiving how a wicked man, without its being any excuse to him, still may bring about the divine purposes. but in Jeroboam's particular case there *is* this difficulty at first sight; that Almighty God had seemed to sanction his act by **promising** him, in Solomon's life-time, the kingdom of the ten tribes. The prophet Ahijah had met him, and delivered to him a message from "*the Lord, the God of Israel.*" "*I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee.*" And it was on account of this prophecy that Jeroboam "*lifted up his hand against the king.*"

On a little consideration, however, we shall find no difficulty here: for though Almighty God promised him the kingdom, He did not tell him to gain it for himself; and if we must not do evil that good may come, surely we may not do evil that a promise may be fulfilled; and to "*rebel against his Lord*" (in the words of Scripture) was a plain, indisputable sin.

God who made the promise, could of course fulfill it in His own time. He did not require man's crime to bring it about. It was, of course, an insult to His holiness and power to suppose He did. Jeroboam ought to have waited patiently God's time; this would have been the part of true faith. But it had always been, as on this occasion, the sin of the Israelites, to outrun God's providence; and even when they chose to pursue His ends, to wish to work them out in their own way. They never would "*be still and know that He was God,*" wait on His word and follow His guidance.

¹ "Jeroboam", in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1987, pp. 522-523.

Thus, when they first took possession of the promised land, they were told to cast the nations out, and utterly destroy all that did not leave the country. They soon became weary of this, and thought they had found out a better way. They thought it wiser to spare their enemies, and form alliances with them and put them under tribute. This brought them first into idolatry, then into captivity. When Samuel rescued them, and their hopes revived, their first act was to choose a king like the nations, contrary to God's will. And Jeroboam, in this instance, as a special emblem of the whole people in the rebellion itself, had not patience to wait, nor faith to trust God, that "*What He had promised He was able also to perform.*"

That it was **a trial** to Jeroboam we need not deny; of course it was. He was tried and found wanting. Had he withstood the temptation, and refrained himself till lawfully called to reign, untold blessings might have been showered on him and on his people, who, in the actual history, were all cut off for their sins. He was not the first man who had thus been tried. David had been promised Saul's kingdom, and anointed thereunto by Samuel, years before he came into possession; yet, thought he was persecuted by Saul, and has his life several times in his power, still he would not lift up his hand against his king.... [David] inherited the patient faith of his forefather Abraham, and through it "*obtained the promise,*" and founded a throne in righteousness and truth. Had Jeroboam followed it, he, too, might have been the father of a line of kings; he might have been the instrument and object of God's promised favor, ... founding a dominion not inferior in glory to that of Judah and Jerusalem. Jeroboam, then, is not excused, though Ahijah prophesied.

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The end of Jeroboam, from a sermon by John Cardinal Newman.

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Jeroboam seemed to have everything his own way, but soon a difficulty arose which he had thought light of, if he thought of it at all. The Jewish nation was not only a kingdom, but a church, a religious as well as a political body; and Jeroboam found, before long, that in setting up a new kingdom in Israel, he must set up a new religion too. He resolved to select places for religious worship in his own kingdom. This was against the Law, of course; but what he did was worse than this. He could not build a Temple like Solomon's, and yet he needed some visible sign of the presence of God. Almighty God had bid the Israelites take to themselves no sign of His presence, no likeness of Him; but Jeroboam thought he could not do better than set up two figures of gold, one at each end of his country, not, indeed, as representations (he would argue), but as emblems and memorials of the true God, and as marking the established place of worship.

The figure he adopted, as a memorial of Almighty God, was in the shape of an ox or calf, the same which the Israelites had set up in the wilderness. It was a direct and open transgression of the second Commandment. The tribe of Levi, who were especially consecrated to religious purposes, refused to countenance the idolatrous worship, and Jeroboam, led on by hard necessity, cast them out of the country, got possession of their cities and lands, and put in priests of his own making in their stead. And he changed the solemn feast days, and dared to offer incense, himself intruding first, for example's sake, into the sacred office.

Now, then, we come to the concluding scene of this course of crime, perpetrated by one man—the transaction to which the text belongs. It

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▲ Jeroboam, in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997, pp. 524-528.

was on the new feast day Awhich he had devised of his own heart,@ and at Bethel where the idol was set up. The people were collected from all parts of the country, and the king Aoffered upon the altar and burnt incense.@ Such was the formal inauguration of the false religion in God=s own hallowed country. One of his prophets was sent from Judah to attend the festival; but, as if he were entering a country infected by the pestilence, he was bid go into no house, nor eat nor drink while he was in it, nay, he was not even to return to his home the same way by which he came, as if his feet must not touch the polluted earth twice.

When the prophet came, he uttered his message before the apostate king. It was a prophecy. The man of God addressed the altar, as not deigning to speak to Jeroboam, and foretold its fate. He announced that, after no long time, the idolatrous power should be destroyed, and that very altar should last long enough to see its fall. To show his Divine commission, the prophet gave the word, and the altar was miraculously rent in twain, and the ashes of the sacrifice scattered on the ground. Nothing could be more public than a judgment like this, denounced from God Himself, after Rehoboam, Solomon=s son, had not been allowed to take the matter into his own hands. And to make the occurrence still more impressive, two further signs were added. Jeroboam stretched forth his hand to seize the prophet; it was instantly shriveled up, so that he could not pull it to him again. The second miracle was still more awful: [the prophet=s own death because he ate and drank] against the express word of God declared to him. [This last sign suggested], throughout all Israel, the fearful argumentC *Alf God so punish his own children, what will be the final, though delayed, punishment of the wicked? If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?*@ (1 Pet 4.18)

As for Jeroboam, in spite of all this, *Aafter this thing he returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places; whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places.*@ Such was his life. At the close of his reign, he lost even his earthly prosperity. *AThe Lord struck him and he died.*@ Such was his end. His family was soon cut off from the throne; and after all his wise counsels and bold plans he

has left but his name and title to posterity, *AJeroboam the son of Nebat who caused Israel to sin.*@ Such is his memorial.

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Prayer in the life of the Curé d'Ars: a reading from an encyclical by Pope John XXIII.

To the priests of this century, apt to be sensitive to the effect of action and easily tempted by a dangerous activism, how beneficial is that model of assiduous prayer in a life given up entirely to the care of souls, which was the Curé d'Ars! O What prevents us priests from being saints, he said. It is lack of reflection. We don't search our hearts; we don't know what we do. Reflection, prayer, union with God, are the things we need. He himself remained, according to contemporary evidence, in a state of continual prayer from which he was not distracted by the wearisome burden of confessions nor by his other pastoral cares. He preserved a constant union with God in the midst of an exceedingly busy life.

Let us listen to him again: he is unflinching on the subject of the joy and blessing of prayer. Man is a beggar who needs to be asking everything from God. How many souls we can convert by our prayers! And he would repeat: prayer is all man's happiness on earth. This happiness he long enjoyed himself with his eyes, lit by faith, contemplating the divine mysteries and, in adoration of the Word incarnate, his pure and simple soul lifted towards the Holy Trinity, the supreme object of his love. And the pilgrims who thronged the Church of Ars realized that the humble priest was confiding to them something of the secret of his own inner life with the frequent exclamation dear to him: A Being loved by God, united to God, living in the presence of God: oh, what happiness in life and in death!

We could wish that all priests might be convinced, by the witness of the holy Curé d'Ars, of the need to be men of prayer and of the possibility of being so, whatever the heavy and sometimes severe load of the labors of their ministry. But we need an intense faith, such as moved Jean-Marie Vianney and made him able to work miracles. What faith! exclaimed one of his colleagues. Enough to spread over a whole diocese!

With St. Pius X, let us consider it certain and well-founded that a priest, in order to occupy his station properly and fulfill his duty, must devote himself before all else to prayer. Above all he should obey Christ's precept: *We ought always to pray*, a precept earnestly recommended by St Paul: *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. Pray constantly.*

The prayer of the Curé d'Ars, who, so to speak, spent the last thirty years of his life in his church where he was kept by his numerous penitents, was above all a prayer of thanksgiving. His devotion to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar was indeed wonderful. He is there, he would say, he who loves us so much; how could we not love him? And most certainly he loved him and felt irresistibly drawn towards the tabernacle: We do not need many words to pray well, he explained to his parishioners. We know that God is there, in the holy tabernacle; we open our hearts to him; we rejoice in his holy presence. This is the best prayer of all.

08SN0501

08.05.17

From a Homily delivered at the Council of Ephesus by St. Cyril of Alexandria ¹

I see here a joyful company of Christian men met together in ready response to the call of Mary, the holy and ever-virgin Mother of God. The great grief that weighed upon me is changed into joy by your presence, venerable Fathers. Now the beautiful saying of David the Psalmist: *How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to live together in unity* has come true for us.

Therefore, holy and incomprehensible Trinity, we salute you, at whose summons we have come together to this church of Mary, the Mother of God.

Mary, Mother of God, we salute you. Precious vessel. Worthy of the whole world's reverence, you are an ever-shining light, the crown of

virginity, the symbol of orthodoxy, an indestructible temple, the place that held him whom no place can contain, mother and virgin. Because of you, the holy gospel could say: *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*

We salute you, for in your holy womb was confined him who is beyond all limitation. Because of you the holy Trinity is glorified and adored: the cross is called precious and is venerated throughout the world; the heavens exult; the angels and archangels make merry; demons are put to flight; the devil, that tempter, is thrust down from heaven; the fallen race of man is taken up on high; all creatures possessed by the madness of idolatry have attained knowledge of the truth; believers receive baptism; the oil of gladness is poured out; the Church is established throughout the world; pagans are brought to repentance.

What more is there to say? Because of you the light of the only-begotten Son of God has shone upon those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death; prophets pronounced the word of God; the apostles preached salvation to the Gentiles; the dead are raised to life, and kings rule by the power of the holy Trinity.

Who can put Mary's high honor into words? She is both mother and virgin. I am overwhelmed by the wonder of this miracle. Of course no one could be prevented from living in the house he had built for himself, yet who could invite mockery by asking his own servant to be his mother?

Behold then the joy of the whole universe. Let the union of God and man in the Son of the Virgin Mary fill us with awe and adoration. Let us fear and worship the undivided Trinity as we sing the praises of the ever-virgin Mary, the holy temple of God, and of God Himself, her Son and spotless Bridegroom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1The Liturgy of the Hours – vol. III – Catholic Book Publishing Co – New York – 1975 – pg 1575

