

07.09.17

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

Our Master is always the same, gentle and benevolent. In his constant concern for our salvation, he says explicitly in the gospel: *Come, learn of me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.*

What great condescension on the part of the Creator! And yet the creature feels no shame! *Come, learn from me.* The Master came to console his fallen servants. This is how Christ treats us. He shows pity when a sinner deserves punishment. When the race that angers him deserves to be annihilated, he addresses the guilty ones in the kindly words: *Come, learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.*

God is humble, and we are proud! The judge is gentle; the criminal arrogant! The potter speaks in lowered voice; the clay discourses in tones of a king! *Come, learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.* Our master carries a whip not to wound, but to heal us. Reflect upon his indescribable kindness. Who could fail to love a master who never strikes his servants? Who would not marvel at a judge who beseeches a condemned criminal? Surely the self-abasement of these words must astound you.

I am the Creator and I love my work. I am the sculptor and I care for what I have made. If I thought of my dignity, I should not rescue fallen humankind. If I failed to treat its incurable sickness with fitting remedies, it would never recover its strength. If I did not console it, it would die. If I did nothing but threaten it, it would perish. This is why I apply the salve of kindness to it where it lies. Compassionately I bend down very low in order to raise it up. No one standing erect can lift a fallen man without putting a hand down to him.

Come learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. I do not make a show of words; I have left you the proof of my deeds. You can see that I am gentle and humble of heart from what I have become. Consider my nature, reflect upon my dignity, and marvel at the condescension I have shown you. Think of where I came from, and of where I am as I speak to you. Heaven is my throne, yet I talk to you standing on the earth! I am glorified on high, but because I am long-suffering I am not angry with you, *for I am gentle and humble in heart.*

¹Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY – 1999 – pg 104

7/10/17

A Reading About Israel and the Prophet Elijah, from the book *Prophets of Salvation*, by Eugene Maly.¹

The seventh king on the northern throne was Ahab. For political and economic reasons he had married the daughter of the king of neighboring Tyre. The woman was a fanatical worshipper of the false god Baal, and she brought this worship with her to her new home in Israel. Her name was Jezebel. The influence of Jezebel was enormous. Many of the Israelites began to worship Baal either out of a hypocritical desire to please the queen, or out of simple ignorance. Even where the true worship of Yahweh was retained, pagan elements were often introduced. It was evident that if Yahwism was to continue in the north, a vigorous religious leader was needed to bring a halt to the paganizing influences.

Elijah was the divine choice to provide the leadership. Coming from the wild countryside of Gilead and appearing as "a hairy man with a girdle of leather about his loins," he must have seemed strange indeed to the sophisticated inhabitants of Israel. But there was no mistaking his teachings. He worshipped Yahweh and would stand up to any Israelite who failed to worship the same God and worship Him without guile. We first meet him shortly after Ahab takes the throne and marries Jezebel. And we meet him executing divine justice on the sinful kingdom; he announces to the king a prolonged drought. It was to be a characteristic of his mission to oppose the king. But behind it all he was opposing Jezebel and her false religion; the king was only a weak instrument of his wife's scheming.

A showdown was definitely called for. Jezebel had succeeded in making many inroads in the worship of Yahweh. Her "prophets" had gone out among the villagers and called them to worship the same god as the queen worshipped. Many found it convenient to do so. The "troubler of Israel," as Ahab called Elijah, challenged the king to bring the prophets of Baal to the top of Mount Carmel and there to see, within the sight of all Israel, which God was the true God. So it was done.

¹Prophets of Salvation, Herder & Herder, NY 1967, pp.53-54.

The Meekness of St. Benedict as our holy Father. From a Sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny²

"He sanctified him through his faith and meekness". (Sir. 45:4) Moses is the real subject of this verse, but today I think it can be applied very well to Saint Benedict. Filled as he was with the spirit of all the saints, he must be considered much more to have not a little of the spirit of Moses. For if the Lord drew from the spirit of Moses and inspired with it every one of those who shared his ministry, how much more must it rest on him who more truly fulfilled on a more spiritual level the fullness of his whole ministry? Moses was the leader of those making their way out of Egypt; Benedict of those turning their backs on the world. They have both given a law. But the one was the minister of the letter that kills, the other, of the spirit that gives life. Moses, owing to the hardness of the hearts of the Jews, apart from a few guides to behavior, left no prescriptions adequate to the task of justification; Benedict however has handed on the unique purity of the Gospel teaching and the simplicity of its way of life. So many of the things about which Moses writes are difficult to understand, impossible or useless to perform. Benedict on the other hand wrote a most excellent Rule of life remarkable both for the lucidity of its style and for its discretion. Finally although Moses was the leader of the children of Israel when they left the land of Egypt he did not lead them into their promised resting-place; whereas our leader, like the standard bearer of the army of monks, has today gone before us along the straight path, the path leading eastward, into the kingdom of heaven. Therefore it is not absurd to consider his merits equal to those of Moses, whose ministry he is found even to have surpassed.

It will not be unfitting therefore to apply to him what we read was written about the other: **"He sanctified him through his faith and meekness,"** especially since it is of these two virtues, faith and meekness, that he is our teacher; he could never have lived otherwise than as he taught.

What could be more notable than his faith? While still a mere youth he scorned the world that smiled upon him. He trampled on the flowers of the world and of his own body as if they were already withered. He desired to suffer the hardships of the world for the sake of God rather than to make merry in it for the moment. What could be more like the faith of Moses, which the apostle praises in the words: **"By faith Moses, when he was grown up, denied himself to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter, rather choosing to be afflicted with the people of God than to have the pleasure of sin for a time."**

² Liturgical Sermons of Gueric of Igny. vol. 2, Cistercian Fathers Series. Cistercian Publications. Spencer, MA. 1971. p. 24f.

And what could be holier than the meekness of our Father? He even refused to be provoked by the spite of those who were plotting to kill him, offering poison instead of wine. Moses indeed, so the Scripture tells us, was a man exceedingly meek, above all that dwelt upon the earth. But does it deny that his spirit was ever provoked? Does it not tell us that he was not only annoyed but terribly enraged against all who stood in his path? As for the gentleness of our teacher, I remember reading that it was remarkable not only toward those who spoke against him, but also toward those who tried to do him harm. Of his wrath I have no recollection. It must not however be considered prejudicial to the praise of holy meekness in either him or Moses if the just one burns with zeal against sinners, since this is the zeal without which meekness would sink to the level of tepidity or timidity. "Brethren, have peace among you," commands the Master, so meek and peace-loving. But before this he gives an admonition: "Have salt in you." For he realized without a doubt that the meekness of peace is the nurse of vice unless a demanding zeal first sprinkles it with searing salt, just as warm weather causes meat to decay unless it is salted. Therefore have peace among you, but a peace that is seasoned with the salt of wisdom. Seek after meekness, but a meekness that burns with faith.

07/12/17

**A Reading about Scripture and Spiritual Wisdom,
from the writings of Maximus the Confessor.**³

So long as we see the Word of God take flesh in the letter of Holy Writ in a variety of figures we have not yet spiritually seen the incorporeal and simple and singular and only Father as in the incorporeal and simple and singular and only Son. As the Scripture says, *The one who has seen me has seen the Father*, and also, *I am in the Father and the Father is in me* (Jn 14:9, 10). It is, therefore, very necessary for a deep knowledge that we first study the veils of the statements regarding the Word and so behold with the naked mind the pure Word as he exists in himself, who clearly shows the Father in himself, as far as it is possible for us to grasp. Thus it is necessary that the one who seeks after God in a religious way never hold fast to the letter lest he mistakenly understand things said about God for God himself. In this case we unwisely are satisfied with the words of Scripture in place of the Word, and the Word slips out of the mind while we thought by holding on to his garments we could possess the incorporeal Word. In a similar way did the Egyptian woman lay hold not of Joseph but of his clothing, and the people of old remain permanently in the beauty of visible things, mistakenly worshipping the creature instead of the Creator.

The meaning of Holy Writ reveals itself gradually to the more discerning mind in loftier senses when it has put off the complex whole of the words formed in it bodily, as in the sound of a gentle breeze. Through a supreme abandonment of natural activities, such a mind has been able to perceive sense only in a simplicity which reveals the Word, the way that the great Elijah was granted the vision in the cave at Horeb. For Horeb means "newness", which is the virtuous condition in the new spirit of grace. The cave is the hiddenness of spiritual wisdom in which one who enters will mystically experience the knowledge which goes beyond the senses and in which God is found. Therefore, any one who truly seeks God as did the great Elijah will come upon him not only on Horeb, that is, as an ascetic in the practice of the virtues, but also in the cave of Horeb, that is, as a contemplative in the hidden place of wisdom, which can exist only in the habit of the virtues.

³from "Chapters on Knowledge", in "Light from Light", NY 1988, p 97.

7/13/17

HOW THE PROPHETS ELIJAH AND ELISHA FORESHADOW CHRIST IN THEIR MISSIONS,
from Pathways in Scripture by Dom Damasus Winzen⁴

[At Mount Horeb, Elijah] the prophet of divine wrath, the "chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof," was initiated into the secret of God's love. Centuries later we find Moses and Elijah listening again to the "still, small voice of silence" when Christ was glorified on Mount Tabor, "and they spoke of his departure which he was to go through at Jerusalem. The "voice of silence" is the Lamb of God who opened not his mouth when he was crushed for our iniquities. It was the "voice of silence" which rebuked James and John when they suggested that the Lord should send fire from heaven and consume the Samaritans, "even as Elijah did": "The Son of man has not come to destroy human lives, but to save them." The God of Israel shows his superiority over the heathen gods of fertility, animal growth, and sexual love not by destroying his enemies, but by sending his Son to become a sacrifice for their sins. The resurrection and the ascension of the crucified Christ is the final triumph over the powers of nature. The historical mission of the great antagonist of the baals ends, therefore, with his assumption into heaven (2Kgs 2:11).

"When Elijah was sheltered by the whirlwind, Elisha was filled with his spirit" (Sir 48:12) Elijah's spiritual son continued his work. His name, "God has helped," is again an indication of his mission. He is the healer and helper whose numerous miracles foreshadow the good physician who would come and heal the multitude to show that he was the Savior. When the son of the Shunammite had died, Elisha sent Gehazi to put his staff on his dead body, but the boy did not come to life again. So Elisha went himself. He prayed and lay upon the child; he put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands, and the child's flesh grew warm, and he opened his eyes. The whole history of our salvation is depicted in this scene, from the rod of the Old Testament to the incarnation of the Son of God and the sacrament of baptism. With another "symbol" of baptism, a man's corpse being thrown into the prophet's sepulchre and coming to life when he touches Elisha's bones, the story of Elisha ends (2Kgs 13:21).

⁴PATHWAYS IN SCRIPTURE, by Damasus Winzen (Word of Life, 1976) pp. 137-138.

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07.14.17

St. Kateri Tekawitha - "The Lily of the Mohawks" - ¹

St. Kateri was born in 1656 near present-day Auriesville, New York. Her mother, a captured Algonquin, was a Christian, while her father, a Mohawk chief, viewed the new religion with deep suspicion. Both parents died from smallpox when Kateri was four. Her own scarred face showed the marks of the disease, which also darkened her vision, causing her to stumble in the light. As a result her people called her Tekakwitha - "the one who walks groping her way". When a Jesuit missionary arrived in her village in 1674 she requested Baptism. She was given the name Kateri – a Mohawk version of Katherine.

Kateri's conversion caused distress in her community, so much so that her confessor feared for her safety and urged her to flee. Under the cover of darkness she set off from her village by foot and traveled two hundred miles to a Christian mission near Montreal, where on Christmas Day, 1677, she made her First Communion.

Though free to practice her faith, she was still forced to grope her way in a world that supplied no clear models. She resisted the idea of marriage. She proposed founding a convent, an idea that was quickly dismissed. Nevertheless, in 1679 she made a public vow of chastity. She said: "I am not my own; I have given myself to Jesus. He must be my only love." Soon after she fell ill and died on April 17, 1680 at the age of twenty-three. She was beatified in 1980 and canonized in 2012.

¹Give Us Today – July – 2015 – p. 150

THE LIFE OF ST. BONAVENTURE, from Butler's Lives of the Saints⁵

Of the youth of this greatest successor of St Francis of Assisi nothing is known beyond the facts that he was born at Bagnorea, near Viterbo, in the year 1221, the son of John Fidenza and Mary Ritella. He was clothed in the order of Friars Minor and studies at the University of Paris under an Englishman, Alexander of Hales, 'the Unanswerable Doctor'; Bonaventure, who was to become known as the Seraphic Doctor, himself taught theology and Holy Scripture there from 1248 to 1257.

Bonaventure was called by his priestly obligation to labor for the salvation of his neighbor, and to this he devoted himself with enthusiasm. He preached to the people with an energy which kindled a flame in the hearts of those that heard him. While at the University of Paris he produced one of the best-known of his written works, the Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard, which covers the whole field of scholastic theology. The years of his public lecturing at Paris were greatly disturbed, however, by the attack made on the mendicant friars by the other professors at the university. Jealousy of their pastoral and academic success and the standing reproof to worldliness and ease of the friars' lives were in part behind this attempt to get them excluded from the schools. The leader of the secular party was William of Saint-Amour, who made a bitter onslaught on the mendicants in a book called The Perils of the Last Times, and other writings. Bonaventure, who had to suspend lecturing for a time, replied in a treatise on evangelical poverty, named Concerning the Poverty of Christ. The pope, Alexander IV, appointed a commission of cardinals to go into the matter at Anagni, and on their findings ordered Saint-Amour's book to be burnt, vindicated and reinstated the friars, and ordered the offenders to withdraw their attack. A year later, in 1257, St Bonaventure and St Thomas Aquinas received the degree of doctor of theology together.

In 1257 Bonaventure was chosen minister general of the Friars Minor. He was not yet thirty-six years old, and the order was torn by dissensions, some of the friars being for an inflexible severity, others demanding certain mitigation of the rule; between the two extremes were a number of other interpretations. Some of the extreme rigorists, called Spirituals, had even fallen into error and disobedience, and thus given a handle to the friars' opponents in the Paris dispute. The new minister general wrote a letter to his provincials in which he made it clear that he required a disciplined observance of the rule, involving a reformation of the relaxed, but giving no countenance to the excesses of the Spirituals. At Narbonne in 1260, the first of the five general chapters which he held, he produced a set of constitutions on the rule, which were adopted and had a permanent effect on Franciscan life, but they failed to pacify the excessive rigorists. At the request of the friars assembled in this chapter, he undertook to write the life of St Francis, which he compiled with a spirit which shows him to have been filled with the virtues of the founder whose life he wrote. He governed his order for seventeen years and has been justly called its second founder.

⁵BUTLER'S LIVES OF THE SAINTS, Concise Edition edited by M. Walsh (Harper San Francisco, 1991) pp. 216-217.

