

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by St Gregory Palamas [1](#)

*The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but when all were asleep his enemy came and sowed darnel among the wheat.*

Now as the Lord himself explains, the darnel is the offspring of the evil one. They bear his mark because they behave the way he does: they are seeds of his sowing, and his children by adoption. Harvest time will be the end of the world, for although it began long since and continues now through death, only then will all things come to an end.

The reapers are the angels, for they are, and will be especially at that time, the servants of the King of heaven. As Scripture says: *Just as the darnel is collected and burnt in the fire, so it will be at the end of the world. The Son of Man, who is also the Son of the Most High, will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all evildoers and every cause of sin.*

And so the Lord's servants, the angels of God, seeing the darnel in the field, that is, wicked and impious folk living among good people, and that even within the Church, said to the Lord: *Do you wish us to go and gather it up?* In other words, "Shall we kill them, to remove them from the earth? But the Lord's reply was: *No, for fear that in collecting the darnel, you may also uproot the wheat.*

How then would the wheat, the good people. Be uprooted as well if the angels gathered up the darnel, cutting off the wicked by death to separate them from the just? The fact is that many godless sinners who live among people who are upright and devout repent in time and are converted, and by learning new habits of piety and virtue they cease to be darnel and become wheat. And so some wheat would be uprooted in the gathering of the darnel. Moreover, many while living evil lives produce children of good disposition, or they may have other rightly disposed descendants. This is why he who sees everything before it comes into being would not permit the darnel to be uprooted until the appointed time. But he says: *At harvest time I will say to the reapers: "First collect the darnel and bind it in bundles to be burnt, but gather the wheat into my barn."*

Those therefore who wish to be saved from eternal punishment and to inherit the everlasting kingdom of God must not be darnel but wheat. They must avoid saying or doing anything evil or useless, and practice the opposite virtues, thus bringing forth the fruits of repentance. In this way they will become worthy of the heavenly granary; they will be called children of the Father Most High, and as heirs will enter his kingdom rejoicing, resplendent with glory. To this may we all attain through the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with his eternal Father

and the most holy and life-giving Spirit belongs glory now and for endless ages.  
Amen.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY – 1999 – pg 108

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**A reading about the Queen of Sheba=s visit to King Solomon, from a commentary by John of Ford. 1**

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When the Queen of Sheba saw *All the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the ranks of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cupbearers, and his burnt offerings which he offered in the house of the Lord, her breath failed her!*@ (1 Kgs 10.5). And notice, we have greater than the queen of Sheba here, yes, and *Aa greater than Solomon here*@, [Christ himself, the second Solomon]. Moreover, surpassing all the spices which she gave to her Solomon, is the scent of those spices which our Solomon tells us he has handled and weighed and savored for himself. For he says [in the Song of Songs], *AThe fragrance of your oils surpasses all spices*@ (Sg 4.10). And, indeed a throne was prepared for that queen [of Sheba], a throne of judgement, to condemn the apathy of a lukewarm race of men! From the ends of the earth she made her arduous way to seek and marvel at the wisdom which today=s race of half-hearted men hears crying out in the streets and knocking insistently at their doors. But men today scorn wisdom, and drive it away.

And yet, that first Solomon, with all his wisdom, could not satisfy her hunger to the full. He unraveled all problems and explained all mysteries; he opened out in its entirety all that was in his heart (cf. 1 Kgs 10.3); he loaded her with gifts, and enriched her with spices, and displayed everything that he had in his treasuries. But for the mind passionately desirous of true wisdom, however deep it drinks, even until *Aliving water flows from its heart*@ (Jn 7.38), it will still never cease to thirst. In fact, the more it drinks, the greater its thirst! (cf. Sir 24.29). Is there any wonder then if this queen of ours, the true queen of Sheba, that land of incense and spice, after leaving her own country, that is to say, the innermost depths of her own heart, to seek Solomon, and finally after the discomforts of a long journey, much weary panting and painful sighs of her weary soul, earning the grace to find, to look on, to gaze at, to hold and embrace to her heart=s desire, one so much

loved, is it any wonder, it should be said of her that her breath fails. Still less wonder then, for lack of breath her words should fail her too.

From a Homily on Matthew by St. John Chrysostom <sup>1</sup>

The sons of Zebedee press Christ: "Promise that one may sit at your right side and the other at your left". What does he do? He wants to show them that it is not a spiritual gift for which they are asking, and that if they knew what their request involved, they would never dare make it. So he says: "You do not know what you are asking", that is, what a great and splendid thing it is and how much beyond the reach even of heavenly powers. Then he continues: "Can you drink the cup which I must drink and be baptized with the baptism which I must undergo?" He is saying: "You talk of sharing honors and rewards with me, but I must talk of struggle and toil. Now is not the time for rewards or the time for my glory to be revealed. Earthly life is the time for bloodshed, war and danger."

Consider how by his manner of questioning he exhorts and draws them. He does not say: "Can you face being slaughtered? Can you shed your blood?" How does he put his question? "Can you drink the cup?" Then he makes it attractive by adding: "which I must drink", so that the prospect of sharing it with him may make them more eager. He also calls his suffering a baptism, to show that it will effect a great cleansing of the entire world. The disciples answer him: "We can!" Fervor makes them answer promptly, though they do not know what they are saying but still think they will receive what they ask for.

How does Christ reply? "You will indeed drink my cup and be baptized with my baptism". He is really prophesying a great blessing for them, since he is telling them: "You will be found worthy of martyrdom; you will suffer what I suffer and end your life with a violent death, thus sharing all with me. 'But seats at my right and left side are not mine to give; they belong to those for whom the Father has prepared them.' " Thus after lifting their minds to higher goals and preparing them to meet and overcome all that will make them desolate, he sets them straight on their request.

"Then the other ten became angry at the two brothers". See how imperfect they all are: the two who tried to get ahead of the other ten, and the ten who were jealous of the two! But, as I said before, show them to me at a later date in their lives, and you will see that all these impulses and feelings have disappeared. Read how John, the very man who here asks for the first place, will always yield to Peter when it comes to preaching and performing miracles in the Acts of the Apostles. James, for his part, was not to live very much longer; for from the beginning he was inspired by great fervor and, setting aside all purely human goals, rose to such splendid heights that he straightway suffered martyrdom.

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<sup>1</sup> The Liturgy of the Hours – vol. III – Catholic Publishing Co. – New York – 1975 – pg 1551

From a Sermon by St John Damascene, Bishop <sup>1</sup>

Ann was to be the mother of the Virgin Mother of God, and hence nature did not dare to anticipate the flowering of grace. Thus nature remained sterile, until grace produced its fruit. For she who was to be born had to be a first-born daughter, since she would be the mother of the first-born of all creation, *in whom all things are held together*.

Joachim and Ann, how blessed a couple! All creation is indebted to you. For your hands the Creator was offered a gift excelling all other gifts: a chaste mother, who alone was worthy of him.

And so rejoice, Ann, that *you were sterile and have not borne children; break forth into shouts, you who have not given birth*. Rejoice, Joachim, because from your daughter *a child is born for us, a son is given us, whose name is Messenger of great counsel and universal salvation, mighty God*. For this child is God.

Joachim and Ann, how blessed and spotless a couple! You will be known by the fruit you have borne, as the Lord says: “by their fruits you will know them”. The conduct of your life pleased God and was worthy of your daughter. For by the chaste and holy life you led together, you have fashioned a jewel of virginity; she who remained a virgin before, during and after giving birth. She alone for all time would maintain her virginity in mind and soul as well as in body.

Joachim and Ann, how chaste a couple! While safeguarding the chastity prescribed by the law of nature, you achieved with God’s help something which transcends nature in giving the world the Virgin Mother of God as your daughter. While leading a devout and holy life in your human nature, you gave birth to a daughter nobler than the angels, whose queen she now is. Girl of utter beauty and delight, daughter of Adam and mother of God, blessed the loins and blessed the womb from which you come! Blessed the arms that carried you, and blessed your parent’s lips, which you were allowed to cover with chaste kisses, ever maintaining your virginity. *Rejoice in God, all the earth. Sing, exult and sing hymns*. Raise your voice, raise it and be not afraid.

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<sup>1</sup> The Liturgy of the Hours – vol. III – Catholic Publishing Co – New York – 1975 – pg 1556

**A reading about how Solomon lost simplicity of heart; from Damasus Winzen's *Pathways in Scripture*.**

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The house that Solomon had built on Mount Sion did not stand forever. *If you turn aside from following Me, you or your children, and keep not My commands, but go and serve other gods, then I shall cast away from Me the house which I have sanctified for My Name*" (1 Kgs 9.6-7). Solomon turned aside. God had given him a heart large as the sand on the sea shore. Solomon allowed this largeness of heart to turn into [a boundless] love of the world. He was "*a lover of foreign women*" (11.1). He had a thousand of them—thousand being the number symbolic of the perfection of this material universe. They turned away his heart after their gods, "*and his heart was not whole with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father*" (11.4).

[This kind of] largeness of heart destroyed in him the simplicity of heart which is derived from the faith in One God. David who had suffered so much during his life, found in his old age Abisag, the Sunamitess, a "*damsel exceeding beautiful*" (1.4). She slept with the king and served him, but "*the king did not know her*"—the first mysterious dawn of virginal love in the Old Testament. Solomon, on the contrary, never had to suffer. He ruled in glory without knowing the Cross. Therefore earthly love destroyed in him the love of God, and his throne could not be established forever.

When Solomon grew old and "Eros" failed him, his days became dark and cold, filled with the "groaning" of this creation. The "Peaceable One" changed more and more into a tyrant. The glory of his court became an unbearable burden to his people (12.4). Rebellions broke out (11.23ff). The days approached of which the "Preacher" [in the book of Ecclesiastes] says: "*The silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl broken, and the jar is shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken in the pit; the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God Who gave it. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, all is vanity*" (Eccl 12.6-8).

"Eros", the love of the world, killed Solomon, because he had not known "Agape", the love of sacrifice, which alone is stronger than death. Only "Agape" is able to make a heart "large" without destroying its simplicity. This the *crucified* son of David teaches, and St. Paul applies it to our daily

*lives: “This, therefore, I say, brethren, the time is short. It remains that they who have wives, live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they did not mourn, and those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, and those who buy anything as though they did not own it, and those who use this world as though they used it not: for the fashion of this world passes away. I want you to be free from all anxiety” (1 Cor 7.29.32).*



**The rending of the kingdom of David;  
a reading from a sermon by Bl. John Henry Newman.** <sup>1</sup>

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When Solomon had sinned, and the kingdom was rent from him, still holy David's seed was not utterly put away...; part of the kingdom was still left to the descendants of the faithful king. "*I will not rend away **all** the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son,*" Solomon's son, "*for David My servant's sake.*" This one tribe was the tribe of Judah, David's own tribe; to which part of Benjamin was added, as being in the neighborhood. And this kingdom, over which David's line reigned for four hundred years after him, is called the kingdom of Judah.

These were the circumstances under which the division of the kingdom was made. Solomon seems to have allowed himself in tyrannical conduct towards his subjects, as well as in idolatry. ...His oppression of the people was a *sin*; yet, you will observe, the people had no right to complain. They had brought this evil on themselves; they had obstinately courted and struggled after it. They would have "*a king like the nations,*" a despotic king; and now they had one, they were discontented. Samuel had not only earnestly and solemnly protested against this measure, as an offence against their Almighty Governor, but had actually forewarned them of the evils which despotic power would introduce among them. "*He will take your sons and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; he will set them to [plow] his ground and to reap his harvest and to make his instruments of war. He will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, and give them to his servants.*" The warning ends thus: "*And you shall cry out in that day, because of your king which you shall have chosen for yourselves, and the Lord will not hear you in that day.*" (1 Sam 8.11-18). These were Samuel's words beforehand. Now all this had come upon them: as they had sown, so had they reaped. And, as matters stood, their best course would have been contentment, resignation; it was their duty to bear the punishment of their national self-will. But one sin was not enough for them. They proceeded, as men commonly do, to mend (as they considered) their first sin, by a fresh one—they rebelled against their king. "*What portion have we in David?*" they said, "*neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel—now see to your own house, David.*" (1 Kgs 11.16). Ten tribes out of twelve revolted from their king in that day. Here they were quite inexcusable. Even putting it out of the question that they had brought the evil on themselves, still, independently of this, their king's tyranny did not justify their sudden, unhesitating, violent rebellion. He was acting against no engagement or stipulation. Because their king did not do his duty to them, this was no reason they should not do their duty to him. Say that he was cruel and rapacious, still they might have safely trusted the miraculous providence of God, to have restrained the king by His prophets, and to have brought them safely through. This would

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<sup>1</sup>"Jeroboam", in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, pp. 520-521

have been the way of *faith*; but they took the matter into their own hands, and got into further difficulty. And I wish you to observe, that all the evil arose from this original fault, worked out in its consequences through centuries, which was their having a king at all.

**How action and contemplation complement one another in our Christian life;  
a reading from the book *Contemplative Prayer* by Thomas Merton.<sup>1</sup>**

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In the monastic life one could find, according to Bernard, three vocations: That of Lazarus the penitent, that of Martha the active and devoted servant of the monastic household, and that of Mary the contemplative. Mary had chosen (said St Bernard) the best part, and there was no reason for her to envy Martha or leave her contemplation, unasked, to share in the labors of Martha. The portion of Mary is, by nature, preferable to the other two and superior to them. And one feels, reading between the lines of St Bernard, that this had to be said because it was not unknown for Mary to envy Martha. The portion of Mary was not in fact always desired by the majority.

St Bernard himself solves the problem by saying that after all Martha and Mary are sisters and they should dwell together in the same household in peace. They supplement one another. But in actual fact, true monastic perfection consists above all in the union of all three vocations: that of the penitent, the active worker (in the care of souls above all) and the contemplative. But when Bernard speaks of the care of souls he refers to the duty of instructing and guiding other monks, rather than apostolic work outside the cloister. Yet the need for preachers and apostolic workers was acute in the twelfth century.

For St Bernard, the contemplative life is that which is normal for the monk, it is that which he should always desire, always prefer, but the active life necessarily has its claims also. Contemplation should always be desired and preferred. Activity should be accepted, though never sought. In the end the perfection of the monastic life is found in the union of Martha, Mary and Lazarus in one person-usually such a person will be an abbot, like Bernard himself.

It must not, of course, be imagined that either St Gregory or St Bernard is always concerned with contemplation from this problematical viewpoint. Because of the large amount of activity in their own lives they do, indeed, give ardent expression to their longing for the silence of contemplative prayer. Yet they always admit that contemplation is not unknown to them in their life of apostolic labor: indeed we sense that their contemplative experience is somehow deeper and richer precisely because of the mystical graces given to them to help them to preach to others.

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<sup>1</sup> New York: Image Books, 1971, pp. 54-55.