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07.13.14

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by St. Gregory the Great ¹

Dearly beloved, the reading from the holy gospel about the sower requires no explanation, but only a word of warning. In fact the explanation has been given by Truth himself, and it cannot be disputed by a frail human being. However there is one point in our Lord's exposition which you ought to weigh well. It is this. If I told you that the seed represented the word, the field the world, the birds the demons, and the thorns riches, you would perhaps be in two minds as to whether to believe me. Therefore the Lord himself deigned to explain what he had said, so that you would know that a hidden meaning is to be sought also in those passages which he did not wish to interpret himself.

Would anyone have believed me if I had said that thorns stood for riches? After all, thorns are piercing and riches pleasurable. And yet riches are thorns because thoughts of them pierce the mind and torture it. When finally they lure a person into sin, it is as though they were drawing blood from the wound they have inflicted.

According to another evangelist, the Lord spoke in this parable not simply of riches but of deceptive riches, and with good reason. Riches are deceptive because they cannot stay with us for long; they are deceptive because they are incapable of relieving our spiritual poverty. The only true riches are those that make us rich in virtue. Therefore, if you want to be rich, beloved, love true riches. If you aspire to the heights of real honor, strive to reach the kingdom of heaven. If you value rank and renown, hasten to be enrolled in the heavenly court of the angels.

Store up in your minds the Lord's words which you receive through your ears, for the word of the Lord is the nourishment of the mind. When his word is heard but not stored away in the memory, it is like food which has been eaten and then rejected by an upset stomach. A person's life is despaired of if he cannot retain his food; so if you receive the food of holy exhortations, but fail to store in your memory those words of life which nurture righteousness, you have good reason to fear the danger of everlasting death.

Be careful, then, that the word you have received through your ears remains in your heart. Be careful that the seed does not fall along the path, for fear that the evil spirit may come and take it from your memory. Be careful that the seed is not received in stony ground, so that it produces a harvest of good works without the roots of perseverance. Many people are pleased with what they hear and resolve to undertake some good work, but as soon as difficulties begin to arise and hinder them they leave the work unfinished. The stony ground lacked the necessary moisture for the sprouting seed to yield the fruit of perseverance.

Good earth, on the other hand. Brings forth fruit by patience. The reason for this is that nothing we do is good unless we also bear with equanimity the injuries done to us by our neighbors. In fact, the more we progress, the more hardships we shall have to endure in this world; for when our love for this present world dies, its sufferings increase. This is why we see many people doing good works and at the same time struggling under a heavy burden of afflictions. They now shun earthly desires, and yet they are tormented by greater sufferings. But, as the Lord said, they bring forth fruit by patience, because since they humbly endure misfortunes, they are welcomed when these are over into a place of rest in heaven.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY -1999 – pg 106

HOW THE PROPHETS ELIJAH AND ELISHA FORESHADOW CHRIST IN THEIR MISSIONS,
from Pathways in Scripture by Dom Damasus Winzen¹

[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).

¹PATHWAYS IN SCRIPTURE, by Damasus Winzen (Word of Life, 1976) pp. 137-138.

07SN1801
07.18.2017

A Reading about St Camillus de Lellis from Butler=s Lives of Saints 1

Camillus de Lellis was born in 1550 at Bocchianico in the Abruzzi. When he was seventeen he went off with his father to fight with the Venetians against the Turks. But soon he contracted a painful and repulsive disease in his leg that was to afflict him for the rest of his life. In 1571 he was admitted to the San Giacomo hospital for incurables at Rome, as a patient and servant. After nine months he was dismissed, for his quarrelsomeness among other things. He returned to active service in the Turkish war. Though Camillus habitually referred to himself as a great sinner, his worst disorder was an addiction to gambling that continually reduced him to want and shame. In the autumn of 1574 he gambled away his savings, his arms, everything down to his shirt, which was stripped off his back in the streets of Naples.

The indigence to which he had reduced himself, and the memory of a vow he had made in a fit of remorse to join the Franciscans, caused him to accept work as a laborer in the new Capuchin buildings at Manfredonia, and there a moving exhortation which the guardian of the friars gave him one day, completed his conversion. Pondering on it as he rode on his business, he at length fell on his knees, and with tears deplored his past life, and cried to Heaven for mercy. This happened on Candlemas day in 1575, the 25th of his age. From that time he never departed from his penitential course. He entered the novitiate of the Capuchins, but could not make profession because of the disease in his leg. He therefore returned to the hospital of San Giacomo and devoted himself to the service of the sick. The administrators of the hospital witnessed his charity and ability, and later appointed him superintendent of the hospital.

In those days the spiritual and physical conditions in the hospital were very deplorable, due to the necessity of employing any staff that could be obtained, even criminals. Camillus, grieving to see the slackness of the hired help in attending the sick, formed a project of forming a group of attendants who desired to devote themselves to this care out of a motive of charity. He found several persons so disposed, but met with great obstacles in carrying out his plan, particularly from the jealousy and suspicion that reformers frequently meet. To make himself more useful in spiritually assisting the sick, he proceeded, with the approval of his confessor, St. Philip Neri, to receive Holy Orders. Camillus decided to sever connections with San Giacomo and to start on his own. With two companions he laid the foundations of his congregation. They went every day to the hospital of the Holy Ghost, where they served the sick with such affection and diligence that it was obvious to all who saw them that they considered Christ Himself as lying sick or wounded in His members. Eventually he determined that the members of his congregation should bind themselves to serve persons infected with the plague, prisoners and those who lay dying in private houses. Later, in 1595 and 1601, some of his religious were sent with the troops fighting in Hungary and Croatia, thus forming the first recorded Amilitary field ambulance@.

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In 1588 Camillus was invited to Naples, and with twelve companions founded there a new house. They took the name of the Ministers of the Sick. Certain galleys having the plague were forbidden to enter the harbor, so the Ministers went on board and attended them. St. Camillus showed a similar charity in Rome when a pestilential fever swept off great numbers, and again when that city was visited by a violent famine. In 1591 Pope Gregory XIV erected this congregation into a religious order for perpetually serving the sick.

Camillus was afflicted by many illnesses himself: the disease in his leg for forty-six years, a rupture for thirty-eight years, two sores in the sole of his foot, which gave him great pain. Yet under these infirmities, he would not allow anyone to wait on him, but sent all his brethren to serve others. When he was not able to stand, he would creep out of his bed, even at night, and crawl from one patient to another to see if they wanted anything.

Camillus saw the foundation of fifteen houses of his brothers and eight hospitals. He laid down the canonical leadership of his order in 1607. But he assisted at the general chapter in Rome in 1613, and after it, with the new superior general, visited the houses, giving them his last exhortations. At Genoa he was extremely ill, but he recovered so as to be able to finish the visitation of his hospitals. He expired on July 14, 1614, being sixty-four years old. St. Camillus de Lellis was canonized in 1746, and was, with St. John of God, declared patron of the sick by Pope Leo XIII, and of nurses and nursing associations by Pope Pius XI.

The mission of Solomon: a reading from a book by Adrienne von Speyr. ¹

Solomon=s mission is one of the Spirit; as such, it correlates with David=s mission, which was oriented toward [the second Person of the triune God,] the Son. Y Solomon requests from God the very thing that God is most happy to give: the godly.Y This leaves [God] in the position of being able to grant precisely that which he most enjoys giving: the Spirit. Y Both [David and Solomon,] father and son, have the task of praying, of singing, of recognizing the divine and transmitting it to later generations in a form that they themselves have given it. Through Solomon=s saying and songs, posterity is to gain an insight into how fully he was recognized by the Spirit, how often what he himself recognized was in the Spirit, how the Spirit passed through him and enabled him to comprehend things in a way far exceeding the understanding proper to the Old Covenant.

Solomon=s mission, which consists in the fact that he is seized by the Spirit and discloses this Spirit to his people, to his friends and enemies, by simultaneously capturing him in wordsCthat mission is rounded off through the building of the temple. What has been captured is then transferred beyond words into the finality of stone, so that the whole people is seized by a new fear of God, by respect and love; undergoes conversion in a new way; and is enabled to rejoice, through a tangible presence, in the splendor of God=s Word, in the precision of his directives, in the beauty of his abode. These formations in word and stone are meant to lend God=s Spirit a visibility for which the Spirit himself strives but which is grasped by Solomon and actualized in a universally valid way.

When he pleads for understanding and insight, he knows that God will fulfill his request. But in just what measure he does not know, and he must learn through his own experience that God=s measure is one of superabundance. He receives what he wishes: and this accords with his capturing of the Spirit. But beyond that, he receives the Spirit=s quality of being ever greater: and this accords with the astonishment that overcomes him when he sees the concrete expressions of his mind and his wisdom. This twofold image of the Spirit in him, namely, as a capturing and as an astonishment, accords with his whole mission. Moreover, in the words he utters, in the sayings and songs he composes, in the temple he erects, his spirit comes into contact with something supremely intimate, which overpowers him. The image of whatever he has grasped is always immediately surpassed by the image of what is no longer graspable; there is the encounter here of God with man, of the supernatural with the natural, and ultimately of the ever greater God with Solomon=s spirit, which wishes to grow greater

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1 *The Mission of the Prophets*, San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996, pp. 60ff.

GN-VOC08

07.20.17

Religious Monastic Profession - from a book by Fr Karl Rahner [1](#)

A monk in religious life vows poverty, chastity and obedience. The means and the manner of execution for his imposed dedication of a whole life to God should be in poverty, chastity and obedience. The formula of the Benedictine profession illustrates the content of this monastic life in a slightly different but perhaps even more striking way: stability, conversion of manners, obedience.

Indeed since we must not remove ourselves to infinite distances, since the Word became flesh, then the radical expressiveness of this life cannot be kept exclusively in the secret innermost recesses of the heart. It becomes tangible and visible, hard and clear, a deed to be performed in sober everyday life. This is why the monk chooses a firm point on this earth. He settles down and vows stability, not in order to root his being into this earth, but to overcome the roving arbitrariness of mood, through which a living man obtains a location outside himself to surmount himself in God. Here I am because God places me here; here I stay so that I may not desert God. I have chosen this measurable circle because this finiteness includes the infinite God.

The monk takes the vow to observe the *conversion of manners*, the monastic way of life as it is practiced in this circle in constantly new conversion to God and His calling, so that the surrender of his being to God may be transmuted from an idea into a true reality. One can only live one's life once. And one can fail one's life. Hence one cannot experiment with this fallible life according to the promptings of one's mood or one's shortsightedness. Therefore in the seriousness of the responsibility which

knows that what is at stake is either eternal life or permanent death, the monk takes upon himself the old and wise, the tested form of life – one sanctified through generations. In its wise moderation it leaves sufficient room for the uniqueness of the individual. But in the last analysis, this is not what concerns the monk. What is, and remains, decisive for him is this: the wisdom of God, the experience of the Church and the testing through the long line of generations, which he joins as a noble man of the spirit, give him the certainty that he is not going astray when he finally takes up this way of life. And precisely because life is too serious to experiment with, because it is a one-time occurrence and even in the clearest and most classical form harbors enough dangers and sinister adventures, the monk vows to observe the prescribed form of monastic life, the *conversatio morum*, in the steadfastness of the chosen site outside himself.

But it is precisely this sanctified tradition of the established way of life which creates the holy restlessness of constant new conversion. For this way of life, by its strict injunction, sees to it that the spirit does not die, that the fire is not extinguished and that the blessed restlessness for God is not lulled to sleep, restlessness for God whom one finds only when one seeks Him, whom one loses when one thinks one has found Him forever. The experience of almost 2000 years show that the *conversatio morum* that is vowed here according to the Rule of St Benedict is a royal road along which one really can race toward the infinite spaces of God with a wide open heart without tiring and without giving up the race before it is crowned with the laurel wreath of eternal life.

A reading about the Temple built by King Solomon, from *Pathways in Scripture* by Dom Damasus Winzen. ¹

The forty years of Solomon's reign are described in the first eleven chapters of the First Book of Kings. They constitute the most glorious period of Jewish history. The weakness of Egypt and Assyria, the two great powers on which the fate of Israel depended, gave Solomon an opportunity to reorganize the administration of his country, to fortify the towns, to set up industries and promote trade with foreign countries, and to crown his work with the building and the dedication of the Temple. [The Scriptures characterize the time in this way:] "*And Judah and Israel dwelt without any fear, everyone under his vine, and under his fig tree, from Dan to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon*" (1 Kgs 4.25).

...The crown of Solomon's works is the *temple*, the beautiful symbol of a world restored to its original splendor as God's "resting place". A Jewish proverb says: "The country of Israel is in the heart of the earth. Jerusalem is in the heart of Israel. The temple is in the heart of Jerusalem. The ark of the Covenant is in the heart of the temple, and next to the ark is the cornerstone of the world." The "cornerstone" is Christ. The temple is indeed a symbol and a promise that all creation will be restored under Christ as the head. The gold and silver of Arabia, the cedars of Lebanon, the wisdom of Hiram, king of Tyre, practically the whole world contributed to the building. The walls and doors of the temple were covered with reliefs of fruit trees and cherubim, reminiscent of the garden of Eden, which is itself a symbol of the world in peace with its Maker. The heart of the temple, however, was a windowless room in cubic form, without any image. It is the "Holy of Holies," a symbol of the innermost sanctuary of heaven where God dwells in darkness, as Solomon said at the dedication of the temple: "*The Lord established the sun in the heavens, but He Himself said that He would dwell in thick darkness*" (8.12).

The windowless darkness of the Holy of Holies shows that God is the center of the universe but *not* a part of it. The Hebrew word for "Holy of Holies"—

¹ "The third and Fourth Books of Kings" in *Pathways in Holy Scripture*, Ann Arbor, MI: Word of Life, 1976, pp.

debir—could be related to [the Hebrew word for “word”], *dabar*, and has therefore been translated by St. Jerome with “*oraculum*—oracle,” a place where the People listen to God and where God listens to His People. The only “object” in the Holy of Holies is the ark containing the Law, surmounted by the two Cherubim facing each other and forming, with their outspread wings, the “mercy-seat,” ready to receive the Divine Presence (8.9). Solomon’s temple is not, like the temples of the heathen gods, a place for the God of Israel to live in. At the dedication Solomon prays: “*If heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee, how much less this house which I have built. But have regard to the prayer of thy servant and to his supplications, O Lord my God ... that Thy eyes may be open upon this house day and night, upon the house of which Thou hast said: ‘My name shall be there’*” (8.27-29). Not an image but the “Name” of God is present in Solomon’s temple, as long as His Word is kept in obedience to the Law and His Name is invoked in prayer. It was “fulfilled,” therefore, when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

A reading about the vigilant watch of Mary Magdalen at the tomb of Jesus, from a sermon by Blessed Gueric of Igny. 1

Brethren, this is the day which the Lord has made, let us exult and rejoice in it. Let us exult in the hope it brings, that we may see and rejoice in its light. Abraham exulted that he might see the day of Christ and by this token he saw and rejoiced.

You too, if you keep watch daily at the doors of wisdom, steadfast at its threshold, if you stay awake through the night with Magdalen at the entrance of his tomb, if I am not mistaken you will experience with Mary how true are the words we read of the Wisdom which is Christ: *AShe is easily seen by those who love her and she is found by those who seek her. She anticipates those who desire her and shows herself to them first. He who, as soon as it is light, keeps watch for her will not have to toil, for he will find her seated at his doors.*@ (Wis 6.13ff.) So did Christ, Wisdom himself, promise in the words: *I love those who love me, and they who from early morning keep watch for me will find me.*@ (Prov 8.17) Mary found Jesus in the flesh. For this she was keeping watch. Over his tomb she had come to mount guard while it was still dark. You, who no longer ought to know Jesus according to the flesh but according to the spirit, will be able to find him spiritually if you seek him with a [similar] desire, if he finds you likewise vigilant in prayer. Say then to the Lord Jesus with the desire and the affection of Mary: *AMy soul has longed for you during the night, my spirit too, deep within me; from early morning I will keep watch for you*@ (Isa 26.9). Say with the voice and the mind of the Psalmist: *AGod, my God, for you as loon as it is light I keep watch, my soul is athirst for you*@ (Ps 62.2). And see if it is not your lot to sing with him: *AWe have been filled early in the morning with your mercy, we have exulted and been delighted*@ (Ps 89.14).

Keep watch then, brethren, intent in prayer; keep watch and carefully guard your actions; especially since the morning of that day which has no sunset has already shone upon us. For already eternal light has come back to us from the nether regions, more serene and more pleasing, and the morning has given its welcome to the newly restored Sun. Indeed it is time now for us to arise from sleep; the night has passed away, while the day has drawn near. Keep watch, I say, that the morning light may rise for you, that is Christ, whose coming forth has been made ready like the dawn, ready to renew often the mystery of the morning of his resurrection in those who keep watch for him. Then you will sing with jubilant heart: *AGod the Lord has shone upon us. This is the day which the Lord has made; let us exult and rejoice in it*@ (Ps 117.27, 24). For then he will give you a glimpse of the light which he has hidden in his hands, telling his friend that it is his possession and he can attain to it.