

St. Bernard as master of mystical and spousal love in Christ: a reading from a letter of Pope John Paul II to the Cistercian Abbots General.

...The age in which St Bernard lived saw the beginnings of a new stage of intellectual life in Europe. In fact, while the study of man himself increased, there began an intellectual movement which later on was called humanism and which even in our own times continues with vigor. The Doctor of Clairvaux who knew the aspirations and anxieties of his age, understood thoroughly this new passion for man and did not simply reject it nor condemn it.

On the contrary, he affirmed that man, created according to the image and likeness of God, is an “exalted creature,” and because of this—a capacity to share in the very divine grandeur itself, but at the same time, this capacity also shows him to be miserable, poor, weak and insignificant. Christ saved the whole person in order to bring into eternal life not only his soul but also his body.

Thus, affirming openly the dignity of the human condition, St Bernard exclaimed: “How admirable is the goodness of God seeking man! How great, also, the dignity of man thus found!” And thus, from the consideration of man’s dignity which is revealed by creation and redemption, he showed that there arose, as from a double spring, a true Christian humanism. In fact, in affirming that the image of God remains in us even after sin, and that God became man in order to save man,; St Bernard in theological doctrine contemplates at the same time the dignity and misery of man and in this way he avoids the danger of false “anthropocentrism.”

The christology of St Bernard offers an adequate foundation to the Christian humanism when he teaches with a certain forcefulness that the whole person was taken up in Christ. Actually, while we are living on this earth, in our human condition, we have access to God only through the law of the Incarnation. This “excellent doctor,” when he affirms that he does not yet see Christ in a form equal to the Father because he does not contemplate “God with God,” nevertheless added: “at least as a man, I present Him as man to men.” These words contain an understanding of the true sense of the word “humanism”: the recognition of the limitations as well as the exalted capacity and dignity of man who was created in Paradise, united in friendship with God and was called through the goodness of God to a much more intimate union which surpasses all human concepts and all expectations.

...In the spiritual school of St Bernard, the earthly life of Jesus is never found separated from the Eternal Word Incarnate; [it is both] present with the Father in glory and present among us by grace as the Spouse of the Church and of the soul. [It is he] who calls and leads his bride to the most intimate union [with him in the Father]. It is with reason then that the Abbot of Clairvaux was called Master of mystical and spousal love in Christ.

A Reading on St Pius X by Leonard Von Matt.¹

Pius X, the canonized Pope, holds a special place in the hearts of the faithful. But this devotion of the faithful did not begin only at his canonization, when the Church publicly proclaimed the holiness of his life: it began from the moment when he ascended the papal throne. At once there grew up an understanding between the Shepherd and his flock. The first to understand him were the simple, humble people, who recognized him for what he was.

...The obvious quality which led to his canonization was his outstanding holiness. With Pius X, sanctity seemed to be the most natural thing in the world. It quietly enlivened all that he said or did. Yet it would seem that Giuseppe Sarto's natural temperament inclined to a certain violence, easily inflamed, and no one will ever know how much struggle it cost him to achieve that gentleness and unruffled goodness for which he was so renowned. We can follow him on the narrow path which he set himself as church-student, curate, parish-priest, bishop, cardinal and Pope; but the moment of his vocation to the priesthood and the beginning of his heroic sanctity are secrets known to God alone. A certain holiness seems to have been his from the beginning: his striving after a virtuous life seems never to have been interrupted, his charity never diminished. But it was when he began what he called the Ascent of Mount Calvary, when he became Pope, that his great sanctity became evident. It was his conscientiousness that turned the enormous responsibility of the office into a crucifixion: he gave himself unstintingly to the service of the Church, and spent himself without reserve for the love of God and everyone. His sanctity lay in this total dedication: it was thus an inner and in a great measure a hidden sanctity: there were no spectacular penances, no remarkable practices beyond those of a normal, good Christian. It might almost be said that Pius X became a saint in spite of himself by sanctifying himself and his nature and by not resisting God's grace that drew him on.

¹St Pius X, Leonard Von Matt. Henry Regnery Co. 1955, p.85,86

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ON THE QUEENSHIP OF MARY, from a Sermon by St Bernard¹

It is the time for all flesh to speak when the Mother of the Incarnate Word is taken up into heaven, nor ought human mortality cease to give praise when the nature of man is in the Virgin exalted above the immortal spirits. But neither does our devotion allow us to be silent, nor can our sterile thought conceive, nor our unlearned speech give forth, anything worthy concerning her glory. Hence it is that those princes of the heavenly court in the consideration of such an unheard-of thing cry out with admiration: "Who is she who ascends from the desert abounding with delights?"

As though they said more manifestly: "How great is she, or whence is she, ascending indeed from the desert, so abounding in delights?" For delights are not found equal in us whom the impetus of the river rejoices in the City of the Lord, who are given to drink by the countenance of your glory from the torrent of pleasure. Who is she who ascends from under the sun, where there is nothing but suffering and sadness and affliction of spirit, abounding in spiritual delights? Why should I not call delights the glory of virginity with the gift of fecundity, and ensign of humility distilling the honeycomb of charity, the bowels of mercy, the plenitude of grace, the prerogative of a singular glory?

Ascending, therefore, from the desert the Queen of the world, as the Church sings, was made beautiful even to the holy angels and sweet in her delights. But let them cease to wonder at the delights of this desert, for the Lord has given goodness and our earth has yielded its fruit. Why do they wonder that Mary ascends from the desert of the earth abounding with delights? Let them wonder rather at Christ, being poor, descending from the plenitude of the heavenly Kingdom, for it seems by far a greater miracle that the Son of God deigned to be made a little less than the angels than that the Mother of God should be exalted above the angels. Indeed, his humiliation has been made our exaltation; his

miseries are the delights of the world. Finally, being rich, he was made poor on account of us, that he might enrich us by his poverty.

LITURGICAL READINGS, Compiled for the Office of the Brothers of St Meinrad's (St Meinrad IN 1943) p. 446.

From the writings of St. Rose of Lima ²

Our Lord and Savior lifted up his voice and said with incomparable majesty: ALet all know that grace comes after tribulation. Let them know that without the burden of afflictions it is impossible to reach the height of grace. Let them know that the gifts of grace increase as the struggles increase. Let them take care not to stray or be deceived. This is the only true stairway to paradise, and without the cross they can find no road to climb to heaven.

When I heard these words, a strong force came upon me and seemed to place me in the middle of a street, so that I might say in a loud voice to people of every age, sex and status: AHear, O people; hear, O nations. I am warning you about the commandment of Christ by using words that came from his own lips: We cannot obtain grace unless we suffer afflictions. We must heap trouble upon trouble to attain a deep participation in the divine nature, the glory of the children of God and perfect happiness of soul.@

That same force strongly urged me to proclaim the beauty of divine grace. It pressed me so that my breath came slow and forced me to sweat and pant. I felt as if my soul could no longer be kept in the prison of the body, but that it had burst its chains and was free and alone and was going very swiftly through the whole world saying: AIf only mortals would learn how great it is to possess divine grace, how beautiful, how noble, how precious. How many riches it hides within itself, how many joys and delights! Without doubt they would devote all their care and concern to winning for themselves pains and afflictions. All people throughout the world would seek trouble, infirmities and torments, instead of good fortune, in order to attain the unfathomable treasure of grace. This is the reward and the final gain of patience. No one would complain about his cross or about troubles that may happen to him, if he would come to know the scales on which they are weighed when they are distributed to souls.

² The Liturgy of the Hours, vol. iv, pg. 1342, Catholic Book Publishing Co., New York, 1975

A reading about St. Bartholomew's quiet life, from a sermon by Bl. John Henry Newman. ¹

When Philip told him that he had found the long-expected Messiah of whom Moses wrote, Nathanael (that is, Bartholomew) at first doubted. He was well read in the Scriptures, and knew that the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem, whereas Jesus dwelt at Nazareth, which Nathanael supposed in consequence to be the place of his birth--and he knew of no particular promises attached to that city, which was a place of evil report, and he thought no good could come out of it. Philip told him to come and see; and he went to see, as a humble single-minded man, sincerely desirous to get at the truth. In consequence, he was vouchsafed an interview with our Savior, and was converted.

Now from what occurred in this interview, we gain some insight into St Bartholomew's character. Our Lord said of him, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" and it appears, moreover, as if, before Philip called him to come to Christ, he was engaged in meditation or prayer, in the privacy which a fig-tree's shade afforded him. And this, it seems, was the life of one who was destined to act the busy part of an apostle; quietness without, guilelessness within. This was the tranquil preparation for great dangers and sufferings! We see who make the most heroic Christians, and are the most honored by Christ!

An even, unvaried life is the lot of most people, in spite of occasional troubles or other accidents; and we are apt to despise it, and to get tired of it, and to long to see the world--or, at all events, we think such a life affords no great opportunity for religious obedience. To rise up, and go through the same duties, and then to rest again, day after day--to pass week after week, beginning with God's service on Sunday, and then to our worldly tasks--so to continue till year follows year, and we gradually get old--an unvaried life like this is apt to seem unprofitable to us when we dwell upon the thought of it. Many indeed there are, who do not think at all--but live in their round of employments, without care about God and religion, driven on by the natural course of things in a dull irrational way like the beasts that perish.

But when we begin to feel we have a soul, and work to do, and a reward to be gained, greater or less, according as we improve the talents committed to us, then we are naturally tempted to be anxious from our very wish to be saved, and we say, "What must I do to please God?" And sometimes we are led to think we ought to be useful on a large scale, and go out of our line of life, that we may be doing something worth doing, as we consider it.

Here we have the history of St Bartholomew and the other apostles to recall us to ourselves, and to assure us that we need not give up our usual manner of life, in order to serve God; that the most humble and quietest station is acceptable to him, if improved duly--nay, affords means for maturing the highest Christian character, even that of an

apostle. Bartholomew read the Scriptures and prayed to God; and thus was trained at length to give up his life for Christ, when he demanded it.

1*Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. 2, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, pp 437-438.

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08.25.17

The Rebuilding of the Temple – Commentary of St. Bede ¹

The letter that Tattenai writes to Darius is very different from the one Rehum and Shimsahi wrote to Artaxerxes. That letter was filled with accusation of the people of Jerusalem; this one with praise not only of the people but also of almighty God. Indeed it begins as follows: “To Darius the king, all peace. Let it be known to the king that we went to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God, which was built with unfinished stone, and the timbers are being laid in the walls; and the work is being carried out with diligence and is making rapid progress in their hands. Yet by 'unfinished stone' we should understand new stone, which they themselves discovered unhewn but, by shaping it up, made it suitable for the building of the Lord's house. For even though some of the old stones remained, which as the lamenting Jeremiah shows, were scattered at the end of every street, yet no one can doubt that new stones also had to be shaped to complete the work of the temple. The mystery of this matter is undoubtedly plain; since we have seen that God's church is built not only from those who by repenting regain their senses and return to the life of holiness that they have previously squandered by sinning, but also from those who have recently been called to the faith, arranged by the instruction of teachers as though with the measuring rod of builders and so inserted into the edifice of the Lord's house in a place appropriate for themselves. Yet the fact that the temple was built from both old and new stones, that is, both from stones that had been finished long previously and from those that had remained unfinished for longer, can also be interpreted as corresponding to the fact that the one church of Christ is assembled from both peoples, namely, Jews and Gentiles – the Jews who long since had been as though finished through knowledge and mindfulness of God's law, the Gentiles who, being enslaved in idolatry, had not by any industry of spiritual architects or any cultivation of piety divested themselves of the ugliness of a rustic and earthly mind.

¹Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture – vol. V – pg 315

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08.26.17

The Temple is Rebuilt and is Dedicated – Commentary by St. Bede [1](#)

Haggai says: “From this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day when the foundations of the Lord's temple were laid, store it in your heart. Is the seed as yet to sprout? Or have the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree not blossomed? From this day on I will bless you.” What happened in the event shows that the prediction was correct. But all the prophets, indeed all the writers of sacred Scripture, promise good things for the builders of the holy church (i.e. teachers) if they do not tire from adversities and cease from their holy labor. For divine help will be present, by which the Lord's house that has been begun may be brought to completion in the heart of their listeners by their believing and living well; and to the architects themselves will come the blessing of crops, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive (i.e. more abundance of spiritual gifts) which without doubt will be copiously granted to us by the Lord the more diligently we have endeavored to establish the abode of his glory either in ourselves or in the hearts of our neighbors.

But since the building of the house after the captivity, as has often been said, designates the correction of those who through sin have wandered from the path of truth that they had only just set out on, it is fitting that when the temple has been restored in this way it is dedicated by the priests and Levites and the rest of the descendants of the exiles with joy. For when those who have sinned are set straight, “there is great joy” in heaven “in the presence of the angels of God”; there is joy also for the teachers who have labored for the salvation of those who go astray, and there is joy for all those who have migrated in their thoughts and deeds from Babylon (i.e. from the confusion of sinners) to the citadel of the virtues, which is truly the promised land. So both the priests and the Levites and all the people rejoice in the dedication of the Lord's restored house because all the orders of the holy church must share in the rejoicing when those who have sinned are reconciled by repenting. They offer victims for this dedication when they bring vows of thanks to God for the efforts of sinners to lead a holy life and when many, observing their life dedicated to God, are themselves spurred on to works of greater virtue.