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

Peter was to be entrusted with the keys of the Church, or rather, he was entrusted with the keys of heaven; to him would be committed the whole people of God. The Lord told him: *Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you lose on earth will be loosed in heaven.* Now Peter was inclined to be severe, so if he had been impeccable what forbearance would he have shown toward those he instructed? His falling into sin was thus a providential grace to teach him from experience to deal kindly with others.

Just think who it was whom God permitted to fall into sin – Peter himself, the head of the apostles, the firm foundation, the unbreakable rock, the most important member of the Church, the safe harbor, the strong tower; Peter who had said to Christ, *Even if I have to die with you I will never deny you*; Peter, who by divine revelation had confessed the truth: *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

The gospel relates that on the night that Christ was betrayed Peter went indoors and was standing by the fire warming himself when a girl accosted him: *You too were with that man yesterday*, she said. But Peter answered: *I do not know the man.*

Just now you said: *Even if I have to die with you*, and now you deny him and say: *I do not know the man.* Oh Peter, is this what you promised? You were not tortured or scourged; at the words of a mere slip of a girl you took refuge in denial!

Again the girl said to him: *You too were with that man yesterday.* Again he answered: *I have no idea what man you mean.*

Who was it that spoke to you, causing you to make this denial? Not some important person but a woman, a doorkeeper, an outcast, a slave, someone of no account whatever. She spoke to you and you answered with a denial. What a strange thing – a girl, a prostitute, accosted Peter himself and disturbed his faith! Peter, the pillar, the

rampart, could not bear the threat of a girl! She had but to speak and the pillar swayed, the rampart itself was shaken!

A third time she repeated: *You too were with that man yesterday*, but a third time he denied it. Finally Jesus looked at him, reminding him of his previous assertion. Peter understood, repented of his sin, and began to weep. Mercifully, however, Jesus forgave him his sin, because he knew that Peter, being a man, was subject to human frailty.

Now, as I said before, the reason God's plan permitted Peter to sin was because he was to be entrusted with the whole people of God, and sinlessness added to his severity might have made him unforgiving toward his brothers and sisters. He fell into sin so that remembering his own fault and the Lord's forgiveness, he might also forgive others out of love for them. This was God's providential dispensation. He to whom the Church was to be entrusted, he, the pillar of the churches, the harbor of faith, was allowed to sin; Peter, the teacher of the world, was permitted to sin, so that having been forgiven himself he would be merciful to others.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY 1999 – pg 118

8/28/17

OUR BEING MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD, from a Treatise of St Augustine¹

Now this trinity of the mind is the image of God, not because the mind remembers, understands, and loves itself, but because it also has the power to remember, understand, and love its Maker. And in doing this it attains wisdom. If it does not do this, the memory, understanding and love of itself is no more than an act of folly. Therefore, let the mind remember its God, to whose image it was made, let it understand and love Him.

In brief, let it worship the uncreated God who created it with the capacity for himself, and in whom it can be made partaker. Hence it is written: "Behold, the worship of God is wisdom"(Jb 28:28). By participating in that supreme Light, wisdom will belong to the mind not by its own light, and it will reign in bliss only where the eternal Light is. The wisdom is so called human wisdom as to be also that of God. If wisdom were only human it would be vain, for only God's wisdom is true wisdom. Yet when we call it God's wisdom, we do not mean the wisdom by which God is wise: He is not wise by partaking in himself as the mind is wise by partaking in God. It is more like speaking of the justice of God not only to mean that God is just but to mean the justice he gives to us when he "justifies the ungodly": to which the Apostle alludes when speaking to those who "being ignorant of God's justice, and wanting to establish their own justice, were not subject to the justice of God"(Rom 4:5). In this way we might speak of those who, ignorant of the wisdom of God and wanting to establish their own, were not subject to the wisdom of God.

There is an uncreated Being who has made all other beings great and small, certainly more excellent than everything he made, and thus also more excellent than the rational and intellectual being which we have been discussing, namely, the human mind, made to the image of its Creator. And the Being more excellent than all others is God. Indeed, he is "not far from any one of us," as the Apostle says,

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68-69.

¹LIGHT FROM LIGHT, edited by Louis Dupre & James Wiseman, OSB--Selections from On The Trinity, (Paulist Press, NY, 1988) pp.

adding, "for in him we live and move and have our being"(Acts 17:27ff). Were this said in a material sense we could understand it of our material world: for in it also, in respect to our body, we live and move and are. The text should be taken, however, in a more excellent and also invisible and intelligible way, namely, with respect to the mind that has been made to his image.

In fact, what is there that is not in him of whom Holy Scripture says: "For from him and through him and in him are all things"(Rom 11:36)? If all things are in Him, in whom except in him in whom they are can the living live or the moving move? Yet all are not with him in the sense in which he says "I am always with you"(Ps 73:23). Nor is he with all things in the sense in which we say, "The Lord be with you." Our great misery, therefore, is not to be with him without whom we cannot exist. Unquestionably, we are never without him in whom we are; but if one does not remember him, does not understand him or love him, he is not with him.

John the Baptist – the Precursor of Christ in birth and death -
From a Homily by St Bede the Venerable ²

As a forerunner of our Lord's birth, preaching and death, John showed in his struggle a goodness worthy of the sight of heaven. In the words of Scripture: "Though in the sight of men he suffered torments, his hope is full of immortality." We justly commemorate the day of his birth with a joyful celebration, a day which he himself made festive for us through his suffering and which he adorned with the crimson splendor of his own blood. We do rightly revere his memory with joyful hearts, for he stamped with the seal of martyrdom the testimony which he delivered on behalf of our Lord.

There is no doubt that blessed John suffered imprisonment and chains as a witness to our Redeemer, whose forerunner he was, and gave his life for him. His persecutor had demanded not that he deny Christ, but only that he should keep silent about the truth. Nevertheless, he died for Christ. Does Christ not say: "I am the truth?" Therefore, because John shed his blood for the truth, he surely died for Christ. Through his birth, preaching and baptizing, he bore witness to the coming birth, preaching and baptism of Christ, and by his own suffering he showed that Christ also would suffer.

Such was the quality and strength of the man who accepted the end of this present life by shedding his blood after the long imprisonment. He preached the freedom of heavenly peace, yet was thrown into irons by ungodly men; he was locked away in the darkness of prison, though he came bearing witness to the Light of life and deserved to be called a bright and shining lamp by that Light itself, which is Christ. John was baptized in his own blood, though he had been privileged to baptize the Redeemer of the world, to hear the voice of the Father above him, and to see the grace of the Holy spirit descending upon him. But to endure temporal agonies for the sake of the truth was not a heavy burden for such men as John; rather it was easily borne and even desirable, for he knew eternal joy would be his reward.

² The Liturgy of the Hours – vol. IV – Catholic Book Publishing Co – New York – 1975 – p 1359.

Since death was ever near at hand through the inescapable necessity of nature, such men considered it a blessing to embrace it and thus gain the reward of eternal life by acknowledging Christ's name. Hence the apostle Paul rightly says: "You have been granted the privilege not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for his sake." He tells us why it is Christ's gift that his chosen ones should suffer for him: "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us."

A Commentary on the Book of Ezra by St Bede ¹

We should admire the faith and excellent resolution of the people who were freed from captivity, who refer to themselves as “the holy seed”, but the other nations in distinction to their own as “the peoples of the lands”, so that they might openly imply that they themselves, although born from the earth, nevertheless have their dwelling not on earth but in heaven insofar as they, more than other nations, believed in the God of heaven and hoped to obtain heavenly blessings from him. Thus they rightly grieve that their holiness has been polluted by the detestable actions of the Gentiles, and, what is worse, they acknowledge that even the leaders by whom they ought to have been corrected were the first to have gone astray. And it should be carefully noted and used as an example of good works that while some leaders sinned and caused the common people who were entrusted to them to sin, other leaders who were of more wholesome view for their part do their best to correct these sins; but because they cannot do this themselves they refer the matter to their pontifex (i.e. their bishop) through whose authority so grave, so manifold and so long-lasting a sin can be expiated. No one can doubt, in fact, that the foreign wives figuratively stand for the heresies and superstitious philosophies which, when they are recklessly admitted into the church, often greatly contaminate the holy seed of catholic truth and pure action with their errors.

Ezra had prepared himself through compunction of heart and through bodily afflictions so that he might be made worthy to hear heavenly mercy and only then did he begin to break forth in words of prayer. He bends his knees, spreads out his hands and pours forth prayers to the Lord at the time of the evening sacrifice, not doubting that this sacrifice that is offered with a humble heart would be more pleasing to God than one offered with the flesh or blood of cattle.

Typologically, however, in the fact that with his garment torn he falls on his knees, spreads out his hands to God and turns the mind of very many to repentance by pouring out prayers and tears, as is

written in what follows, he represents the Lord Savior, who deigned to pray for our sins both before and at the very time of his passion and who allowed his hands to be stretched out on the cross, and the garment of his own flesh to be torn with wounds and mortified at the appointed time on behalf of our restoration, so that, as the apostle says, he who “died on behalf of our sins” might rise “for our justification”. This was aptly done at the time of the evening sacrifice either because the Lord at the end of the age offered the sacrifice of his own flesh and blood to the Father and ordered that it should be offered by us in bread and wine or because with legal sacrifice coming to an end, he freed us through his own passion and, separating us from the people of the lands, made us become heavenly and allowed those who are chaste in heart and body to adhere to him.

1Ancient Christian Comentary on Scripture – vol. V – pg 328

Divine Calls – a Sermon by Blessed John Henry Newman 3

We find in scripture a remarkable instance of a Divine Call, and the manner in which it is our duty to meet it. Samuel was a mere child when he was brought to the house of the Lord; and in due time he was called to a sacred office, and made a prophet. He was called, and he forthwith answered the call. He did not understand at first who called, and what was meant; but on going to Eli he learned who spoke, and what his answer should be. So when God called again, he said: "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears." Here is prompt obedience.

Very different in its circumstances was St. Paul's call, but resembling Samuel's in this respect, that, when God called, he also promptly obeyed. When St. Paul heard the voice from heaven, he said at once, trembling and astonished, "Lord, what will you have me do?" This same obedience is stated or implied in two accounts which he himself gives of his miraculous conversion. In chapter 22 he says, "And I said, What shall I do, Lord?" and in ch. 26 he tells King Agrippa: "Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision". Such is the account given us in St. Paul's case of that first step in God's gracious dealings with him, which ended in his eternal salvation. "Whom He foreknew, He also predestined – and whom He predestined, He also called" – here was the first act which took place in time – "and whom He called He also justified, and whom He justified, He also glorified". Such is the Divine series of mercies; and you see that it was prompt obedience on St. Paul's part which moved Divine grace forward.

This, then, is the first lesson taught us by St. Paul's conversion, promptly to obey the call. If we do obey it, to God be the glory, for He it is Who works in us. If we do not obey, to ourselves be all the shame, for sin and unbelief work in us.

Such is the state of mind expressed by holy David in Psalm 27: "When you said, Seek My face, my heart said to you: Your face, O Lord, will I seek". And this also is illustrated in the case of many other saints in scripture shown in word and deed. For instance, we read of the apostles that "Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers. And He said to them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets and followed him". Again, when He saw James and John with their father Zebedee, "He called them; and they immediately left the ship, and their father and followed Him." And so also with St. Matthew at the custom house, "He said to him, Follow Me; and he left all, rose up and followed Him."

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9/1/17

A Reading on the Book of Tobit by Dom Damasus Winzen.⁴

The little book of Tobit is filled with that good family spirit which always has been the precious heritage of the chosen people. The history of salvation during the time of the Old Testament is the history of families. When God ordered Moses to "take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel," he added "by their families." The Israelites do not exist as individuals but as sons and daughters, because it is the "Son of Abraham," the Messiah, in whom their destiny is fulfilled. The history of the Old Covenant culminates in the holy family of Nazareth. The family of Tobit is an image of that family where Jesus was the only-begotten son. Right at the beginning of the book we find Tobit's little family gathered together at the good dinner that was prepared in his house when there was a festival of the Lord. The father sends the son to invite the poor to share the joy of the family. It was an old ordinance in Israel: "With your son, your daughter, your male and female servants, the Levite living in your community, the stranger, the orphan and the widow who are in your community, you are to rejoice before the Lord your God." We can see already how young Tobias takes on the similarity of the Son of God sent by his father to invite the poor into the kingdom of God and to pour out his Spirit upon sons and daughters, upon servants and handmaids. What an invitation, at the same time, to a Christian family to celebrate the feasts of the New Testament at their home in the same spirit of all-embracing charity!

Another aspect of the true family spirit is shown in Tobit's beautiful admonitions to his son. There he really fulfills the office of the father, whose function it is not only to take care of the physical needs of the family but to teach, to become a father by laying his words of wisdom as a foundation in the heart of the son. In this the earthly father

⁴ Winzen, Pathways in Scripture. Ann Arbor, Word of Life, 1976. p 141-2

imitates his heavenly prototype, the eternal Father whose word is his Son; while the son who reverently receives the father's word to hand it down to his own children represents the Son of God made flesh who said "What the Father has taught me I speak."

In her hiddenness we find Mary's greatness; from a book by Thomas Merton.⁵

In all the great mystery of Mary, then, one thing remains most clear: that of herself she is nothing, and that God has for our sakes delighted to manifest his glory and his love in her.

It is because she is, of all the saints, the most perfectly poor and the most perfectly hidden, the one who has absolutely nothing whatever that she attempts to possess as her own, that she can most fully communicate to the rest of us the grace of the infinitely selfless God. And we will most truly possess him when we have emptied ourselves and become poor and hidden as she is, resembling him by resembling her.

And all our sanctity depends on her maternal love. The ones she desires to share the joy of her own poverty and simplicity, the ones whom she wills to be hidden as she is hidden, are the ones who share her closeness to God.

It is a tremendous grace, then, and a great privilege when a person living in the world we have to live in, suddenly loses his interest in the things that absorb that world and discovers in his own soul an appetite for poverty and solitude. And the most precious of all the gifts of nature or grace is the desire to be hidden and to vanish from human sight and be accounted as nothing by the world and to disappear from one's own self-conscious consideration and vanish into nothingness in the immense poverty that is the adoration of God.

This absolute emptiness, this poverty, this obscurity holds within it the secret of all joy because it is full of God. To seek this emptiness is true devotion to the Mother of God. To find it is to find her. And to be

⁵ *New Seeds of Contemplation*, New Directions, 1961, pp. 173-75.

hidden in its depths is to be full of God as she is full of him, and to share her mission of bringing him to all peoples.

Yet all generations must call her blessed, because they all receive through her obedience whatever supernatural life and joy is granted to them. And it is necessary that the world should acknowledge her and that the praise of God's great work in her should be sung in poetry and that cathedrals should be built in her name. For unless Our Lady is recognized as the Mother of God and as the Queen of all the saints and angels and as the hope of the world, faith in God will remain incomplete. How can we ask him for all the things he would have us hope for if we do not know, by contemplating the sanctity of the Immaculate Virgin, what great things he has power to accomplish in us.