

NT-MT50

09.17.17

A Commentary on the Gospel by At. Augustine ¹

The Lord puts the parable of the unforgiving debtor before us that we may learn from it. He has no desire for us to die, so he warns us: *This is how your heavenly Father will deal with you if you, any of you, fail to forgive your brother or sister from your heart.*

Take notice now, for clearly this is no idle warning. The fulfillment of this command calls for the most vigorous obedience. We are all in debt to God, just as other people are in debt to us. Is there anyone who is not God's debtor? Only a person in whom no sin is found. And is there anyone who has no brother or sister in his debt? Only if there is someone who has never suffered any wrong. Do you think anyone can be found in the entire human race who has not in turn wronged another in some way, incurring a debt to that person? No, all are debtors, and have others in debt to them. Accordingly, God who is just has told you how to treat your debtor, because he means to treat his in the same way.

There are two works of mercy which will set us free. They are briefly set down in the gospel in the Lord's own words: *Forgive and you will be forgiven*, and *Give and you will receive*. The former concerns pardon, the latter generosity. As regards pardon he says: "Just as you want to be forgiven, so someone is in need of your forgiveness." Again, as regards generosity, consider when a beggar asks you for something that you are a beggar too in relation to God. When we pray we are all beggars before God. We are standing at the door of a great householder, or rather, lying prostrate, and begging with tears. We are longing to receive a gift – that of God himself.

What does a beggar ask of you? Bread. And you, what do you ask of God, if not Christ who said: *I am the living bread that has come from heaven*? Do you want to be pardoned? Then pardon others. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Do you want to receive? Give and you will receive.

If we think of our sins, reckoning up those we have committed by sight, hearing, thought, and countless disorderly emotions, I do not know whether we can even sleep without falling into debt. And so, every day we pray; every day we beat upon God's ears with our pleas; every day we prostrate ourselves before him saying: *Forgive us our trespasses, as we also forgive those who trespass against us*. Which of our trespasses, all of them or only some? All, you will answer. Do likewise, therefore, with those who have offended you. This is the rule you have

laid down for yourself, the condition you have stipulated. When you pray according to this pact and covenant you remember to say: *Forgive us, as we also forgive our debtors.*

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY – 1999 – pg 124

9/18/17

OUR NATURE RETURNING TO ITS FORMER BEAUTY, by St Gregory of Nyssa¹

It seems to me that the argument of the Apostle [Paul] agrees in all respects with our conception of the resurrection, and displays the same notion as is contained in our definition of it, which asserted that the resurrection is nothing other than the reconstitution of our nature to its pristine state. For we learn from Scripture, in the first cosmogony, that the earth first brought forth the green plant, then seed was produced from this plant, and from this, when it had been shed on the ground, the same form of the original growth sprang up. Now the inspired Apostle says that this is what happens also at the resurrection. Thus we learn from him not only that human nature is changed into a far nobler state, but also that what we are to hope for is just this; the return of human nature to its primal condition. The original process was not that of an ear from the seed, but of the seed from the ear, the ear thereafter growing from the seed.

The order of events in this simile clearly shows that all the happiness which will burgeon for us through the resurrection will be a return to our original state of grace. Originally we also were, in a sense, a full ear, but we were withered by the torrid heat of sin; and then on our dissolution by death the earth received us. But in the spring of the resurrection the earth will again display this naked grain of our body as an ear, tall, luxuriant, and upright, reaching up as high as heaven, and, for stalk and beard, decked with incorruption and all the other godlike characteristics. For "this corruptible thing must put on incorruption"; and this "incorruption", and "glory", and "honor", and "power" are confessedly the distinguishing marks of the divine nature, once the property of him who was created in God's image, now hoped for hereafter. The first ear was the first man, Adam. But with the entrance of evil, human nature was divided into multitude; and, as happens with the ripe grain in the ear, each individual person was stripped of the beauty of the ear and mingled with the earth. But in the resurrection we are reborn in that pristine beauty, becoming the infinite myriads of the harvest-fields instead of that original ear.

¹THE LATER CHRISTIAN FATHERS, Edited by Henry Bettenson, (Oxford Univ. Press, 1970) pp. 164-165.

OT-TOB08

09.19.17

A Commentary on the Book of Tobias by Fr John Craghan, C.S.S.R. ¹

Farewell discourses are at home in both the Old and New Testaments. A person about die gives words of hope and encouragement to the family and kinsmen concerning the future. The discourse is a type of last will and testament in which the dying person elaborates guidelines to provide for the success and happiness of the bereaved. Since legal observance is often central to such guidelines, it is not surprising that Tobit's farewell discourse is permeated with Deuteronomic theology. Some of this is found even in the Farewell discourse of Jesus in John 13-17.

Tobit commands his family to bless God's name "with all their strength", a phrase which derives from the Great Commandment in Deuteronomy 6:5. Tobit articulates the Deuteronomic teaching regarding the possibility of mercy in the wake of sin and judgment, indeed a mercy which will touch not only Israel but also the nations.

Deuteronomy stresses long life in the good land and fidelity-related success. Deuteronomy also promises rest and security in the Promised Land. One of the hallmarks of Deuteronomy is fear and love of God. Loving Yahweh means fearing him which is then expressed concretely in keeping his commandments. Tobit predicts that the Gentiles will also fear God in truth.

Deuteronomy also insists on the centralization of cult, that the Jerusalem temple is the only place where Israelites may lawfully worship the Lord. Tobit predicts that the house of God will be rebuilt for all generations to come. In the future even the Gentiles will offer worship by abandoning their idols.

Tobit's final exhortation is reminiscent of the speech in Deuteronomy 30:19-20 where Moses offers his people the choice of life or death. The author is also careful to repeat the three important notions of mercy, righteousness and truth. The dying Tobit is a latter-day Moses.

Tobit dies in the way a patriarch should. He is surrounded by his son and his grandsons. As for the dutiful son, Tobias receives his due reward: family, inheritance, longevity. In accordance with his father's word he leaves Nineveh and settles in Ecbatana. Tobias is able to rejoice at the fall of Nineveh.

In a similar way, Jesus prays for his disciples – yet not only for them but for “all those who will believe in my word”. All of their progeny. He foretells the fall of Satan as a result of his death and promises eternal life to all who believe in him.

1Old Testament MESSAGE – VOL. 16 – Fr. John Craghan, C. SS.R. - Michael Glazier, Inc. - Wilmington, DE – 1982 – pg 160

Love and perseverance are the crown of faith: a reading from the final exhortation of Andrew Kim Taegon, priest and martyr. ¹

My brothers and sisters, my dearest friends, think again and again on this: God has ruled over all things in heaven and on earth from the beginning of time; then reflect on why and for what purpose he chose each one of us to be created in his own image and likeness.

In this world of perils and hardship if we did not recognize the Lord as our Creator, there would be no benefit either in being born or in our continued existence. We have come into this world by God's grace; by that same grace we have received baptism, entrance into the Church, and the honor of being called Christians. Yet what good will this do us if we are Christians in name alone and not in fact? We would have come into the world for nothing, we would have entered the Church for nothing, and we would have betrayed even God and his grace. It would be better never to have been born than to receive the grace of God and then to sin against him.

Look at the farmer who cultivates his rice fields. In season he plows, then fertilizes the earth; never counting the cost, he labors under the sun to nurture the seed he has planted. When harvest time comes and the rice crop is abundant, forgetting his labor and sweat, he rejoices with an exultant heart. But if the crop is sparse and there is nothing but straw and husks, the farmer broods over his toil and sweat and turns his back on that field with a disgust that is all the greater the harder he has toiled.

The Lord is like a farmer and we are the field of rice that he fertilizes with his grace and by the mystery of the incarnation and the redemption irrigates with his blood, in order that we will grow and reach maturity. When harvest time comes, the day of judgment, those who have grown to maturity in the grace of God will find the joy of adopted children in the kingdom of heaven; those who have not grown to maturity will become God's enemies and, even though they were once his children, they will be punished according to their deeds for all eternity.

Dearest brothers and sisters: when he was in the world, the Lord Jesus bore countless sorrows and by his own passion and death founded his Church; now he gives it increase through the sufferings of his faithful. No matter how fiercely the powers of this world oppress and oppose the Church, they will never bring it down. Even since his ascension and from the time of the apostles to the present, the Lord Jesus has made his Church grow even in the midst of tribulation.

For the last fifty or sixty years, ever since the coming of the Church to our own land of Korea, the Faithful have suffered persecution over and over again. Persecution still rages and as a result many who are friends in the household of the faith, myself among them,

have been thrown into prison and like you are experiencing severe distress. Because we have become the one Body, should not our hearts be grieved for the members who are suffering? Because of the human ties that bind us, should we not feel deeply the pain of our separation? But, as the Scriptures say, God numbers the very hairs of our head and in his all-embracing providence he has care over us all. Persecution, therefore, can only be regarded as the command of the Lord or as a prize he gives or as a punishment he permits.

Hold fast, then, to the will of God and with all your heart fight the good fight under the leadership of Jesus; conquer again the diabolical power of this world that Christ has already vanquished. I beg you not to fail in your love for one another, but to support one another and to stand fast until the Lord mercifully delivers us from our trials. There are twenty of us in this place and by God's grace we are so far all well. If any of us is executed, I ask you not to forget our families. I have many things to say, yet how can pen and paper capture what I feel? I end this letter. As we are all near the final ordeal, I urge you to remain steadfast in faith, so that at last we will reach heaven and there rejoice together. I embrace you all in love.

1*Pro Corea Documenta*, ed. Mission Catholique Seoul (Seoul-Paris, 1938) v. 1, pp. 74-75; trans. in *NCCB Newsletter*, v. 21, August/September 1985.

Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist, from *The Saints*, ed. John Coulson²

Few people love the tax collector. Even in these days when the relation between taxpayer and taxed is, no doubt, scrupulously correct, his name strikes cold. Much more was this so in the Palestine of the first century, when it was in his interests to bully and harry and falsify. But even the mild and honest tax collector was not acceptable to official Judaism: he did business with the gentile and handled his money; he was legally impure, socially outcast. A Jewish Rabbi would be bold indeed to invite him to join his inner circle of disciples: it would be a gesture of defiance to the established prejudice. And so the formula 'publicans and sinners' slipped even into the phrase book of the evangelist and, quaintly enough, into the Gospel of Matthew the publican. This term 'publican' by the way does not accurately describe Matthew's profession but flatters it. The Pharisees might despise it, but the trade was a profitable one and much sought after: whether it be pursued honestly or dishonestly would depend on the character of the officer.

"And Jesus passed further on, he saw Levi, the son of Alpheus, sitting at work in the customs-house and said to him, "Follow me"; and he rose and followed him. That this was a call to the apostolate there is no doubt - its terms too closely match those of the call of Simon and Andrew to be otherwise. Yet 'Levi' does not appear in any list of the Twelve. Now the vocation of the tax collector is reported in the first Gospel too, but there he is called 'Matthew', thus identifying him with the Matthew who appears in all the apostolic lists. The widely accepted and most natural explanation is that Matthew and Levi are one person with two Semitic names. It may be that our Lord himself gave him the name Matthew (Mattai, 'gift of God', in Aramaic) as he gave Kepha to Simon.

This Matthew then got up from his registers and henceforth - at our Lord's suggestion - took a lesson from the lilies and birds that never did a day's calculation in their lives. His master was no longer Antipas, the shrewd 'fox' but one who, unlike the foxes, had not even a home. The change destroyed all Matthew's worldly prospects: Simon and Andrew might return to their fish, but Matthew had thrown over a coveted business and could never recover it. He left it gladly, it seems and completely - at least it was not he but Judas who kept the accounts for the apostolic group.

After the incident of his call Matthew disappears from the New Testament except as a name in the apostolic lists. What became of him? We have a sentence from a book by Bishop Papias of Hieropolis. "Matthew wrote an ordered account of the oracles (of our Lord) and each interpreted these oracles according to his ability." Time had had its revenge. When the need for a written gospel record began to be felt, upon which of the Apostles would the choice fall? Upon one who used the pen, no doubt. Poor Matthew was back where he started, but this time with an eager will and high purpose. In Palestine, some time between the years 40 and 50, this ex-civil servant produced not the

²The Saints.ed. John Coulson, Guild Press-NY,1957,p.538-541.

lively and artless Gospel of St. Mark but the orderly, almost ledger like, treatise, which we know as 'The Gospel according to St. Matthew.'

(over)

And so Matthew's old trade entered a new service; the accountant became an evangelist. It is not surprising that he alone records his Master's words; "Every scholar whose learning is of the kingdom of heaven...knows how to bring both new and old things out of his treasure house. For there is no poor tool of ours that God's service will not perfect and dignify.

It is commonly but not unanimously affirmed he died a martyr's death; but we know for certain that he lived a martyr's life - and that is enough. And for us he will always be the man who knew what money was and what it was not.

OT-JUDTH

09/22/17

A Commentary on the Book of Judith by Dom Damasus Winzen ¹

The theme of Judith is "God has given salvation into the hand of a woman". Woman appears in Scripture as God's natural ally in his struggle against a selfish world. She is made to receive new life, to rear it patiently, to suffer that it may prosper, to decrease that it may increase. In this she represents the love described in the New Testament, love "which seeks not its own". The enmity which God set between the woman and the serpent after the fall represents the struggle between the human order of selfishness and tyranny and the divine order of grace and charity. The victory was won when Mary the virgin, "full of grace", gave to God's call the answer that only a woman could give: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to your word." The whole history of the chosen people, the "virgin daughter of Israel", had been a constant preparation for this, its fulfillment in Mary. It is the Book of Judith however, which singles out this aspect of sacred history and lifts it up into the sphere of the typical.

The very name Judith (Jewess) is typical. The widow of Bethulia represents the virgin daughter of Israel. The clash between God's people and heathenism appears as the clash between "man's world" and "woman's world". The former is depicted in the first chapters of the book as a world of power, of tremendous fortresses, immense armies, vast empires, mighty rulers who are constantly scheming to overthrow one another. These men hate liberty and independence. The use of power makes them thirsty for more power. The rights of others they consider as an insult to themselves. Using the cowardly submissiveness and adulation in those who are subject to their rule, they build up gigantic war machines which like irresistible steamrollers crush all resistance in their path. At the moment of crisis, however, all this power may suddenly come to naught. Because the whole system is built on the absolute power of one leader, it is unable to work without him. When all the boastfulness turns into panic, and of those who marched to conquer the world, each now runs to save his own skin.

Against the power of man Judith rises in the totally different strength of the woman. Her strength is her faith, and her faith is trust in the mercy of God. "For God will not threaten like man, nor be influenced in anger like the son of

man: let us seek God with tears, that according to his will he would show mercy to us: that as our heart is troubled by their pride so we may also glorify him in our humility". Because God is love "his power is not in a multitude, nor his pleasure in the strength of horses, nor from the beginning have the proud been acceptable to him, but the prayer of the humble and the meek has always pleased him." Therefore the Lord decided that the mighty Holofernes should not fall by giants, but by the hand of a woman.

[1](#)Pathways in Scripture – Damasus Winzen – Word of Life – Ann, Arbor MI – 1976 – pg 143

St. Pio of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio) from Butler's Lives of the Saints 3

The most famous stigmatist since St Francis of Assisi was born into a family of agricultural laborers in Pietrelcina, northeast of Naples, on May 25, 1887. In 1903 he received the capuchin habit, taking the name of Fra Pio. Seven years later he was ordained to the priesthood. Not long after this he began to experience pains in his hands and feet, and on September 11, 1911 he confessed to his spiritual director that he had had invisible stigmata for over a year. He also suffered the pains of Christ's crown of thorns and scourging.

On August 5, 1918 he underwent the further mystical experience of "transverberation" (piercing with the lance), which left him with a wound in his side that bled continually. A month later the stigmata in his hands and feet became visible and remained so until the final day of his life. The Capuchins made no attempt to conceal Padre Pio's condition, which soon became known all over Italy and was the main cause of both his celebrity and the controversy that surrounded him. As people started flocking to his convent in their thousands, the Vatican, cautious as ever when faced with "private" favors and revelations, had him examined by a succession of doctors. The physical manifestations were undeniable. But were they from God, the psychosomatic effect of a disturbed personality, or even a fraudulent attempt on his part of that of the convent to achieve notoriety?

Huge crowds attended his Masses, during which he went into ecstatic states that could last for two hours or more. In July 1923 he received an order to say Mass in private, but so real was the threat of a violent popular reaction that it was rescinded the following day. Padre Pio himself made no comment on his condition other than that he was "a mystery to himself" but his gifts should produce benefits for others.

His community was able to ensure that they were so used when money offerings started coming in from his penitents and admirers. In January 1925, he opened a twenty-bed hospital that was named after St. Francis and remained in operation for thirteen years.

Throughout this time apostolic visitations continued, as the church authorities attempted to establish the "genuineness" of his stigmata and of his ever-growing ministry. In 1931 he was suspended from all priestly functions apart from saying Mass, which he was required to do in private. However after two years official doubt again yielded to popular enthusiasm, and the restrictions were lifted.

In 1940, with the particular support of Maria Pyle, a wealthy American woman to whose mother he had ministered as she was dying in 1929, Padre Pio was in a position to undertake a more ambitious hospital project. Medical and administrative committees

were set up, but the Second World War delayed further implementation of the project until 1946, when a limited company was formed to carry the work forward.

By 1948, when the number of penitents was such that Padre Pio was obliged to establish an advanced booking system, Pope Pius XII and the Vatican were taking a more favorable line. Padre Pio was invited to visit the Pope, who suggested the formation of prayer groups to support the work of the hospital. His vision here was original. The schedule for each day was divided into times for prayer and times for science, and he declared that he wanted the foundation to include an international study center, a hospice for old people, and a cenacle for spiritual exercises, all to be run by a “new militia” in the service of the sick.

In 1959 Padre Pio’s own health deteriorated. Then in August he recovered, apparently miraculously, when a statue of Our Lady of Fatima was brought into the hospital for two days.

He died on September 23, 1968, and doctors who examined his body found his hands and feet unmarked and “fresh as those of a child”. He was beatified and later canonized by Pope John Paul II. In his address the Pope spoke not so much of Padre Pio’s extraordinary experiences but of the long hours the friar would spend in the confessional and of his extraordinary charity, which, he said, “was poured like balm on the sufferings of his brothers and sisters.”