

NT-MT41

09.24.17

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by St Augustine ¹

The gospel story about the vineyard workers is appropriate to this time of year, the season of the earthly grape harvest. But there is another harvest, the spiritual one, at which God rejoices in the fruits of his vineyard.

The kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out to hire men to work in his vineyard. In the evening he gave orders for all to be paid, beginning with the last comers and ending with the first. Now why did he pay the last comers first? Will not everyone be rewarded at the same time? We read in another gospel passage how the king will say to those placed on his right hand: Come, you whom my Father has blessed: take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. If all, then, are to receive their wages together, how should we understand this statement about those who arrived at the eleventh hour being paid first, and those who had been working since daybreak being paid last? If I can say anything to further your understanding, thanks be to God. Give thanks to him who teaches you through me, for my own knowledge is not the source of my teaching.

To take an example, then, let us ask which of two workers receives his wages sooner, one who is paid after an hour, or one who is paid after twelve hours? Anyone will answer: "One who is paid after an hour." So also in our parable. All the workmen were paid at the same time, but because some were paid after an hour and others after twelve hours, the former, having had a shorter time to wait, may be said to have received their wages first.

The earliest righteous people like Abel and Noah, called as it were at the first hour, will receive the joy of resurrection at the same time as we do. So also will others who came later, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and those contemporary with them, called as we may say at the third hour; Moses and Aaron and those called with them at the sixth hour; and after them the holy prophets, called at the ninth hour. At the end of the world all Christians, called at the eleventh hour, will receive the joy of resurrection together with those who went before them. All will be rewarded at the same time, but the first comers will have had the longest to wait. Therefore, if they receive their reward after a longer period and we after a shorter one, the fact that our reward is not delayed will make it seem as though we were receiving it first, even though we all receive it together.

In that great reward, then, we shall all be equal – the first to the last and the last to the first. For the denarius stands for eternal life, in which all will have the same share. Although through diversity of merit some will shine more brilliantly than others, in the possession of eternal life there will be equality. What is endless for all will not be longer for one and shorter for another. What has no bounds will have none either for you or for me. Those who have lived chastely in the married state will have one kind of splendor; virgins will have another. The reward for good works will differ from the crown of martyrdom; but where eternal life is concerned there can be no question of more or less for anyone. Whatever may be the individual's degree of glory, each one will live in it eternally. This is the meaning of the denarius.

1. [1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY – 1999 – pg 126

OT-JUDTH07

09/25/17

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

The first seven chapters of the book are not simply a catalog of Assyrian successes and non-Assyrian failures. They serve to demonstrate the might of the Assyrians and thus underline the depth of faith required to counteract such might. The story begins with an invitation by the Assyrian king, Nebuchadnezzar, to his vassal states to join in a war against the Medes in Ecbatana – an invitation which some decline. Once he has defeated the Medes, he turns against those vassals that had refused his invitation. His commander-in-chief, Holofernes, is commissioned to punish these western nations and thus force them to capitulate. Despite great destruction only one nation chooses to hold out – the people of Israel. Realizing the might of the enemy, the Jews plan their strategy and cry to Yahweh for help. When Holofernes learns that only one nation is still insubordinate, Achior, the chief of the Ammonites, explains to him that the Jews enjoy a unique protection from their God, provided they remain faithful to Him. Angered by this explanation, Holofernes orders that Achior perish with the Jews. Achior is left just below Bethulia where the Jewish population of the town rescues him and learns of Nebuchadnezzar's plan to destroy their town and their nation. The Assyrian advance strikes fear in the hearts of the people of Bethulia.

Originally the Jews were simply one nation which sided with the Gentile nations to oppose Nebuchadnezzar. However once he moved against these western nations, the Jews and Gentiles part company. The Gentiles are willing to renounce their gods and swear allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, while sending their troupes to fight with Holofernes. Thus the Jews choose to be different by opposing the Assyrian threat. Bethulia thereby becomes the symbol of resistance to the gigantic coalition of pagan nations.

The history of Israel provides the theological control for assessing the meaning of the book. While seeming to narrate one concrete encounter between a pagan king and Israel, it is actually speaking of an encounter which transcends history and becomes a model of opposition to any and every pagan rule. Thus the author invokes the pattern of the Exodus. The Book of Judith, therefore, is a confrontation between the divine Nebuchadnezzar and Yahweh.

¹Old Testament Message – vol. 16 – Esther, Judith, Tobit, Jonah, Ruth – Michael Glazier, Inc – Wilmington, DE – 1982 – pg 67f

The Divine Call – from a book by Hans Urs von Balthasar ¹

Christian revelation is primarily a revelation of hearing, not of seeing. Although the image of seeing is not excluded – for “we see now through a mirror in an obscure manner” (I Cor 13:12); wisdom, when it appears, is the “mirror . . . and image” of the divine goodness (Wis 7:26); and Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15) so that, in seeing him, we also see the Father (Jn 14:9) – nevertheless the comparison with hearing is the dominant one in revelation: the Second Person is heard primarily as “Word” (Jn 1:1) and faith in him comes by hearing (Rom 10:17). The hearing of the Word is by no means a temporary substitute for the seeing that is wanting to us here below. On the contrary, it is the lasting proof that God never is and never will be a mere “object” of knowledge to us, but is rather the infinitely sovereign majesty of a Trinity of Persons that makes itself known in whatever way and to whomever it wills. That God speaks to us in his personal word is a greater grace than that we are allowed to see him: That we are deemed worthy of his word is the grace of graces that makes us partners in a divine, even Trinitarian, conversation. That the word of God is spoken to us is the highest revelation and honor the personal God can bestow upon us, for it presumes that God considers us capable of understanding his word through the gift of his grace and of possessing the Spirit who “searches all things, even the deep things of God, that we may know all things that have been given us by God” (I Cor 2:10,12). So tremendous is this grace that the creature thus addressed by God must forget its own wishes and desires, even its longing for “eternal happiness” and for the “vision of God” so that, trembling in the depths of its being, it may fall to the ground and hear his voice (cf. Acts 9:4) only to ask: “What shall I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10)

But one who has been thrown to the ground by the impact of this compelling voice is also “set upon his feet” by it. When God speaks, He wants a partner. He wants one who is erect, who, hearing his voice, is yet able to stand upon his feet and answer: “...I fell upon my face, and I heard the voice of the one that spoke. And he said to me: Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I will speak to you. And the Spirit entered into me after he spoke to me, and he set me upon my feet; and I heard him speaking to me...” (Ezek 2:1-2). When God speaks personally, he wants to be understood personally; when he utters his personal word into the world, he wants that word to be returned to him, not as a dead echo, but as a personal response from his creature in an exchange that is genuinely a dialogue even though it can be conducted only in the unity of the divine Word that mediates between the Father and us. But just as that divine Word proceeds from the Father, yet is not the Father, but only declares the Father, so the creature can give back to the Father this word it has received by uttering itself in it – or better, by letting itself be uttered by it.

¹ The Christian State of Life – Hans Urs von Balthasar – Ignatius Press – San Francisco – 1983 – pg 393

From a writing by St Vincent de Paul ²

Even though the poor are often rough and unrefined, we must not judge them from external appearances nor from the mental gifts they seem to have received. On the contrary, if you consider the poor in the light of faith, then you will observe that they are taking the place of the Son of God who chose to be poor. Although in his passion he almost lost the appearance of a man and was considered a fool by the Gentiles and a stumbling block by the Jews, he showed that his mission was to preach to the poor. *He sent me to preach the good news to the poor.* We also ought to have this same spirit and imitate Christ's actions, that is, we must take care of the poor, console them, help them, support their cause.

Since Christ willed to be born poor, he chose for himself disciples who were poor. He made himself the servant of the poor and shared their poverty. He went so far as to say that he would consider every deed which either helps or harms the poor as done for or against himself. Since God surely loves the poor, he also loves those who love the poor. For when one person holds another dear, he also includes in his affection anyone who loves or serves the one he loves. That is why we hope that God will love us for the sake of the poor. So when we visit the poor and needy, we try to be understanding where they are concerned. We sympathize with them so fully that we can echo Paul's words: *I have become all things to all people.* Therefore we must try to be stirred by our neighbor's worries and distress. We must beg God to pour into our hearts sentiments of pity and compassion and to fill them again and again with these dispositions.

It is our duty to prefer the service of the poor to everything else and to offer such service as quickly as possible. If a needy person requires medicine or other help during prayer time, do whatever has to be done with peace of mind. Offer the deed to God as your prayer. Do not become upset or feel guilty because you interrupted your prayer to serve the poor. God is not neglected if you leave him for such service. One of God's works is merely interrupted so that another can be carried out. So when you leave prayer to serve some poor person, remember that this service is performed for God. Charity is certainly greater than any rule. Moreover, all rules must lead to charity. Since she is a noble mistress, we must do whatever she commands. With renewed devotion, then, we must serve the poor, especially beggars and outcasts. They have been given to us as our masters and patrons.

2

OT-JUDth08

09/28/17

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

Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. It was a traumatic experience that Israel never forgot. Nebuchadnezzar thus became the very epitome of opposition, not only to Yahweh's people, but to Yahweh himself. However, as in the case of Assyria, Yahweh inveighed against the tyrant who exceeded the divine mandate: "Sit in silence, and go into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans; for you shall no more be called the mistress of kingdoms." (Isaiah 47:5)

Judith is clearly a rescue story in which the female plays the heroine and saves the male (Israel) from the hand of Holofernes. It is a perfect example of resisting the most overwhelming forces. Yet the book recites history, not in any scientific way, but in a parabolic way. It is the resistance story for every time and place. It is the Exodus story for every generation of Israelites.

What threatened Israel's covenantal faith was Hellenism – the philosophy and way of life introduced by Alexander the Great in 332 BC when he swept through Palestine. The Book of Judith reflects the ongoing resistance of the Maccabees to Hellenism. The author encourages his audience to continue the resistance – the cause of the Maccabees should live on in them. As a result, the author promotes a fervent religious-nationalistic mentality, zeal for the Jewish Law, ascetic practices, and concern for the temple in Jerusalem. It hardly seems an accident that the heroine's name is the female counterpart of *Judas* Maccabeus. Judith continues to champion Judas' cause.

Fundamentally Judith is an appeal to identify with a common cause, to find meaning for their lives by accepting the common challenge. As a result, Judith appeals to Christians as well to enfold their history in the needs of the world-wide community. Evil wears new disguises, manipulation has new masks. Thus understood, Judith announces that the only genuine form of identity derives from contributing one's gifts to this wider community and thereby fulfilling the expectations of a more encompassing covenant faith. The Christian must revive the passion/resurrection story in the debacle of the 20th century. The story of Judith is an ongoing challenge which transcends its own historical parameters. To be moved by Judith is to be led to oppose any and every form of human injustice.

¹Old Testament Message – vol. 16 – Esther, Judith, Tobit, Jonah, Ruth – Michael Glazier, Inc. - Wilmington, DE – 1982 - p71f

From a Homily on the Gospels by St Gregory the Great ³

You should be aware that the word “angel” denotes a function rather than a nature. Those holy spirits of heaven have indeed always been spirits. They can only be called angels when they deliver some message. Moreover those who deliver messages of lesser importance are called angels; and those who proclaim messages of supreme importance are called archangels.

And so it was that not merely an angel but the archangel Gabriel was sent to the Virgin Mary. It was only fitting that the highest angel should come to announce the greatest of messages.

Some angels are given proper names to denote the service they are empowered to perform. In that holy city where perfect knowledge flows from the vision of Almighty God, those who have no names may easily be known. But personal names are assigned to some, not because they would not be known without them, but rather to denote their ministry when they come among us. Thus Michael means “Who is like God?; Gabriel is “The Strength of God”; and Raphael is “God’s Remedy”.

Whenever some act of wondrous power must be performed, Michael is sent, so that his action and his name may make it clear that no one can do what God does by his superior power. So also our ancient foe desired in his pride to be like God, saying: *I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of heaven; I will be like the Most High*. He will be allowed to remain in power until the end of the world when he will be destroyed in the final punishment. Then he will fight with the archangel Michael, as we are told by John: *A battle was fought with Michael the archangel*.

So too Gabriel, who is called God’s strength, was sent to Mary. He came to announce the One who appeared as a humble man to quell the cosmic powers. Thus God’s strength announced the coming of the Lord of the heavenly powers, mighty in battle.

Raphael means, as I have said, God’s remedy, for when he touched Tobit’s eyes in order to cure him, he banished the darkness of his blindness. Thus since he is to heal, he is rightly called God’s remedy.

³ The Liturgy of the Hours vol. IV Catholic Book Publishing Co – New York 1975 pg 1435

Saint Jerome's advice about Scripture: a reading from his letter to Paulinus. ¹

You see how, carried away by my love of the scriptures, I have exceeded the limits of a letter yet have not fully accomplished my object. We have heard only what it is that we ought to know and to desire, so that we too may be able to say with the psalmist: "*My soul breaks out with the fervent desire it always has had for your judgments*" (Ps 119.20). But the saying of Socrates about himself—"I only know this: that I know nothing"—is fulfilled in our case also.

The New Testament I will briefly deal with. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are the Lord's team of four, the true cherubim or store of knowledge. [Like the description in the prophet Ezekiel,] with them the whole body is full of eyes, they glitter as sparks, they run and return like lightning, their feet are straight feet, and lifted up, their backs also are winged, ready to fly in all directions. They hold together each by each and are interwoven one with another: like wheels within wheels they roll along and go wherever the breath of the Holy Spirit wafts them. The apostle Paul writes to seven churches (for the eighth epistle, that to the Hebrews, is not generally counted in with the others). He instructs Timothy and Titus; he interceded with Philemon for his runaway slave. Of him I think it better to say nothing than to write inadequately. The Acts of the Apostles seem to relate a mere unvarnished narrative, descriptive of the infancy of the newly born church; but when once we realize that their author is Luke the physician whose praise is in the gospel, we shall see that all his works are medicine for the sick soul. The apostles James, Peter, John and Jude have published seven epistles at once spiritual and to the point, short and long, short that is in words but lengthy in substance so that there are few indeed who do not find themselves in the dark when they read them. The apocalypse of John has as many mysteries as words. In saying this I have said less than the book deserves. All praise of it is inadequate; manifold meanings lie hid in its every word.

I beg of you, my dear brother, to live among these books, to meditate upon them, to know nothing else, to seek nothing else. Does not such a life seem to you a foretaste of heaven here on earth? Let not the simplicity of the scripture or the poorness of its vocabulary offend you: for these are due either to the faults of translators or else to deliberate purpose: for in this way it is better fitted for the instruction of an unlettered congregation as the educated person can take one meaning and the uneducated another from one and the same sentence. I am not so dull or so forward as to profess that I myself know it, or that I can pluck upon the earth the fruit which has its root in heaven, but I confess that I should like to do so. I put myself before the man who sits idle and, while I lay no claim to be a master, I readily pledge myself to be a fellow-student. "*Every one that asks, receives; and those that seek, find; and to those that knock, it shall be opened*" (Mt 7.8).

Let us learn upon earth that knowledge which will continue with us in heaven.

[1](#)Letter LIII in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series Two, Volume 6; translated by W. H. Fremantle, p. 101-102.