

NT-MT39

09.03.17

A Commentary on the Gospel by St. Augustine ¹

If anyone wished to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and come after me.

Our Lord's command seems hard and heavy, that anyone who wishes to follow him must renounce himself. But no command is hard and heavy when it comes from one who helps to carry it out. That other saying of his is true: *My yoke is easy and my burden is light*. Whatever is hard in his commands is made easy by love.

We know what great things love can accomplish, even though it is often base and sensual. We know what hardships people have endured, what intolerable indignities they have borne to attain the object of their love. What we love indicates what sort of people we are, and therefore making a decision about this should be our one concern in choosing a way of life. Why be surprised if people who set their hearts on Christ and want to follow him renounce themselves out of love? If we lose ourselves through self-love we must surely find ourselves through self-renunciation.

Who would not wish to follow Christ to supreme happiness, perfect peace, and lasting security? We shall do well to follow him there, but we need to know the way. The Lord Jesus had not yet risen from the dead when he gave this invitation. His passion was still before him; he had still to endure the cross, to face outrages, reproaches, scourging; to be pierced by thorns, wounded, insulted, taunted and put to death. The road seems rough, you draw back, you do not want to follow Christ. Follow him just the same. The road we made for ourselves is rough, but Christ has leveled it by passing over it himself.

Who does not desire to be exalted? Everyone enjoys a high position. But self-abasement is the step that leads to it. Why take strides that are too big for you – do you want to fall instead of going up? Begin with this step and you will find yourself climbing. The two disciples who said: *Lord, command that one of us shall sit at your right hand in your kingdom and the other at your left* had no wish to think about this step of self-abasement. They wanted to reach the top without noticing the step that led there. The Lord showed them the step, however, by his reply: *Can you drink the cup that I am to drink?* You who aim at the highest exaltation, can you drink the cup of humiliation? He did not simply give the general command: *Let him renounce himself and follow me* but added: *Let him take up his cross and follow me*.

What does it mean to take up one's cross? It means bearing whatever is unpleasant – that is following me. Once you begin to follow me by conforming your life to my commandments, you will find many to contradict you, forbid you, or dissuade you, and

some of these will be people who call themselves followers of Christ. Therefore if you meet with threats, flattery, or opposition, let this be your cross; pick it up and carry it – do not collapse under it. These words of our Lord are like an exhortation to endure martyrdom. If you are persecuted you ought, surely, to make light of any suffering for the sake of Christ.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY – 1999 – pg 120

The Meaning of Work – from the Catholic Catechism ¹

Human work proceeds directly from persons created in the image of God and called to prolong the work of creation by subduing the earth, both with and for one another. Hence work is a duty: “If anyone will not work, let him not eat” (2 Thess.3:10).

Work honors the Creator's gifts and the talents received from him. It can also be redemptive. By enduring the hardship of work in union with Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth and the one crucified on Calvary, man collaborates in a certain fashion with the Son of God in his redemptive work. He shows himself to be a disciple of Christ by carrying his cross, daily, in the work he is called to accomplish. Work can be a means of sanctification and a way of animating earthly realities with the Spirit of Christ.

In work, the person exercises and fulfills in part the potential inscribed in his nature. The primordial value of labor stems from man himself, its author and its beneficiary. Work is for man, not man for work. Everyone should be able to draw from work the means of providing for his life and that of his family, and of serving the human community. Everyone has the right of economic initiative; everyone should make use of his talents to contribute to the abundance that will benefit all and to harvest the just fruits of his labor. He should seek to observe regulations issued by legitimate authority for the sake of the common good.

Economic life brings into play different interests, often opposed to one another. This explains why the conflicts that characterize it arise. Efforts should be made to reduce these conflicts by negotiation that respects the rights and duties of each social partner: those responsible for business enterprises, representatives of wage-earners (for example, trade unions), and public authorities when appropriate.

Economic activity, especially the activity of a market economy, cannot be conducted in an institutional, juridical or political vacuum. On the contrary it presupposes sure guarantees of individual freedom and private property, as well as a stable currency and efficient public services. Hence the principal task of the state is to guarantee this security, so that those who work and produce can enjoy the fruits of their labors and thus feel encouraged to work efficiently and honestly. Another task of the state is that of overseeing and directing the exercise of human rights in the economic sector. However primary responsibility in this area belongs not to the state but to individuals and to the various groups and associations which make up society.

Access to employment and to professions must be open to all without unjust discrimination: men and women, healthy and disabled, natives and immigrants. For its part society should, according to circumstances, help citizens to find work and

employment. Unemployment almost always wounds its victim's dignity and threatens the equilibrium of his life. Besides the harm it does to him personally, it entails many risks for his family.

[1](#)Catechism of the Catholic Church – Ligouri Publications – Ligouri, MO – 1994 – pg 583

OT-TOB06

09.05.17

A Commentary on the Book of Tobias by St. Augustine ¹

“Light has arisen for the just person.” What light is there for a just man or woman? A certain light that does not arise for the unjust, different from the light that dawns on good and bad alike. Another light arises on the righteous person, that light of which the unrighteous will confess at the end that it never dawned for them.: “No doubt of it, we strayed from the path of truth. On us the light of righteousness did not shine, nor did the sun rise for us.” Reveling in the common light, they lay in darkness of heart. What did it profit to them to see daylight with their eyes, if their mind could not see the light beyond. Tobit was blind, yet he taught his son the way of God. You know this is true because Tobis advised his son, “Give alms, my son, for almsdeeds save you from departing into darkness”, yet the speaker was in darkness himself. Do you see from this that it is a different light that rises for a just person and good cheer for those of strightforward heart?

“You loved malice above kindness.” Do you want proof that an evil person can see both, malice and kindness, yet choose malice and turns away from kindness? Here it is. Why do such persons complain when suffering unjustly? Why do they, in that situation, exaggerate the injustice as much as possible while commending kindness and denounce the offender who in treating them so badly has put malice above kindness? Let such people be their own criterion: let them judge their own behavior by their experience. If they would only obey Scripture's injunction, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself, “ and “whatever good you want people to do for you, do the same yourselves for them,” they will have within themselves evidence that they must not treat others as they would not be treated themselves.

¹Ancient Christian Commentary – vol. XV – Inter Varsity Press – Downers Grove, IL – 2010 – pg. 12

OT-TOB07

09.06.17

A Commentary on the Book of Tobias by St Bede ¹

An angel appeared to Tobias and offered himself as a companion through whom he might perform wonders for the people to whom he had been sent. And the Son of God assumed the nature of a human being so that, thus spending his life with human beings, he might save the human race.

Azarias means “the Lord is my helper”. Ananias, the favor of the Lord”. And the Lord intimates to those who believe in him that he is the one whom the profits longed for when he sang, “Lord, you are my helper and liberator; do not delay,” and of him too the Evangelist says, “And we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

And our Lord through the miracles that he wrought in the flesh showed the Jewish people from whom he had taken flesh that he was the Son of God, and the angel, that is, the messenger of his Father's will. He also announced to them the joy of eternal salvation, saying: “Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven will draw near”; and to those who despaired of obtaining heavenly light he said: “I am the light of the world; the one who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

The angel promises Tobit to bring his son to Rages, a city of the Medes, and to bring him back to him. The Lord promises the believers among the Jewish people (although this same people is largely blinded) that he will reveal the mysteries of his incarnation to the Gentile people, and again at the end of our times he will make them known more widely to his people from whom he has taken flesh, when faith in his divinity will both accompany him everywhere and accomplish everything. Of the “bringing” to the Medes he says: “And I have other sheep which are not of this fold; these too I must bring, and so forth. Of the “bringing back” the apostle says: “Until the fullness of the Gentiles should come in, and so all Israel should be saved.”

¹Ancient Christian Commentary – vol XV – Inter Varsity Press – Downers Grove, IL – 2010 – pg 14

OT-TOB03

09.07.17

A Commentary on the Book of Tobias by St. Bede [1](#)

Tobias stopped by the waters of the Tigris because the Lord, when he appeared in the world, spent his life among sinners and mortals; but the water of sin did not touch him, nor did the prince of darkness, when he came, find in him anything of his own. Here again the mystery of the Lord's passion is quite obviously signified. For the huge fish, which, since it wanted to devour him, was killed by Tobias on the angel's instructions, represents the ancient devourer of the human race, that is, the devil. When the latter desired the death of humanity in our Redeemer, he was caught by the power of the divinity. The river Tigris, which, because of its swift current, takes its name from the tiger, a very swift animal, intimates the downward course of our death and mortality. In it lurked a huge fish, inasmuch as the invisible seducer of the human race held the power of death.

The Lord seized hold of the devil and by dying caught and conquered the one who wanted to catch him in death. Moreover he seized him by the gill so that, with the right hand of his power, he might separate his most wicked head from his entrapped body, that is, that he might remove the wickedness of the ancient enemy from the heart of those whom he had wickedly allied with himself and had made, as it were, one body with him, and that, as a merciful redeemer, he might graft them into the body of his church. For a fish has a gill at the joining of its head and body. Now, just as our Lord is head of his church and the church is his body, so the devil is the head of all the wicked and all the wicked are his head and members. The reason why the Lord seized the very savage fish by the gill, dragged it towards him and cast it upon dry land was that, in smashing them to pieces, he openly and boldly exposed the devil's capabilities in public and rescued from the power of darkness those whom he foreknew to be children of light.

The Lord gutted the fish when he exposed more extensively to his saints the devil's wickedness and tore from their flesh, as it were, the secrets of his snares. He put away his heart for himself because he wanted to point out in the holy books his cunning, of which it is written, "Now the serpent was more cunning than any of the beasts of the earth". He put away the gall, since, in his concern for caution he wanted the extent of the malicious fury with which he raged against the human race to be put on record. The liver too he put away because he deigned to make known to us through the teachers of the truth the mischievous maturity of his intrigues against us.

The amount of the fish they took for themselves signifies those who are changed from members of the devil into members of Christ, that is, are converted from unbelief to the

faith; but the amount they left represents those who, on hearing God's Word, prefer to remain behind among the dead and decaying members of their deceiver rather than return to the companionship of the Savior. He broiled the flesh of those whom he found carnal but rendered spiritual and strong again by the fire of his love.

1Ancient Christian Commentary – Old Testament - vol. XV – InterVarsity Press –
Downers Grove, IL – 2010 – p 17

A reading about ascending to God through the humanity of Jesus;

from a homily by St. Ælred of Rievaulx. ¹

You know, dearest brothers, that today we are celebrating the birth of our Lady, Saint Mary, and so it is right that we rejoice in the Lord and remember how great is the joy that comes to us through her birth, for in her birth all of our joy begins to appear...

For today he began to show us his wonderful mercy and his marvelous love, which he had promised to Abraham so many years ago, namely that *in his seed all nations will be blessed* (Gen 22.18). Today was born that seed from which the sun of righteousness arose, Christ our God, in whom...even all nations are blessed, because faith in Christ and Christ's blessing extends throughout all nations. This seed, brothers, is blessed Mary, who today was born from the seed of Abraham, who received such a wonderful blessing from the Lord that it took away the curse of the world. As the Gospel that [is] read today says, it is certain that she is from the seed of Abraham. We read: *The book of the generations of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham* (Mt 1.1). From this we know that our Lord, who did not have a father on earth, could not rightly be called the son of Abraham and the son of David unless his mother was from their seed. Again, so that we might be certain that he is the one of whom God spoke to Abraham, the evangelist Matthew wished to narrate to us the entire genealogy of our Lord from Abraham to blessed Mary, from whom the sun of justice arose, Christ our God.

We should consider further that the evangelist presented this genealogy to us not simply to show us those ancestors from whom Christ was born, so that we might know his bodily genealogy, but also so that we might take spiritual fruit from his bodily genealogy. If the evangelist intended merely to show us a genealogy and nothing else, why did he make those three divisions and in every single division put fourteen generations, that is fourteen names? ...He omitted in his counting some fathers and sons who belong to this genealogy, and he skipped from father to grandson. Therefore by those ancestors through whom Christ descended to us, we should understand something spiritual and take note of certain steps by which we should ascend to him.

Let us consider how he narrates this genealogy. He begins from Abraham and by descending comes to our Lord. It seems to me that he wanted to show us through this descent, by which our Lord descends to us, a certain ascent by which we must ascend to him. For this reason he descended, that we might ascend. He became poor for our sake, to that he might make us rich. The evangelist begins this descent with Abraham. Abraham is interpreted as *exalted father*, by which can be signified the one who is truly

the exalted Father, that is *God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. From the bosom of the exalted Father, our Lord descended so as to come to us. He came to us by the fact that he became a man among us. He is a man by the fact that he is indeed the son of Mary. At the end of this descent, the evangelist says: *And Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ* (Mt 1.16).

Dearest brothers, if we want to ascend to that place from where he descends to us, that is, to the exalted Father, let us begin our ascent here. Where? From the son of Mary, that is from the humanity of Christ, and thus let us ascend to his divinity. He is the way, just as he said: *I am the way* (Jn 14.6). Except by this way, no one can come to the exalted father. Therefore he says: *No one comes to the Father except through me* (Jn 14.6). No one can begin anything good without beginning from Christ who is the foundation of all good things, as the Apostle says: *No one can lay another foundation but that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus* (1 Cor 3.11). But because we are in the depths and he to whom we must ascend is exceedingly high, we cannot reach the place except by some steps. As we say, we can discern these spiritual steps, by which we ascend, in those ancestors through whom our Lord descended to us so that we might ascend to him. Just as he descended from Abraham, that is, from God the Father, to us by way of those ancestors according to the flesh, so also let us ascend by those ancestors, understood in a spiritual way, to God the Father.

1Sermon 24: On the Birth of Mary; CCCM 2A:190-203; PL 195: 326-336, S 21; translated by Athanasius Sulavik, OP, in CSQ 32.1 (1997), pp. 79ff.

St Peter Claver – From Butler’s Lives of the Saints ¹

Peter Claver was born at Verdu, in Catalonia, about 11581. He was sent to study at the University of Barcelona. Here he graduated with distinction and then entered the Society of Jesus. He was received into the novitiate of Tarragona at the age of twenty, and was sent to the college of Montesionie at Palma, in Majorca. Here he met St Alphonsus Rodriguez, who was porter in the college, though with a reputation far above his humble office.

In later years St Peter Claver said that St. Alphonsus had actually foretold to him where he would go and the very place wherein he would work. Moved by these exhortations Peter Claver approached his provincial, offering himself for the West Indies, and was told that his vocation would be decided in due course by his superiors. He was sent to Barcelona for his theology and after two years was, at his request, chosen to represent the province of Aragon on the mission of Spanish Jesuits being sent to New Granada. He left Spain forever in April 1610, and after a wearisome voyage landed with his companions at Cartagena, in what is now the republic of Columbia. From there he went to the Jesuit house of Santa Fe to complete his theological studies, and was employed as sacristan, porter, infirmarian and cook, and was later ordained priest.

By this time the slave trade had been established in the Americas for nearly a hundred years, and the port of Cartagena was one of its principal centers as a clearing house. At the time of Father Claver’s ordination the leader of the work among the black slaves from Angola and the Congo was Father Alfonso de Sandoval, a great Jesuit missionary who spent forty years in the service of the slaves, and after working under him Peter Claver declared himself ‘the slave of the Negroes for ever’. As soon as a slave-ship entered the port he went to wait on its living cargo. When he came upon any who were dying he baptized them and then sought out all babies born on the voyage that he might baptize them.

It is estimated that in forty years St Peter Claver instructed and baptized over 300,000 slaves. When there was time and opportunity, he instructed them in the sacraments and the use of confession. Every spring after Easter Peter would make a tour of those plantations near Cartagena to see how the Negroes were getting on. The masters complained that he wasted the slaves’ time with his preaching, praying and hymn-singing. Many of the stories both of the heroism and of the miraculous powers of St. Peter Claver concern his nursing of the sick and diseased Negroes, in circumstances often that no one else, black or white, could face.

¹ Butler’s Lives of the Saints – edited by Michael Walsh – Harper – San Francisco – 1991 – p 280f

In the year 1650 St Peter Claver was sent to preach the jubilee among the Negroes along the coast, but sickness attacked his weakened body, and he was recalled to the residence at Cartagena. But here a virulent epidemic had begun, and one of the first to be attacked among the Jesuits was the weakened missionary, so that his death seemed at hand. After receiving the last sacraments he recovered, but he was a broken man. For the rest of his life pain hardly left him, and a trembling in his limbs made it impossible to celebrate Mass. He died on September 8, 1654. The civil authorities who had looked askance at his solicitude for mere Negro slaves, and the clergy who had called his zeal indiscreet, now vied with one another to honor his memory. He was canonized at the same time as his friend St. Alphonsus Rodriguez in 1888, and he was declared by Pope Leo XIII patron of all missionary enterprises among Negroes.