

NT-MT44

10.15.17

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by St. Augustine ¹

All believers are familiar with the story of the wedding of the king's son and the banquet that followed it, and of how the Lord's table was thrown open to all comers. When everyone was seated *the master of the house came in to see the guests, and among them he noticed one without a wedding garment. So he said to him, "My friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?"*

Now what precisely does this mean? Let us try to find out what it is that some believers have, but which the wicked lack, for that will be what the wedding garment is.

Can it be one of the sacraments? Hardly, for these, as we know, are common to good and bad alike. Take baptism for example. It is true that no one comes to God except through baptism, but not every baptized person comes to him. We cannot take this sacrament as the wedding garment, then, for it is a robe worn not only by good people but also by wicked people. Perhaps, then, it is our altar that is meant, or at least what we receive from it. But we know that many who approach the altar eat and drink to their own damnation. Well, then, maybe it is fasting? The wicked can fast too. What about going to church? Some bad people also go to church.

Whatever can this wedding garment be, then? For an answer we must go to the Apostle who says: *The purpose of our command is to arouse the love that springs from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and a genuine faith.* There is your wedding garment. It is not love of just any kind. Many people of bad conscience appear to love one another, but you will not find in them *the love that springs from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and a genuine faith.* Only that kind of love is the wedding garment.

If I speak in the tongues of men and angels, says the Apostle, but have no love, I am nothing but a booming gong or a clashing cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, if I have all knowledge and understand all mysteries, if I have faith strong enough to move mountains, but have no love, I am nothing. In other words, even with all these gifts I am nothing without Christ. Does that mean that prophecy has no value and that knowledge of mysteries is worthless? No, they are not worthless but I am, if I possess them but have no love. But can the lack of one good thing rob so many others of their value? Yes, without love my confession of the name of Christ even by shedding my blood or offering my body to be burnt will avail me nothing, for I may do this out of a desire for glory. That such things can be endured for the sake of empty show without any real love for God the Apostle also declares. Listen to him: *If I give away all I have to the poor, if I hand over my body to be burnt, but have no love, it will avail me nothing.* So this is what the wedding garment is. Examine yourselves to see whether you possess it. If you do, your place at the Lord's table is secure.

¹Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY -1999 – pg 132

The Life of St. Hedwig from Butler's Lives of the Saints ¹

Hedwig was born in Bavaria about the year 1174, the daughter of Berthold, count of Andechs. When she was only twelve she was married to Henry, duke of Silesia. Together they founded a large number of religious houses, the best known of which was a convent for Cistercian nuns at Trebnitz, near Breslau in modern Poland, the first convent for women in Silesia. These foundations helped both to develop the religious life of the people and to spread a common German culture throughout their lands. They also established hospitals and a house for lepers. Their seventh and last child was born in 1209, and Hedwig persuaded her husband to take a mutual vow of chastity. They lived apart, with Hedwig taking up residence close to the nunnery at Trebnitz, and often sharing the austere life of the nuns. She recommended fasting to those who wanted to live holier lives, saying that it could “master concupiscence, lift up the soul, confirm it in the paths of virtue, and prepare a fine reward for the Christian.

Much of the rest of Hedwig's life was spent in trying to keep peace between her warring sons Henry and Conrad and in attempts to make peace between her husband and his enemies. When Henry died in 1238, she comforted those who mourned him with the words, “Would you oppose the will of God? Our lives are his; our will is whatever he is pleased to ordain, whether our own death or that of our friends.” She took the habit at Trebnitz but did not take any religious vows, remaining free to administer her property for the good of the poor. We are told that she took great care to instruct the uneducated in their religion, on one occasion having an old woman share a room with her so that they could go through the Our Father together whenever there was a free moment. After ten weeks of patient teaching, the old woman could repeat and understand the prayer.

When her son Henry II was killed in 1240 fighting the Tartar invaders, Hedwig knew of his death three days before a messenger arrived from the battlefield. Other miracles were attributed to her; she cured a blind man, for example, and had the gift of prophecy, foretelling her own death in October 1243. She was canonized in 1267, and her feast was extended to the Western Church in 1706.

¹ Butler's Lives of the Saints – New Full Edition – October – The Liturgical Press – Collegeville, MN - 1997

From a Letter to the Romans by St. Ignatius, bishop and martyr ²

I am writing to all the churches to let it be known that I will gladly die for God if only you do not stand in my way. I plead with you: show me no untimely kindness. Let me be food for the wild beasts, for they are my way to God. I am God's wheat and shall be ground by their teeth so that I may become God's pure bread. Pray to Christ for me that the animals will be the means of making me a sacrificial victim for God.

No earthly pleasures, no kingdoms of this world can benefit me in any way. I prefer death in Christ Jesus to power over the farthest limits of the earth. He who died in place of us is the one object of my quest. He who rose for our sakes is my one desire. The time for my birth is close at hand. Forgive me, my brothers. Do not stand in the way of my birth to real life; do not wish me stillborn. My desire is to belong to God. Do not, then, hand me back to the world. Do not try to tempt me with material things. Let me attain pure light. Only on my arrival there can I be fully a human being. Give me the privilege of imitating the passion of my God. If you have him in your heart, you will understand what I wish. You will sympathize with me because you will know what urges me on.

The prince of this world is determined to lay hold of me and to undermine my will which is intent on God. Let none of you here help him; instead show yourselves on my side, which is also God's side. Do not talk about Jesus Christ as long as you love this world. Do not harbor envious thoughts. And supposing I should see you, if then I beg you to intervene on my behalf, do not believe what I say. Believe instead what I am now writing to you. For though I am alive as I write to you, still my real desire is to die. My love for this life has been crucified, and there is no yearning in me for any earthly thing. Rather within me is the living water which says deep inside me: "Come to the Father." I no longer take pleasure in perishable food or in the delights of this world. I want only God's bread, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, formed of the seed of David, and for drink I crave his blood, which is love that cannot perish.

I am no longer willing to live a merely human life, and you can bring about my wish if you will. Please, then, do me this favor, so that you in turn may meet with equal kindness. Put briefly, this is my request: believe what I am saying to you. Jesus Christ himself will make it clear to you that I am saying the truth. Only truth can come from that mouth by which the Father has truly spoken. Pray for me that I may obtain my desire. I have not written to you as a mere man would, but as one who knows the mind of God. If I am condemned to suffer, I take it that you wish me well. If my case is postponed, I can only think that you wish me harm.

² The Liturgy of the Hours – vol. IV – Catholic Book Publishing Co – New York – 1975 – pg 1490

10SN1804

10.18.17

From an Unknown Greek Writer of the eleventh century ¹

When Paul, abandoning the darkness of error, accepted the true faith and joined the band of the disciples, Luke, desiring to do battle for the faith, became his traveling companion and accompanied him wherever he went. As the associate of such a soldier of Christ, Luke suffered imprisonment with him like a criminal, and joined him in spreading the light of the divine knowledge to the ends of the earth. So close was he to Paul and so pleasing in every way, that in his letters to the faithful, Paul frequently refers to *his beloved Luke*. Luke preached the gospel with Paul all the way from Jerusalem to Illyricum, and while traveling from Judea to Rome he was imprisoned with him. Luke's desire was to be known as Paul's associate in everything, including his crown.

After trading with the talent of preaching with Paul, gaining many nations and bringing them to the true faith under the direction of his master, this loving and beloved disciple proved to be a sacred writer and evangelist, having first followed closely the events that had taken place among them, gaining a knowledge of them from the first disciples and receiving divine inspiration. He was the evangelist who recorded the mystery of Gabriel's mission to the Virgin to announce the joy that was coming to the whole world. He was the one who described the birth of Christ so vividly, showing us the new born babe lying in a manger, and telling us of shepherds and angels proclaiming the glad tidings. He has made known inconceivable wonders with such a love for truth and beauty that the truth of these wonders is conveyed through the very beauty of his words, his language being worthy of the richness of his thought. He records more of the saving teachings given in parables than do the other evangelists, and just as he told us of the Word's coming down to earth, so also did he describe his going up to heaven and his return to the Father's throne.

But with Luke the grace of the Spirit did not stop at this. He did not confine himself to writing a gospel, but after recounting the wonders wrought by Christ, he went on to record the Acts of the Apostles: first the holy ascension of the Savior into heaven, then the descent of the Spirit upon the apostles in tongues of fire; then the stoning of Stephen, the conversion of Paul – his being called by Christ from heaven, and his passing from the letter to the spirit; the times Paul was bound, wounded, beaten, ambushed by unbelievers; his journey from Jerusalem to Rome; his sufferings at sea, his afflictions, dangers, misfortunes, shipwrecks. Luke was

not a mere spectator of all this but an actual participant, and that is why he took such pains to record it.

[1](#)A Word in Season – vol. IV – Augustinian Press – 1991 – pg 191

From the spiritual diaries of St John de Brebeuf, priest and martyr³

For two days now I have experienced a great desire to be a martyr and to endure all the torments the martyrs suffered.

Jesus, my Lord and Savior, what can I give you in return for all the favors you have conferred on me? I will take from your hand the cup of your sufferings and call on your name. I vow before your eternal Father and the Holy spirit, before your most holy Mother and her most chaste spouse, before the angels, apostles and martyrs, before my blessed fathers Saint Ignatius and Saint Francis Xavier – in truth I vow to you, Jesus my Savior, that as far as I have the strength I will never fail to accept the grace of martyrdom, if some day you in your infinite mercy should offer it to me, your most unworthy servant.

I bind myself in this way so that for the rest of my life I will have neither permission nor freedom to refuse opportunities of dying and shedding my blood for you, unless at a particular juncture I should consider it more suitable for your glory to act otherwise at that time. Further, I bind myself to this so that, on receiving the blow of death, I shall accept it from your hands with the fullest delight and joy of spirit. For this reason, my beloved Jesus, and because of the surging joy which moves me, here and now I offer my body and blood and life. May I die only for you, if you will grant me this grace, since you willingly died for me. Let me so live that you may grant me the gift of such a happy death. In this way, my God and Savior, I will take from your hand the cup of your sufferings and call on your name: Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!

My God, it grieves me greatly that you are not known, that in this savage wilderness all have not been converted to you, that sin has not been driven from it. My God, even if all the brutal tortures which prisoners in this region must endure should fall on me, I offer myself most willingly to them and I alone shall suffer them all.

³ The Liturgy of the Hours – vol. IV – Catholic Book Publishing Co – New York – 1975 – p 1503

OT-MAC01

10.20.17

A Reading on the Book of Maccabees from a book by Dom Damasus Winzen ¹

During the exile, a great winnowing took place: out of it emerged a remnant of those who were determined to remain faithful. They were certain of the unique character of their religion and their chosenness, and this very certainty gave them an absolute determination to survive and an abiding hope in the future. When the dawn of a new day seemed to arise with the downfall of Babylon, and Cyrus, king of Persia, ended the Babylonian exile in 537 B.C., through a decree which allowed the Jews to return into their homeland, forty thousand were ready. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel, a prince of the house of David, as governor, and Jeshua, son of Josadak, as high priest, they set out to rebuild the temple and the city. After long years of rivalries, intrigues and open hostilities on the part of the neighboring tribes the second temple was finished and dedicated in the year 516 B.C. When the attacks from the outside did not cease, Nehemiah, a high official of Jewish blood at the Persian court, was sent to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Despite determined opposition on the part of Israel's enemies this task was carried out successfully. Now the most important step in this whole work of reconstruction was taken by Ezra, the scribe. He was a man of the book. He represented all that Israel had learned in the school of the exile.

Now all the essential factors that were going to determine this period of Jewish history were set up: the temple with its ritual and its leading official, the high priest; the walls of Jerusalem under the guardianship of the governor; the law, entrusted to the scribes. Divine Providence, which was now leading the chosen people into the last phase of preparation for the coming of the Messiah Jesus, arranged the course of events in such a way that all the hopes put on these things by the Jewish people came to nought. The temple with its treasures and the high priests with their enormous revenues became objects for foreign powers to plunder or buy. The walls of Jerusalem, the symbol of political power, conquered after bloody battles by Judas Maccabeus, were held thereafter by Jewish kings until "the scepter was taken away from Judah" by Herod, the Idumaeen. The "fence" which the Pharisees built around the religion finally eclipsed the law of Moses, so that when the Messiah came he could say to the scribes: "You make void the commandments of God that you may keep your own traditions". (Mk 7:9). The entire period of reconstruction which followed the Babylonian exile was designed to make it clear that this temple, and this Jerusalem, and these doctors of the law were not the fulfillment of the glorious promise which God had made through Isaiah and Jeremiah about the new covenant he was going to make with his people.

This was also the tragedy of the Maccabees. With all their valor and all their heroism, their restoration of the temple and of the Jewish state was never wholly successful. In the eyes of orthodox Jews they remained usurpers, and for that reason the two books which tell of their great deeds were never received into the Jewish canon of holy Scripture. For

us Christians, however, they are of greatest importance, because they give us a picture of the conflict between Judaism and Hellenism which developed in the 3rd and 2nd century B.C. As a consequence of the invasion by Greek civilization that took place in the wake of Alexander's conquest of the Persian empire. The process of Hellenization might have gone much further had not Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria attempted to substitute pagan worship for Jewish. This brought about the Maccabean revolt recounted in the books of Maccabees.

1Pathways in Scripture – Damasus Winzen – Word of Life – Ann Arbor, MI – 1976 – pg 152

Praise of Mary, St. Ephrem.¹

The Blessed Virgin Mary invites me to sing of the mystery which I contemplate with admiration, Son of God, give me your wonderful gift, that I may portray the beautiful picture of your beloved Mother.

The blessed Virgin brought forth her Son when a virgin, she fed him who feeds the nations, in her chaste bosom she held him who upholds the universe. She is virgin and mother, what is she not?

Holy in body , lovely in soul, pure in mind, of an upright understanding, perfect in affection, chaste, faithful, pure of heart, proved, she is full of virtues.

Let all the race of virgins rejoice in Mary, for one of them has brought forth the illustrious one who upholds all creation, him who has delivered humanity groaning in servitude.

Let Adam wounded by the serpent rejoice in Mary. She gave to Adam a descendant who permitted him to crush the cursed serpent, and healed him of his mortal wound.

Let priests rejoice in the Blessed Virgin. She has given to the world the high-priest who made himself a victim. He has put an end to the old sacrifice, because he became himself the victim who appeased the Father.

Let the line of all the Prophets rejoice in Mary. In the same way that she received the blessing which was promised to them, so, in her Son, she has perfected them. By him, indeed, seers, justs and priests find themselves purified.

Instead of the bitter fruit plucked by Eve from the fatal tree, Mary has given to men a fruit full of sweetness. And the whole world delights in the fruit of Mary.

The tree of life, hidden in the midst of Paradise, has grown in Mary. Springing from her, it has spread its branches over the world, it has distributed its fruits to the peoples most remote as well as to those near at hand.

Mary has woven a garment of glory and has given it to our first father. He had hidden his nakedness in the trees, but now he is adorned with modesty, virtue,

beauty. His daughter has lifted him up whose spouse had thrown him down;
upheld by her he stands erect, like a hero.

The virginal vine has produced a grape, from which the delectable wine gives joy
to the afflicted. Eve and Adam in their anguish have tasted the beverage of life: in
it they have found the solace of all their sadness.

[Lectionary and Martyrology, II.](#) ed. monks of Encalcat Abbey, Editions
D'Encalcat, 1956, p.507-508.