

## NT-MT43

10.08.17

### A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by St Basil the Great <sup>1</sup>

You need only look at the vine to be reminded of your own nature, that is, if you observe it intelligently. No doubt you remember the image used by the Lord in which he says that he is the vine and the Father the vinedresser. Each of us who have been grafted onto the Church by faith he calls branches, and he urges us to bear much fruit so as not to be rejected as useless and thrown into the fire.

Throughout the Scriptures the Lord continually likens human souls to vines. He says for instance: *My beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hillside*; and again: *I planted a vineyard and put a hedge around it*. Clearly it is human souls that he calls his vineyard, and the hedge he has put round them is the security of his commandments and the protection of the angels; for *the angel of the Lord will encamp around those who fear him*. Moreover, by establishing in the Church apostles in the first place, prophets in the second, and teachers in the third, he has surrounded us as though by a firmly planted palisade.

In addition, the Lord has raised our thoughts to heaven by the examples of saints of past ages. He has kept them from sinking to the earth where they would deserve to be trampled on, and he wills that the bonds of love, like the tendrils of a vine, should attach us to our neighbors and make us rest on them, so that always climbing upward like the vines growing on trees, we may reach the loftiest heights.

He also requires that we allow ourselves to be weeded. To be spiritually weeded means to have renounced worldly ambitions that burdened our hearts. Anyone who has renounced the love of material things and attachment to possessions, or who has come to regard as despicable and deserving of contempt the poor, wretched glory of this world, is like a weeded vine. Freed from the profitless burden of earthly aspirations, that person can breathe again.

Finally, following out the implications of the comparison, we must not run to wood, or, in other words, show off or seek the praise of

outsiders. Instead, we must bear fruit by reserving the display of our good works for the true vinedresser.

1Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – 1999 – pg  
130

## OT-JUDTH11

10.09.17

### Commentary on the Book of Judith by St. Fulgentius of Ruspe <sup>1</sup>

Behold a wisdom, famous in family, wealthy in goods, young in age, marvelous in appearance, who despised riches, repudiated delights, tramped on the attractions of the flesh, and, putting on virtue from on high, did not seek to be entangled in a second marriage. So, by the witness of so brilliant a deed, it is apparent how beloved of God is a widow's continence. Then when Holofernes besieged Bethulia in force with an army and all the power of the Israelites, shaken, grew weak, chastity went forth to assault lasciviousness and holy humility proceeded to the destruction of pride. He fought with armies, she with fasts; he with drunkenness, she with prayer. Therefore, what the entire people of the Israelites was unable to do, the holy widow accomplished by the virtue of chastity. For one woman cut off the head of the leader of so great an army and restored to the people of God an unhopd for freedom.

Let us also see in the New Testament how the way of life of Saint Anna is revealed to us. Concerning her, Saint Luke speaks as follows: *There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer.*

These two widows, although they lived at different periods, still both served the mystery of the one faith; because Christ, whom Anna knew as born in the flesh, Judith had known as one who was going to be born. How God showed in each widow that continence pleases him greatly! For Judith, girded with spiritual weapons, cut off the head of the lustful brigand. But Anna, filled with the Holy Spirit, knew the very head of the Church. The death of Holofernes was given to Judith; to Anna was revealed the coming of the Savior. To the former, God gave it to drive away a plague from the people; to the latter, he gave it to recognize the remedy of the human race. And because the

contenance of the widow follows after virginal holiness as a lower degree, therefore, after he Son of God was born of a virgin, he deigned to be proclaimed by the office of the widow's tongue. Still it was not a widow given over to pleasure who spoke about him, one who is dead while she lives, but one who *never left the temple but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer.*

[1](#)A Word in Season – vol. VIII – Augustinian Press – 1999 – pg 138

## OT-JUDTH12

10.10.17

### **A Commentary on the Book of Judith by Fr. John Craghan [1](#)**

Judith is courageous. In a male-dominated society it is Judith who summons the elders and takes them to task. The Mayor comes off as less than courageous: “But the people were very thirsty, and they compelled us...” On the other hand, Judith lives up to her name – she is the embodiment of the true Israel. Nothing less than the honor of the country is at stake. In her logic the situation calls for calculated risks. Moreover, such action will set an example for the rest of the people. Her courage moves her to think in terms of others, namely, the people of Israel together with their temple and sanctuary. The woman's hand is anything but weak.

Judith is wise. She reflects the wisdom of the woman of Abel of Bethmaacah who recommended the execution of Sheba in order to preserve the common good (Sam. 20:14-22). Judith argues that one cannot set up parameters for God. The five-day limit means tempting God. She thereby strikes a blow for God's liberty – she allows God to be God, not a puppet to be cajoled and manipulated by human imperatives.

Judith also rejects the suggestion that God is punishing the people since according to verse 20 they are righteous. Her wisdom betrays Israel's covenant faith. However to surrender to Holofernes is to acknowledge Nebuchadnezzar as god. Judith concludes that the present impasse is really a trial. God is testing them as He tested their ancestors. After the manner of the Wisdom literature, Judith urges that such testing goes hand in hand with God's loving concern.

The author suggests a link with Israel's Exodus experience. The phrase “The Lord will deliver Israel” reflects Yahweh's concern for his people in Egypt and his care for them as demonstrated in his providing for the patriarch Joseph. The instrument for effecting this

deliverance will be Judith's hand, implying a connection with God's hand now and Moses' hand in the first Exodus.

1Old Testament Message – vol. 16 – Michael Glazier, Inc. -  
Wilmington, DE – 1982 – p 76

**10SN1101**

**10.11.17**

**Spiritual Testament and Last Wishes by St. Pope John XXIII <sup>1</sup>**

On the point of presenting myself before the One and Triune Lord who created me, redeemed me, chose me to be his priest and bishop, and covered me with unending graces, I entrust my poor soul to His mercy; I humbly ask pardon for my sins and deficiencies. I offer Him the little good, although petty and imperfect, that with His aid I have succeeded in doing, for His glory, for the service of Holy Church, for the edification of my brethren, begging Him finally to receive me, like a good and kind Father, with His Saints into eternal happiness.

I profess once again with all my heart my entire Christian and Catholic faith, my adherence and subjection to the Holy Apostolic and Roman Church, and my complete devotion and obedience to her August Head, the Supreme Pontiff, whom it was my great honor to represent for long years in various regions of the East and West, who at the end chose me to come to Venice as Cardinal and Patriarch, and whom I have always followed with sincere affection, aside from and above any dignity conferred upon me. The sense of my own littleness and nothingness has always been my good companion, keeping me humble and calm, and making me employ myself to the best of my ability in a constant exercise of obedience and charity for souls and for the interests of the Kingdom of Jesus, my Lord and my all. To Him be all glory; for me and for my merit, His mercy. "My merit is the mercy of the Lord. O Lord, You know everything: You know that I love You." This alone is enough for me.

I ask pardon of those whom I have unwittingly offended, of all to whom I have not been a source of edification. I feel that I have nothing to forgive anyone, for all who have known and dealt with me – including those who have offended me, scorned me, held me in bad esteem (with good reason, for that matter), or have been a source of

affliction for me – I regard solely as brothers and benefactors, to whom I am grateful and for whom I pray and always will pray.

Born poor, but of honorable and humble people, I am particularly happy to die poor, having given away, in accord with the various demands and circumstances of my simple and modest life, for the benefit of the poor and of Holy Church that had nurtured me, all that came into my hands – which was little enough as a matter of fact – during the years of my priesthood and episcopacy. Outward appearances of ease and comfort often veiled hidden thorns of distressing poverty and kept me from giving with all the largess I would have liked. I thank God for this grace of poverty which I vowed in my youth, poverty of spirit as a priest of the Sacred Heart, and real poverty. This grace has sustained me in never asking for anything, neither positions nor money, nor favors – never, not for myself, nor for my relatives or friends.

The goodness directed toward my poor person by all whom I met along the path made my life serene. As I face death, I recall each and every one – those who preceded me in taking the final step, those who will survive me and who will follow me. May they pray for me. I will repay them from Purgatory or from Paradise, where I hope to be received. I repeat it once again, not because of my merits, but because of the mercy of the Lord.

At the moment for saying farewell, or better still, *arrivederci*, I once more remind everyone of what counts most in life: blessed Jesus Christ, His Holy Church, His Gospel; and in the Gospel, above all, the *Pater noster* in the spirit and heart of Jesus and the Gospel, the truth and goodness, the goodness meek and kind, active and patient, victorious and unbowed.

My children, my brethren, *arrivederci*. In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

[1](#)The Encyclicals and Other Messages of John XXIII – TPS Press – Washington DC – 1964 – pg 465



## OT-JUDTH13

10.12.17

### **A Commentary on the Prayer of Judith by St. John Chrysostom <sup>1</sup>**

Prayer is the height of our blessings and communion with God; for it is both companionship and unity with God. Just as the eyes of the body are enlightened when they look upon light, so a soul intent on God is enlightened by his inexpressible light. It is not indeed formal prayer that I refer to, but prayer offered from the heart, and not so much confined to suitable times and fixed intervals, but continuing in action without cease day and night. For we do not only have to withdraw to pray, and suddenly turn our minds towards God. No, even while we are busy among the needy, either with the care of the poor or with other concerns, or useful good works – into their very midst we should also bring our desire for and remembrance of God, so that seasoned, as it were, with the love of God they may provide a most acceptable offering for the Lord of all. If we devote most of our time to prayer, the delight we can gain from it will last us the whole of our lives.

Prayer is the illumination of the soul and true knowledge of God. It mediates between God and humans; it heals suffering and counteracts disease. It calms the soul and guides it to heaven, for prayer has no earthly life, but follows a path leading to the very heights of heaven. It transcends the created world, and in the spirit cuts through and soars above the air; it passes beyond the circle of stars, opens the gates of heaven, and taking precedence of the angels enters the very presence of the unapproachable Trinity. There it worships the deity, and is held worthy to be the companion of the king of heaven. The soul, raised by it high into heaven, embraces the Lord in an ineffable embrace, and cries out tearfully like a child to its mother, begging for the heavenly milk. It seeks its own desires, and receives gifts surpassing all that belongs to the world of nature.

Now in speaking of prayer, you must not imagine that I mean words. I mean desire for God, unutterable love, which mortals cannot offer of

themselves but by the inspiration of divine grace. Of this the apostle says: *We do not know how we ought to pray, but in our wordless sighs the Spirit himself intercedes for us.* If the Lord grants to anyone prayer of this kind, it is wealth that will never be taken away, and heavenly food that satisfies the soul; for whoever tastes it is possessed with a mighty longing for the Lord, which sets the heart ablaze with a mighty fire.

[1](#)A Word in Season – vol. VIII – Augustinian Press – 1999 – pg 130

DEAD -46

10.13.17

**From a Sermon by Saint Anastasius of Antioch, bishop<sup>1</sup>**

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"To this end Christ died and rose to life that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. But God is not God of the dead, but of the living."

That is why the dead, now under the dominion of one who has risen to life, are no longer dead but alive. Therefore life has dominion over them and, just as Christ having been raised from the dead, will never die again, so too they will live and never fear death again. When they have been thus raised from the dead and freed from decay, they shall never again see death, for they will share in Christ's resurrection just as he himself shared in their death.

That is why Christ descended into the underworld, with its imperishable prison-bars: to shatter the doors of bronze and break the bars of iron and, from decay, to raise our life to himself by giving us freedom in place of servitude.

But if this plan does not yet appear to be perfectly realized - for people still die and bodies still decay in death - this should not occasion any loss of faith. For, in receiving the first-fruits, we have already received the pledge of all the blessings we have mentioned; with them we have reached the heights of heaven, and we have taken our place beside him who has raised us up with himself, as Paul says: In Christ God has raised us up with him, and has made us sit with him in the heavenly places.

And the fulfillment will be ours on the day predestined by the Father, when we shall put off our childish ways and come to perfect manhood. For this is the decree of the Father of the ages: the gift, once given, is to be secure and no more to be rejected by a return to childish attitudes.

There is no need to recall that the Lord rose from the dead with a spiritual body, since Paul in speaking of our bodies bears witness that they are sown as animal bodies and raised as spiritual bodies:

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<sup>1</sup> Oratio 5, de Resurrectione Christi, 6-7,9: PG 89,1358-1359. 1361-1362. From the Liturgy of the Hours vol. III, p. 1886.

that is, they are transformed in accordance with the glorious transfiguration of Christ who goes before us as our leader.

The Apostle, affirming something he clearly knew, also said that this would happen to all peoples through Christ, who will change our lowly body to make it like his glorious body.

If this transformation is a change into a spiritual body and one, furthermore, like the glorious body of Christ, then Christ rose with a spiritual body, a body that was sown in dishonor, but the very body that was transformed in glory.

Having brought this body to the Father as the first-fruits of our nature, he will also bring the whole body to fulfillment. For he promised this when he said: I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself.

**MY-68**

**10.14.2017**

**On Mary's Role in the Mediation of Grace from an Interview in a Colloquium on Marian Devotion with Karl Rahner in Innsbruck 1983<sup>2</sup>**

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I believe that one can speak in a meaningful way about Mary's role in the mediation of grace. A pope such as Pius X certainly spoke of it. Obviously one can be afraid that this kind of language could cloud or endanger the unique and fundamental mediation of Jesus. Because Protestants on the basis of their tradition have such fears, Vatican II spoke of the reality of Mary's involvement in the mediation of grace without using the term.

Many years ago in Rome I once spoke with the Protestant theologian Karl Barth about devotion to Mary. I asked him, "Can you, may you, should you perhaps say to another Christian 'Pray for me'?" Barth hesitated because he knew what I was getting at. Had he simply said yes, then my question would have been, "Why are you not allowed then to say something like that to Mary? She is alive, she has been taken up into the life of God. With God she has not become less than she was but has been brought to fulfillment. Why, therefore, should I not be able to say 'Pray for me'?" Barth naturally suspected what I would have said and answered, "We would say, 'Let us pray with one another.'" I agreed with his response. When in fact I say, "Mary, let us pray for one another that you might be blessed and that I might be blessed," this formulation still contains a "Pray for me."

To pray for particular people means quite simply to ask for God's grace for them. Why then should one not be able to say that they received the grace because I prayed for them? God wills us in our individual uniqueness but also insofar as we are sanctified members

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<sup>2</sup>Faith in a Wintry Season. Karl Rahner. Crossroad, NY, 1990, pp. 85,91.

of the whole of humanity. God intends a true and authentic social bond, a solidarity, among all people. Each one of us lives with everyone else in a great and mysterious social union; we are all members of the body of Christ. To put it in an overly pointed way, God intends me in my uniqueness so that there will be people like Maximilian Kolbe. Even he was "dependent" on my prayers and on my unity with God.

From this point of view there is no reason to reject the notion of the "mediation of grace." It is of course obvious that, within this great solidarity to which Jesus Christ also belongs, each person does not have the same function for all the others. For all of us Christ has a saving significance that no one else has. That does not mean that other people have no such meaning for others. The idea of the different functions within the one human family applied to Mary means that she, because of her distinct and unique position in the history of salvation, has a role in redemption that is peculiarly hers.

It is obvious that in talking about intercession we should not imagine some kind of heavenly office for mediation. It is certainly false to think that Mary would turn directly to Jesus and to God the Father and say something like this: "Fred is not reciting the rosary. I don't want to have anything to do with him. Jack, on the other hand, prays to me everyday. Things really ought to be better for him in his life on earth." We really ought to abandon such primitive and anthropomorphic notions. Let us leave aside all images and simply say that, since every human being is of significance for every other human being, a Christian can prayerfully realize the continuing fundamental significance of the Blessed Virgin when he says, "Pray for me." by doing this he or she becomes more open for the mediation and the intercession of the Virgin. For this to be so, no complicated things have to take place in heaven. When we pray to Mary, we open ourselves to her solidarity with us, the solidarity that flows from her role in the history of salvation and that has been brought to its fulfillment in God.