

NT-MT45

10.22.17

**A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by Lawrence of Brindisi <sup>1</sup>**

In today's gospel we find two questions: one put to Christ by the Pharisees, and the other put by him to them. The Pharisees' question concerns this world alone, while Christ's has an entirely heavenly and other-worldly sense. Their question derived from profound ignorance and perversity; his stemmed from perfect wisdom and goodness.

*Whose likeness and inscription is this? Caesar's, they reply. Then give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. To each, he says, must be given what belongs to him. This, surely, is a judgment full of heavenly wisdom and instruction. For it teaches that authority is twofold, having an earthly and human aspect, and a heavenly and divine aspect. It teaches that we owe a twofold duty of obedience: to the human laws and to the law of God. The coin bearing Caesar's likeness and inscription must be given to Caesar, and the one stamped with the divine image and likeness must be given to God. We bear the imprint of your glorious face, O Lord.*

We are made *in the image and likeness of God*. So you, O Christian, because you are a human being, are God's tribute money – a little coin bearing the image and likeness of the divine emperor. Therefore with Christ I ask: *Whose likeness and inscription is this?* Your answer is, God's. To which I reply, Then why not give God what belongs to him?

If we really want to be God's image, we must be like Christ, for his is the image of God's goodness and *the perfect copy of his nature*, and God *foreordained that those he has chosen should take on a likeness to his Son*. Christ undoubtedly gave Caesar what was Caesar's and God what was God's. He fulfilled to perfection the precepts of both tablets of the law, becoming *obedient unto death, even death on a cross*, and he was most highly endowed, both inwardly and outwardly, with every virtue.

In today's gospel the reply, most wise and discreet, by which Christ sidestepped his enemies' trap shows his great prudence. His teaching that

each must be given what belongs to him, and also the example he gave by being willing to pay the temple tax and giving a shekel for himself and Peter, shows his justice. His declaring it to be a duty to pay taxes to Caesar, openly teaching the truth without fear of the Jews who would be offended, shows his fortitude. For this is God's way, of which Christ is the authentic teacher.

Those therefore who resemble Christ in their lives, conduct and practice of virtues, they are the ones who manifest the divine image; for the way to recover this image is by being absolutely just. *Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's*; that is, give to each what belongs to him.

1Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY - pg134

## OT-MAC03

10.23.17

### A Commentary on First Maccabees by Fr John Collins [1](#)

1 Maccabees chapter 3 begins with a hymn in praise of Judas, the mighty warrior. The picture of the giant dressing for battle recalls the portrayal of the Divine Warrior in the Old Testament Isaiah 59 where Jahweh prepares for battle, glorious in his apparel. While the prophet looked to God as the mighty warrior, and the glorious apocalyptic visionary looked to an angel such as Michael, 1 Maccabees looks to Judas. The human hero was not without precedent. Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus) writing in the early part of the second century B.C. sang the praises of the famous men of old. Among them was Joshua “a great savior of God's elect”: “How glorious he was when he lifted his hands and stretched out his sword against the cities ... for he waged the wars of the Lord”. Judas is the new Joshua, and much of the narrative is colored with motifs from the wars of the Lord in Joshua and Judges. The last verse of the hymn suggests even more. The one who is renowned to the ends of the earth and gathers in those who are perishing has some characteristics of a royal messiah.

The first victory of Judas is over Apollonius, presumably the one who had plundered Jerusalem at the outbreak of the persecution. The account emphasizes that the Jews were few and the enemies many. The motif is familiar from the historical books of the Old Testament. (Compare the words of Jonathan in 1 Samuel 14: “nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few.”) The most memorable illustration is that of Gideon in Judges 7, where Gideon is told to reduce his number, lest Israel say “My own hand has delivered me.” Again, the feat that fell on the Gentiles round about recalls the fear that fell on the nations after the Exodus, at the beginning of the conquest. Despite the generally realistic tone of the account, the old theology of holy war is in the background here. The battle depends not on the size of the army but on the strength that comes from heaven. Such beliefs undoubtedly bolstered the courage of the

guerrilla fighters. It also deepened the conviction that “God is on our side,” and that the justice of Judas and his cause were guaranteed by his military success.

1Daniel, 1-2 Maccabees – John Collins – Michael Glazier, Inc. - Wilmington, DE – 1981- pg171

## OT-MAC04

10.24.17

### A Commentary on First Maccabees by Fr John Collins <sup>1</sup>

The generals sent by Lysias pose a threat of far greater magnitude than that of the previous Syrian commanders, as can be seen by the threat to sell Jews into slavery. This threat had particularly deep-rooted associations for the Jews, in view of the biblical story of slavery in Egypt.

The Jews prepare for battle at Mizpah. This episode echoes 1 Samuel 7, where the Israelites are gathered at Mizpah by Samuel to fast and confess their sins before a battle with the Philistines. The passage emphasizes the careful observance of the old traditions, including the consultation of the law, which had been outlawed by the king. Judas behaves like Moses in Deuteronomy, appointing his officers and in accordance with the prescriptions of the Law of Moses in sending home those who were betrothed, engaged in building or planting, or faint-hearted. Judas is carefully portrayed as an exact observer of the Law. Despite the agreement to fight on the sabbath in chapter 2, he keeps the intrusion on the sabbath to a minimum. All of this is by way of ensuring the support of God in the battle. At the same time, the poetic passages keep the desecrated temple in view as the ultimate motivating factor. The temple is the central symbol of the nation. Its desecration is the humiliation of the people, and it is better to die in battle than to endure that humiliation. The gentiles are assembled to destroy not only the temple but also the Jews. What is at issue is the preservation of the nation.

The battle is decided by tactical manoeuvres. Judas eludes Gorgias' surprise attack, appears unexpectedly in the plain and catches the Syrian army divided. In typical biblical style, however, 1 Maccabees does not attribute the victory to such human factors but to the power of God. The victory at Emmaus is an act of God as surely as the crossing of the sea in Exodus. The battle at Beth-zur is similarly explained. Before the battle Judas asks God to give him victory as he gave it to David and Jonathan, by filling the enemy with cowardice.

[1](#)Daniel, 1-2 Maccabees – John Collins – Michael Glazier, Inc. - Wilmington,  
DE – 1981 – pg 178

**The Divine Call – from a book by Hans Urs von Balthasar**<sup>1</sup>

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

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

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.



## **OT-MAC05**

**10.26.17**

### **A Commentary on the First Book of Maccabees by Fr John Collins [1](#)**

After the battles the Jews give praise to God. There is something ironic in the hymn that is sung in verse 24 - “for he is good, and his mercy endures forever” (Psalm 136). Mercy is manifested in military victory. True, the battles of Judas are still defensive ones, and his victories bring liberation to the Jews. Yet we must note the close identification of the divinity with the interests of a specific people.

The prayer before the battle of Beth-zur must strike us as even more ironic: “strike them down with the sword of those who love thee.” It is assumed that the enemies of the Jews are the enemies of God. Love of God does not involve any desire for reconciliation with the enemy. 1 Maccabees' attitude towards the gentiles is the attitude of the psalmist: “I hate them with a perfect hatred” (Ps. 139).

In all of this, 1 Maccabees is drawing on beliefs and assumptions which have a venerable history in the Old Testament, and would continue to figure prominently in Judaism and in Christianity alike. Judas is the new Joshua. The re-birth of the Jewish nation is conceived in ways that are similar to its original birth. God is known as the champion of the Jewish people. Their victory is taken as a sign of his power. It is probably true that the more profound parts of the biblical tradition were born out of the failures and set-backs of the Jewish people rather than out of their victories. Yet few peoples have been able to resist the assumption that their triumphs reflect the favor of the divinity. The basic revelations of the Old Testament were precisely the “mighty acts of God” in the victories that brought Israel into being. If the claim for the “acts of God” was justified in the case of Joshua, it is surely justified in the case of Judas too, but our better knowledge of the historical circumstances of the Maccabees allows

us to see the difficulty and ambiguity involved in claiming that any human victories are “acts of God.”

[1](#)Daniel, 1-2 Maccabees – John Collins – Michael Glazier, Inc. - Wilmington, DE – 1981 – pg 180

## OT-MAC06

10.27.17

### A Commentary on the First Book of Maccabees by Fr John Collins [1](#)

**After his great victories in battle, Judas goes up to Mount Zion. The historical** sequence of events here conforms to an ancient pattern: compare Exodus 15, where, after the victory at sea, we are told that God will bring in his people and plant them on his holy mountain, The sequence is natural enough. The desecration of the temple was a glaring eye-sore in the land. Its rededication symbolized the re-establishment of the Jewish people.

Throughout antiquity temples were thought to have central importance in the order of creation. The holy mountain was thought to be the navel of the earth, its center point, the point of connection between heaven and earth. The right maintenance of the temple was essential if there was to be right order in the world. In the Old Testament Psalms we hear that Mount Zion, the holy mountain, is the joy of all the earth. God is in its midst. So the Israelites need not fear “though the earth should change” and “the mountains shake in the heart of the sea” (Psalms 48 & 46). When the temple lay desolate that assurance of security was gone. The work of Judas, then, was not only repeating the conquest of the land. In a sense it was repeating the work of creation, by restoring right order in place of chaos.

The entire sanctuary is built anew, faithfully following the instructions of the Torah. The stones of the old altar are stored “until there should come a prophet.” There had been no authoritative prophets for many centuries, although various forms of prophecy always persisted. The present passage seems to point forward to the distant expectation of an eschatological prophet – a prophet like Moses or Elijah. We will find a similar expression later when Simon is appointed high priest (ch. 14).

[1](#)Daniel, 1-2 Maccabees – John Collins – Michael Glazier, Inc. - Wilmington,  
DE – 1981 – pg 183

**The zeal of the apostles: a reading from a sermon on Sts Simon and Jude  
by  
Blessed John Henry Newman.** <sup>2</sup>

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The Apostles commemorated on this Festival direct our attention to the subject of Zeal. St. Simon is called **Zelotes**, which means the Zealous; a title given him (as is supposed) from his belonging before his conversion to the Jewish sect of Zealots, which professed extraordinary Zeal for the Law. Anyhow, the appellation marks him as distinguished for this particular Christian grace. St. Jude's Epistle, which forms part of the service of the day, is almost wholly upon the duty of manifesting Zeal for Gospel Truth, and opens with a direct exhortation to *Acontend earnestly for the Faith once delivered to the Saints.*

It will be a more simple account of Zeal, to call it the earnest desire for God's honor, leading to strenuous and bold deeds in His behalf; and that in spite of all obstacles. Now Zeal is one of the elementary religious qualifications; that is, one of those which are essential in the very notion of a religious man. A man cannot be said to be in earnest in religion, till he magnifies his God and Savior; till he so far consecrates and exalts the thought of Him in his heart, as an object of praise, and adoration, and rejoicing, as to be pained and grieved at dishonor shown to Him, and eager to avenge Him. In a word, a religious temper is one of loyalty towards God; and we all know what is meant by being loyal from the experience of civil matters. To be loyal is not merely to obey; but to obey with promptitude, energetic dutifulness, disinterested devotion, disregard of consequences. And such is Zeal, except that it is ever attended with that reverential feeling which is due from a creature and a sinner towards his Maker, and towards Him alone. It is the main principle in **all** religious service to love God above all things; now, Zeal is to love Him above all other people, above our dearest and most intimate friends. This was the especial praise of the Levites, which gained for them the reward of the Priesthood, that is, their executing judgment on the people in the sin of the golden calf. Zeal is the very consecration of God's Ministers to their office. Accordingly our Blessed Savior, the One Great High Priest, the Antitype of all Priests who

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<sup>2</sup> "Christian Zeal," in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, pp. 464 ff.

went before Him and the Lord and Strength of all who come after, began His manifestation of Himself by two acts of Zeal. When twelve years old he deigned to put before us in representation the sacredness of this duty, when He remained in the Temple *Awhile His father and mother sought Him sorrowing,* @ and on their finding Him, returned answer, *ADo you not know that I must be about My Father=s business?@* And again, at the opening of His public Ministry, He went into the Temple, and *Amade a scourge of small cords, and drove out the sheep and oxen, and overthrew the changers= tables@* that profaned it: thus fulfilling the prophecy contained in the text, *AZeal for your house has eaten me up.@*

Being thus consumed by Zeal Himself, no wonder He should choose His followers from among the Zealous.