

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by St. John Chrysostom <sup>1</sup>

In the parable of the talents the Master entrusted money to his servants and then set out on a journey. This was to help us understand how patient he is, though in my view this story also refers to the resurrection. Here it is a question not of a vineyard and vine dressers, but of all workers. The Master is addressing everyone, not only rulers, or the Jews.

Those bringing him their profit acknowledge frankly what is their own, and what is their Master's. One says: *Sir, you gave me five talents*; another says: *You gave me two*, recognizing that they had received from him the means of making a profit. They are extremely grateful, and attribute to him all their success.

What does the Master say then? *Well done, good and faithful servant* (for goodness shows itself in concern for one's neighbor). *Because you have proved trustworthy in managing a small amount, I will give you charge of a greater sum: come and share your Master's joy.*

But one servant has a different answer. He says: *I knew you were a hard man, reaping where you have not sown and gathering where you have not winnowed; and I was afraid, and hid your talent. Here it is – you have back what belongs to you.*

What does the Master say to that? *You wicked servant! You should have put my money in the bank*, that is, “You should have spoken out and given encouragement and advice.” “But no one will pay attention.” “That is not my concern. You should have deposited the money” he says, “and left me to reclaim it, which I would have done with interest,” meaning by interest the good works that are seen to follow the hearing of the word. “The easier part is all you were expected to do, leaving the harder part to me.” Because the servant failed to do this, the Master said: *Take the talent away from him, and give it to the servant who has ten talents. For to everyone who has more will be given, and he will have enough and to spare; but the one who has not will forfeit even the little he has.*

What is the meaning of this? That whoever has received for the good of others the ability to preach and teach, and does not use it, will lose that ability, whereas the zealous servant will be given greater ability, even as the other forfeits what he had.

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<sup>1</sup>Journey with the Fathers – Year A – pg 142

A Commentary on the Book of Daniel by St. Jerome <sup>1</sup>

On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, that is, of Nissan, after three weeks or twenty-one days had elapsed, Daniel beheld this vision. And he heard from the angel that on the very first day he had begun to pray and to afflict himself before God, his words had been heard and granted. The question arises, why, if he had been heard, was the angel not sent to him right away? Well, by reason of the delay an opportunity was afforded him of praying to the Lord at greater length, so that in proportion as his earnest desire was intensified, he might deserve to hear more than he would otherwise. And as for the angel's statement, "And I have come in response to your words," his meaning is this: After you began to invoke God's mercy by good works and tearful supplication and fasting, then I for my part embraced the opportunity of entering in before God and praying for you.

In my opinion this was the angel to whose charge Persia was committed, in accordance with what we read in Deuteronomy. These are the princes of whom Paul also says, "We speak forth among the perfect a wisdom that none of the princes of this world knew. For if they had known it, they would never have crucified the lord of glory." And so the prince of the Persians offered resistance, acting in behalf of the province entrusted to him, in order that the entire captive nation might not be released. And it may well be that although the prophet was graciously heard by God from the day that he set his heart to understand, the angel was nevertheless not sent to proclaim to him God's gracious decision, for the reason that the prince of Persia opposed him for twenty-one days, enumerating the sins of the Jewish people as a ground for their justly being kept in captivity and as a proof that they ought not to be released.

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<sup>1</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture – vol. XIII – InterVarsity Press – Downers Grove, IL – 2008  
– pg 276

## **The Virgin Mary and the Temple, by Fr. Yves Congar<sup>1</sup>**

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The only occasion on which the Gospels expressly mention the Virgin Mary in connection with the Temple are in the account of her Purification and of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (LK 2:23-38) and the finding of the child Jesus in the Temple after four days' absence on his part and three anxious searching by his parents (LK 2:42-50). To these very brief indications, the piety of Christians very soon added the idea of the presentation of Mary in the Temple at the age of three to be consecrated to the service of God. We are dealing here with a symbolical representation of a profound spiritual reality about which the tradition and the doctrine of the Church provide us with valid information. Mary, predestined to be the Mother of Jesus, true God and true man, and to be worthy of her vocation, was prepared by the gift of exceptional graces and lived with unfailing fidelity a most pure life of inner consecration to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As the type of all faithful souls and of the Church herself, Mary expressed spiritually and supremely in her life the "presentation" which, for each one of us, is to begin by the service of faith and to be consummated in heaven.

It is obvious that the tradition and doctrine of the Church may, without falling prey to the imaginary productions of the apocrypha, propound statements concerning the status of the Mother of God in relation either to the Jewish messianic temple going far beyond what we are explicitly told in the three short passages from the Gospel which narrate the incidents mentioned above. If Mary is the Mother of God, she has a special relation to the body of Christ which is the true temple--to his physical body and doubtless also, in a certain sense, to his body the Church. She is herself a temple of God in a quite specific and sublime way, both because Christ was within her from the moment of his conception until that of his birth, and because of the exceptional spiritual gifts she received in preparation for her divine motherhood and as a reward for her free acceptance of this vocation (LK 1:38), not only after the Annunciation but during the whole of her life. Hence the liturgy--the Oriental liturgy in particular--shows a profound understanding of the mystery of Mary when it constantly uses the texts concerning the Temple and the tabernacle in order to express it.

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<sup>1</sup>The Mystery of the Temple, Westminster (Maryland) 1962, p.254-255.

11.22.17

**St. Cecilia from Butler's Lives of the Saints [\[1\]](#)**

Her "Acts" state that Cecilia was a patrician girl of Rome and that she was brought up a Christian. She wore a coarse garment beneath the clothes of her rank, fasted from food several days a week, and determined to remain a virgin for the love of God. But her father had other views, and gave her in marriage to a young patrician named Valerian. On the day of the marriage, when they retired to their room, she took her courage in both hands and said to her husband gently: "I have a secret to tell you. You must know that I have an angel of God watching over me. If you touch me in the way or marriage he will be angry and you will suffer; but if you respect my maidenhood he will love you as he loves me." Valerian replied: "Show me this angel." Cecilia said: "If you believe in the living and one true God and receive the water of baptism, then you will see the angel." Valerian agreed and was sent to find Bishop Urban. He was received with joy and baptized. Then he returned to Cecilia, and found standing by her side an angel, who put upon the head of each a chaplet of roses and lilies. Then appeared her brother, Tibertius. He too was offered a deathless crown if he would renounce his false gods. Cecilia talked long with him, until he was convinced by what she told him of Jesus, and he too was baptized.

From that time forth the two young men gave themselves up to good works. Because of their zeal in burying the bodies of martyrs they were both arrested. Almachius, the prefect before whom they were brought, began to cross-examine them. Almachius told them to tell the court if he would sacrifice to the gods and go forth free. Tiburtius and Valerian both replied: "No, not to the gods, but to the one God to whom we offer sacrifice daily." The prefect asked whether Jupiter were the name of their god. "No, indeed," said Valerian.

Valerian rejoiced when they were delivered over to be scourged. Even then the prefect was disposed to allow them a respite in which to reconsider their refusal, but they assured him that they would only use the time to distribute their possessions, thus preventing the state from confiscating their property. They were accordingly condemned to death and were beheaded in a place called Pagus Triopius, four miles from Rome. With them perished one of the officials, a man named Maximus, who had declared himself a Christian after witnessing their fortitude.

Cecilia gave burial to the three bodies, and then she in turn was called upon to repudiate her faith. Instead she converted those who came to induce her to sacrifice; and when Pope Urban visited her at home, he baptized over 400 persons there: one of them, Gordian, a man of rank, established a church in her house, which Urban later dedicated in her name. When she was eventually brought into court, Almachius argued with Cecilia at

some length, and was quite provoked by her attitude. At length she was sentenced to be suffocated to death in the bathroom of her own house. But though the furnace was fed with seven times its normal amount of fuel, Cecilia remained for a day and a night without receiving any harm, and a soldier was sent to behead her. He struck at her neck three times, and then left her lying. She was not dead and lingered for three days, during which time the Christians flocked to her side and she formally made over her house to Urban and committed her household to his care. She was buried next to the papal crypt in the catacomb of St. Callistus.

This well-known story, familiar to and loved by Christians for many ages, dates back to about the end of the fifth century, but unfortunately can by no means be regarded as trustworthy or even founded upon authentic materials. Today perhaps St Cecilia is most generally known as the patron-saint of music and musicians. At her wedding, the *Acta* tell us, while the musicians played, Cecilia sang to the Lord in her heart.

[1] Butler's Lives of the Saints – revised and updated – ed. By Michael Walsh – Harper – San Francisco –

## **Thankfulness in our everyday lives, from a sermon by John Henry Newman.** <sup>1</sup>

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It would be well if we were in the habit of looking at all we have as God's gift, undeservedly given, and day by day continued to us solely by his mercy. He gave; He may take away. He gave us all we have, life, health, strength, reason, enjoyment, the light of conscience; whatever we have good and holy within us; whatever faith we have; whatever of a renewed will; whatever love towards him; whatever power over ourselves; whatever prospect of heaven. He gave us relatives, friends, education, training, knowledge, the Bible, the Church. All comes from him. He gave; he may take away. Did he take away, we should be called on to follow Job's pattern, and be resigned: "*The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord.*" (Job 1:21) While he continues his blessings, we should follow David and Jacob, by living in constant praise and thanksgiving, and in offering up to him of his own.

We are not our own, any more than what we possess is our own. We did not make ourselves; we cannot be supreme over ourselves. We cannot be our own masters. We are God's property by creation, by redemption, by regeneration. He has a triple claim upon us. Is it not our happiness thus to view the matter? Is it any happiness, or any comfort, to consider that we *are* our own? It may be thought so by the young and prosperous. These may think it a great thing to have everything, as they suppose, their own way,--to depend on no one,--to have to think of nothing out of sight,--to be without the irksomeness of continual acknowledgment, continual prayer, continual reference of what they do to the will of another. But as time goes on, they, as all others, will find that independence was not made for man--that it is an unnatural state--may do for a while, but will not carry us on safely to the end. No, we are creatures; and, as being such, we have two duties, to be resigned and to be thankful.

Let us then view God's providences towards us more religiously than we have hitherto done. Let us try to gain a truer view of what we are, and where we are, in his kingdom. Let us humbly and reverently attempt to trace his guiding hand in the years which we have hitherto lived. Let us thankfully commemorate the many

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<sup>1</sup> *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, pp. 1003-1005.

mercies he has vouchsafed to us in time past, the many sins he has not remembered, the many dangers he has averted, the many prayers he has answered, the many mistakes he has corrected, the many warnings, the many lessons, the much light, the abounding comfort which he has from time to time given. Let us dwell upon times and seasons, times of trouble, times of joy, times of trial, times of refreshment. How did he cherish us as children? How did he guide us in that dangerous time when the mind began to think for itself, and the heart to open to the world! How did he with his sweet discipline restrain our passions, mortify our hopes, calm our fears, enliven our heavinesses, sweeten our desolateness, and strengthen our infirmities! How did he gently guide us towards the strait gate! How did he allure us along his everlasting way, in spite of its strictness, in spite of its loneliness, in spite of the dim twilight in which it lay! He has been all things to us. He has been, as he was to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, our God, our shield, and great reward, promising and performing, day by day.

## **The martyrs= share in Christ=s victory, from a letter of St Paul Le-Bao-Tinh. <sup>1</sup>**

I, Paul, in chains for the name of Christ, wish to relate to you the trials besetting me daily, in order that you may be inflamed with love for God and join with me in his praises, Afor his mercy is for ever.@ The prison here is a true image of everlasting hell: to cruel tortures of every kind B shackles, iron chains, manacles B are added hatred, vengeance, calumnies, obscene speech, quarrels, evil acts, swearing, curses, as well as anguish and grief. But the God who once freed the three children from the fiery furnace is with me always; he has delivered me from these tribulations and made them sweet, Afor his mercy is for ever.@

In the midst of these torments, which usually terrify others, I am, by the grace of God, full of joy and gladness, because I am not alone B Christ is with me. Our Master bears the whole weight of the cross, leaving me only the tiniest, last bit. He is not a mere onlooker in my struggle, but a contestant and the victor and champion in the whole battle. Therefore upon his head is placed the crown of victory, and his members also share in his glory.

How am I to bear with the spectacle, as each day I see emperors, mandarins, and their retinue blaspheming your holy name, O Lord, Awho are enthroned above the Cherubim and Seraphim@? Behold, the pagans have trodden your cross underfoot! Where is your glory? As I see all this, I would, in the ardent love I have for you, prefer to be torn limb from limb and to die as a witness to your love. O Lord, show your power, save me, sustain me, that in my infirmity your power may be shown and may be glorified before the nations: grant that I may not grow weak along the way, and so allow your enemies to hold their heads up in pride.

Beloved brothers, as you hear all these things may you give endless thanks in joy to God, from whom every good proceeds; bless the Lord with me, Afor his mercy is for ever.@ AMy soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor@ on his lowly servant and from this day all generations will call me blessed, Afor his mercy is for ever.@

AO praise the Lord, all you nations, acclaim him, all you peoples,@ for AGod chose what is weak in the world to confound the strong, God chose what is low and despised@ to confound the noble. Through my mouth he has confused the philosophers who are disciples of the wise of this world, Afor his mercy is for ever.@ I write these things to you in order that your faith and mine may be united. In the midst of this storm I cast my anchor toward the throne of God, the anchor that is the lively hope in my heart.

Beloved brothers, for your part Aso run that you may attain the crown,@ put on the Abreastplate of faith@ and take up Athe weapons@ of Christ Afor the right hand and for the left,@ as my patron Saint Paul has taught us. AIt is better for you to enter life with one eye or crippled@ than, with all your members intact, to be cast away. Come to my aid with your prayers, that I may have the strength to fight according to the law, and indeed Ato fight the good fight@ and to fight until the end and so finish the race. We may not again see each other in this life, but we will have the happiness of seeing each other again in the world to come, when, standing at the throne of the spotless Lamb, we will together join in singing his praises and exult for ever in the joy of our triumph.

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<sup>1</sup> *Le Clerge Tonkinois et Ses Pretres Martyrs*, A. Launay (Paris: Paris Foreign Mission Society, 1925), pp. 80-83.

St. Catherine of Alexandria from Butler's Lives of Saints <sup>1</sup>

Since about the tenth century, veneration of St. Catherine of Alexandria has been marked in the East, but from the time of the Crusades until the 18<sup>th</sup> century her popularity was even greater in the West. Numerous churches were dedicated to her honor, including the parish church of Gethsemani Abbey at New Haven. She was venerated as patroness of maidens and women students of philosophers, preachers and apologists. Adam of St. Victor wrote a poem in her honor; hers was one of the heavenly voices heard by St. Joan of Arc. But not a single fact about her life or death has been established.

It is said in her Acts that she belonged to a patrician family of Alexandria and devoted herself to learned studies, in the course of which she learned about Christianity. She was converted by a vision of Our Lady and the Holy Child. When Maxentius began persecuting Christians, Catherine went to him and rebuked him for his tyranny. He could not answer her arguments against his gods, so summoned fifty philosophers to oppose her. These confessed themselves convinced by the learning of the Christian girl, and were therefore burned to death by the infuriated emperor. Then he tried to seduce Catherine with an offer of a consort's crown, and went off to inspect a camp. On his return he discovered that his wife and an officer had gone to see Catherine out of curiosity and had both been converted, together with two hundred soldiers of the guard. They accordingly were all slain and Catherine was sentenced to be killed on a spiked wheel. When she was placed on it, her bonds were miraculously loosed and the wheel broke, its spikes flying off and killing many of the onlookers. Then she was beheaded.

All the texts of the "Acts" of St Catherine state that her body was carried by angels to Mount Sinai, where a church and monastery were afterwards built. In 527 the Emperor Justinian built a monastery for the hermits of the place, and the body of Catherine was said to have been taken there in the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century. The monastery has borne her name since then. The great monastery of Mount Sinai still claim the alleged relics of St. Catherine, in the care of the monks of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Archbishop Falconio of Santa Severina said that the meaning of the "angels" is that her body was carried by the monks of Sinai to their monastery. Tradition has referred to the monastic life as "the angelic life". This is still a current expression in Eastern monasticism.

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<sup>1</sup>Butler's Lives of the Saints – vol. IV – P.J. Kennedy & Sons – New York – 1956 – pg 420