

## VIGILS READINGS

THIRD WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

JANUARY 21-27, 2018

**Sunday, January 23**

NT-MK22

A Commentary on the Gospel by Caesarius of Arles [1](#)

In today's gospel, beloved, we heard the exhortation to repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Now the kingdom of heaven is Christ, who, as we know, is the judge of good and evil and scrutinizes the motives for all our actions. We should therefore do well to forestall God's judgment by freely acknowledging our sins and correcting our wrongheaded attitudes; for by failing to seek out the needful remedies and apply them, we place ourselves in danger. And our knowledge that we have to account for the motives behind our shortcomings makes the need for such a change of heart even greater.

We must recognize the greatness of God's love for us; so generous is it that he is willing to be appeased by the amends we make for our evil deeds, provided only that we freely admit them before he has himself condemned them. And though his judgments are always just, he gives us a warning before he passes them, so as not to be compelled to apply the full rigor of his justice. It is not for nothing that our God draws floods of tears from us; he does so to incite us to recover by penance and a change of heart what we had previously let slip through carelessness. God is well aware that human judgment is often at fault, that we are prone to fleshly sins and deceitful speech. He therefore shows us the way of repentance, by which we can compensate for damage done and atone for our faults. And so to be sure of obtaining forgiveness, we ought to be always bewailing our guilt. Yet no matter how many wounds our human nature has sustained, we are never justified in giving ourselves over to despair, for our Lord is magnanimous enough to pour out his compassion abundantly on all who need it.

But perhaps one of you will say: "What have I to fear? I have never done anything wrong." On this point hear what the apostle John says: *If we claim to be sinless, we deceive ourselves and are blind to the truth.* So let no one lead you astray; the most pernicious kind of sin is the failure to recognize one's own sinfulness. Once let wrongdoers admit their guilt and repent of it, and this change of heart will bring about their reconciliation with the Lord; but no sinner is more in need of the tears of others than the one who thinks he has nothing to weep for. So I implore you, beloved, to follow the advice given you by the holy Scripture and *humble yourselves beneath the all-powerful hand of God.*

As none of us can be wholly free from sin, so let none of us fail to make amends; here too we do ourselves great harm if we presume our own innocence. It may be that some are less guilty than others, but no one is entirely free from fault; there may be degrees of guilt, but no one can escape it altogether. Let those then whose offenses are more grievous be more earnest in seeking pardon; and let those who have so far escaped contamination by the more heinous crimes pray that they may never be defiled by them, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year B – New City Press – 1999 – pg 74

**Monday, January 22**

GN-ABORT01

From the Encyclical “The Gospel of Life” by St John Paul II <sup>1</sup>

The human person is called to a fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of earthly existence, because it consists in sharing the very life of God. The loftiness of this supernatural vocation reveals the greatness and the inestimable value of human life even in its temporal phase. In a special way believers in Christ must defend and promote this right, aware as they are of the wonderful truth recalled by the Second Vatican Council: By his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every human being”. This saving event reveals to humanity not only the boundless love of God who “so loved the world that he gave his only Son”, but also the incomparable value of every human person.

The Church acknowledges this value with ever new wonder. She feels called to proclaim to the people of all times this Gospel, the source of invincible hope and true joy for every period of history. *The Gospel of God's love for humans, the Gospel of the dignity of the person and the Gospel of life are a single and indivisible Gospel.*

Today this proclamation is especially pressing because of the extraordinary gravity of threats to the life of individuals and peoples, especially where life is weak and defenseless. In addition to the ancient scourges of poverty, hunger and disease, violence and war, new threats are emerging on an alarmingly vast scale.

Thirty years after Vatican II, taking up the words of the Council and with the same forcefulness I repeat the condemnation in the name of the whole Church, certain that I am interpreting the genuine sentiment of every upright conscience: **“Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself, whatever insults human dignity, such as sub-human living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where people are treated as mere instruments of gain rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others like them are infamies indeed. They poison human society, and they do more harm to those who**

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<sup>1</sup>The Theology of the Body – John Paul II – Pauline Books – Boston – 1997 – pg 495 ff

**practice them than to those who suffer from the injury. Moreover they are a supreme dishonor to the Creator.”**

Unfortunately, this disturbing state of affairs, far from decreasing, is expanding with the new prospects opened up by the scientific and technological progress there arise new forms of attacks on the dignity of the human person. At the same time a new cultural climate is developing and taking hold, which gives rise to grave concern: broad sectors of public opinion justify certain crimes against life in the name of rights of individual freedom, and on this basis they claim not only exemption of punishment but even authorization by the state, so that these things can be done with total freedom and indeed with the free assistance of health-care systems.

All this is causing a profound change in the way in which life and relationships between people are considered. The fact that legislation in many countries, has determined not to punish these practices against life, and even to make them altogether legal, is both a disturbing symptom and a significant cause of grave moral decline. Choices once unanimously considered criminal and rejected by the common moral sense are gradually becoming socially acceptable. Even certain sectors of the medical profession, which by its calling is directed to the defense and care of human life, are increasingly willing to carry out these acts against the person.

The end result of this is tragic; not only is the fact of the destruction of so many human lives still to be born or in their final stage extremely grave and disturbing, but no less grave and disturbing is the fact that conscience itself, darkened as it were by such widespread conditioning, is finding it increasingly difficult to distinguish between good and evil in what concerns the basic value of human life.

The present encyclical, the fruit of the cooperation of the episcopate of every country of the world, is therefore meant to be a precise and vigorous reaffirmation of the value of human life and its inviolability, and at the same time a pressing appeal to each and every person, in the name of God, *respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life!* Only in this direction will you find justice, development. True freedom, peace and happiness.

**Tuesday, January 23**

OT-NUMB01

The Book of Numbers – by Dom Damasus Winzen [1](#)

After the book of Exodus has ended with the erection of the tabernacle for God to dwell in, and after Leviticus has shown the ideal of holiness which the presence of the Holy One demanded from his people, the book of Numbers returns to historical reality by describing the vicissitudes of the Israelites on their march from Mount Sinai to the promised land. Again, however, Numbers is no mere report of historical events during the journey in the wilderness. Its aim is to show the order and the spirit which made the sons of Israel an army ready to fight the battles of God. The book of Numbers is the book of the Church militant. On every page it points beyond the historical reality of the Jewish nation to the “new Israel” which, under the leadership of a

“prophet” greater than Moses, would reach what Moses was only allowed to behold from afar: the promised land of eternal salvation.

The mystery of the Church appears already in the census with which the book opens and from which its present title, Numbers, is derived. It is not souls that are counted to find out the sum total of all the “sons of Israel”, but only men who are of “service age” are registered. They are those upon whom the Lord can count for responsible fulfillment of the law. They are the backbone of the people and constitute the “congregation” in the strict sense of the word. More than six hundred thousand are mustered for the service of the Lord “to fight the wars of Israel”. The course of events shows, however, that of all those who were registered, only two, Caleb and Joshua, were found worthy to enter the promised land.

After three days of marching, the people began already to complain. Significantly enough, the rabble, who never had had anything good because they were not able to keep an orderly household, were the first to “fall a-lusting” and to cry for meat and for the good things of Egypt. Infected by their discontent, the whole people started to lament throughout their families, “every man in the door of his tent”. Moses was deeply discouraged: “Have I conceived all this people? Have I begotten them that you should say to me: “Carry them in your bosom, as the nurse bears her suckling child? ... I am not able to bear this people alone, because it is too heavy for me”. God sends quail to feed the people, but while the flesh was yet between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord smote thousands of them who were buried in the “graves of lust”. “They were protected by the cloud, and passed safely through the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink ... still with most of them God was not well pleased, and they were struck down in the desert. Now these things happened to warn us”, says St Paul. We Christians were saved through the waters of baptism. We have the spiritual food and drink of the Holy Eucharist, but they will not be available to us if we, forgetting the dignity of our Christian birth, join the rabble of our lower instincts.

Much more critical than the murmuring of the riffraff, who had not even been counted at the census, was the rebellion which broke out among the “congregation” when the spies whom Moses sent into the promised land returned with their tale of horror. Lack of confidence in God had affected the imagination of the spies, so that in their eyes their enemies grew into giants, and they themselves shrank to the size of grasshoppers. At their report all those who had been registered to fight the battles of God lost heart, and began at once to complain: “Wherefore has the Lord brought us into this land to fall by the sword that our wives and our children should be a prey!” They refused to obey their divine leader, and wanted a captain of their own choice to lead them back into the slavery of Egypt. It was an apostasy similar to the one at Mount Sinai when they had asked Aaron: “Up, make us a god who will go before us”. The covenant was broken. The wrath of God was kindled, but as at Mount Sinai, justice was turned into mercy through the intercession of Moses, who showed himself again the true shepherd of his flock. He did not want himself to be made the father of a new People of God. All that he asked was that God should manifest his greatest power, his mercy. Indeed the sentence which God pronounced revealed the whole pattern of redemption: “As truly as I live, I swear that all men who have seen the miracles I worked in Egypt and in the desert and have not hearkened to my voice shall not see

the land, and yet my glory shall fill the whole earth". The rejection of the "old generation" and the calling in of the "little ones" is really God's way of extending his salvation to the whole of humanity.

[1](#)Pathways in Scripture – Dom Damasus Winzen – Word of Life – Ann Arbor, MI – 1976 – pg 61

**Wednesday, January 24**

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**How Charity Produces Love of Neighbor by St. Francis de Sales.** <sup>2</sup>

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Just as God has created us in his image and likeness, so also has he ordained for us a love in the image and likeness of the love due to his divinity. He says: You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole mind. This the greatest and the first commandment. and the second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Theotimus, why do we love God? The reason for which we love God is God himself. says St. Bernard, as if to say that we love God because he is the most supreme and most infinite goodness. Why do we love ourselves in charity? Surely, it is because we are God's image and likeness. Since all persons have this same dignity, we also love them as ourselves, that is, in their character is most holy and living images of the divinity. It is in this character, Theotimus, that we are related to God by such close alliance and such loving dependence that nothing prevents him from saying that he is our Father and from calling us his children. It is in this character that we are capable of being united to his divine essence by enjoyment of his supreme goodness and bliss. It is in this character that we receive his grace and our spirits are associated with his most holy Spirit, and as it were we are made partakers of his divine nature, as St. Leo says. Hence, the same charity that produces acts of love of God produces at the same time those of love of neighbor. Just as Jacob saw that one and the same ladder touched heaven and earth and equally served the angels both to descend and to ascend, so also we know that one and the same love reaches out to cherish both God and neighbor. Thus it raises us up to unite our spirit with God and it brings us back again to loving association with our neighbors. However, this is always on condition that we love our neighbors in as much as they are God's image and likeness, created to communicate with the divine goodness, to participate in his grace, and to enjoy his glory.

Theotimus, to love our neighbor in charity is to love God in the human being or the human being in God. It is to cherish God alone for love of himself and creatures for love of him. When we see our neighbor created in the likeness and image of God, should we not say to one another, AStop, do you see this created being, do you see how it resembles the Creator?@ Should we not cast ourselves upon him, caress him, and weep over him with love? Should we not give him a thousand, thousand blessings? Why so? O Theotimus, it is for love of God who made us in his own image and likeness and therefore capable of sharing in his goodness in grace and glory.

**Thursday, January 25**

**A Reading about the Vocation of St. Paul, from a book by Lucien Cerfaux.<sup>3</sup>**

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In terms of today, Paul passed from the Jewish religion to Christianity. He is the first of the great "converts" who distinguish the pages of Christian history and provide the apologists with proof of the supremacy of our religion. Yet he himself would not have used the term "conversion" if this implied abandoning one religion for another. For him Christianity was not a new religion, distinct from Judaism. If it had been suggested to Paul that he was no longer a Jew, he would not have understood what was meant. The many protests in the epistles do not apply to the past: Paul is and continues to be Hebrew and Jew, in race and religion....

We can state definitely that St Paul interprets the event which took place on the road to Damascus as a call from God, a vocation to a mission which ranks him with the prophets of the Old Testament. Like the prophets, he has been granted a vision; like them, he has been given a mission, and like them too, he is constrained to answer the calls: his human resolve is endowed by grace to such an extent that it is God himself who carries out the work with which the Apostle is entrusted.

The book of Acts confirms these conclusions. Paul is the chosen instrument to "carry" the name of Christ, that is, to bear witness, in the midst of persecution, before kings, nations and Israel (Acts 9:15). The three accounts of the vision at Damascus agree with the Epistle to the Galatians; Paul changed abruptly from being an active persecutor of the church and submitted himself to the orders transmitted by Christ. The last account describes the mission which was entrusted to him: "I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and from the gentiles - to whom I send you to open their eyes, that they may turn from

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<sup>3</sup>Lucien Cerfaux, The Christian in the Theology of St Paul. Herder and Herder, NY 1967. p81f.

darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:16-18). Christ's words in the third account, "It hurts you to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14), compare the Apostle to an ox which its owner leads when and where he will. Paul intimates, a few verses later, that he has been given a divine command. Thus Luke, too, thought that the vision of Damascus was not the kind of vision manifested to converts but that it was similar to those by which God transmitted his orders to the prophets. The idea of conversion is, in any case, excluded by Luke when he classes Christianity among the Jewish "sects". The sects are branches of "orthodox" Judaism.

There are two distinct aspects of his vocation. The first concerns salvation only: the chosen are destined for the messianic era; they are called children of God, they receive the messianic graces. The summons to the messianic feast was known to the rabbis from the first century and was used by Jesus. A second series of texts reserves the call to outstanding leaders in the Old Testament such as Abraham, Moses, Joshua, the prophets, who were predestined before their birth and "called" at the chosen moment by God. When he calls someone by name it is to entrust that one with a mission.

St Paul is called as the bearer of a mission. He is ranked on the same level as the spiritual leaders of Israel and shares their privileges. His mission is addressed to the gentiles, to whom he will transmit the call to the messianic graces.

**Friday, January 26**

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**The beginnings of the Cistercian Order: a reading from the *Exordium Parvum*.<sup>4</sup>**

We Cistercians, the first founders of this Church, in this document hereby relate to our successors how this Monastery and its way of life took its beginning according to the Laws of Holy Mother the Church; by what authority it began, and also by what persons and at what times; so that by the telling of the plain and unadulterated truth, they may be moved to a deep love for this Monastery and for the observance of the Holy Rule of St. Benedict which was begun in it by us through the Grace of God; and that they might pray for us who have borne the heat and the burden of the day without losing courage; that they might labor with great fervor in the straight and narrow way which the Rule describes, even unto complete union with God, when, having shed the garments of this flesh, they might happily rest in eternal peace.

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<sup>4</sup> translation by a monk of the Abbey of Gethsemani.

In the year 1098, Robert of blessed memory, the first Abbot of the Church of Molesme founded in the Diocese of Langre, together with some of the brethren from the same Monastery, came to the venerable Hugh, who was at that time the Legate of the Holy See and the Archbishop of the Church of Lyons, stating that they desired to live their life under the guidance of the Holy Rule of Father Benedict, and that in order that they might follow out these designs with greater freedom and security, they earnestly entreated him that he would bless and endorse their project with his Apostolic Authority. The Legate was happily pleased with their desire, and he laid the foundation of their beginnings by his Letter.

After these affairs, the Abbot (Robert) and those who sided with him returned to Molesme and chose from that community of brethren those who wished to associate with themselves, brothers who had made their vows according to the Rule; so that between those who had spoken to the Legate at Lyons and those who had been chosen from the Monastery, there were twenty-one monks. Accompanied by such a troop, they made their way in all haste to the desert which was called Citeaux. This place was situated in the Diocese of Chalons-sur-Saone. Because of the thickness of the woods and undergrowth, it was very rarely visited by people and it was inhabited by nothing but wild animals. When they arrived there, the men of God immediately conceived a great and holy reverence for the place, for the more contemptible and inaccessible it was to the people of the world, the more they considered it fit for their life. This was the very reason for which they had come there. Far away and hidden by the density of trees and undergrowth, they began to construct a monastery there with the help of the Bishop of Chalons-sur-Saone and the consent of the one who owned the property. For these men, while they were still at Molesme, inspired by the grace of God, had frequently spoken among themselves about the transgressions of the Rule of Blessed Benedict, Father of Monks. They had lamented and grown sad in spirit, seeing that both they and the rest of the monks who had promised by their Solemn Profession that they would observe this Rule, kept that promise to a very small degree. On account of this, by the authority of the Holy See, they came to this solitude in order that they might fulfill their profession by the observance of the Holy Rule. Then Lord Odo, the Duke of Burgandy, having been delighted by their holy fervor, and having been approached by the letters of the Legate (Hugh) of the Holy Roman Church, completed with his own resources the wooden monastery which they had begun, and he daily provided for them in all their needs and assisted them abundantly with grants of land and cattle.

**Saturday, January 27**

MY-79

**Mary: Mother of God, and mother of the living; from a sermon by Blessed Gueric of Igny. <sup>1</sup>**



***Come, my chosen one, and I will set up my throne in you.*** Many are called but few indeed are chosen. Blessed are those whom you have chosen, Lord; they shall dwell in your courts. More than that, you will live in them, you will reign in them, and you will set up the throne of your kingdom in them. Of them all, Mary is the most blessed. She of all the elect was in a unique way chosen and singled out, for the Lord has chosen her; he has chosen her to be his dwelling, saying: *“She shall be my rest for ever and ever; here will I dwell, for I have chosen her”* (Ps 131.13f.)....

“O Mary,” the Lord says, “you will no longer be called ***Forsaken***, and your land will no longer be called ***Desolate*** for although a virgin you will not be unfruitful. No. You will be called ***My Pleasure*** (that is, my Beloved Son) ***is in her***, because the Lord has been well pleased with you and your land will be inhabited. For the young man shall dwell with the virgin, and your son shall dwell in you” (Isa 62.4ff.).

But let us keep more strictly to the words of Scripture: *“and your children shall dwell in you.”*...She bore only one Son. In heaven, he is the Only-begotten of the Father; on earth, likewise, he is the Only-begotten of his Mother. She bore no other children.... But...she who is the only Virgin-Mother, she who glories in having borne the Only-begotten of the Father, embraces that same Only-begotten of hers in ***all*** his members; so [she] can be truly called Mother of [everyone] in whom she recognizes her Christ to have been formed, or is being formed. Mary consummated the mystery [of Eve]. She... is a mother of all who are reborn to life.

She is in fact the mother of the Life by which everyone lives, and [she] brought to rebirth all those who were to live by that Life....Thus the blessed Mother of Christ ... is the mother of all Christians by reason of this mystery, and she shows herself a mother by her care and loving attention. Already we really dwell in the help of the Mother of the Most High; we do live in her protection as if under the shadow of her wing. And afterwards, in participating in her glory, we shall be cherished as if [we were] in her bosom. Then a single cry of rejoicing and thanksgiving will be heard addressed to this Mother: *“The dwelling place of all of us who rejoice and are glad is in you, holy Mother of God”* (Ps 86.7).

You will not think it a greater happiness and glory to dwell in the bosom of Abraham than in the bosom of Mary, when the King of Glory has erected his throne in her.

***“Come, my chosen one,”*** he says, ***“and I will set up my throne in you.”*** There is no more expressive or more fitting description of her glorious privilege than to say that she is the throne of the God who reigns supreme. The Divine Majesty has never been seen to lavish his abundance on any soul so completely and so intimately as on her in whom he has especially chosen to reside before all others.

1“Sermon 47: the First Sermon for the Assumption” in *Guerric of Igny: Liturgical Sermons*, vol. 2 (CF 32), trans. by Monks of Mount Saint Bernard Abbey; Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1971, pp. 167 ff.

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