

NT-JN32

01.14.18

A Commentary on the Gospel of John by Basil of Seleucia ¹

Spurred on by the testimony of John the Baptist, the glorious apostle Andrew left his teacher and ran to the one pointed out by him. John's words were his signal, and moving more swiftly than John could speak, he approached the master with obvious longing, his companion, John the Evangelist, running beside him. Both had left the lamp to come to the sun.

Andrew was the first to become an apostle. It was he who opened the gates of Christ's teaching. He was the first to gather the fruits cultivated by the prophets, and he surpassed the hopes of all by being the first to embrace the one awaited by all. He was the first to show that the precepts of the law were in force only for a limited time. He was the first to restrain the tongue of Moses, for he would not allow it to speak after Christ had come. Yet he was not rebuked for this, because he did not dishonor the teacher of the Jews, but honored more the sender than the one sent. In fact Andrew was the first to honor Moses, because he was the first to recognize the one he foretold when he said: The Lord God will raise up for you from among your kindred a prophet like myself. Listen to him. Andrew set the law aside in obedience to the law. He listened to Moses who said: Listen to him. He listened to John who cried out: Behold the Lamb of God, and of his own accord went to the one pointed out to him.

Having recognized the prophet foretold by the prophets, Andrew led his brother to the one he had found. To Peter, who was still in ignorance, he revealed the treasure: We have found the Messiah for whom we were longing. How many sleepless nights we spent beside the waters of the Jordan, and now we have found the one for whom we longed! Nor was Peter slow when he heard these words, for he was Andrew's brother. He listened attentively, then hastened with great eagerness.

Taking Peter with him, Andrew brought his brother to the Lord, thus making him his fellow-disciple. This was Andrew's first achievement: he increased the number of the apostles by bringing Peter to Christ, so that Christ might find in him the disciples' leader. When later on Peter won approval, it was thanks to the seed sown by Andrew. But the commendation given to the one redounded to the other, for the virtues of each belonged to both, and each was proud of the other's merits. Indeed when Peter promptly answered the master's question, how much joy he gave to all of the disciples by breaking their embarrassed silence! Peter alone acted as the mouthpiece of those to whom the question was addressed. As though all spoke through him, he replied clearly on their behalf: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. In one sentence he acknowledged both the Savior and his saving plan.

Notice how these words echo Andrew's. By prompting Peter the Father endorsed from above the words Andrew used when he led Peter to Christ. Andrew had said: We have found the Messiah. The Father said, prompting Peter: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, almost forcing these words on Peter. "Peter," he said, "when you are questioned, use Andrew's words in reply. Show yourself very prompt in answering your master. Andrew did not lie to you when he said: We have found the Messiah. Turn the Hebrew words into Greek and cry out: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!"

1Journey with the Fathers – Year B – New City Press – 1993 – pg 72

01.15.2018

A Reading on the greatness of obedience, from the book *Christ, The Ideal of the Monk* by Dom Columba Marmion.¹

The virtue of obedience is only acquired and strengthened by corresponding acts of obedience. Now, in the measure that we advance in maturity of mind or are inclined to take more initiative, we realize the more the truth of these words of the Psalmist recalled by our Holy Father: You have placed authorities over our heads. Our holy Legislator gives us moreover to understand that obedience can become very hard to [our] nature; in his fourth degree of humility he speaks of hard and contrary things, even injuries, which may befall us in the course of obedience: he warns us that narrow is the way, but he adds - which leads to life. If indeed we submit with faith we may be assured, as St. Benedict guarantees, that each of our acts done under these difficult circumstances will turn to good, and our virtue will go on strengthening. God's glory triumphs precisely in using our frailty and errors for the good of those who trust in God.

Our holy Father's words should then be ever before our eyes. The more we see Christ in the Abbot, the more we enter into this life of faith, the more too will the Abbot become for us a cause of eternal salvation and of perfection.

There is yet more. The soul who yields itself up by a like obedience into God's hands can be compared to an arrow of election, shot by the hand of a mighty archer. The soul that possesses this supernatural suppleness of obedience is capable of great things, because if it can count upon God, God can count upon and be sure of it; and very often, God uses these souls for work wherein God's glory is particularly at stake. But God uses them through obedience, in order to preserve them in humility. However high be the aim, the fully obedient soul reaches it; however arduous be the work, it accomplishes it to perfection, for the strong God is with this soul which has at its disposition the very power of God.

We are therefore not surprised at the prodigies performed by those who, forgetting themselves and stripped of self, are invested by obedience with power from on high. A very remarkable example of this is given in the well-known episode recounted in the Dialogues of St. Gregory. The young Placid having fallen into the Lake of Subiaco, St Benedict orders his disciple Maurus to go and pull the child out of the water, and St. Maurus, in the promptitude of his obedience, walks on water, and brings back St. Placid safe and sound.

It is this faith alone that can assure the security of our monastic life. As long as we see Christ in the Superior, we shall participate, like St. Peter walking upon the waves, in the Divine immunity; as soon as the breath of doubt touches our heart, we shall sink. The soul who obeys in faith in God's word is not supported solely by natural strength; it has the right of counting upon the very

¹ B. Herder Book Co., 1926, pp. 271-272.

power of God. Do not be astonished in that I have insisted so much upon the part that faith holds in religious obedience. It is a most important part. Faith makes our obedience safe and guarantees its fruitfulness; it also makes its greatness.

GN-VOC05

01.16.18

The Call of God – from a book by Hans Urs von Balthasar ²

The call in its historical actuality is a meeting with the living God, to whose nature it belongs to be actually present in history. God never ceases to make known to mortals the here-and-now quality of his grace, not only by recommending vigilance since he comes “at an hour that you do not expect”, but even more drastically by depicting the fearful possibility that one may be asleep when the call comes and may thus fail to know, until it is too late, the mission to which one has been called. Such a failure becomes increasingly tragic in proportion to the uniqueness of God’s call and of the grace that is offered, In the ordinary course of Christian life, there is a superabundance of divine patience, for God has obliged Himself by grace to forgive again and again as often as one appeals to Him. But for one on whom a special mission has been conferred – a mission that pertains not only to his salvation in the life to come, but also to the whole course of his life on earth; a mission he must hear, accept, initiate and accomplish – there is but a single moment of decision. Once that moment has passed, the mission is lost forever.

Who is called? There is but one answer to this question: those “of the Lord’s own choosing”. For the world, the only certainty about vocations is the mysterious fact that God incorporates the prayer and sacrifices of Christians into His “selective purpose” that they may thereby become productive of new vocations. It is meaningful, therefore, to offer prayers and sacrifices for priestly and religious vocations. Credit for their increase must also be given to the Church, but the Church’s role is so totally hidden in God that it can never be properly evaluated.

How many are called? To this question, too, revelation offers but one answer: many more than actually follow the call. As evidence of this, we have the often repeated word of the Lord: “For many are called, but few are chosen”, and the parables that explicate it> The parable of the sower divides the scattered seed, which is “the word”, into four categories: the seeds that fall by the wayside are those “in whom the word is sown, but as soon as they have heard, Satan at once comes and takes away the word that has been sown in their hearts”; the seeds that fall on rocky ground are those who “when they have heard the word, receive it immediately with joy, and they have no roots in themselves, but continue only for a time; then when trouble and persecution come because of the word, they at once fall away”; the seeds sown among thorns are those who “listen to the word; but the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires about other things, entering in, choke the word, and it is made fruitless”; and finally the seeds that fall upon good ground are those who “hear the word, and welcome it, and yield fruit, one thirty, another sixty, and another a hundredfold”. (Mk 4:14-20)

² The Christian State of Life – Hans Urs von Balthasar – Ignatius Press – 1983 – p 464

It would be futile to attempt, on the basis of these parables, to determine even approximately the number of those who are called. On the other hand, we cannot attach too much importance to the fact that only one-fourth of the seed in the parable falls on good ground. There is always waste product when God shapes and chisels – not because He is an imperfect craftsman, but because the material he is trying to shape so often eludes his grasp. “How often would I..., but you would not” (Mt 23:37). We may assume that the number of Christians invited to a personal following of Christ in the evangelical or priestly state is far greater than the number of those who actually accept the call.

The hearing of God’s elective call is the concern not only of those who are called, but also of the whole Church, whose responsibility it is to make this hearing possible. God urges His call gently in the depths of the soul, but He expects His ministers to interpret and clarify it, to alert and guide those to whom it is addressed

01SN1703

01/17/18

The Ascetical Discourse of St. Anthony. From the Life by St. Athanasius.³

All the monks were one day gathered around Anthony so as to hear his words. He said to them with the authority of a prophet: "The Holy Scriptures are sufficient for our instruction; nevertheless it is a good thing to encourage each other mutually in the faith and to urge one another in discourse. You, therefore, in a filial manner, bring what you know to your father, and I, your elder, will transmit to you something of what I have experienced.

In the first place, let us all endeavor together not to become lax after having begun well, and not to be discouraged in the face of difficulties. Let us not say to ourselves: We have been living the ascetical life for a long time. On the contrary, let us increase our ardor every day as if we were just beginning, for a person's whole life is very short compared with the centuries to come, and the whole of time present is nothing compared with eternal life. Everything in this world is sold at its value, or exchanged for something of the same worth, but the promise of eternal life is bought cheaply. After combating on earth we shall obtain no earthly inheritance but a celestial one, and when we have left this corruptible body we shall receive it again incorruptible. Therefore, dear sons, let us not be discouraged nor find the time long. Let us not believe ourselves doing too much, for 'The sufferings of this present time cannot be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us.' (Rom. 8:18)

For this reason, my sons, let us remain firm in asceticism and flee from sloth. The Lord is working with us, as it is written: 'God collaborates for good with the one who has chosen what is good.' (Rom.8:28). In order to avoid negligence we will do well to meditate upon the Apostle's words: 'I die every day' (I Cor. 15:31). If, in fact, we live as if each day were that of our death, we shall not sin. This means that every day, on waking, we must think that we shall not last until

³ The Writings of the Saints: The Holy Monks of the East. Life of St. Anthony by St. Athanasius. A.I.M. Center, St. Louis, Mo.

evening; and every night, in falling asleep, we must think that we shall not reawaken.

Having thus begun and walked along the path of virtue, let us press straight on, straining forward. Let no one look back, like Lot's wife, especially as the Lord has said: 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.' (Lk. 9:62) Looking back is nothing else than feeling regret, and renewing a taste for things of the world.

Do not fear, on hearing talk of virtue, that it will remain foreign to you. It is not far from us nor outside of us. It is a work which is taking place within us, and an easy thing if only we wish it. The Greeks leave their country and cross the sea to gain learning, but as for us we have no need to travel to obtain the kingdom of heaven, nor to cross the ocean to become instructed in virtue. The Lord indeed said: 'The kingdom of God is within you.' (Lk. 17:21). So virtue has need only of our will, as it is in us and finds its source in ourselves. To have a righteous soul is just a matter of keeping one's soul in conformity with its nature and in the state in which it was created. It is when it deviates and turns away from its nature that one calls it vicious. It is not a difficult thing then if we remain in the state in which we were created, we are in virtuousness; but if, on the contrary, we give ourselves up to evil thoughts we shall be condemned as wicked. If we had to go outside of ourselves to acquire virtue, it would be difficult; but since it is actually within us, let us keep ourselves from evil thoughts and preserve our soul for the Lord as a trust received from him, to the end that he may recognize his handiwork, for it is in the state in which he formed it.

GN-CHUNITY01

01.18.18

A reading from the Encyclical of Pope John Paul II – “Ut Unum Sint” –

“That they may be One” ¹

At the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church committed herself irrevocably to following the path of the ecumenical venture, thus heeding the spirit of the Lord, who teaches people to interpret carefully the “signs of the times”. The experiences of these years have made the Church even more profoundly aware of her identity and mission in history. The Catholic Church acknowledges and confesses the weaknesses of her members, conscious that their sins are so many betrayals of and obstacles to the accomplishment of the Savior’s plan. Because she feels herself constantly called to be renewed in the spirit of the Gospel, she does not cease to do penance. At the same time, she acknowledges and exalts still more the power of the Lord, who fills her with the gift of holiness, leads her forward, and conforms her to his Passion and Resurrection.

Taught by the events of her history, the Church is committed to freeing herself from every purely human support, in order to live in depth the Gospel law of the Beatitudes. Conscious that the truth does not impose itself except “by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power”, she seeks nothing for herself but the freedom to proclaim the Gospel. Indeed her authority is exercised in the service of truth and charity.

Together with all Christ’s disciples, the Catholic Church bases upon God’s plan her ecumenical commitment to gather all Christians into unity. Indeed, “the Church is not a reality closed in on herself. Rather, she is permanently open to missionary and ecumenical endeavor, for she is sent to the world to announce and witness, to make present and spread the mystery of communion which is essential to her, and to gather all people and all things into Christ, so as to be for all an “inseparable sacrament of unity”.

The unity of all divided humanity is the will of God. For this reason He sent His son, so that by dying and rising for us he might bestow on us the Spirit of love. On the eve of his sacrifice on the Cross, Jesus himself prayed to the Father for his disciples and for all those who believe in him, that they might be one, a living communion. This is the basis not only of the duty, but also of the responsibility before God and his plan, which falls to those who through Baptism become members of the Body of Christ, a Body in which the fullness of reconciliation and communion must be made present. How is it possible to remain divided, if we have been “buried” through Baptism in the Lord’s death, in the very act by which

God, through the death of His Son, has broken down the walls of division?
Division openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the Good News to every creature.

1 The Encyclicals of John Paul II – edited by J. Michael Miller – Our Sunday Visitor Publishing – Huntington, IN 46750 – 1996 – pg 914f

GN-CHUNITY02

01.19.18

A Reading from the Encyclical of Pope John Paul II – “Ut Unum Sint” –

“That They may be One” ¹

The Decree on Ecumenism from the Second Vatican Council states: “The Lord of the ages wisely and patiently follows out the plan of his grace on behalf of us sinners. In recent times he has begun to bestow more generously upon divided Christians remorse over their divisions and a longing for unity. Everywhere, large numbers have felt the impulse of this grace, and among our separated brethren also there increases from day to day a movement, fostered by the grace of the Holy spirit, for the restoration of unity among all Christians. Taking part in this movement, which is called ecumenical, are those who invoke the Triune God and confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. They join in not merely as individuals but also as members of the corporate groups in which they have heard the Gospel, and which each regards as his Church and, indeed, God’s. And yet almost everyone, though in different ways, longs that there may be one visible Church of God, a Church truly universal and sent forth to the whole world that the world may be converted to the Gospel and so be saved, to the glory of God.”

The Catholic Church embraces with hope the commitment to ecumenism as a duty of the Christian conscience enlightened by faith and guided by love. Here too we can apply the words of St Paul to the first Christians in Rome: “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy spirit”; thus our “hope does not disappoint us”. This is the hope of Christian unity, which has its divine source in the Trinitarian unity of the Father, the son and the Holy spirit.

Jesus himself, at the hour of his Passion, prayed “that they may all be one”. This unity, which the Lord has bestowed on his Church and in which he wishes to embrace all people, is not something added on, but stands at the very heart of Christ’s mission. Nor is it some secondary attribute of the community of his disciples. Rather, it belongs to the very essence of this community. God wills the Church, because he wills unity, and unity is an expression of the whole depth of his *agape*.

In effect, this unity bestowed by the Holy spirit does not merely consist in the gathering of peoples as a collection of individuals. It is a unity constituted by the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments and hierarchical communion. The faithful are *one* because, in the Spirit, they are in *communion* with the son and, in him, share in his *communion* with the Father: “Our *fellowship* is with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn 1:3). For the Catholic Church, then,

the *communion* of Christians is none other than the manifestation in them of the grace by which God makes them sharers in his own *communion*, which is his eternal life. Christ's words "that they may be one" are thus his prayer to the Father that the Father's plan may be fully accomplished, in such a way that everyone may clearly see "what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things" (Eph 3:9). To believe in Christ means to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the Church; to desire the Church means to desire the communion of grace which corresponds to the Father's plan from all eternity. Such is the meaning of Christ's prayer: "Ut unum sint".

1 The Encyclicals of John Paul II – edited by J. Michael Miller – Our Sunday Visitor Publishing – Huntington, IN – 1996 – pg 914f

ALL READINGS WK 2 _2018.DOC
01.20.2018

In her hiddenness we find Mary's greatness; from a book by Thomas Merton.⁴

In all the great mystery of Mary, then, one thing remains most clear: that of herself she is nothing, and that God has for our sakes delighted to manifest his glory and his love in her.

It is because she is, of all the saints, the most perfectly poor and the most perfectly hidden, the one who has absolutely nothing whatever that she attempts to possess as her own, that she can most fully communicate to the rest of us the grace of the infinitely selfless God. And we will most truly possess him when we have emptied ourselves and become poor and hidden as she is, resembling him by resembling her.

And all our sanctity depends on her maternal love. The ones she desires to share the joy of her own poverty and simplicity, the ones whom she wills to be hidden as she is hidden, are the ones who share her closeness to God.

It is a tremendous grace, then, and a great privilege when a person living in the world we have to live in, suddenly loses his interest in the things that absorb that world and discovers in his own soul an appetite for poverty and solitude. And the most precious of all the gifts of nature or grace is the desire to be hidden and to vanish from human sight and be accounted as nothing by the world and to disappear from one's own self-conscious consideration and vanish into nothingness in the immense poverty that is the adoration of God.

This absolute emptiness, this poverty, this obscurity holds within it the secret of all joy because it is full of God. To seek this emptiness is true devotion to the Mother of God. To find it is to find her. And to be hidden in its depths is to be full of God as she is full of him, and to share her mission of bringing him to all peoples.

Yet all generations must call her blessed, because they all receive through her obedience whatever supernatural life and joy is granted to them. And it is necessary that the world should acknowledge her and that the praise of God's great work in her should be sung in poetry and that cathedrals should be built in her name. For unless Our Lady is recognized as the Mother of God and as the Queen of all the saints and angels and as the hope of the world, faith in God will remain incomplete. How can we ask him for all the things he would have us hope

⁴ *New Seeds of Contemplation*, New Directions, 1961, pp. 173-75.

for if we do not know, by contemplating the sanctity of the Immaculate Virgin,
what great things he has power to accomplish in us.