

SUNDAY 01.07.18

A sermon for Epiphany by Aelred of Rievaulx ¹

Rise up, be enlightened, Jerusalem, for your light has come. This is the Jerusalem which the Lord Jesus, who is the true and highest peace, is building up out of living stones, the Jerusalem that aspires to the vision of him and believes with utter certainty that it shall find its happiness in that vision. It is the holy Church. It is each and every holy gathering, each and every holy soul. *Rise up, he said, be enlightened, Jerusalem.* Rightly was it told: *Rise up*, for it was lying prostrate. Rightly is it told, *Be enlightened*, for it was blind. It was lying prostrate, blind, in darkness, in error, in sin. Therefore it was told: *Rise up*, because he who would raise it up had already stooped down. It is told: *Be enlightened*, because he who would enlighten it was already present. What else does that new star proclaim from the heavens but *Rise up, be enlightened*? The sign of the Lord's birth has appeared in the heavens so that we may rise from the love of earthly things to heaven. And this sign takes the form of a star so that we may know that by his birth we shall be enlightened.

But from where does this light come to them? *Rise up, he says, be enlightened, Jerusalem, for your light has come.* This is the whole reason why the holy Church is enlightened, first in those three kings and afterwards in all nations. This is the whole reason – what was said to her through the Prophet: *Because your light has come.* For a *light has arisen in the darkness.* But for whom? Not for the perverse of heart who remain in their darkness, but for the upright of heart who recognize the light and come to adore.

The heart that is empty and a waste is told to rise up – that is, to prepare itself for the things of heaven that are to be desired. And as if to someone who answers: “I do not see what things of heaven, what things of the spirit I ought to desire, is added: *Be enlightened.* And look how beautifully these two testaments agree in these two lessons – from the Prophet and from the Gospel – which are read in the Church today. We explicitly see the Gospel in the prophecy and the prophecy in the Gospel, like a wheel within a wheel. In the Prophecy the holy Church of the Gentiles is told: *Rise up, be enlightened, for your light has come.* In the Gospel the story is told of how there appeared to the same Church of the Gentiles a new star in the heavens which bade it raise itself from the things of earth and invited it to the true light newly born. In the Prophecy, *And the glory of the Lord has arisen over you* is added.

Before this time the carnal Jews were glorifying the Lord, but all that glory was beneath them, not beyond them. For when those carnal Jews glorified the Lord they did so because the Lord promised them the good things of earth. The only reward they sought was a temporal one. But today the Church is told: *Rise up, for the glory of the Lord has arisen over you*, so that the children of holy Church may turn their hearts from the things

of the earth to those of heaven and may serve and glorify God not for the things of earth but for the things of heaven.

The three kings of whom we have spoken came to Jerusalem and asked: *Where is he who is born King of the Jews?* As soon as Herod heard those words *he was dismayed*. Why, if not because he was earth and darkness covered the earth? He was afraid of losing his earthly kingdom. Because all he sought was an earthly kingdom, he thought that the newborn king would seek only an earthly kingdom.

It is no wonder that before the Lord's coming – when they had heard nothing of God, when they did not discern the light of Scripture – the pagans lay prostrate in their sins and in the darkness of their errors. But now lying prostrate in carnal desires and in the darkness of iniquities is a matter for great agitation, *for the true light that enlightens every one coming into the world, Christ Jesus, has now come*. We cannot have further excuse for our sins, for Christ, who takes away the sins of the world and justifies the wicked, now speaks to us openly. *Someone who follows me does not walk in darkness but will have the light of life*. And what is the way by which he walks and which leads to him? Let him tell you himself: *Anyone who chooses to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me*. The apostle also points out the way that leads to Christ; it is, he says, *through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of heaven*. Again, the Lord tells us in the Gospel: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. This is the way by which Jesus walked and by which we shall come to him: the renunciation of our own will, the imitation of Christ's passion, the hardships of the present life, and voluntary poverty. This is the way which sacred Scripture shows us, which, as we said, appeared to the three kings.

1Aelred of Rievaulx – The Liturgical Sermons – Cistercain Publications – Kalamazoo – 2001 – pg 106 f

MONDAY: 01/08/18

THE GIVING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE BAPTISM OF JESUS, from a homily by Bede the Venerable¹

And John gave testimony, saying, 'I saw the Spirit descending like a dove from heaven, and it rested on him'. It is good that the Spirit descended upon the Lord in the form of a dove, so that the faithful may learn that they cannot be filled with his Spirit unless they are simple, unless they possess true peace with their brothers and sisters, which is signified by the kiss of doves. And so the Spirit, by descending as a dove, does not represent merely its own innocence and simplicity, or that of him on whom it descended, but likewise that of those who *think of him in goodness and seek him in simplicity of heart*. The Lord himself says in praise of the piety that they share with one accord, and of the gentleness granted by a spiritual grace, *One is my dove; she is the only one of her mother, the elect of her progenetrix*. Indeed, he calls the grace of the Spirit 'the mother and progenetrix of the Church'. By that inspiring grace she too receives the capacity of being rightly called a dove. Accordingly, in Hebrew, the language in which holy scripture was set forth, 'spirit' is a name that is feminine in gender. On this account, the Church is appropriately given the name 'the one dove of Christ,' and 'the elect of her mother and progenetrix,' for undoubtedly it is not because of her own merits, but because of gift of spiritual grace she has received, that she is gathered into the unity of the Christian faith from many nations, that she is gladdened by a mutual dove-like peace, and that she is blessed by her share in election.

'And I,' John says, *'was not aware of him'.* You understand what is implied: 'I did not recognize him as sublimely as I recognized him when the Spirit descended upon him'. *'But he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "The one upon whom you will see the Spirit descending and resting upon him, he it is who baptizes with the Holy Spirit."* The Lord baptizes with the Holy Spirit, pardoning sins through the gift of the Holy Spirit. For either he would first baptize some of his disciples with water, through whom the river of baptism would flow to the rest of the faithful; he would baptize them too with the Spirit by unloosing them from their sins and administering the gifts of the Spirit--or else his faithful, calling upon his name, would baptize the elect with water and

¹HOMILIES ON THE GOSPEL, Bede the Venerable, Trans. by L. Martin & D. Hurst (Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo MI 1991) pp. 150-152.

anoint them with sacred chrism. Nevertheless, he himself baptizes them in the Holy Spirit, for no one except him is capable of releasing the bonds of sins or of bestowing the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

TUESDAY 01.09.18

The Fulfillment of the Old Testament – from the writings of Cardinal John Henry Newman ²

Christianity is the continuation and conclusion of what professes to be an earlier revelation, which may be traced back into prehistoric times. When mankind had universally denied the first lesson of their conscience by lapsing into polytheism, is it a thing of slight moment that there was just one exception to the rule, that there was just one people who, first by their rulers and priests, and afterwards by their own unanimous zeal, professed as their distinguishing doctrine, the Divine Unity and Government of the world, and that, moreover, not only as a natural truth, but as revealed to them by that God Himself of whom they spoke, - who so embodied it in their national polity that a Theocracy was the only name by which it could be called? It was a people founded and set up in Theism, kept together by Theism, and maintaining Theism for a period from the first to the last of 2,000 years, till the dissolution of their body politic; and they have maintained it since in their state of exile and wandering for 2,000 years more.

They began with the beginning of history, and the preaching of this august dogma begins with them. They are its witnesses and confessors, even to torture and death; on it and its revelation are moulded their laws and government; on this their politics, philosophy, and literature are founded; of this truth their poetry is the voice, pouring itself out in devotional compositions which Christianity, through all its many countries and ages, has been unable to rival; on this aboriginal truth, as time goes on, prophet after prophet bases his further revelations, with a sustained reference to a time when, according to the secret counsels of its Divine Object and Author, it is to receive completion and perfection – till at length that time comes.

The last age of their history is as strange as the first. When that time of destined blessing came, which they had so accurately marked out, and were so carefully waiting for – a time which found them, in fact, more zealous for their Law and for the dogma it enshrined, than they had ever been before – then, instead of any final favor coming on them from above, they fell under the power of their enemies, and were overthrown, their holy city razed to the ground, their polity destroyed, and the remnant of their people cast off to wander far and away through every land except their own; lasting on, century after century, not absorbed in other populations, not annihilated, as likely to last on, as unlikely to be restored, as far as outward appearances go, now as a thousand years ago. They were the favored servants of God, and yet a peculiar reproach and note of infamy is affixed to their name. It was their belief that His protection was unchangeable, and that their Law would last forever; - it was their consolation to be taught by an

² The Heart of Newman – A Synthesis by Eric Przywara – London & Oates – 1963 – pg 51f

uninterrupted tradition, that it could not die, except by changing into a new self, more wonderful than it was before. It was their faithful expectation that a promised King was coming, the Messiah, who would extend the sway of Israel over all people; - it was a condition of their covenant that, as a reward to Abraham, their first father, the day at length should dawn when the gates of their narrow land would open, and they should pour out for the conquest and occupation of the whole earth. And, I repeat, when the day came, they did go forth, and they spread into all lands, but as hopeless exiles, as eternal wanderers.

Are we to say that this failure is a proof that, after all, there is nothing providential in their history? It is an historical fact that, at the very time that the Jews were driven out of their home to wander over the earth, their Christian brethren, born of the same stock, and equally citizens of Jerusalem, did also issue forth from the same home, but in order to subdue that same earth and make it their own; that is, they undertook the very work which, according to the promise, their nation actually was ordained to execute; and, with a method of their own indeed and with a new end, and only slowly and painfully, but still really and thoroughly, they did it. And since that time the two children of the promise have ever been found together – of the promise forfeited and the promise fulfilled. So that in fact that Christianity actually has done what Judaism was to have done. It is of importance to the significance of those early traditions to be able to determine that they were not lost together with their original storehouse, but were transferred, on the failure of Judaism, to the custody of the Christian Church. If the history of Judaism is so wonderful as to suggest the presence of some special divine agency in its appointments and fortunes, still more wonderful and divine is the history of Christianity. And again it is still more wonderful and divine that two such wonderful creations should span almost the whole course of the ages, during which nations and states have been in existence, and should constitute a professed system of continued intercourse between earth and heaven amid all the vicissitudes of human affairs. This phenomenon carries on its face, to those who believe in a God, the probability that it has that divine origin which it professes to have

WEDNESDAY 01.10.18

St. William of Bourges – from Butler's Lives of the Saints ³

Guillaume de Donjeon came from a distinguished family of Nevers on the river Loire in central France. He was educated by his uncle Peter, who was archdeacon of Soissons north-east of Paris. At an early age he was appointed canon on Soissons and then of Paris. He felt the call to the solitary life, however, and retired to Grandmont Abbey. A dispute there disturbed his peace, and he joined the stricter Cistercian Order, being clothed at the abbey of Pontigny. He was elected abbot of two smaller abbeys dependent on Pontigny, first Fontaine-Jean then Chalis, near Senlis.

When Henri de Sully, archbishop of Bourges, died, a successor was sought from among the Cistercian Abbots. William was elected by a process of drawing the first of three names from slips placed on the altar by Henri's brother Eudes, bishop of Paris, a choice that confirmed the vote of the clergy. William would have refused the appointment had he not received direct orders to take it up both from Pope Innocent III and from his religious superior, the Abbot of Citeaux. He proved to be a model bishop, austere in private life, wearing a hair shirt and abstaining from red meat, and full of pastoral care for the spiritual and material welfare of the poor, whom he saw as his first responsibility. He defended the rights of his church, including its lands, against threatened encroachment by the civil powers, arguing his case successfully even against the king.

The Albigensians were numerous in France at this time, and he was active in crusading against them, making many converts. He was preparing a mission to them when his final illness came upon him. He preached a last sermon to his people, which brought on a high fever and hastened his end. At his request he was laid on a bed of ashes, and he died with the first two words of the Nocturns on his lips, just after midnight on January 10, 1209. His body was interred in the cathedral of Bourges, and many miracles were attributed to him. A shrine was accordingly built in 1217, and he was canonized by Pope Honorius III the following year.

³ Butler's Lives of the Saints – New Full Edition – Burns & Oates – The Liturgical Press – Collegeville, MN – 1998 – pg 70

THURSDAY 01.11.18

Continuation of the Fulfillment of the Old Testament – from the writings of Cardinal John Henry Newman ⁴

From the book of Genesis we learn that the chosen people was set up for this one idea, viz. to be a blessing to the whole earth, and that, by means of one of their own race, a greater than their father Abraham. This was the meaning and drift of their being chosen.

Such was the categorical prophecy, literal and unequivocal in its wording, direct and simple in its scope. One man, born of the chosen tribe, was the destined minister of blessing to the whole world; and the race, as represented by that tribe, was to lose its old self in gaining a new self in Him. Its destiny was sealed upon it in its beginning. An expectation was the measure of its life. It was created for a great end, and in that end it had its beginning.

It is quite clear that the Jews did thus understand their prophecies, and did expect their great Ruler, in the very age in which our Lord came, and in which they, on the other hand, were destroyed, losing their old self without gaining their new.

Now, considering that at that very time our Lord did appear as a teacher, and founded not merely a religion, but (what was then a new idea in the world) a system of religious warfare, an aggressive and militant body, a dominant Catholic Church, which aimed at the benefit of all nations by the spiritual conquest of all; and that this warfare, then begun by it, has gone on without cessation down to this day, and now is as living and real as ever it was; that this militant body has from the first filled the world, that it had wonderful successes, that its successes have on the whole been of extreme benefit to the human race, that it has imparted an intelligent notion about the Supreme God to millions who would have lived and died in irreligion, that it has raised the tone of morality, wherever it has come, has abolished great social anomalies and miseries, has elevated the female sex to its proper dignity, has protected the poorer classes, has destroyed slavery, encouraged literature and philosophy, and had a principal part in the civilization of human kind, which, with some evils, has still on the whole been productive of far greater good – considering, I say, that all this began at the destined, expected, recognized season when the old prophecy said that in one Man, born of the tribe of Judah, all the tribes of the earth were to be blessed, - I feel I have the right to say (and my line of argument does not lead me to say more), that it is at the very least a remarkable coincidence; that is, one of those coincidences which, when they are accumulated, come close upon the idea of a miracle, as being impossible without the Hand of God directly and immediately in them.

⁴ The Heart of Newman – A Synthesis by Eric Przywara – London & Oates – 1963 – pg 53f

FRIDAY 01.12.18

**The prayer of an abbot for himself and for his household:
a reading from *The Pastoral Prayer of St. Aelred of Reivaulx.***

O Jesus, good Shepherd, O Jesus, kind and loving shepherd, a wretched and miserable shepherd cries out to you. Although he is weak, ignorant, and useless, still he is the shepherd of your sheep. O good Shepherd, a shepherd who is not good cries out to you, anxious for himself, anxious for your sheep.

You, dear Lord, have entrusted such a one with the care of the household, you have appointed such a one over the sheep of your pasture. You order me who am too little solicitous for myself to be solicitous for them; who am not able to pray for my own sins to pray for them; and to teach them when I have not sufficiently taught myself. Why do you, Fountain of mercy, why do you wish to entrust those who are so dear to you to one whom your watchful care has lost sight of? Did you appoint such a one over your family that your mercy might be made manifest and your wisdom known? If by chance it is pleasing to your goodness for such a one to rule your family well, may he not boast as a wise man in his own wisdom, or as a strong man in his own strength, or as a just man in his own justice, since when he rules your people well, you rule rather than he. *Not to us, Lord, not to us the glory; let your name alone be honored.*

Since you have given them this blind leader, this unlearned teacher and ignorant guide, if not for my sake then for theirs, teach him whom you have commanded to teach others, lead him whom you have commanded to lead others, direct him whom you have set over others to guide. Our merciful God, hear me when I pray for them through affection and duty or from the consideration of your kindness. You know, sweet Lord, how I love them, how my heart is poured out on them, how my affection melts over them. You know, My Lord, that I do not command by austerity or by the power of my spirit. You know how I wish in charity to be useful to them rather than to rule over them; in humility to be under them but by affection to be in them. This I ask, that your eyes should be ever watching, night and day. Spread your wings most lovingly to protect them, extend your holy right hand to bless them, infuse your holy Spirit into their hearts, until we all realize our common unity through faith.

O sweet Lord, by the working of your holy Spirit may they be at peace with themselves, with one another, and with me. May they be modest, kind, and obedient; serving and supporting one another; fervent in spirit, rejoicing in hope. Be in their midst according to your faithful promise. Since you know what is necessary for each, I beseech you to strengthen what is weak in them, support what is warm, make firm what is unstable, so that each one may feel that your grace is not lacking in his necessities and temptations.

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This one thing I ask of your loving kindness, my Lord, that you make your servant the faithful steward, wise procurator, and prudent provider of all the things which you will give, whether little or much. Inspire them, my God, to suffer patiently when you do not give, and to use moderately when you do C that they may always believe and know what is useful for them concerning me, your servant and theirs for your sake, that they may love and fear me as much as you see is expedient for them.

I entrust them to your holy hands and your loving providence. No one can tear away from your hand or from the hand of your servant to whom you have entrusted them, but may they happily persevere in their holy purpose and B persevering B obtain eternal life through you, our dearest Lord, who lives and reigns, world without end. Amen.

SATURDAY 01.13.18

In the Silence of her Heart – A Sermon by St Bede the Venerable ¹

Mary wished to divulge to no one the secret things which she knew about Christ, but she reverently waited for the time and place when he would wish to divulge them. However, though her mouth was silent, in her careful, watchful heart she weighed these secret things. And this is what the evangelist says, *pondering in her heart* – indeed she weighed those acts which she saw in relation to those things which she had read were to be done. Now she saw that she herself, who had arisen from the stock of Jesse, had conceived God's Son of the Holy Spirit. *A shoot shall sprout from the root of Jesse.* She had read, *And you, Bethlehem Ephrata, are a little one among the thousands of Judah.* She saw that she had given birth in Bethlehem to the Ruler of Israel, who was born eternal from the Father, God before the ages.

She saw that she had conceived as a virgin, and given birth to a son, and called his name Jesus. She had read in the prophets, *Behold, a virgin shall conceive and give birth to a son, and his name will be called Emmanuel.* She remembered that it had been said to her by the angel, *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the Power of the Most High will overshadow you, and so the holy one who will be born from you will be called the Son of God.* She therefore knew that the Lord had come in the flesh, whose power is one and eternal with the Father, and he would give to his daughter the Church the kingdom of the heavenly Jerusalem. Mary was comparing these things which she had read were to occur with those which she recognized as already having occurred. Nevertheless, she did not bring these things forth from her mouth, but kept them closed up in her heart.

¹St Bede – Homily 1.7 – Give Us this Day – pg 23