

NT-MK45

02.04.18

A Reading on the Gospel of Mark by Peter Chrysologus ¹

Those who have listened attentively to today's gospel will have learnt why the Lord of heaven, by whom all creation was renewed, entered the houses of his servants on earth. Nor would it surprise us that he so courteously adapted himself to every situation, since his motive in coming among us was to bring mercy and help to all.

You can easily see what drew Christ to Peter's house on this particular occasion; it was no desire to sit down and rest himself, but compassion for a woman stricken down by sickness. He was prompted not by the need to eat but by the opportunity to heal, his immediate preoccupation being the performance of a work which only his divine power could carry out, rather than the enjoyment of human company at table. In Peter's house that day it was not wine that flowed, but tears. Consequently Christ did not enter to obtain sustenance for himself, but to restore vitality to another. God wants human beings, not human goods. He desires to bestow what is heavenly, not to acquire anything earthly. Christ came to seek not our possessions but us.

As soon as Jesus crossed the threshold he saw Peter's-in-law lying ill in bed with a fever. On entering the house he immediately saw what he had come for. He was not interested in the comfort the house itself could offer, nor the crowds awaiting his arrival, nor the formal welcome prepared for him, nor the assembled household. Still less did he look for any outward signs of preparation for his reception. All he had eyes for was the spectacle of a sick woman, lying there consumed with a raging fever. At a glance he saw her desperate plight, and at once stretched out his hands to perform the divine work of healing; nor would he sit down to satisfy his human needs before he had made it possible for the stricken woman to rise up and serve her God. *So he took her by the hand, and the fever left her.* Here you see how fever loses its grip on a person whose hand is held by Christ's; no sickness can stand its ground in the face of the very

source of health. Where the Lord of life has entered, there is no room for death.

1Journey with the Fathers – Year B – New City Press – 1999 – pg. 78

02SN0501

St. Agatha - From Butler's Lives of the Saints

02.05.18

St Agatha has retained her place in the Universal Calendar following the reforms of 1969, even though nothing that can be called historical fact is known of her life. There is, however, good evidence of an early cult, with many versions of her legend recorded in both Greek and Latin, the Greek being the earlier, with the Latin dating from the sixth century. This means that however fictitious the details of her Acts, she cannot be dismissed as a mere fiction altogether. Her Acts, though, are more of an indication of the type of woman held up for veneration as a saint in the early centuries than anything else.

She is described as a wealthy woman who had dedicated her virginity to Christ. This, then, rather than her life, is the most precious thing she has to offer. Her birthplace is assigned to either Palermo or Catania in Sicily, and she is said to have died at Catania, which has the stronger historical claim to be her birthplace. Among those who try to take the precious gift she has vowed to Christ from her is a consul named Quintianus. He used the imperial edict against Christians to have her brought before him, then placed in a brothel run by a woman with the appropriate name of "Aphrodisia" and her assistants, referred to as her daughters. All tricks, assaults and threats to make her yield her virginity fail, and so she stands as an example of "virginity as a sacred power, a concrete realization within this world of the divine spirit".

Quintianus then handed her over to be tortured, and her Acts dwell on the tortures inflicted on her, culminating in the cutting off of her breasts, which were placed on a platter. Perhaps because further details of her tortures involve her being rolled over live coals, she is invoked against fire in general. This may, though, be an extension of her protection against eruptions from Mount Etna, because she is associated with Sicily, and her legend states that after her death a flow of lava from Mount Etna was miraculously diverted by her silken veil held up on a staff. This is last recorded as happening in the 1840s, and her veil is still carried in solemn procession on her feast day in Catania. By extension she protects against earthquakes everywhere. She is also patron saint of bell-founders. The association

is ancient and certain, but the reason has not been determined. It may be that it derives from her protection against volcanic eruptions and fire, as bells were rung to warn of both. Another explanation given is that the molten metal involved in casting bells suggests the flow of molten lava. Her breasts also brought a more appropriate patronage, as she is invoked against diseases of the breast. Her breasts on a dish were often mistaken for loaves in the Middle ages, from which arose the custom of blessing bread on a dish at her altar on her feast day.

Pope Damasus I composed a hymn in her honor. Two churches were dedicated to her in the sixth century. Pope St Gregory the Great had rich shrines made for some of her relics in Rome, then moved them to the monastery of San Stefano on the island of Capri. Other relics remained in Catania until 1840, when they were moved to Constantinople.

Whatever the facts behind her legend, Agatha remains one of the best-loved and most invoked saints in the Christian devotional life.

02SN0601

02.06.18

From an Account of the Martyrdom of St Paul Miki and his companions by a contemporary writer ¹

The crosses were set in place. Fr Pasio and Fr Rodriguez took turns encouraging the victims. Their steadfast behavior was wonderful to see. The Father Bursar stood motionless, his eyes turned heavenward. Brother Martin gave thanks to God's goodness by singing psalms. Again and again he repeated: "Into your hands, Lord, I entrust my life." Brother Francis Branco also thanked God in a loud voice. Brother Gonsalvo in a very loud voice kept saying the Our Father and Hail Mary.

Our brother, Paul Miki, saw himself now standing in the noblest pulpit he had ever filled. To his "congregation" he began by proclaiming himself a Japanese and a Jesuit. He was dying for the Gospel he preached. He gave thanks to God for this wonderful blessing and he ended his "sermon" with these words: "As I come to this supreme moment of my life, I am sure none of you would suppose I want to deceive you. And so I tell you plainly: there is no way to be saved except the Christian way. My religion teaches me to pardon my enemies and all who have offended me. I do gladly pardon the Emperor and all who have sought my death. I beg them to seek baptism and be Christians themselves."

Then he looked at his comrades and began to encourage them in their final struggle. Joy glowed in all their faces, and in Louis' most of all. When a Christian in the crowd cried out to him that he would soon be in heaven, his hands, his whole body strained upward with such joy that every eye was fixed on him.

Anthony, hanging at Louis' side, looked toward heaven and called upon the holy names - "Jesus, Mary!" He began to sing a psalm: "praise the Lord, you children!" (He learned it in catechism class in Nagasaki. They take care there to teach the children some psalms to help them learn their catechism.)

Others kept repeating “Jesus, Mary!” Their faces were serene. Some of them even took to urging the people standing by to live worthy Christian lives. In these and other ways they showed their readiness to die.

Then, according to Japanese custom, the four executioners began to unsheathe their spears. At this dreadful sight, all the Christians cried out, “Jesus, Mary!” And the storm of anguished weeping then rose to batter the very skies. The executioners killed them one by one. One thrust of the spear, then a second blow. It was over in a very short time.

1The Liturgy of the Hours – vol. II -Catholic Book Publishing Co. -
New York – 1976 – p 1664

2/7/18

JOSHUA AS A PROPHET AND FIGURE OF JESUS, from a Book by Damasus Winzen ¹

The Book of Joshua is not only an end, the fulfillment of God's promise to give his people a home, but also a beginning: it is the first of the books of the Old Testament that describe the political development of the Israelitic nation, and show how the people lived up to their part of the covenant with God by keeping the law. Joshua is a "beginning" in the sense this word always has in sacred history, whose author is the "I am who I am." It is comprehensive and universal, containing the entire future development and foreshadowing the end. We do not find in Joshua a mechanical registering of events exactly as they took place during the first period of infiltration of the Israelitic tribes into Canaan. It selects and sees the events which it relates in the light of the purpose, the "end" of the history of the chosen people. This history is essentially "prophetic."

It is different from the history of the gentile nations, because it has as its objective the establishment of God's kingdom among peoples. The history of the gentile nations is one continuous effort to obtain prosperity and glory for themselves. Consequently they are not being guided by the light of divine wisdom. Their history is, in their own eyes, a matter of chance and luck and fate. They trust in soothsayers and diviners to guide them, blindly led by the blind. Divine wisdom, on the contrary, chooses the prophets to make God's will known to his people. "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren--him you should heed." (Deut 18:15) Our Lord's contemporaries see this famous prophecy of Moses' fulfilled in Christ, calling him "the Prophet" (Jn 6:14). Jewish scholars refer it to the prophets who in every period of Jewish history are the successors of Moses, beginning with Joshua, and continuing with Samuel, David, Elijah, etc...

Joshua is, therefore, the first of the prophets, and as such he immediately points to the last: Jesus. They have, in fact, the same name, because Jesus is the Hebrew form of Joshua. It is the first name in the Old Testament formed with the name of God--Yahweh--and it means "God will liberate" or "God will give room." The name is, therefore, in itself a prophecy. It indicates that the conquest of the

¹PATHWAYS IN SCRIPTURE by Damasus Winzen OSB (Word of Life, Ann Arbor MI 1976) pp.88-89.

promised land under Joshua is more than a political event, that it foreshadows a spiritual liberation, the true nature of which is revealed when the same name is given to our Lord. The angel announced to Joseph: "She [Mary] shall bring forth a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sin" (Mt 1:21). Jesus fulfills what Joshua has prefigured. In the beginning of his public life as saviour he goes to the banks of the Jordan, and at the spot where the ark of the covenant stood when Joshua together with his people passed through the river, he receives from St John the baptism of penance. Instead of standing on dry ground, as Joshua had done, he is immersed in the water to typify his death. Jesus opens the passage into the land of liberty from sin by dying for the sins of the people. He is the Lamb which takes away the sins of the world. Joshua's courage is fulfilled in Christ's charity.

2/8/18

THE MYSTERY OF DEATH, from the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World²

It is in the face of death that the riddle of human existence grows most acute. Not only are we tormented by pain and by the advancing deterioration of our bodies, but even more so by a dread of perpetual extinction. We rightly follow the intuition of our hearts when we abhor and repudiate the utter ruin and total disappearance of our own person. We rebel against death because we bear in ourselves an eternal seed which cannot be reduced to sheer matter. All the endeavors of technology, though useful in the extreme, cannot calm our anxiety; for prolongation of biological life is unable to satisfy that desire for high life which is inescapably lodged in our breast.

Although the mystery of death utterly beggars the imagination, the Church has been taught by divine revelation and firmly teaches that we have been created by God for a blissful purpose beyond the reach of earthly misery. In addition, that bodily death from which we would have been immuned had we not sinned, will be vanquished, according to the Christian faith, when we who were ruined by our own doing are restored to wholeness by an almighty and merciful Savior.

For God has called us and still calls us so that with our entire being we might be joined to him in an endless sharing of a divine life beyond all corruption. Christ won this victory when he rose to life, for by his death he freed us from death. Hence to every thoughtful person a solidly established faith provides the answer to our anxiety about what the future holds for us. At the same time faith gives us the

²GAUDIUM ET SPES, 18:22.

power to be united in Christ with our loved ones who have already been snatched away by death; faith arouses the hope that they have found true life with God...

Pressing upon the Christian to be sure, are the need and the duty to battle against evil through manifold tribulations and even to suffer death. But, linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope.

All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all people of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For since Christ died for all, and since our ultimate vocation is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to everyone the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.

Such is the mystery of humankind, and it is a great one, as seen by believers in the light of Christian revelation. Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful. Apart from his gospel, they overwhelm us. Christ has risen, destroying death by his death; he has lavished life upon us so that, as sons in the Son, we can cry out in the Spirit: Abba, Father!

2/9/18

THE WAR OF JOSHUA, from a Book by Damasus Winzen³

After the defilement brought on the Israelites by Achan has been removed, Joshua is able to conquer Ai, the second town in Canaan to fall to the Israelites. The inhabitants are put to the sword and the king is "hanged on a tree (i.e. crucified) and left until evening, but at sunset Joshua ordered his body to be taken down from the tree." (8:29) In the attack on Ai the Israelites use violence for the first time in their campaign to conquer Canaan. The battle against the five kings follows, and the defeat of the "kings of the north"; "and Joshua took and put to the sword and destroyed all the cities round about, and their kings"(11:12).

This war of extermination had nothing in common with the colonial wars which the white race fought during the last three centuries against practically all the rest of humanity. During the white conquest of colonial empires whole nations were sacrificed to the white race's skill in exploiting nature. The war of Joshua was directed against idolatry and sin. Recent excavations have proved the Canaanite culture at the time of the Hebrew invasion had reached its lowest level and found itself in a state of complete moral corruption. One should not forget that temple-prostitution, child-sacrifices, and such were public institutions in these little city-states. Their extermination through Joshua is the demonstration of the absolute opposition between the holiness of God and human sin. The wages of sin is death, because the living God is holy, and he hates sin. It is the plant which the heavenly Father has not planted and which, therefore, shall be rooted up (Mt 15:13).

There is no essential difference between Joshua and the messiah of whom David speaks:"the Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, until I make of your enemies your footstool. The Lord at your right hand has broken kings in the day of his wrath; he shall fill ruins, he shall crush heads in the land of the many" (Ps.110:1,5-6). But the messiah Jesus has revealed a spiritual principle, here expressed in terms of war to be carried on by everyone in his own heart, when he

³PATHWAYS IN SCRIPTURE, by Dom Damasus Winzen (Word of Life, Ann Arbor MI, 1976) pp. 93-94.

said: "He that loves his life shall lose it; and he that hates his life in this world, keeps it unto life eternal" (Jn 12:25). True to his teaching, he has fulfilled Joshua by carrying the burden of our sins in his own body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live in justice. The difference between the book of Joshua and the New Testament is not that the former belongs to a more primitive stage of the ethical development of the human race, in which violence is still considered a legitimate means of spreading religion, while the latter is pacifistic, but that Joshua hangs the evil kings on the tree, while Jesus takes on the likeness of sin and takes upon himself the death of the kings of Canaan. The difference between Joshua and Jesus is, therefore, that in Jesus charity has fulfilled justice, and death has been swallowed up in life.

The Life of St Scholastica from Butler's Lives of Saints⁴

St Scholastica, who was St Benedict's sister, traditionally his twin, consecrated herself to God from her earliest years, as we learn from St Gregory. It is not known where she lived, whether at home or in a community, but after her brother had moved to Monte Cassino, she settled at Plombariola in that same neighborhood, probably founding and ruling a nunnery about five miles to the south of St Benedict's monastery. St. Gregory tells us that St. Benedict governed the nuns as well as the monks, and it seems clear that St Scholastica must have been their Abbess, under his direction. She used to visit her brother once a year and, since she was not allowed to enter his monastery, he used to go with some monks to meet her at a house a little way off. They spent these visits in praising God and in conferring together on spiritual matters.

St. Gregory gives a remarkable description of the last of these visits. After they had passed the day as usual they sat down in the evening to have supper. When it was finished, Scholastica, possibly foreseeing that it would be their last visit in this world, begged her brother to delay his return till the next day that they might spend the time discoursing of the joys of Heaven. Benedict, who was unwilling to transgress his rule, told her that he could not pass a night away from the monastery. When Scholastica found that she could not move him, she laid her head upon her hands which were clasped together on the table and besought God to interpose on her behalf. Her prayer was scarcely ended when there arose such a violent storm of rain that St. Benedict and his companions were unable to set foot outside the door. He exclaimed, God forgive you sister; what have you done! Whereupon she answered, I asked a favor of you and you refused it. I asked it of God, and He has granted it. Benedict was therefore forced to comply with her request, and they spent the night talking about holy things. The next morning they parted, and three days later St. Benedict saw the soul of his sister rising heavenward in the form of a white dove. Benedict then announced the death of his sister to

4 Butler's Lives of the Saints , pg 42, edited by Michael Walsh - revised version , Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1991

the monks and later buried her in the tomb he had prepared for himself.