

SUN 11 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

A Reading on the Gospel of Mark by Paschasius Radbertus [1](#)

However great our sinfulness, each one of us can be healed by God every day. We have only to worship him with humility and love, and wherever we are, to say with faith: *Lord, if you want to you can make me clean*. It is *by believing from the heart that we are justified*, so we must make our petitions with utmost confidence, and without the slightest doubt of God's power. If we pray with a faith springing from love, God's will need be in no doubt. He will be ready and able to save us by an all-powerful command. He immediately answered the leper's request, saying: *I do want to*. Indeed, no sooner had the leper begun to pray with faith than the Savior's hand began to cure him of his leprosy.

This leper is an excellent teacher of the right way to make petitions. He did not doubt the Lord's willingness through disbelief in his compassion, but neither did he take it for granted, for he knew the depths of his own sinfulness. Yet because he acknowledged that the Lord was able to cleanse him if he wished, we praise this declaration of firm faith just as we praise the Lord's mighty power. For obtaining a favor from God rightly depends as much on having a real living faith as on the exercise of the Creator's power and mercy. If faith is weak, it must be strengthened, for only then will it succeed in obtaining health of body or soul. The Apostle's words, *purifying their hearts by faith* referred, surely, to strong faith like this. And so if the hearts of believers are purified by faith, we must give thought to this virtue of faith, for, as the Apostle says, *Anyone who doubts is like a wave in the sea*.

A faith shown to be living by its love, steadfast by its perseverance, patient by its endurance of delay, humble by confession. Strong by its confidence, reverent by its way of presenting petitions, and discerning with regard to their content – such a faith may be certain that in every place it will hear the Lord saying: *I do want to*.

Pondering this wonderful reply puts the words together in their proper sequence. The leper began: *Lord, if you want to*, and the Savior said: *I do want to*. The leper continued: *You can make me clean*, and the Lord spoke

his powerful word of command: *Be clean*. All that the sinner's true confession maintained with faith, love and power immediately conferred. And in case the gravity of his sins should make anyone despair, another Evangelist says this man who was cured had been completely covered with leprosy. For *all have sinner and forfeited the glory of God*. Since, as we rightly believe, God's power is operative everywhere, we ought to believe the same of his will, for *his will is that all should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth*.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year B – New City Press – 1999 – pg. 80

MON 12 BI Humbeline

Blessed Humbeline, Sister of St. Bernard - from the Life of St Bernard¹

From earliest childhood Humbelina and Bernard had been drawn together by a special bond of affection and sympathy, due to identity of interests and tastes. After her marriage, forgetful of her mother's example and exhortations, she began to follow the fashions of the world. In 1117 she came to Clairvaux surrounded with all the splendor of dress and attendants that unlimited wealth could bestow, thinking, so it seems, that she was doing her brothers honor. Her brother Andrew, the porter, in announcing her arrival, did not omit to describe to his Abbot the pomp and ceremony that attended her. It grieved Bernard to hear that his beloved sister had become a worshipper at the shrine of vanity. He refused to see her himself, nor would he allow any of his brothers to see her, but told Andrew to tell her from him that with these worldly ornaments she was making herself the devil's instrument for the ruin of immortal souls. Andrew delivered the message, adding on his own: Why so much solicitude to embellish a body destined for worms and rotteness, while the soul that now animates it is burning in everlasting flames?

Humbeline burst into tears, crying out: I deserve it all because I am a sinner. Yet it is for such as I that Christ suffered on the Cross. Indeed it is because of my sinfulness that I seek counsel and encouragement from the saints. If my brother Bernard, who is the servant of God, despises my body, let him at least have pity on my soul. Let him come; let him command; and whatever he thinks proper to enjoin I am prepared to carry out.

There was no resisting such an appeal. Bernard and his brothers hastened to meet her and to confirm her in these good dispositions. It was the holy Abbot's desire that she should enter religion; but as this was unlawful without her husband's consent, he recommended her to live as much as possible like a recluse in the world, shunning ostentation and all kinds of vanity, and devoting herself, after her mother's example, to the service of God and the poor. She promised to do so. Five years later, in

¹ Life and Teaching of St Bernard by Ailbe J. Luddy, O. Cist., pg. 68-69, M.H. Gill & Son, Dublin, 1937

1122, having obtained after much resistance her husband's consent, she left the world altogether and entered the convent of Jully where Elizabeth, her sister-in-law was superioress. When the latter went forth about 1130 to found a new convent in the neighborhood of Dijon, Humbeline was appointed to succeed her. Under her direction the house flourished greatly; the noblest ladies of the land sought admission in such numbers that she was forced to make about a dozen new foundations. She rivaled Bernard himself in her love of the Cross. Of food and sleep she allowed herself much less than the minimum which nature demands; her clothes were the meanest she could find, and it was her happiness to be employed in the humblest occupations. When her nuns begged her to be more careful of her health, which seemed in danger of breaking down under such austere practices, she replied: For you, my dear sisters, whose lives have been consecrated to the service of God, this is an excellent counsel. But for me, who have lived so long amidst worldly vanities, no kind of penance can be excessive.

In 1132 a colony of nuns from Jully founded Tart, in the diocese of Langres, the first convent to embrace the reform and submit to the jurisdiction of Citeaux, and the motherhouse, consequently, of the Cistercian nuns. It is uncertain whether Humbelina took part in this foundation, but there can be no doubt that to the end Jully remained purely Benedictine.

Her last hours were consoled by the presence of three of her brothers, Bernard, Andrew and Nivard. Bartholomew, who was then Abbot of La Ferte, may also have been with her. When about to breathe her last she looked with a radiant smile at Bernard and said: AOh, how happy I am to have followed your counsel and consecrated myself to God! And what a beautiful reward I expect to receive for the love I have entertained for you in this life! It is to that love that I owe the joy and glory awaiting me in the homeland. Then turning to the others she cried out: I rejoiced at the things that were said to me: we shall go into the house of the Lord (Ps. 121,1) With these words, she gave up her spirit.

TUES 13

JOSHUA AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KINGDOM, from Pathways in Scripture by Dom Damasus Winzen²

The whole purpose of the conquest of Palestine by Joshua is the establishment of the kingdom of God. Therefore an altar is built as soon as a firm foothold has been gained in the land, of unhewn stones to indicate that whatever serves God should be untouched by violence and corruption. One God, one country, one people, one altar: this fundamental principle of the kingdom of God seems to be endangered when the tribes living east of the Jordan build an altar for themselves. All Israel is ready to fight against them, until the eastern tribes explain that this altar is not being used to offer sacrifices, but only serves as a reminder to them that they also have the right to offer, and that they also "have a part in the Lord". In these tribes living outside the holy land, Israel in exile is prefigured; their altar is an anticipation of the synagogue which takes the place of the temple. God's mercy is not limited by geographical border lines; his altar is wherever there are hearts to adore him. Thus the altar east of the Jordan represents all those who, although they have not been incorporated into the Church "physically" through the sacraments, have nevertheless the sincere intention, in good faith, to serve God, who is the God in heaven and on the earth below...

In the last two chapters (23-24) Joshua renews the covenant, impressing upon the minds of the Israelites that the love of God, which has given them a land in which they had not labored and cities to dwell in which they had not built, does not take away from the freedom of choice. They have to decide whom they want to serve: the God of their fathers or the gods of the Amorites. When they choose to serve the God of their fathers he tells them that they will not be able to serve the Lord, but he and his house, they will serve the Lord. A true prophet, Joshua sees the apostasy of Israel, but also the loyalty of Jesus and his house, the Church.

²PATHWAYS IN SCRIPTURE, by Dom Damasus Winzen, (Word of Life, Ann Arbor, MI 1976) pp. 95-96.

WED 14 Ash Wednesday

The Manner of Keeping the Lenten Observance. From a Sermon by St. Bernard³

I beseech you, most dearly beloved, to enter with all possible fervor upon this Lenten time, which is commended to us not only by the law of abstinence, but also and much more by the mystery it contains. Oh, with what devotion should we observe what has been transmitted to us as an inheritance from the righteous Moses who, by a special privilege granted to no other prophet, spoke to the Lord face to face. With what eagerness should we embrace a practice commended to us by the example of Elias, who was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot. We are encouraged to undertake this fast by the example of Moses and Elias, who, illustrious though they may be, are still our fellow-servants. But much greater encouragement should be given in the example of our Lord Jesus Christ Who also fasted for forty days. What kind of monk, or even what kind of Christian, would one be who would submit only with reluctance to an observance given to us by Christ? Besides, we ought to imitate His example with all the more fervor knowing that He fasted not for His own sake but for ours.

Let us fast, therefore, dearest brethren, and let us fast with devotion during this holy season of Lent. But let us also remember that the time of our Lent must not be limited to forty days. We are required to continue it all the days of this miserable existence, during which, with the help of divine grace, we are to fulfill the ten commandments of the law. They are clearly in error who suppose that these few days are sufficient for the practice of penance, since it is obvious that the whole period of our earthly life is ordered for no other purpose. "Seek the Lord," says the prophet, and not only during forty days, but "while He may be found". "Call upon Him while He is near". For the time of calling upon Him will then have gone by when God shall be near to no one, but to some intimately present and from others far remote. From the fact that He is declared to be **near**, it is clear

³St. Bernard's Sermons for the Seasons & Principal Festivals of the Year. vol. II. Bernard of Clairvaux. The Carroll Press. Westminster, MD. 1950. p. 84.

that He is not yet present, not yet possessed, but it is equally evident that He can be found and possessed without difficulty. "Who seemed to you to have been neighbor to him that fell among robbers"? Doubtless "the one who showed mercy to him". Therefore since the Lord is near during all this time of mercy, "seek Him," most dearly beloved, "seek Him while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near."

Nevertheless we ought to seek Him with greater ardor during these forty days of Lent, which is not only a part, but the most sacred part of the whole season of mercy. If, then, at other times we have allowed our zeal to grow slack, it is fitting that our hearts should now be warmed with a renewal of spiritual fervor. If the stomach alone has sinned, let the stomach alone fast, and that suffices. But if the other members have sinned also, why should they not be made to fast as well as the stomach? Therefore let the "eye which has wasted the soul" be made to fast. Let the ear, too, be made to fast, and the tongue, and the hand, and even the soul herself. Let the eye fast from curious looks, so that, wholesomely humbled, it may now be kept in penitential restraint. Let the ear fast from news and idle tales and from all that is vain and worthless with regard to salvation. Let the tongue fast from detraction and murmuring, from unprofitable, vain and frivolous words, and - because of the great importance of silence - sometimes even from words that seem necessary. Let the hand fast from every work not sanctioned by obedience. But above all, let the soul fast from vice and the following of her own will. For without this kind of fasting, all the rest will have no value in the eyes of God. For we read in the prophet Isaias that when the people said to the Lord: "Why have we fasted and you have not regarded?", they received this answer: "Behold in the day of your fast your own will is found."

THUR 15 Thursday after Ash Wednesday

On Lenten Prayer and Fasting. From a Sermon by St. Bernard.⁴

Notice in this Lenten observance how prayer and fasting assist each other like two allies, as it is written: "When a neighbor helps a neighbor, both shall be comforted". Prayer obtains the strength for fasting and fasting merits the grace to pray. Fasting renders prayer more powerful, and prayer responds by sanctifying the fast and presenting it to the Lord. What would our fast profit us if - God forbid - it were allowed to remain on the earth? Let it therefore be lifted up on the wing of prayer. But since this one wing may not be sufficient, it is necessary to add a second. "The prayer of the just one pierces the heavens", says Ecclesiasticus. Consequently, in order that our fast may be easily lifted up to heaven, let it be provided with the two wings of prayer and justice.

Now what is justice but the virtue which inclines us to render everyone their due? Therefore it is not enough to have regard only to God. You are a debtor also to your human superiors, and a debtor to your equals. It is certainly not the will of God that you should despise those whom He is far from despising. You may have said to yourself, "It is enough for me if I have the approval of God alone for my conduct. Why should I be concerned about the judgment of others?" But be assured of this: that the Lord is pleased with no action of yours which either gives scandal to His children or which is done contrary to the will of the one whom you are obliged to obey as God's representative. Joel says: "Sanctify the fast; call a solemn assembly". What is it to "call a solemn assembly" but to preserve unity, to foster peace, to "love the family of believers"? The proud Pharisee fasted; he also returned thanks to God. But he did not call the assembly, since he rather isolated himself by saying, "I am not as others". And therefore his fast, borne up on only one wing, was unable to ascend to heaven. See to it carefully that your fast shall have two wings, "peace, namely, and holiness,

⁴St. Bernard's Sermons for the Seasons & Principal Festivals of the Year, vol. II. Bernard of Clairvaux. The Carroll Press. Westminster, MD. 1950. p. 91.

without which no one shall see God". "Sanctify the fast," that is to say, let a pure intention and devout prayer offer it to the Divine Majesty; and "call a solemn assembly," that is to say, your fast should not be singular or detrimental to unity.

Since I have spoken about justice and fasting, it is right that I should say something concerning prayer. Now just as this holy exercise is more efficacious when discharged as it ought to be, so the adversary strives to hinder it. Sometimes he obstructs prayer by inspiring "smallness of spirit" and immoderate fear. This happens when a person is so taken up with consideration of their own unworthiness that they lose sight altogether of the goodness of God. The psalmist says: "Abyss calls on abyss": the abyss of light on the abyss of darkness, the abyss of mercy on the abyss of misery. For the human heart is deep and unfathomable. But although my iniquity is great, much greater, O Lord, is Your goodness. And consequently, whenever my soul disquiets me, I shall be "mindful of the multitude of Your mercies" and so shall be comforted.

FRI 16 Friday after Ash Wednesday

Lent as a Time for Conversion. From a Sermon by St. Bernard.⁵

"Be converted to Me with all your heart," says the Lord Almighty, "in fasting, and in weeping and in mourning. And rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God." What does it mean, dearest brethren, that the Lord here commands us to turn to Him? For He is everywhere, He fills all things and at the same time contains all things. Where shall I turn that I may turn to You, O Lord my God? "If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I descend into hell, You are present". What do you require me to do? This, my brethren, is a secret of divine wisdom, a secret which is communicated only to the friends of God. It is a "mystery of the kingdom of God" which is revealed privately to the disciples. "Unless you be converted," said the Lord, "and become like little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven". Now I see clearly where He wants us to turn. We must turn to that little Child in order to learn from Him, because He is "meek and humble of heart".

But let us now see how we should turn to this little One, to this Master of meekness and humility. "Be converted to Me," He says, "with all your heart." My brethren, had His words been simply "Be converted to Me", without any addition, we might have replied: **That** we have already done; give us now another precept. As a matter of fact, however, He admonishes us here of a purely spiritual conversion which cannot be accomplished in a single day; and would to God we were able to complete it in the whole course of the life we live in the body! An external turning to God, unaccompanied by a conversion of the heart and spirit is worth nothing. It is only a formal, not a true conversion, "having the appearance indeed of godliness but lacking the power of it". Unhappy the monk who, devoting all his attention to outward observances, remains ignorant of his interior, for "thinking himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceives himself". For as he looks only to the outward appearance, when that is

⁵St. Bernard's Sermons for the Seasons & Principal Festivals. Bernard of Clairvaux. vol. II. The Carroll Press. Westminster, MD. 1950. p. 76.

found to be in order he judges everything secure, unaware of that secret worm that is consuming his being. The tonsure still remains, the religious habit is not yet put off, the regular fasts are observed as before, the divine praises are chanted at the appointed hours. Nevertheless the Lord says of such a one, "His heart is far from Me".

My brothers, consider carefully what is the object of your love and of your fear, what is the source of your joy and of your sadness, and you will find a worldly spirit under the habit of religion, and under the tattered covering of an exterior conversion a perverted heart. For the whole heart is made up of four affections, and it seems to me that it is with reference to them we must understand the precept to turn to the Lord with all our heart. Therefore, let your love be converted to God, so that henceforth you shall love nothing besides Him, or at least nothing except for His sake. Let your fear, too, be converted to the Lord, because every fear is perverse other than fear of Him or on account of Him. To Him let your joy also as well as your sadness be converted. This will happen when you no longer grieve or rejoice over anything except according to God.

The Lord then continued, speaking by the mouth of His prophet, "Rend your heart and not your garments." Is there any individual among you, my brethren, whose will tends to be attached too tenaciously to some particular object? Let him rend his heart, let him cleave it with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Let him rend it, I repeat, and make haste to divide it into many fragments. For it is impossible for him to be converted to the Lord with all his heart until his heart has been rent.

Dearest brethren, let us therefore rend our hearts, in order that thus we may be able to keep our garments whole. Our garments are our virtues. One can understand this rending of heart in two senses: compunction rends the evil heart, while compassion rends the strong heart. Both rendings are undoubtedly profitable; for the poison of sin must not remain concealed in the heart and the depths of compassion should not be closed to a needy neighbor, so that we ourselves may obtain mercy from our Lord Jesus Christ.

SAT 17 Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Lent the Season of Purification by Pope St. Leo the Great⁶

This sacred season is dedicated to the purification of the soul, let us therefore be careful to fulfill the Apostolic command that we cleanse ourselves from all defilement of the flesh and of the spirit, so that restraining the conflict that exists between the one and the other substance, the soul, which in the Providence of God is meant to be the ruler of the body, may regain the dignity of its rightful authority, so that, giving offence to no one, we may not incur the contumely of evil mongers. With just contempt shall we be tormented by those who have no faith, and from our wickedness evil tongues will draw weapons to wound religion, if the way of life of those who fast be not in accord with what is needed in true self denial. For the sum total of our fasting does not consist in merely abstaining from food. In vain do we deny our body food if we do not withhold our heart from iniquity, and restrain our lips that they speak no evil.

We must then so moderate our rightful use of food that our other desires may be subject to the same rule. For this is also a time for gentleness and patience, a time of peace and serenity, in which having put away all stains of evil doing we strive after steadfastness in what is good. Now is the time when generous Christian souls forgive offences, pay no heed to insults, and wipe out the memory of past injuries. Now let the Christian soul exercise itself in the amour of justice, on the right hand and on the left, so that amid honor and dishonor, evil report and good, the praise of all will not make proud the virtue that is well rooted, the conscience that has peace, nor dishonor cast it down. The moderation of those who worship God is not melancholy, but blameless.

Therefore, you Dearly Beloved, the holy offspring of the Catholic Mother, Whom the Spirit of God has taught in the School of Truth, use your freedom of action with right reason, knowing that it is good to abstain,

⁶Sermons of the Great Fathers. "Lent the Season of Purification" by Pope Leo the Great. Henry Regenerny Co., 1958, pp. 29-31.

even from what is lawful; and when you must practice self denial, so abstain from food as merely putting aside its use, not as condemning its nature. And so you will not allow yourselves in any way to be infected by the error of those who are completely defiled by their own observance of it; serving the creature rather than the Creator; and dedicating their own stupid observance to the lights of heaven. For they have decreed for themselves days of fasting, in honor of the sun and moon, and, they have decreed this fast both in honor of the stars and to show their contempt of the Lord's resurrection.