

NT-JN33

03.11.18

A Commentary on the Gospel of John by St. John Chrysostom ¹

Although we praise our common Lord for all kinds of reasons, we praise and glorify him above all for the cross. It fills us with awe to see him dying like one accursed. It is this death for people like ourselves that Paul constantly regards as the sign of Christ's love for us. He passes over everything else that Christ did for our advantage and consolation and dwells incessantly on the cross. *The proof of God's love for us, he says, is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners.* Then in the following sentence he gives us the highest ground for hope: *If, when we were alienated from God, we were reconciled to him by the death of his Son, how much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life!* It is this above all that made Paul so proud, so happy, so full of joy and exultation, when he wrote to the Galatians: *God forbid that I should glory in anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.* What wonder, indeed, if Paul rejoices and glories in the cross, when the Lord himself spoke of his passion as his glory. *Father, he prayed, the hour has come: glorify your Son.*

The disciple who wrote those also told us that the Holy Spirit had not yet come to them because Jesus was not yet glorified, calling the cross glory. And when he wanted to show God's love, did he do so by referring to signs, wonders, or miracles of any sort? By no means: he pointed to the cross, saying: *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that all who believe in him might not perish but have eternal life.* And Paul writes: *Since he did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how can he fail to lavish every other gift upon us?* And in his exhortation to humility he uses the same example, saying: *You should have the same dispositions as you find in Christ Jesus. Although his nature was divine, he did not cling to his equality with God, but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave. Bearing the human likeness, sharing the human lot, he humbled himself and was obedient even to the point of dying – dying on a cross!*

Returning to the subject of love, Paul again urges his hearers to *love one another, even as Christ loved us, and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.* And Christ himself showed how the cross was his chief preoccupation, and how much he longed to suffer. In his ignorance, Peter, first of the Twelve, foundation of the Church, leader of the Apostles, protested: *God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you!* Listen to what Christ called him: *Get behind me, Satan. You are an obstacle in my way,* proving by the strength of his reprimand his great eagerness to suffer on the cross.

¹Journey with the Fathers -Year B – New City Press – NY – 1993 – pg 36

TM-LNT50
03/12/18

A Sermon of St. Ambrose ¹

Give thanks, brethren, to the Divine Mercy Which has brought you safely half-way through the season of Lent. For this favor they give praise to God, thankfully and with devotion, who in these days have striven to live in the manner in which they were instructed at the beginning of Lent: that is, those who, coming with eagerness to the church, have sought with sighs and tears, in daily fasting and almsdeeds, to obtain the forgiveness of their sins.

They, however, who have neglected this duty, that is to say, those who have not fasted daily, or given alms, or those who were indifferent or unmoved in prayer, they have no reason to rejoice, but cause rather for mourning. Yet let them not mourn as if they had no hope; for He who could give back sight to the man blind from birth can likewise change those who now are lukewarm and indifferent into souls fervent and zealous in His service, if with their whole heart they desire to be converted unto Him.

Labor therefore, beloved children in the Lord, labor while it is yet day; for as Christ our Lord says, *The night comes, when no man can work*. Daytime is this present life; night is death and the time that follows death. If after this life there is no more freedom to work, as the Truth tells us, why then does every person not labor while yet there is time, that is, while he still; that is while he still lives in this world?

Be fearful, brethren, of this death. All those who now work evil are without fear of this death, and because of this when they depart from this life they shall encounter everlasting death. Labor while you yet live, and particularly in these days; fasting from dainty fare, withholding yourselves at all times from evil works. For those who abstain from food, but do not withhold themselves from wickedness, are like the devil, who while he eats not, never ceases from evildoing.

¹ The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers – vol. 2 – Henry Regnery Co – Chicago – 1958 – pg 82

TM-LNT57

03/13/18

A Sermon for the Lenten Season by St Augustine ¹

To my spirit of devotion, it seems fitting that we, who are about to honor the Passion of our crucified Lord in the very near future, should fashion for ourselves a cross of the bodily pleasures in need of restraint, as the apostle says: "And those who belong to Christ have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires." In fact the Christian ought to be suspended constantly on this cross throughout his entire life, passed as it is in the midst of temptation. For there is no time in life when we can tear out the nails of which the Psalmist speaks in the words: "Pierce my flesh with your fear". Bodily desires constitute the flesh, and the precepts of justice, the nails with which the fear of the Lord pierces our flesh and crucifies us as victims to the Lord. Hence the same Apostle says: "I exhort you therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice, living holy, pleasing to God."

Hence there is a cross in regard to which the servant of God, far from being confounded, rejoices, saying: "But as for me, God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world." That is a cross, I say, not of forty days duration, but of one's whole life, which is symbolized by the mystical number of forty days, whether because man, about to lead this life, is formed in the womb for forty days, as some say, or because the four gospels agree with the tenfold Law and four tens equal that number. Hence Moses and the Lord himself fasted for forty days so that it might be suggested to us that in Moses and in Elias and in Christ himself, that is, in the Law and the Prophets and the Gospel, this penance was performed just as it is by us, and so that, instead of being won over and clinging to this world, we might rather put to death the old man, "living not in revelry and drunkenness, not in debauchery and wantonness, not in strife or jealousy. But let us put on the Lord Jesus, and as for the flesh, take no thought for its lusts." Live always in this fashion, O Christian; if you do not wish to sink into the mire of this earth, do not come down from the cross. Moreover, if this ought to be done throughout one's entire life, with how much greater reason should it be done during these forty days in which this life is not only passed but is also symbolized?

Therefore, on other days let not your hearts be weighed down with self-indulgence and drunkenness, but on these days also fast. What you deprive yourself of by fasting add to your alms giving; the time which was formerly taken up with other duties, spend in conversation with God. You, who fast even on other days, throughout these days cleave to your God by more frequent and more fervent prayer. Let all be of one mind, all faultlessly faithful while on this journey, breathing with desire and burning with love for their one country. Let no one envy in another or belittle the gift of God which he himself

lacks. Rather, where spiritual blessings are concerned, consider as your own what you love in your brother and let him in turn, consider as his own what he loves in you.

Above all else, my brethren, fast from strife and discord.

[1](#)The Fathers of the Church – vol 38 – Fathersd of Church Inc. - New York – 1959 – pg 83

TM-LNT59

03/14/18

From a Sermon of Blessed Gueric of Igny ¹

It seems to me that these days when we are solemnly observing the annual commemoration of our Lord's passion and crucifixion, I cannot speak to you on a more appropriate subject than that of Jesus Christ himself, and him crucified. Even at another season of the year it would be hard to find a worthier theme. Can you hear anything more salutary or occupy your minds with anything more profitable? Surely nothing can so sweetly stir the hearts of the faithful or exert so wholesome an influence on their lives, nothing has such power to cut off their sins, root out their vices, nourish and strengthen their virtues, as the remembrance of Jesus crucified.

To those who have reached maturity Saint Paul may preach about the hidden wisdom of God; but to me, whose shortcomings are visible to all, let him speak of the crucified Christ, who indeed seems foolishness to those who are on the road to perdition, but is the power and wisdom of God to those who are on the way to salvation. For me this is the highest and noblest philosophy, in the light of which all worldly and human wisdom is of no account.

How perfect I might think myself, how advanced in wisdom, if only I could qualify as a true disciple of Jesus crucified, for God has made him not only our wisdom but also our righteousness, our holiness, and our freedom! If anyone is nailed to the cross with Christ he is altogether wise, righteous, holy and free. Wise, because he has been raised with Christ above the earth, and now seeks and understands the things of heaven; righteous, because sin has been put to death in him and he is no longer enslaved to it; holy, because he has offered himself to God as a living sacrifice, consecrated and acceptable to him, and in freedom of spirit he can now boldly repeat the son's words: *The prince of this world is on his way, but he has no claim on me.*

Truly there is mercy and fullness of redemption with our crucified Lord. So completely has he redeemed Israel from all its iniquity that it is now acquitted of any accusation that the prince of this world could make against it. *The Lord has redeemed his people from the land of the foe and gathered them from far-off lands.* Let them be of one mind with their teacher, Saint Paul, in declaring: *God forbid that I should boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!*

TM-LNT60

03.15.18

A Sermon on Lent by St. Caesarius of Arles ¹

Behold, dearest brethren, through the mercy of God the season of Lent is upon us. Therefore I beseech you, beloved, with God's help let us celebrate these days, salutary for bodies and healing for the soul, in so holy and spiritual a manner that the observance of a holy Lent may lead to progress for us and not judgment. For if we lead a careless life, involving ourselves in too many occupations, not applying ourselves to fasting and vigils and prayers, neither reading Sacred Scripture ourselves nor willingly listening to others reading it, to very remedies are changed into wounds for us. As a result of this we shall have judgment, where we could have had a remedy.

For this reason I exhort you, dearest brethren, to rise rather early for vigils, and above all to come to Terce, Sext and None. Let no one withdraw himself from the holy Office unless either infirmity or public service or at least great necessity keeps him occupied. Let it not be enough for you that you hear the divine lessons in church, but read them yourselves in your room or look for someone else to read them and willingly listen to them when they do. Remember the thought of our Lord, brethren, when he says: "If he were to gain the whole world and destroy himself in the process, what can a man offer in exchange for his very self?" Finally, if you cannot do more, at least labor as much on behalf of your soul as you desire to labor for the sake of your body.

For this reason, dearest brethren, "Have no love for the world, nor for the things the world affords," because "the world with its seductions is passing away." What, then, remains in a person except what each one has stored up in the treasury of his conscience for the salvation of his soul by reading or prayer or the performance of good works? For miserable pleasure and dissipation through a passig sweetness prepare eternal bitterness; but abstinence, vigils, prayer and fasting lead to the delights of paradise through the briefest hardships. The Truth does not lie when He says in the Gospel: "Strait and narrow is the road that leads to life, and how few there are who find it!"

For this reason, dearest brethren, by fasting, reading, and prayer in these forty days we ought to store up for our souls provisions, as it were, for the whole year. Although through the mercy of God you frequently and devoutly hear the divine lessons throughout the entire year, still during these days we ought to rest from the winds and the sea of this world by taking refuge, as it were, in the haven of Lent, and in the quiet of silence to receive the divine lessons in the receptacle of the heart. Devoting ourselves to God out of love for eternal life, during these days let us with all solicitude strive to repair and compose in the little ship of our soul whatever through the year has been broken or destroyed or damaged by many storms, that is, by the waves of sins. And since it is necessary for us to endure the storms and tempsts of the world while we are still in this frail body, as often as the enemy wills to lead us astray by means of the roughest storms, with God's help may he always find us prepared against him.

[1](#)The Fathers of the Church – St. Caesarius of Azrles – vol. III – Catholic University Press – Washington
DC – 11973 p 41

`A Reading on Lent by Thomas Merton ²

The Paschal Mystery is above all the mystery of life, in which the Church, by celebrating the death and resurrection of Christ, enters into the Kingdom of Life which He has established once for all by His definitive victory over sin and death. We must remember the original meaning of Lent, as the *ver sacrum*, the Church's Aholly spring@ in which the catechumens were prepared for their baptism, and public penitents were made ready for penance for their restoration to the sacramental life in a communion with the rest of the Church. Lent is then not a season of punishment so much as one of healing. There is joy in the salutary fasting and abstinence of the Christian who eats and drinks less in order that his mind may be more clear and receptive to receive the sacred nourishment of God's word, which the whole Church announces and meditates upon in each day's liturgy throughout Lent. The whole life and teaching of Christ pass before us, and Lent is a season of special reflection and prayer, a forty-day retreat in which each Christian, to the extent he is able, tries to follow Christ into the desert by prayer and fasting.

Some, monks and ascetics, will give themselves especially to fasting and vigils, silence and solitude in these days, and they will meditate more deeply on the Word of God. But all the faithful should listen to the Word as it is announced in the liturgy or in Bible services, and respond to it according to their ability. In this way, for the whole Church, Lent will not be merely a season simply of a few formalized penitential practices, half understood and undertaken without interest, but a time of *metanoia*, the turning of all minds and hearts to God in preparation for the celebration of the Paschal Mystery in which some will for the first time receive the light of Christ, others will be restored to the communion of the faithful, and all will renew their baptismal consecration of their lives to God, in Christ.

It is a time in which joy and grief go together hand in hand: for that is the meaning of compunction - a sorrow which pierces, which liberates, which gives hope and therefore joy. Compunction is a baptism of sorrow, in which the tears of the penitent are a psychological but also deeply religious purification, preparing and disposing him for the sacramental waters of baptism or for the sacrament of penance. Such sorrow brings joy because it is at once a mature acknowledgment of guilt and the acceptance of its full consequences: hence it implies a religious and moral adjustment to reality, the acceptance of one's actual condition, and the acceptance of reality is always a liberation from the burden of illusion which we strive to justify by our errors and sins. Compunction is a necessary sorrow, but it is followed by joy and relief because it wins for us one of the greatest blessings: the light of truth and the grace of humility. The tears of the Christian penitent are real tears, but they bring joy.

Only the inner rending, the tearing of the heart, brings this joy. It lets out our sins, and lets in the clean air of God's spring, the sunlight of the days that advance toward Easter. Rending of the garments lets in nothing but the cold. The rending of the heart

²Seasons of Celebration - Farrar, Straus & Giroux - NY - 1965 - pg. 113f

which is spoken of in Joel is that tearing away@ from ourselves and our *vetustas* - the Aoldness@ of the old man, wearied with the boredom and drudgery of an indifferent existence, that we may turn to God and taste His mercy, in the liberty of His sons and daughters.

When we turn to Him, what do we find? That AHe is gracious and merciful, patient and rich of mercy@. He even speaks to us in His own words, saying ABehold I will send you corn and wine and oil and you shall be filled with them: and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations@. This at the beginning of a forty days fast!

It is necessary that at the beginning of this fast, the Lord should show Himself to us in His mercy. The purpose of Lent is not only expiation, to satisfy the divine justice, but above all a preparation to rejoice in His love. And this preparation consists in receiving the gift of His mercy - a gift which we receive in so far as we open our hearts to it, casting out what cannot remain in the same room with mercy.

Now one of the things we must cast out first of all is fear. Fear narrows the little entrance of our heart. It shrinks up our capacity to love. It freezes up our power to give ourselves. If we were terrified of God as an inexorable judge, we would not confidently await His mercy, or approach Him trustfully in prayer. Our peace, our joy in Lent are a guarantee of grace.

From a Sermon by St Leo the Great on Lent ³

In the gospel of John the Lord says: *Whoever loves me will keep my commandments, and whoever keeps my commandments will abide in me, and my Father will love him, and I will love him, and I will manifest myself to him.* In a letter of the same apostle we read: *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God; whoever does not love does not know God, for God is Love.*

The faithful should enter into themselves and make a true judgment on their attitudes of mind and heart. If they find some store of love's fruit in their hearts, they must not doubt God's presence within them. If they would increase their capacity to receive so great a guest, they should practice greater generosity in doing good, with persevering charity.

Any time is the right time for works of charity, but these days of Lent provide a special encouragement. Those who want to be present at the Lord's Passover in holiness of mind and body should seek above all to win this grace, for charity contains all other virtues and covers a multitude of sins.

As we prepare to celebrate that greatest of all mysteries, by which the blood of Jesus Christ did away with our sins, let us first of all make ready the sacrificial offerings of works of mercy. In this way we shall give to those who have sinned against us what God in his goodness has already given to us.

Let us extend to the poor and those afflicted in different ways a more open-handed generosity, so that God may be thanked through many voices and the relief of the needy supported by our fasting. No act of devotion on the part of the faithful gives God more pleasure than that which is lavished on his poor. Where he finds charity with its loving concern, there he recognizes the reflection of his own fatherly care.

In these acts of giving do not fear a lack of means. A generous spirit is itself great wealth. There can be no shortage of material for generosity where it is Christ who feeds and Christ who is fed. In all this activity there is present the hand of him who multiplies the bread by breaking it, and increases it by giving it away.

The giver of alms should be free from anxiety and full of joy. His gain will be the greatest when he keeps back least for himself. The holy Apostle Paul tells us: *Whoever sows seed for the sower will also provide bread for eating; he will provide you with more seed, and will increase the harvest of your goodness,* in Christ Jesus our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy spirit for ever and ever. Amen

³ The Liturgy of the Hours - vol II - pg 295 - Catholic Book Publishing Co - 1976