

## SUN 18 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent

A Commentary on the Gospel by Cyril of Alexandria [1](#)

As the firstfruits of our renewed humanity, Christ escaped the curse of the law precisely by becoming accursed for our sake. He overcame the forces of corruption by himself becoming once more *free among the dead*. He trampled death under foot and came to life again, and then he ascended to the Father as an offering, the firstfruits, as it were, of the human race. *He ascended, as Scripture says, not to a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the real one, but into heaven itself, to appear in God's presence on our behalf.* He is the life-giving bread that came down from heaven, and by offering himself to God the Father as a fragrant sacrifice for our sake, he also delivers us from our sins and frees us from the faults that we commit through ignorance. We can understand this best if we think of him as symbolized by the calf that used to be slain as a holocaust and by the goat that was sacrificed for our sins committed through ignorance. For our sake, to blot out the sins of the world, he laid down his life.

Recognized then in bread as life and the giver of life, in the calf as a holocaust offered by himself to God the Father as an appeasing fragrance, in the goat as one who became sin for our sake and was slain for our transgressions, Christ is also symbolized in another way by a sheaf of grain, as a brief explanation will show.

The human race may be compared to spikes of wheat in a field, rising, as it were, from the earth, awaiting their full growth and development, and then in time being cut down by the reaper, which is death. The comparison is apt, since Christ himself spoke of our race in this way when he said to his holy disciples: *Do you not say, "Four months and it will be harvest time?" Look at the fields I tell you, they are already white and ready for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving his wages and bringing in a crop for eternal life.*

Now Christ became like one of us; he sprang from the holy Virgin like a spike of wheat from the ground. Indeed, he spoke of himself as a grain of wheat when he said: *I tell you truly, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains as it was, a single grain; but if it dies its yield*

*is very great.* And so, like a sheaf of grain, the firstfruits, as it were, of the earth, he offered himself to the Father for our sake.

For we do not think of a spike of wheat, any more than we do of ourselves, in isolation. We think of it rather as part of a sheaf, which is a single bundle made up of many spikes. The spikes have to be gathered into a bundle before they can be used, and this is the key to the mystery they represent, the mystery of Christ who, though one, appears in the image of a sheaf to be made up of many, as in fact he is. Spiritually, he contains in himself all believers. *As we have been raised up with him,* writes Saint Paul, *so we have also been enthroned with him in heaven.* He is a human being like ourselves, and this has made us one body with him, the body being the bond that unites us. We can say, therefore, that in him, we are all one, and indeed as he himself says to God, his heavenly Father: *It is my desire that as I and you are one, so they also may be one in us.*

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year B – New City Press – NY – 1993 – pg 38

## MON 19 St Joseph

From a Homily of St. Bernard of Clairvaux [1](#)

Joseph's character and qualities can be deduced from the fact that God honored him with the title of father, and, although his doing so was a mere matter of convenience, this was what he was known as and believed to be. Joseph's own name, which as you know means "increase", supplies further indications. Call to mind the great patriarch of old who was sold into Egypt, and you will realize that it was not only his name that our saint received but also his chastity, innocence, and grace.

His brothers' envy had caused the earlier Joseph to be sold and taken to Egypt, thus symbolizing the selling of Christ: the later Joseph carried Christ into Egypt, fleeing before Herod's envy. The former Joseph kept faith with his master and would not become involved with his master's wife, while his namesake faithfully protected his own spouse, the mother of his Lord, acknowledging her virginity and remaining continent himself. The first Joseph had the gift of interpreting dreams; the second was given a revelation of the divine plan and a share in its accomplishment. Joseph the patriarch stored up grain, not for himself but for all the people: our Joseph was given custody of the living bread from heaven to keep safe both for himself and the whole world.

There is no doubt that the Joseph to whom the Savior's mother was engaged was a good and faithful man. He was, I say, the wise and faithful servant whom the Lord appointed to support his mother and care for himself in childhood, singling him out for his complete reliability to help him with his momentous plan.

Added to all this, scripture tells us that he was of David's house. Joseph was obviously of David's house, a true descendant of the royal line, a man of noble birth and still nobler disposition. That he was David's son was seen from the fact that he in no way failed to maintain his standard: he was a true son of David not only as regards physical descent, but also in his faith, holiness, and devotion. In him the Lord found, as it were, a second David, a man after his own heart, to whom he could safely confide his most holy and secret design. To him as to another David he revealed the unfathomable, hidden depths of his wisdom, and granted him knowledge of that mystery which was known to none of the princes of

this world. In a word, that which many kings and prophets had longed to see and had not seen, to hear and had not heard – that was granted to Joseph. He was allowed not only to see and hear him, but also to carry him, guide his steps, embrace and kiss him, cherish and protect him.

It is not only Joseph, however, but Mary as well whom we believe to be a descendant of David, for she would not have been engaged to a man of David's line unless she herself had been of that line. Both of them, then, belonged to David's family, but it was in Mary that the oath which the Lord had sworn to David was fulfilled, while Joseph was privy to the promise and witnessed its fulfillment.

[1](#)A Word in Season – vol. IV – Augustinian Press – 1991 – pg 34

## TUES 20 Lenten Weekday

A Reading on the Virtue of Compassion, from a Homily of St. Asterius of Amasea.<sup>1</sup>

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If you desire to resemble God, for you have been created in God's own image, imitate your model. You, Christians, whose very name calls to mind love, imitate Christ's love. Consider and wonder at the wealth of Christ's love for us. When he was about to show himself to us in our own nature, he sent John to preach repentance by word and example. Before John he sent all the prophets. They too were to teach people to amend their lives. Then he came himself and with his own voice cried out: *Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.* And how did he receive those who listened to his call and followed him? He readily forgave them their sins, instantly relieving them of all their cause for grief. The Word has sanctified them and the Spirit has confirmed them. Their old self was buried in the waters of baptism and a new self born; their youth was renewed by grace. And the result? Enemies of God became his friends, strangers to him became his children, idolaters became worshipers of the true God.

You, therefore, who are harsh and unable to show gentleness, learn goodness from your Creator. Do not act as bitter judges and severe arbiters toward those who are your companions in service, as you wait for the coming of One who will reveal the secret recesses of the heart and, as the Almighty Lord, will assign to each person their proper place in the life beyond.

Do not pass severe judgements that you may avoid being judged with the same severity, being pierced yourselves by the words of your own mouth as by sharp-pointed teeth. For it is against this kind of fault that the words of the gospel seem indeed to warn us where it is said: *If you want to avoid judgement, stop passing judgement, your verdict on others will be the verdict passed on you.*

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<sup>1</sup>Homily 13: PG 40, 355-359C-D. [CR VI 221] [cf. also WS II 176].

Christ does not thereby mean that he wants to banish discernment and wisdom. What he condemns is a condemnation that is too severe. So, lighten as much as possible the weight of your measurement of others, if you want your own actions not to be considered excessively heavy when our lives are weighed at the divine judgement....Do not refuse to act mercifully that you yourselves may not be sent away unpardoned at the time when you will need forgiveness.

## WED 21 Lenten Weekday

### A reading about the Christian Mystery, from a book by Louis Bouyer. 1

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To say that the Easter observances are the center of the ecclesiastical year leaves much untold: they are the center where the entire liturgy converges and the spring whence it all flows. All Christian worship is but a continuous celebration of Easter: the sun, rising and setting daily, leaves in its wake an uninterrupted series of Eucharists; every Mass that is celebrated prolongs the pasch. Each day of the liturgical year and, within each day, every instant of the sleepless life of the Church, continues and renews the pasch that Our Lord had desired with such great desire to eat with His disciples while awaiting the pasch He should eat in His kingdom, the pasch to be prolonged for all eternity. The annual pasch, which we are constantly recalling or anticipating, preserves us ever in the sentiment of the early Christians, who exclaims, looking to the past, The Lord is risen indeed, and, turning towards the future, Come, Lord Jesus! Come! Make no delay.

The Christian religion is not simply a doctrine: it is a fact, an action, and an action, not of the past, but of the present, where the past is recovered and the future draws near. Thus it embodies a mystery of faith, for it declares to us that each day makes our own the action that Another accomplished long ago, the fruits of which we shall see only later in ourselves.

St. Paul has persistently set forth this mystery in all his epistles. Writing to the Ephesians, he states simply that the mystery that unites Christ to the Church is great, as if nothing adequate could ever be said of it. A few lines earlier he revealed to us the substance of this mystery: it is that *Christ so loved the Church and handed Himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish* (Eph 5.25-27). To this end the glorifying action which He has accomplished in flesh

like ours and by which this flesh has found life in death must become our own.

The action accomplished of old by Him is the pasch of two thousand years ago; becoming ours today, that action is the pasch we celebrate. The glory that will result therefore is for us as it has resulted for Him is the eternal pasch celebrated by the elect in heaven: the feast of the Lamb, immolated and glorious. For Christ died for us, not in order to dispense us from dying, but rather to make us capable of dying efficaciously, of dying to the lie of the old man, in order to live again as the new man who will die no more.

Here is the meaning of the pasch; it points out to us that the Christian in the Church must die with Christ in order to rise with Him. And not only does it point out, as one might indicate with the forefinger something beyond one's reach (that is what the pasch of the Old Testament did), but it accomplishes the very thing it points out. The Pasch is Christ, who once died and rose from the dead, making us die in His death and raising us to His life. Thus the pasch is not a mere commemoration: it is the cross and the empty tomb rendered actual. But it is no longer the Head who must stretch Himself upon the cross in order to rise from the tomb: it is His Body, the Church, and of this body we are the members.



## THUR 22 Lenten Weekday

### Continuing the reading about the Paschal Mystery of Christianity, by Louis Bouyer. 1

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Our death with Christ and this resurrection with Him, giving us the life hidden with Christ in God, who will appear when Christ Himself will appear, is the whole mystery that St. Paul tells us God had reserved for these later times for our own. Writers have often stressed the extraordinary frequency of [grammatical] compounds [containing the word] with in the writings of St. Paul, and have rightly observed that it is a characteristic feature of his whole conception of the Christian life. Indeed, for him, the Christian life, the life of the Church or that of each Christian, is a life with Christ. It is important to grasp all that that implies.

Jesus of Nazareth, who died and rose under Pontius Pilate and is now seated at the right hand of the Father until the day He will come to judge the living and the dead, has never been for St. Paul, nor for any Catholic theologian, a hero whose epic must leave the impression that His achievements are too wonderful ever to be duplicated in ourselves. Surely no poet has dreamed of a hero more sublime than the One of whom the Apostle wrote: *Despoiling the principalities and the powers, he made a public spectacle of them, leading them away in triumph* (Col 2.15). But it is for us that He triumphed thus, and we must know that by Him and with Him, dead as we were, God has *raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus* (Eph 2.6).

Yes, Christ accomplished all that in us, for, if the sense of our own weakness is what faith, in cutting at the very root of our pride, first thrusts upon us, it does so only to make clear to us that *strength is made perfect in weakness* (2 Cor 12.9), and that we can do all things in Him who strengthens us (Phil 4.13) that is, Jesus Christ.

That the Church celebrates Easter, that today she suffers and weeps with her Head, then rises and exults with Him, is the sign that the relation between Christ and the Church, between Christ and us, is quite different from that existing between any historic personages of different epochs, even between a master and his disciples. For the authors of the New Testament, even for the evangelists whose immediate end is to recount the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth, this Christ can never be considered simply as a man whose life and death might inspire sentiments analogous to those awakened by, say, the life and death of a Socrates, even though those sentiments were incomparably deepened and purified.

FRI 23 Lenten Weekday

Continuing the reading about the Paschal Mystery of  
Christianity, by Louis Bouyer. 1

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If the apostles set out across the world to evangelize it, they did so primarily because the Holy Spirit had given them after the Resurrection, the certitude expressed in these simple words: Jesus is the Lord. The word Lord has become so commonplace in our writing and speech that we find it difficult to realize all that this statement expressed. The Lord was *Adonai*, the reverent paraphrase by which the Jews replaced the awesome name of *Yahweh*; the *Kyrios* by which the Seventy, so styled traditionally, had religiously translated this same name in their Greek version [of the Bible called the Septuagint]. To say Jesus is the Lord was to declare that He who had been known in the flesh was now known in the spirit; that this man, this Holy child of God, was the corporal dwelling place of divinity; and that divinity, unimpeded, inundated his risen humanity, forever setting at defiance death and the devil.

But all this still falls short of the whole truth. Paradoxically, it misses the important point C the point in the gospel, which concerns us so directly that the apostles, as soon as they recognized it, set out to disseminate it. The good tidings, in their opinion, were that this Man-God was also the Second Adam; just as humanity had borne the likeness of the terrestrial Adam, so they were now called to resemble the heavenly Adam. Baptized in Him, they would put him on and would know that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. *I live, yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me* (Gal 2.20) this was the cry of the Church on the days following the Resurrection and Pentecost; such it has remained through the centuries.

In other words, Christ is not for the Church the individual Jesus that profane historians attempt to deduce from the sum total of the dogma she teaches: He is rather the divine Head of the Body that is the Church, the Head from which she receives all life and light. He is the Bridegroom

and she is the Bride, two in one flesh, for the Bride is only *the fullness of the One who fills all things in every way* (Eph 1.23).

Christ is not a part of the Church; rather, the Church might be called a part of Christ, grafted upon Him, living by Him and for Him, suffering with Him in order to rule with Him. The ultimate end of the Incarnation, according to St. Augustine, is the total Christ: Christ Jesus the Head and we the members constituting henceforth but one in the ineffable interchange of grace between the One who gives all and those who receive all; for this giving of oneself to Him who has given everything to us is but the supreme fruit of His grace.

Rightly understood, the imitation of Jesus Christ is the very essence of the Christian life. We must have in us the mind that Christ had; we must be crucified and buried and rise with Him. This, of course, does not mean that we fallen human beings are to copy clumsily the God-Man. The whole matter is a mystery signifying that we are to be grafted upon Him so that the same life which was in Him and which He has come to give us may develop in us as in Him and produce in us the same fruits of sanctity and love that it produced in Him.

The whole life of the Church is indeed the imitation of the life of Jesus Christ, but it is not a copy of that life. For the life of the Church is the life of Jesus Christ propagated, reproducing itself in people of all the ages, watered by that river of living water that flows forever over this earth, from the throne where the immolated Lamb is seated in the glory of His immolation.

Just as Jesus Christ, in that pasch for which He had come, expressed through His crucifixion the love that animated his whole existence, an obedient love for His Father and a compassionate love of His brethren, so, at each recurring paschal season, the Church externalizes this same love that flowed as water and blood from the heart of Christ to pour itself, through the sacraments, into the hearts of all people, becoming for them eternal life. At this time, together with its changeless Head, the Mystical Body, ever renewed, partakes of the Last Supper, is stretched upon the cross, and descends into the tomb to rise again on the third day. This is the paschal mystery.

## SAT 24 Lenten Weekday

From a Homily by St Gregory Nazianzen on sharing in the Passover <sup>2</sup>

We are soon going to share in the Passover, and although we still do so only in a symbolic way, the symbolism already has more clarity than it possessed in former times, because under the law, the Passover was, if I may dare to say so, only a symbol of a symbol. Before long, however, when the Word drinks the new wine with us in the kingdom of his Father, we shall be keeping the Passover in a yet more perfect way and with deeper understanding. He will then reveal to us and make clear what he has so far only partially disclosed. For this wine, so familiar to us now, is eternally new.

It is for us to learn what this drinking is, and for him to teach us. He has to communicate this knowledge to his disciples, because teaching is food, even for the teacher.

So let us take our part in the Passover prescribed by the law, not in a literal way, but according to the teaching of the Gospel; not in an imperfect way, but perfectly; not only for a time, but eternally. Let us regard as our home the heavenly Jerusalem, not the earthly one, the city glorified by angels, not the one laid waste by armies. We are not required to sacrifice young bulls or rams, beasts with horns and hoofs that are more dead than alive and devoid of feeling; but instead let us join the choirs of angels in offering God upon his heavenly altar a sacrifice of praise. We must now pass through the first veil and approach the second, turning our eyes toward the Holy of Holies. I will say more: we must sacrifice ourselves to God each day and in everything we do, accepting all that happens to us for the sake of the Word, imitating his passion by our sufferings, and honoring his blood by shedding our own. We must be ready to be crucified.

If you are a Simon of Cyrene, take up your cross and follow Christ. If you are crucified beside him like one of the thieves, now, like the good thief, acknowledge your God. For your sake, and because of your sin, Christ himself was regarded as a sinner; for his sake, therefore, you must cease to sin. Worship him who hung on the cross because of you, even if you are hanging there yourself. Derive some benefit from the very shame; purchase salvation with your death. Enter paradise with Jesus, and

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<sup>2</sup> The Liturgy of the Hours - vol II - pg 392 - Catholic Book Publishing Co - 1976

discover how far you have fallen. Contemplate the glories there, and leave the other scoffing thief to die outside in his blasphemy.

If you are a Joseph of Arimathea, go to the one who ordered his crucifixion, and ask for Christ=s body. Make your own the expiation for the sins of the whole world. If you are a Nicodemus, like the man who worshiped God by night, bring spices and prepare Christ=s body for burial. If you are one of the Mary=s or Salome or Joanna, weep in the early morning. Be the first to see the stone rolled back, and even the angels perhaps, and Jesus himself.