

NT-MK26

03.25.18

A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark by Bl. Gueric of Igny ¹

When Jesus entered Jerusalem like a triumphant conqueror, many were astonished at the majesty of his bearing; but when a short while afterward he entered upon his passion, his appearance was ignoble, an object of derision. If today's procession and passion are considered together, in the one Jesus appears as sublime and glorious, in the other as lowly and suffering. The procession makes us think of the honor reserved for a king, whereas the passion shows us the punishment due to a thief.

In the one Jesus is surrounded by glory and honor, in the other *he has neither dignity nor beauty*. In the one he is the joy of all and the glory of the people, in the other *the butt of men and the laughing stock of the people*. In the one he receives the acclamation: *Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes as the king of Israel*; in the other there are shouts that he is guilty of death and is reviled for having set himself up as king of Israel.

In the procession the people meet Jesus with palm branches, in his passion they slap him in the face and strike his head with a rod. In the one they extol him with praises, in the other they heap insults upon him. In the one they compete to lay their clothes in his path, in the other he is stripped of his own clothes. In the one he is welcomed to Jerusalem as a just king and savior, in the other he is thrown out of the city as a criminal, condemned as an impostor. In the one he is mounted on an ass and accorded every mark of honor; in the other he hangs on the wood of the cross, torn by whips, pierced with wounds, and abandoned by his own. If, then, we want to follow our leader without stumbling through prosperity and through adversity, let us keep our eyes upon him, honored in the procession, undergoing ignominy and suffering in the passion, yet unshakably steadfast in all such changes of fortune.

Lord Jesus, you are the joy and the salvation of the whole world; whether we see you seated on an ass or hanging on the cross, let each one of us bless and praise you, so that when we see you reigning on high we may praise you for ever and ever, for to you belong praise and honor throughout all ages. Amen.

¹Journey with the Fathers – Year B – New City Press – NY – 1993 – pg 40

3/26/18

A Reading on the Lord's Passion, from a Sermon by St Leo the Great.¹

The glory of the Lord's Passion, dearly beloved, of which we promised to speak today also, is especially to be honored in the mystery of his lowliness, by which he has redeemed and taught us all: so that from where our price was paid charity might also spring up. For the omnipotence of the Son of God, in which through one and the same essence he is equal with the Father, could have, by a simple act of his will, saved us from the power of the devil, were it not more perfectly in accord with the divine plan, that the hostility of our wicked enemy should be undone through that which he had undone; and that we should be restored by means of that same nature through which slavery was imposed.

For the Evangelist, saying that, *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us*, and the Apostle saying, *That God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself* (2 Cor 5:19), shows us that the only-begotten Son of the Most High Father entered into such a union with our human lowliness that, though taking to himself the substance of our soul and body, he yet remained one and the same Son of God; raising up our nature, not his: for it was lowliness that was raised up, not power: in such a manner that when the creature was joined to its Creator, nothing of the divinity was absent from what he assumed, and nothing of humanity in him who assumed it.

This plan of God's justice and mercy, though veiled in times past, was not yet so hidden as to be concealed from the minds of the saints who lived good lives from the beginning to the Lord's coming. For the salvation that Christ was to bring us, was promised both in the words of the Prophets and in the meaning of events; and received not alone by those who foretold it, but by all who believed them. For one is the faith which sanctifies the just of all ages, and the same is the hope of the faithful, whatever we confess was accomplished, or our forefathers prayed might come to pass, through Jesus Christ, the Mediator of God and humankind (1 Tim 2:5).

There is then no doubt, dearly beloved, that human nature was taken into such close union with him by the Son of God, that Christ is not alone in the man who is *the firstborn of every creature* (Col 1:15), but one and the same in all the sanctified. And as the head cannot be separate from its members so neither can the members from their head. And though it is not in this life but in the life eternal that God *shall be all in all* (1 Cor 15:28), yet even now he dwells within his Temple the Church, as he promised, saying: *Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world* (Mt 28:20). And

¹"Sermo. 63 On the Passion of the Lord XII", PL 54, 353 [also [The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers](#), vol.2, pp.149-150].

this the Apostle echoes when he says: *He is the head of the body, the Church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead: that in all things he may hold the primacy: because in him it hath well pleased the Father, that all fullness should dwell; and through him to reconcile all things unto himself* (Col 1:18-20).

03/27/18

A Sermon of St Aelred of Rievaulx on the Passion ¹

Our Lord Jesus Christ worked for our salvation not in one way only but in many. Because his mercy provided for our redemption, he accomplished it in such a way that he might be an example for us. Behold, my brothers, how at this time you call to mind our redemption; therefore pay diligent attention not only to the redemption itself but also to both the manner by which redemption was accomplished and the place in which it was done. The manner of redemption is the passion of Christ; the place, outside the city. You must know, then, that from this redemption and the manner of accomplishing it, we receive both a way of living and the right location that we must choose in order to live in this way.

Let us accept now the way of living that comes from this cross of Jesus. Do I say a way of living or of dying? Certainly both of living and of dying; of dying to the world, of living for God; of dying to vices, and of living in virtues; of dying to the flesh, of living, however, in the Spirit. Therefore in the cross of Christ there is death, and in the cross of Christ there is life. There, the death of death and the life of life. There, the death of sins and the life of virtues. There, the death of the flesh and the life of the spirit. Why, however, did God choose this kind of death? Because of both the divine mystery itself and the example to be given. Then, too, because our illness was such that the remedy should fit it in this way.

It was certainly fitting that we who had fallen through the wood would rise up through the wood. Fitting that he who conquered through the wood should himself be conquered through it. Fitting that we who chose the fruit of death from the wood would be given the fruit of life from the wood. And because we fell from the stability of this most beautiful earth into the great and spacious sea, it is fitting that wood be prepared for us by which we would cross over that sea. For no one can cross the sea without wood, nor this world without the cross.

Let us now say something of the hidden meaning of the cross. One who dies on the cross is not on the earth but above the earth; furthermore, the members of the body are not cut off but stretched out. They are so stretched out in width and in length that the crucified is extended in four directions, so that he seems to enfold the four parts of the world and to take possession of heaven and earth at the same time. When the cross is erect, the head is toward heaven, the feet are stretched toward the earth, and the outstretched arms are positioned between heaven and

earth. If the crucified is laid on the earth, one part of his body is toward the east, another toward the west, the third toward the south, the fourth toward the north.

Therefore do you see how Christ chose this kind of death as full of divine meaning or other? The apostle explains it openly, saying *He humbled himself, being made obedient even to death, death on the cross*. He then proclaims the meaning:

Because of this, God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven, on earth, and in the depths. Because he was about to take possession of heaven and earth through the cross, he was placed on the cross as if he embraced heaven and earth.

On the mysteries of our redemption hidden and revealed in the heart of Jesus; a prayer from the *Meditations* of William of St. Thierry. 1

O Truth supreme, you are the heaven of heavens, you who are what you are, who have your being from yourself, who belong to yourself and are sufficient to yourself. You lack nothing, yet you have no excess; ...you have within yourself supremest concord, utmost clarity, most perfect fullness and completest life.

...O Lord, the height, the depth, the wisdom and the mightCare these the heaven of which you are the door? It is so, truly; that is why the ark of the covenant was seen in heaven when the door was opened, as [St.] John says. For what does the ark of the covenant that was seen in heaven mean, if not, as the Apostle [Paul] says: *Athe dispensation of the mystery, which from the beginning has been hidden in God, who created all things@?* You are yourself that ark. In you from all eternity was hidden, and in you in these latter days has been fulfilled, all that from the beginning of the world has been revealed to all the saints and prophets by the Law and by the prophecies, by wonders and by signs....

These blessings, that were hidden in your secret heaven through the ages, you at the ages= end unveiled to the world=s longing eyes, when you opened in heaven the door that is yourself. You opened that door when your grace appeared to all [people], teaching us.... The heavens being thus opened, all the good and glory and delight of heaven poured itself out on earth. And then, O God, who spared not your own Son, but delivered him up for us all, the greatness of your kindness... to us was published openly to all. You made known your salvation to the world, and in the sight of all the nations you revealed your righteousness....

Those unsearchable riches of your glory, Lord, were hidden in your secret place in heaven until the soldier=s spear opened the side of your Son our

Lord and Savior on the cross, and from it flowed the mysteries of our redemption. Now we may not only thrust our finger or our hand into his side, like Thomas, but through that open door may enter whole, O Jesus, even into your heart, the sure seat of your mercy, even into your holy soul that is filled with the fullness of God, full of grace and truth, full of our salvation and our consolation....

Open, O Lord, the ark-door of your side, that all your own who shall be saved may enter in, before this flood that overwhelms the earth. Open to us your body=s side, that those who long to see the secrets of your Son may enter in, and may receive the sacraments that flow [from there], even the price of their redemption. Open the door of your heaven, that your redeemed may see the good things of God in the land of the living, though they still labor in the land of the dying....

O good Father, loving Brother, and sweet Lord, you are all that is good and sweet and loving; the sum of goodness overflows in you. Open yourself to us, that your sweetness may flow forth from you to us, and fill us. Open yourself to me, O you who are the door, so that through you I may by longing love attain sometimes to the place of your wondrous dwelling, even to the house of God, although I am not worthy yet to enter there in full reality....

Open to me, O Lord, so that, although I am a stranger unworthy of enrollment as a citizen, yet nonetheless, I may by your gift be suffered on occasion for a little while to journey there, that I may truly see your glory, and not come out again unless I am thrown out!....

O, if only I may see, if only I may persevere, if only I may hear some day:
*AE*Enter into the joy of your Lord,@ and may thus enter in, never to come out again! Lord, you are mighty and your truth is all about you. Finish your work and give what you have promised.

TM-LNT63

03.29.18

A Reading from St. Ephrem ¹

The evening before our Lord gave himself up to death he shared his own body with his apostles and offered them his blood, with the commandment that they were to do what he had done in order to keep the memory of his passion alive.

Then a strange thing happened. Earlier Jesus had charged his disciples not to fear death. *Do not be afraid of those who have the power to kill your body*, he had said. But now he himself showed fear, and begged to be spared the cup of suffering: *Father*, he prayed, *if it be possible, let this cup pass me by*. How are we to explain this?

The answer is that our Lord's petition was wrung from the human weakness that he had made his own. There was no pretense about his incarnation; it was absolutely real. And since the donning of our poor humanity had made him weak and defenseless, it was only natural that he should experience fear and alarm. Eating to alleviate hunger, showing weariness after exertion, and revealing human weakness by the need for sleep were all effects of taking our flesh and clothing himself with our infirmity. Consequently when the moment of death drew near he necessarily experienced the ultimate frailty of our human condition; he was gripped by a dreadful horror of dying. This in itself was proof of his humanity, since it clearly showed him to be a descendant of Adam, over whom *death held sway*, to quote the words of the apostle Paul.

It was then that Jesus said to his disciples: *Stay awake and apply yourselves to prayer, or you may be assailed by temptation. The spirit is ready and willing, but the flesh is weak*. And in answer to our question he might well say: "When you are afraid, it is not your spirit that trembles but your human weakness. Remember then that I myself tasted the fear of death in my desire to convince you that I truly shared your flesh and blood."

Jesus did indeed experience fear, just as he experienced hunger, thirst, fatigue, and the need for sleep. In view of this the world's inhabitants would find it very difficult to claim that the payment of their debts had cost the Lord neither anguish nor pain.

A further answer to our question is that Jesus wished to teach his disciples how to commit themselves to God both in life and in death. His own divine knowledge made him supremely wise, yet he prayed for what his Father judged to be expedient. How much more ought we ignorant folk to surrender our wills to God's omniscience!

Determining to give his disciples an example they could imitate, our Lord identified himself with them by assuming a human soul like theirs. This enabled him to enter

into their sentiments and thus to sow the seeds of comfort in their hearts. He acquainted himself with their fear in order that the knowledge of his resemblance to themselves might restrain them from boasting of their readiness to meet death while it was still far off. Fearless though he was, our Lord actually experienced fear and prayed to be delivered from suffering, even though he knew his prayer could not be granted. Surely then before temptation assailed them his disciples should have prayed all the more earnestly to be saved from failing the test!

We may also tell ourselves that we too were in the Lord's mind as he prayed. In time of temptation our minds become confused and our imagination runs riot. By persevering in prayer Jesus was showing how much we ourselves need to pray if we are to escape the wiles and snares of the devil. It is only by sustained prayer that we gain control of our distracted thoughts.

Finally, there is our Lord's desire to strengthen all who are afraid of death. By letting them see that he himself had experienced fear he would show them that fear does not necessarily lead to sin, provided that one continues to resist it. This is the force of our Lord's concluding prayer: *Not my will, Father, but yours be done*. He is saying: Yes, Father, I am ready to die, in order to bring life to many.

¹From the Commentary on the Diatessaron – A Word in Season – vol. II – Exordium Books – 1982 – pg 193

TM-FRI08

03/30/18

From a Sermon by St. Leo the Great ¹

When our Lord was handed over to the will of his cruel foes, they ordered him, in mockery of his royal dignity, to carry the instrument of his own torture. This was done to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah: *A child is born for us, a son is given to us; sovereignty is laid on his shoulders*. To the wicked, the sight of the Lord carrying his own cross was indeed an object of derision; but to the faithful a great mystery is revealed, for the cross was destined to become the scepter of his power. Here was the majestic spectacle of a glorious conqueror mightily overthrowing the hostile forces of the devil and nobly bearing the trophy of his victory. On the shoulders of his invincible patience he carried the sign of salvation for all the kingdoms of the earth to worship, as if on that day he would strengthen all his future disciples by the symbol of his work, and say to them: *Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me*.

As the crowd accompanied Jesus to the place of execution, the soldiers found a man named Simon of Cyrene, onto whose shoulders they transferred the weight of the Lord's cross. This action also prefigured the faith of the Gentiles, to whom the cross of Christ would mean glory rather than shame. By this exchange the atonement of the unblemished lamb and the fulfillment of all the rites of the old law passed from the people of the circumcision to the Gentiles, from the children born of the flesh to those born of the spirit.

In the words of the Apostle: *Christ our Passover is sacrificed*. As the new and authentic sacrifice of reconciliation, it is not in the temple, whose cult was now at an end, that he offered himself to the Father; nor was it within the walls of the city doomed to destruction for its crimes. It was beyond the city gates, outside the camp, that he was crucified, in order that when the ancient sacrificial dispensation came to an end a new victim might be laid on a new altar not of the temple, but of the world.

When Christ is lifted up on the Cross, do not let your inward gaze dwell only on the appearance he had in the eyes of the wicked, to whom the word was addressed through Moses: *Your life will hang before your eyes; night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life*.

O the marvelous power of the Cross, the glory in the Passion! No tongue can fully describe it. Here we see the judgment seat of the Lord, here sentence is passed upon the world, and here the sovereignty of the Crucified is revealed. You drew all things to yourself, Lord, when all the elements combined to pronounce judgment in execration of that crime; when the lights of heaven were darkened and the day was turned into night; when the land was shaken by unwonted earthquakes, and all creation refused to serve those wicked people. Yes, Lord, you drew all things to yourself; the veil of the temple was torn in two and the Holy of Holies taken away from those unworthy high priests. Figures gave way to reality, prophecy to manifestation, law to gospel. You drew all things to yourself in order that the worship of the whole human race could be celebrated everywhere in a sacramental form which would openly fulfill what had been enacted by means of veiled symbols in that single Jewish temple. A nobler order of levites has now arisen. Through your Cross the faithful are given strength instead of weakness, glory instead of shame, life instead of death. Now that the multiplicity of animal sacrifices has ceased, the single offering of your body and blood takes the place of that diversity of victims, since you are the true Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and in yourself you fulfill all the rites of the old law, so that as there is now a single sacrifice in place of all these victims, so there is a single kingdom formed of all the peoples of the earth.

Something strange is happening - there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear.

He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, he who is both God and the son of Eve. The Lord approached them bearing the cross, the weapon that had won him the victory. At the sight of him Adam, the first man he had created, struck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone: "My Lord be with you all." Christ answered him: "And with your spirit." He took him by the hand and raised him up, saying: "Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light."

I am your God, who for your sake have become your son. Out of love for you and for your descendants I now by my own authority command all who are held in bondage to come forth, all who are in darkness to be enlightened, all who are sleeping to arise. I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you; together we form only one person and we cannot be separated.

For your sake I, your God, became your son; I, the Lord, took the form of a slave; I, whose home is above the heavens, descended to the earth and beneath the earth. For your sake, for the sake of humankind, I became like one without help, free among the dead. For the sake of you, who left a garden, I was betrayed in a garden, and I was crucified in a garden.

2 [□]THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS II, (Catholic Book Pub. Co. NY 1976) pp 496-98. (PG 43, 439, 451, 462-463.)

See on my face the spittle I received in order to restore to you the life I once breathed into you. See there the marks of the blows I received in order to refashion your warped nature in my image. On my back see the marks of the scourging I endured to remove the burden of sin that weighs upon your back. See my hands, nailed firmly to a tree, for you who once wickedly stretched out your hand to a tree.. Rise, let us leave this place. The enemy led you out of the earthly paradise. I will not restore you to that paradise, but I will enthrone you in heaven.