

## Vigils Readings Gethsemani Abbey

Octave of Easter, April 1-7, 2018

**Sunday, April 1, 2018**

**A Reading from an Easter Sermon of Pope St Leo the Great.<sup>1</sup>**

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*Though we once knew Christ according to the flesh, we now do so no longer.* The resurrection of the Lord did not mean the end of his flesh, but its transformation, and his bodily substance was not consumed by its increase in power. The quality changed, but the nature did not pass away. What could die became immortal, what could be harmed became incorruptible. And so he says correctly that he no longer knows the body of Christ in its former state, because there remains nothing in it subject to suffering or to weakness. It remains essentially human, but surpasses itself through the glory of the resurrection. It is not surprising that Paul says this of the body of Christ, when he says about Christians who live according to the Spirit, *From now on, we know no one according to the flesh.* From now on, he says, resurrection in Christ has begun in us; from Christ who died for all comes the shape of all our hope. We do not hold back through diffidence, nor are we held in suspense through uncertainty: we have received the beginnings of what we are promised, and see already with the eyes of faith the things that will be ours. Rejoicing in the lifting up of our nature, we possess already all that we believe.

Therefore, let us not be taken up by the appearances of things that pass, nor let things which are merely of this earth turn our thoughts from the things of heaven. Let us take as passing those things which have even now scarcely any reality; and with our minds intent on those that endure, let us fix our desire there where what is offered is eternal. For though we are saved only in hope, and carry with us still our corruptible and mortal body, yet we rightly claim to be no longer in the flesh if carnal passions do not rule us: rightly do we disclaim allegiance to something which

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<sup>1</sup>*Sermo de Resurrectione Domini* l. --nn 4-5; SC, Vol 74, pp 125-126.

no longer holds us in its power. And so when the Apostle says: "*Make no provision for the flesh, to follow its desires*," we understand that he has not forbidden those things consistent with our bodily health, or those demanded by human weakness. But in that we are not to cater to all our desires, or fulfill all that the flesh covets, we recognize that he has warned us to observe a certain measure of temperance, that the flesh, which is created subject to the soul, is not given too much, nor is denied what is necessary.

**Monday, April 2, 2018**

**A Discourse on Christ's Resurrection, by Symeon the New Theologian.<sup>2</sup>**

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Already Easter, that joyful day, that day of all gladness and delight, the day of Christ's resurrection, has arrived in the circle of the year. But rather, it happens daily and eternally in those who know its mystery, and so has filled our hearts with unspeakable joy and gladness.

Let us look and carefully examine what is the mystery of that resurrection of Christ our God which takes place mystically in us at all times, if we are willing, and how Christ is buried in us as in a tomb and how He unites Himself to our souls and rises again, and raises us with Himself. Such is the aim of our discourse.

Christ our God was hanged on the cross and nailed on it the sin of the world. He tasted death and went down to the uttermost depths of hell. Again, He returned from hell into His own spotless body, from which He had in no way been separated as He descended thither, and forthwith He arose from the dead. After that He ascended into heaven with great glory and power. So, likewise, as we have now come out of the world and entered into the tomb of repentance and humiliation by being assimilated to the sufferings of the Lord, He Himself comes down from heaven and enters into our body as into a tomb. He unites Himself to our souls and raises them up, though they were undoubtedly dead, and then grants to him who

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<sup>2</sup>The Discourses, Paulist Press CWS, 1980. cp.XIII 10,40-80.

has thus been raised with Christ that he may see the glory of His mystical resurrection.

Christ's resurrection is thus our resurrection, ours who lie here below. He who has never fallen into sin, as it is written, nor lost anything whatever of His own glory, how will He ever be raised up or be glorified, since He is always glorified above all and remains the same, "far above all rule and authority"? As has been said, Christ's resurrection and His glory are our glory. Through His resurrection in us it comes into being in us, is shown to us, and is seen by us. Once He has appropriated what is ours, that which He works in us He attributes to Himself. The resurrection of the soul is union with life. The body is dead and cannot live or be called alive unless it receives the living soul in itself and is joined to it, though not mingled with it. Likewise the soul cannot live unless it is ineffably and without confusion united to God, who is truly the life eternal. Before this union in knowledge, vision, and perception it is dead, even though it is endowed with intellect and is by nature immortal. There is no knowledge without vision, nor vision without knowledge. This is what I want to say - there is vision, and in the vision there is knowledge and perception; but I say this about spiritual things, for in the physical realm there is perception even apart from vision.

What do I mean? A blind man who hits his foot against a stone feels it, but a dead man does not. But in spiritual things, unless the mind comes to the contemplation of the things that are above thought, it does not perceive the mystical activity. Those who have not arrived at contemplation in spiritual matters and claim that they perceive the things that are above intellect, word, and thought are like someone whose eyes are blinded and who has a sensation of good or bad things that he experiences, but does not know what is in his hands or at his feet, even if they are for him a matter of life or death. Since he is deprived of the faculty and perception of vision he in no way perceives the bad or the good things that come upon him. Thus he will often lift up his staff to ward off his enemy and possibly strike his friend instead, while his enemy stands before his eyes and laughs at him.

Most people believe in the resurrection of Christ, but very few have a clear vision of it. Those who have no vision thereof cannot even adore Christ Jesus as the Holy One and as Lord.

**Tuesday, April 3, 2018**

**A Reading from St. Augustine's SERMONS (Easter Sunday).<sup>3</sup>**

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"O you who have been baptized, you who were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.' If light, then day; for God 'called the light Day.' You were darkness; He made you light; He made you the day; concerning you we now sing: 'This is the day which the Lord hath made: Let us be glad and rejoice therein.' Avoid darkness. Drunkenness leads to darkness. Do not depart sober and return intoxicated. We shall see you this afternoon. The Holy Spirit has begun to dwell in you; let Him not move out; do not shut Him out of your hearts. He, a good guest, found you empty; He is filling you. He found you hungry; He is feeding you. Finally, He found you thirsty; He is giving you to drink. Let Him inebriate you, for the Apostle says: 'Do not be drunk with wine, for in that is debauchery.' And, as if wishing to teach us how we ought to be inebriated, he adds: 'But be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing to one another in hymns and psalms and spiritual songs, singing in your hearts to the Lord.' Is not he who rejoices in the Lord and who sings praises to the Lord with great exultation like to an inebriated person? I approve of such inebriation, 'for with thee, O God, is the fountain of life; and thou shalt give them to drink of the torrent of thy pleasure.' Whence will this be? 'For with thee, O God, is the fountain of life; and in thy light we shall see light.' The Spirit of God is drink and light. If you would find the fountain in the darkness, you should enkindle a light, so that you might come to it. But do not enkindle a light at the fountain of light; He Himself will shine upon you; He will lead you to Himself. When you come to drink, approach and be enlightened. 'Come ye to him and be enlightened.' Do not depart, do not be enveloped in darkness. O Lord God, call them and let them approach Thee; strengthen them, lest they depart from Thee. Make Thy children

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<sup>3</sup>The Fathers of the Church. Fathers of the Church Inc., 1959, pp. 193-194.

new beings, make these newly baptized strong; but do not make dead of the old ones, for in this wisdom one may grow old, but one may not die.

Thus you have heard it proclaimed that Christ is the Lord, because 'in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God.' For, if the Lord Christ had not humbled Himself, but had wished to remain always as He was, then we would have perished. We acknowledge the Word as God with God; we acknowledge that the only-begotten Son is equal to the Father; we recognize the Light from Light, Day from Day. He who made the day is the Day, not made, but begotten by the Day. If, then, Day is from Day, not made but begotten, what is the day which the Lord has made? Why is it day? Because it is light. 'And the Lord called the light Day.

**Wednesday, April 4, 2018**

**A reading about the healing effects of Jesus' resurrection, from a sermon by St. Leo the Great.**<sup>1</sup>

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During Lent our aim was to experience some share in the sufferings of the cross and to enter into the mystery of the Lord's passion by taking up our cross and following him along the way of his humiliation and endurance. Now, during Eastertide, the accent is on sharing his resurrection. Not for any merit of our own, but through the blood of Christ and the free gift of God's grace, we have been healed and set free. What the Lord asks of us now is not to try to earn this freedom, but to hold fast to what he has already given us and to guard it from the devil's envy. In the Lord Jesus we have passed over from death to life, but while we are still on earth his Passover must be continually renewed in us. We have to be dead to Satan and alive to God; we have to abandon sin in order to rise to holiness. Jesus himself said: "*No one can serve two masters*" (Lk 16.13). Our

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<sup>1</sup> St. Leo the Great, Sermon 71; translated by Anne Field, O.S.B., in *The Binding of the Strong Man: the Teaching of St. Leo the Great*, Ann Arbor, MI: Word of Life, 1976, pp. 99-101.

business is to make sure that the master we serve is the Lord who has raised up the fallen to glory, not the one who brought the upright to ruin....

It was his will to die for us, but death could not keep him. The body that was laid in the tomb and the soul that descended to the world of the departed were the body and soul of the Son of God. Through his own will they were separated when he bowed his head on the cross and gave up his spirit; through his divine power they were reunited on the third day. The gospels tell us of the rolling away of the stone, the empty tomb, the linen cloths, the angel witnesses, and the Lord's appearances to the women and to the apostles. All this evidence formed the basis for the preaching of the faith throughout the whole world.

Not only did Jesus speak with his disciples, but he ate with them, allowing them to touch him and to probe his wounds. He entered the upper room when the doors were shut and greeted them with the words *"Peace be with you"*—peace to quiet their troubled hearts and to assure them of the unfailing constancy of his love and forgiveness. To bring God's love and forgiveness to the world had been his mission from the Father; now he passed on that mission to his apostles. *"As the Father sent me,"* he told them, *"so I send you. Receive the Holy spirit. If you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven"* (Jn 20.21-23). Patiently he went through the scriptures with them to show them everything that had been written about him in the Old Testament, how it had been ordained from the beginning that the Messiah should suffer and so enter into his glory. After this he showed them the wound in his side and the marks of the nails. By his own choice he had retained these scars in his body in order to heal the wounds of their unbelieving minds. Now they knew with absolute certainty that the risen body, radiantly alive in their midst, was the same body that had been born in Bethlehem and had suffered on the cross. From now on it would be seated with God the Father on his heavenly throne.

Thursday, April 5, 2018

A reading from a commentary on an Easter hymn of St. Gregory of Nazianzen,  
by St. Dorotheus of Gaza. <sup>1</sup>

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*This is the Day of Resurrection.*

*Let us offer God its first-fruits — which is ourselves.*

*Let us, as his most precious children, return to the likeness [of God],*

*What is truly his likeness in us.*

*Let us reverence our worth.*

*Let us honor our Exemplar.*

*Let us come to understand the power of the ‘mystery’ wherein Christ died.*

The Israelites of old, coming together for their festivals, according to the Law offered God gifts such as incense, burnt offerings, first-fruits, and the like. St. Gregory invites us too to celebrate this feast in God’s honor as they did, and exhorts us to do so by saying, “This is the Day of Resurrection”, a day to replace all their holy feasts, a day of divine assembly, the day of Christ’s Passover. What is this Passover of Christ? The Israelites kept the Passover when they came out of Egypt. Easter, the Passover which we are now keeping and which the Saint commends to our celebration, is enacted in the soul, which comes out of the spiritual Egypt, that is, from sin. When the soul passes over from sin to virtue, then it celebrates the Passover of the Lord, As Evagrius says: “The Passover of the Lord is the passage away from evil.”

Today... is therefore the ‘Passover’ of Christ, a day of brilliant festival, the day of Resurrection, the day of his nailing sin to the Cross, of his dying and being raised to life—all for our sakes. Let us offer ourselves as sacrificial gifts and holocausts to the Lord, who has no desire for senseless animals. *“You did not desire irrational*

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<sup>1</sup> Dorotheus of Gaza, “Commentary on an Easter Hymn of St. Gregory Nazianzen,,” *Discourses and Sayings* (Cistercian Studies Series 33), Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1977, pp. 220 ff.

*sacrifices and offerings, and are not pleased with burnt offerings of sheep and cattle” (Ps 40.6, Heb 10.5-6). ...What sort of gift ought we offer to Christ in order to please him on the day of his Resurrection, if he does not desire the sacrifice of senseless animals?*

The Saint in his teaching tells us the answer, for after saying “This is the Day of Resurrection”, he adds, “Let us offer up its first-fruits, which is ourselves.” The Apostle [Paul] too instructs us: “*Offer up your own bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and well-pleasing to God, the worship that your reason dictates*” (Rom 12.1).

How then ought we to make an offering of our bodies as a living sacrifice to God? “*By no longer following our physical desires and our own ideas,*” but “*walking in the spirit and not fulfilling the desires of the flesh*”(Gal 5.16). “*For this is to mortify our earthly members*” (Col 3.5). This is what is meant by a living sacrifice, holy and well-pleasing to God.

But why a **living** sacrifice? Because an animal destined for sacrifice, by the very fact that it becomes a sacrificial victim, dies. But the saints who offer themselves to God, offer themselves alive, every day—as David says, “*For your sake we are put to death all the day long, we are considered as sheep for the slaughter*” (Ps 44.22). ...By not loving the world or what is in the world [but by] taking up the Cross and following Christ and crucifying the world to themselves and themselves to the world... this is how the saints put themselves to death.

But how did they offer themselves up? By not living for themselves, but reducing themselves to servitude to God’s commandments and putting away their own will for the sake of the command and love of God and their neighbor.. As St. Peter says, “*Behold, we have given up everything and followed you*” (Mt 19.27). ...This is how the saints offered themselves up, putting themselves to death... in regard to all their passionate desires and doing their own will and living solely for Christ and his commandments.

So then for us! Let us offer ourselves as St. Gregory teaches us. For he wants us to be “*God’s most precious children.*”



**Friday, April 6, 2018**

**A reading about the triumph of the redemption, from the *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* by St. Irenaeus. <sup>1</sup>**

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In order to give His own life, the Word of God was made flesh through the instrumentality of the Virgin, to undo death and to work life in man; for we were in the bonds of sin, and were to be born through sinfulness and to live with death.

Great, then, was the mercy of God the Father: He sent the creative Word, who, when He came to save us, put Himself in our position, and in the same situation in which we lost life. He loosed the prison-bonds; His light appeared and dispelled the darkness in the prison; He sanctified our birth and abolished death, loosing those same bonds by which we were held. He showed forth the resurrection, becoming Himself "*the first-born from the dead,*" and raised in Himself prostrate man, being lifted up to the heights of heaven, at the right hand of the glory of the Father, as God had promised through the prophet, saying: "*I will raise up the tabernacle of David, that is fallen,*" that is, the body sprung from David.

This was in truth accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ, in the triumph of our redemption, that He raises us in truth, setting us free to the Father.

If anyone [does not] accept His virgin birth, how shall they accept His resurrection from the dead? For it is nothing marvelous, nothing astonishing, nothing unheard-of, if one who was not born rose from the dead. But we cannot even speak of the "resurrection" of one who came into being without birth, for one who is not born is immortal; and one who was not subject to birth will not be subject to death either; for how can one who did not take on [a human] beginning receive [a human] end?

So, if He was not born, neither did He die; and if He did not die, neither was He raised from the dead; and if He was not raised from the dead, He has not

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<sup>1</sup> Ancient Christian Writers vol.16, Westminster (Maryland), 1952, pp. 71-73; trans. by Fr. Joseph Smith, S.J , adapted for liturgical use.

conquered death, nor is its reign abolished; and if death is not conquered, how are we to mount on high into life, [since we are] subject to death from the [very] beginning [of our lives]?

So those who exclude redemption from humanity, and do not believe God will raise them from the dead, also despise our Lord's birth, which the Word of God underwent for our sake. [He was] made flesh, that He might manifest the resurrection of the flesh. [He underwent this in order to] take the lead of all in heaven: as the first-born, first-begotten of the thought of the Father, the Word, Himself in the world making all things perfect by His guidance and legislation; as the first-born of the Virgin, a just and holy man, a servant of God, good, pleasing to God, perfect in all things, freeing those who follow Him from Hell; as the first born of the dead, head and source also of the life unto God.

Thus, then, does the Word of God "*in all things hold the primacy,*" for He is true man and "*Wonderful Counselor and God the Mighty,*" calling [us] back again into communion with God, that by communion with Him we may have part in incorruptibility.

**Saturday, April 7, 2018**

**A reading about Christ's question to Peter "Do you love me?", from a sermon by St. Augustine. <sup>1</sup>**

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Appearing to His disciples another time after the Resurrection, our Lord put a question to the Apostle Peter, prompting him who had denied Him three times out of fear to make a threefold profession of his love. Christ arose bodily from the dead, Peter was raised up spiritually; as Christ met death by His suffering, so Peter was stricken with death by his denial. Christ our Lord rose from the dead, and by His love raised Peter. He questioned Peter in order to receive an avowal of his love, and then entrusted him with the care of His sheep.

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<sup>1</sup> *Selected Easter Sermons of St. Augustine*, trans. by Philip Weller, St. Louis, 1959, pp.169-170.

What advantage was it to Christ to be loved by Peter? When Christ loves you, you are the gainer, not Christ. And when you love Christ, again you stand to gain, not Christ. Wishing to teach [us] how [we] can prove [our] love for Him, Christ our Lord made it plain that this is best proved by [our] concern for His sheep. *“Do you love me?” ‘Lord, you know that I love you.’ ‘Feed my sheep.’*” This happened not once, but a second and a third time. Our Lord asked only, *“Do you love me?”* He received no other answer than, *“You know that I love you.”* He gave no other charge to Peter than, *“Feed my sheep.”*

If we love one another then we also love Christ.... We do not see Christ whom we are commanded to love, and yet each one of us cries out his avowal. I love Christ! *“If you do not love your brother whom you see, how can you love God whom you do not see?”* In loving the sheep we prove that we love the Shepherd, for the sheep are in truth the very members of the Shepherd. In order that the sheep might be His members, He deigned to become the Lamb of God. In order that the sheep might be His members, *“He was led as a sheep to the slaughter.”* In order that the sheep might be His members, it was said of Him, *“Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world.”*

But what tremendous strength there is in this Lamb. Would you like to know when strength was made manifest in this Lamb? Well, the Lamb was crucified and the lion was overcome. Consider and reflect with what power the world is ruled by Christ our Lord who vanquished the devil by His death.

Let us then, give Him our love, and let nothing be dearer to us than He. Or do you think that our Lord is not questioning us? Do you imagine that Peter alone deserved to be questioned, and not ourselves? Whenever this lesson is read, the heart of each and every Christian is being scrutinized. Therefore, whenever you hear the Lord saying, *“Peter, do you love me?”* visualize a mirror and examine there your own reflection. For what else was Peter but a symbol of the Church? Hence when the Lord questioned Peter, He was questioning us, He was questioning the Church.

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End Easter Octave