

VIGILS READINGS, GETHSEMANI ABBEY: EASTER WEEK 5
April 29-May 5, 2018

Sunday, April 29, 2018

A Commentary on the Gospel of John by St. Augustine [1](#)

The passage from the gospel in which the Lord calls himself the vine and his disciples the branches affirms in its own way that, as mediator between God and the human race, the man Christ Jesus is head of the Church and we are his members. It is beyond dispute that a vine and its branches are of one and the same stock. Since Christ, therefore, possessed a divine nature not shared by ourselves, he became man precisely in order that in his own person there might be a vine of human stock whose branches we could become.

Dwell in me, said Jesus, *and I will dwell in you*. His disciples, however, do not dwell in Christ in the same way as Christ dwells in them. In either case, the benefit is theirs, not his. If branches are attached to a vine, it is not to confer any advantage on the vine; it is rather that the branches themselves may draw their sustenance from the vine. The vine is attached to the branches to provide them with their vital nourishment, not to receive anything from them. In the same way Christ's presence in his disciples and their presence in him both profit the disciples rather than Christ. If a branch is cut off, another can grow from the life-giving root; but once severed from the root, no branch can remain alive.

The incarnate Truth goes on to say: *I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever dwells in me and I in him yields fruit in plenty, because without me you can do nothing*. These words are to be weighed and pondered continually. Someone hearing Jesus say, *he yields fruit in plenty*, might perhaps think that a branch can bear at least a certain amount of fruit on its own. Our Lord's words, however, were not: *You can do little without me*, but: *you can do nothing*. These are words to be weighed and pondered continually. Someone hearing Jesus say, *he yields fruit in plenty*, might perhaps think that a branch can bear at least a certain amount of fruit on its own. Our Lord's words, however, were not: *you can do little without me*, but: *you can do nothing*. Little fruit or plenty, there can be neither without

him, because without him nothing can be done. Even if a branch does produce a little fruit, the vinedresser prunes it away so that it may produce more. But if the branch does not remain attached to the vine and draw its life from the root, it can bear no fruit at all.

Now, although Christ could not be the vine if he were not human, he could not offer such a grace to his branches if he were not at the same time divine. Since without this grace it is impossible to have life and consequently death is the result of one's free choice, he said: *Whoever does not dwell in me will be thrown away like a branch and will wither, to be gathered in and cast on the fire to burn.* And so the shame incurred by those branches that refuse to dwell in the vine is in direct proportion to the glory they will have if they do remain in him.

If you dwell in me, said Jesus, and my words dwell in you, you will ask for whatever you desire and it will be yours. Can a person dwelling in Christ desire anything out of harmony with Christ? The very fact that people dwell in their Savior must mean that they have no desire that is opposed to their salvation. And yet we do indeed desire one thing insofar as we are in Christ, and another insofar as we are still in this world. Because of our sojourn here below, a thought sometimes steals into our ignorant minds to ask for something which cannot be good for us. But this may not be, if we are dwelling in Christ. He does what we ask only if it is for our good. To dwell in him, therefore, is to have his words dwelling in us; whatever we desire we shall then ask for, and it will be given us.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year B – New City Press – 1999 – pg 56

Monday, April 30, 2018

The Holy and Saving Pascha, by St. Gregory of Nyssa.¹

Let us consider the prophecy which says, "This is the day which the Lord has made". In it there is no hard or laborious work, but happiness and joy and gladness, as the word puts it, "Let us rejoice and be glad in it." What kind of commands! What sweet legislation! Who postpones obedience to such

¹The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa. Ed. by Andreas Spira and Christoph Klock. Patristic Monograph Series, No.9, 1981. p.51

commands? Who does not reckon the slightest delay in the commands as loss? Joy is the task, gladness the injunction, and by these the condemnation for sin is lifted and sorrows are transformed into happiness. That is what the wise saying means, "In the day of gladness ills are not remembered". This day brought the forgetting of the previous sentence against us, or rather its annulment, not just forgetting; it destroyed every single trace of our condemnation. Our child-bearing once brought pains, our birth now is free from labour. Once we were born as flesh from flesh, now what is born is spirit from spirit. Once we were born children of men, now as children of God. Once we were dismissed from heaven to earth, now the Heavenly One has made us heavenly. Once death reigned through sin, now justice has taken over power through life. There was one once who opened the way into death, and there is one now through whom life is introduced instead. Once through death we fell away from life, now it is by life that death is destroyed. Once for shame we hid behind the fig tree, now for glory we approach the tree of life. Once for disobedience we were evicted from the garden, now for faith we come within the garden, Again the fruit of life lies open to our grasp for our enjoyment. Again the garden fountain, dividing fourfold in gospel rivers, waters all the face of the church, so that the furrows of our souls, which the sower of the word cut with the plough of teaching, are cheered with drinking, and the harvest of virtue abounds.

What then remains for such as us to do? What but to imitate prophetic hills and mountains in their leaping? "The mountains", it says, "leaped like rams, and the hills like young lambs." Let us say, "The Lord is a great God", and "a great king over all the earth" is he who "has blessed the crown of the year with his goodness" and gathered us into this spiritual choir in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

Tuesday, May 1, 2018

**The true meaning of work: a reading from an address of St. John Paul II
to the workers of a shipyard near Sorrento, South Italy.²**

² AThe Church is on the Side of the Human Person@, reprinted in *L'Osservatore Romano* 12 (1233), 25 March 1992.

The feast of St. Joseph, patron and model of workers offers us the opportunity to reflect on the true meaning of work. In fact, it is not enough just to work, even though it is already quite a feat to satisfy that basic human right. It is necessary to know the why and wherefore of working, beyond the immediate benefits which derive from it. By means of their work human beings commit themselves, not only for their own sake but also for others and with others. Each person collaborates in the work of others and for their good. They work in order to provide for the needs of their family, community, nation, and ultimately all humanity. @

Let us look at the figure of St. Joseph, the just man, the spouse of Mary and Jesus' foster father. The Gospel presents him to us as a worker. In fact, in defining Jesus' social identity, it was said of him: 'Is he not the carpenter's son?' @ For him his work as a carpenter was not merely a way of contributing to the support of the Son of God and his Virgin Mother, but created the environment for the life of the Holy Family itself. Thus work entered into the mystery of the incarnation, becoming an instrument of redemption. @ At the workbench where he plied his trade together with Jesus, Joseph brought human work closer to the mystery of the Redemption. @ This must be the starting point if we want to understand the deepest meaning of human work. God himself wanted to make it his own.

The Marxist system, which promised equality and justice, uprooting God from human hearts, has fallen in Eastern Europe, while new problems are looming on the horizon for those peoples. No one can be sanguine in the face of a capitalistic system when it is closed in on a radical capitalistic ideology...which refuses even to consider the reality of human alienation @ and which blindly entrusts their solution to the free development of market forces (*Centessimus annus*, n. 42). In the face of all the dangers of human alienation which are found in the culture and economy of today's world, the Church does not hesitate to declare her choice: she is always on the side of the human person, but especially when the person is neglected, mistreated and scorned, because the human person seen in the light of Christ is the Church's principal way. @ Before considering human work in its objective aspect @, it should be seen in its subjectivity: it is the human person who gives meaning to work. Workers are not, nor can they ever be, mere wheels in the machinery. Through work they fulfill their existence as the image of

God, live their vocation to collaborate with the Creator, and experience the saving power of the paschal mystery. In work and through it man and woman fulfill their specific human vocation. The State and society, all of us, that is, are obliged to recognize this dignity and nobility of theirs. [In another encyclical] I wrote: A society in which the right to work is systematically denied, in which economic policies do not allow workers to reach satisfactory levels of employment, cannot be justified from an ethical point of view, nor can that society attain social peace@ (*Centessimus annus*).

To the human, spiritual, economic, social and cultural dimensions of work, then, you should add the Christian dimension, which finds a living example in St. Joseph, the Virgin Mary, and Jesus Christ, himself a worker. Work finds its ultimate reference in the Creator who, as Genesis teaches us, was finished with the work being done@ and, as St. John states, is at work until now@. Therefore, no one can succeed in properly understanding the dignity of work, on the part either of the worker or society, unless they consider it in this light. That is why in the Church's tradition it has constantly been associated with prayer: *Aora et labora*@.

Wednesday, May 2, 2018

A reading of St. Athanasius on the Letter to the Philippians.³

It is not a dark saying but a divine mystery. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"; but for our sakes afterwards the "Word was made flesh." And the term in question, "highly exalted", does not signify that the substance of the Word was exalted, for He was ever and is "equal to God", but the exaltation is of His humanity. Accordingly, this is not said before the Word became flesh; that it might be plain that "humbled" and "exalted" are spoken of His human nature, for where there is humble estate, there too may be exaltation; and if because of His taking flesh "humbled" is written, it is clear that "highly exalted" is also said because of it. For of this was human nature in want, because of the humble estate of the flesh and of death.

³ *Orations Against the Arians*, Parker & Co., pp. 238-239.

Since then the Word, being the Image of the Father and immortal, took the form of a servant, and as man underwent for us death in His flesh, that thereby He might offer Himself for us through death to the Father; therefore also, as man, He is said because of us and for us to be highly exalted, that as by His death we all died in Christ, so again in the Christ Himself we might be highly exalted, being raised from the dead, and ascending into heaven, "whither the forerunner is for us entered, not into the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."

But if now for us the Christ is entered into heaven itself, though He was even before and always Lord and Framer of the heavens, for us therefore is that present exaltation also written. And as He Himself, who sanctifies all, says also that He sanctifies Himself to the Father for our sakes, not that the Word may become holy, but that He Himself may in Himself sanctify all of us, in like manner we must take the present phrase, "He highly exalted Him", not that He Himself should be exalted, for He is the highest, but that He may become righteousness for us; and we may be exalted in Him, and that we may enter the gates of heaven, which He has also opened for us, the forerunners saying, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in." For here also not on Him were shut the gates, who is Lord and Maker of all, but because of us is this too written, to whom the door of paradise was shut. And therefore in a human relation, because of the flesh which He bore, it is said of Him, "Lift up, O ye gates", and "shall come in", as if humanity were entering; but in a divine relation on the other hand it is said of Him, since the "Word was God", that He is the "Lord" and the "King of Glory". For as Christ died and was exalted as man, so, as man, is He said to take what, as God He ever had, that even this so high a grant of grace might reach to us.

Thursday, May 3, 2018

The witness of the apostles to the resurrected Christ: a reading from the *Guide to the Christian Assembly* by Jean Frisque. [1](#)

They were still talking about all this when he himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you!"

The preeminent witnesses to the resurrection of Christ were the apostles. From the time of Jesus' baptism to his death, they accompanied him in his

public ministry. His death on the cross at the first threw them into a panic, but soon afterwards it clarified everything for them, once it had been placed in its Scriptural context, through the aid of the resurrected Christ himself.

But was the testimony of the apostles limited to this single well-founded assertion: *He whom you crucified has risen from the dead through the power of God?* In reality, there was much more: the apostles did not only offer an eyewitness account of an event but the testimony of their faith. Only their faith enabled them to discover why the death on the cross was the key-event of salvation-history and in what way it led to the life of the resurrection. And theirs was not simply any faith, but faith in the paschal experience itself, the faith which had perceived that in Jesus Christ all people were called to share in the divine filiation and to contribute on their own behalf to the construction of the Kingdom.

Nor was this all. The witness which the apostles rendered to the resurrection of Christ was above all an authorized witness. The apostles had received from the resurrected Christ himself their power to testify validly to him. They had received the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the resurrected Christ. Thus the very life of the resurrected Christ was given to the apostolic group, and the Church which they would construct in his name would be animated by this same life. The Church was to be the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the life which circulated in her would testify until the end of time to the resurrection of her Head!

Thus we can see why the apostolic witness rendered to the resurrected Christ was inseparable from the life which animated the first Christian community. This witness was necessarily communal. The preaching in which this witness took shape was absolutely inseparable from the grace of communion given to the primitive community and its efforts to be entirely faithful to the law of universal charity.

Today's Christians are not wrong, therefore, when they insist upon the importance of the testimony of their life. But the life to which they must witness in order to testify to the resurrected Christ is the life of Christ himself. This life is displayed here on earth by the way of total obedience unto death for the love of all people, for such an obedience leads us constantly from death to life. Such a sign can only be displayed by the Church herself.

1London, 1965, vol. 3, pp 77-78.

Friday, May 4, 2018

THE RESURRECTION AND THE DAY OF THE LORD, from a Sermon by Card.
John H. Newman⁴

"A little while, and you shall not see me: and again, a little while, and you shall see me, because I go to the Father." (Jn 16:16)...Now observe what the promise is, in the text and the verses following-- a new era was to commence, or what is called in Scripture "a day of the Lord." We know how much is said in Scripture about the awfulness and graciousness of a *day* of the Lord, which seems to be some special time of visitation, grace, judgment, restoration, righteousness, and glory. Much is said concerning days of the Lord in the Old Testament. In the beginning we read of those august days, seven in number, each perfect, perfect all together, in which all things were created, finished, blessed, acknowledged, approved by Almighty God. And all things will end with a day greater still, which will open with the coming of Christ from heaven, and the judgment; this is especially the Day of the Lord, and will introduce an eternity of blessedness in God's presence for all believers. And another special day predicted and fulfilled, is that long season which precedes and prepares for the day of heaven, viz. the Day of the Christian Church, the Day of the gospel, the Day of grace. This is a day much spoken of in the Prophets, and it is the day of which our Saviour speaks in the passage before us.

Observe how solemn, how high a day it is: this is his account of it, "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice; your joy no one takes from you. And in that Day you shall ask me nothing. Truly, truly, I say unto you, whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my name; ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full... At that Day you shall ask in my Name, and I do not say to you, that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again I leave the world, and go to the Father."

The Day, then, that dawned upon the Church at the Resurrection, and beamed forth in full splendour at the Ascension, that Day which has no

⁴PAROCHIAL & PLAIN SERMONS, John H. Newman (Ignatius, San Francisco 1987) pp. 1253-54.

setting, which will be, not ended but absorbed in Christ's glorious appearance from heaven to destroy sin and death; that Day in which we now are, is described in these words of Christ as a state of special Divine manifestation, of special introduction into the presence of God. By Christ, says the Apostle, "we have the access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." He "has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." "Your life is hid with Christ in God." "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." And our Lord says; "I will love him, and will manifest myself to him... We will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Thus we as Christians stand in the courts of God Most High, and, in one sense see his face; for he who once was on earth, has now departed from this visible scene of things in a mysterious, twofold way, both to his Father and into our hearts, thus making the Creator and his creatures one; according to his own words, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world sees me no more; but you see me: because I live, you shall live also. At that Day you shall know that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you."

Saturday, May 5, 2018

HOW CHRIST HAS TRANSFIGURED THE WORLD FROM ITS INNERMOST CENTER, by Karl Rahner⁵

What we call [Christ's] resurrection--and unthinkingly take to be his own private destiny--is only the first surface indication that all reality, behind what we usually call experience, has already changed in the really decisive depth of things. His resurrection is like the first eruption of a volcano which shows that God's fire already burns in the innermost depths of the earth, and that everything shall be brought to a holy glow in his light. He rose to show that this has already begun. The new creation has already started, the

⁵THE ETERNAL YEAR, Karl Rahner, Trans. by John Shea (Helicon, Baltimore MD, 1964) pp. 92-93.

new power of a transfigured earth is already being formed from the world's innermost heart, into which Christ descended by dying. Futility, sin and death are already conquered in the innermost realm of all reality, and only the "little while" is needed until what has actually already happened appears everywhere in glory, and not only in the body of Jesus.

Because he did not begin to heal, to save, and to transfigure the world by transfiguring the symptoms on the surface, but began rather at the innermost root, we suppose that nothing has happened to the essence beneath this superficial area. Because the waters of grief and guilt still flow on the surface where we stand, we fancy that their source in the depths is not yet dried up. Because evil still carves new marks in the face of the earth, we conclude that in the deepest heart of reality love is dead. But these are only appearances, which we take for the reality of life.

Christ is risen because in death he conquered, and redeemed forever, the innermost center of all earthy existence. And, having risen, he has kept this innermost center in his control, and he continues to preserve it. If we acknowledge that he has gone away to God's heaven, this is only another way of saying that he withdraws from us for a while the tangibility of his transfigured humanity. But this is only another way of saying that there is no longer any abyss between God and the world.

Christ is already in the midst of the poor things of this earth--the earth which we cannot leave because she is our mother. He is in the ineffable yearning of all creatures who, without knowing it, yearn for a share in the transfiguration of his body. He is in the history of the earth, whose blind course, with all its victories and all its crashing defeats, steers with uncanny precision towards the day when his splendor, transforming everything, will erupt out of the earth's own depths. He is in all the tears as hidden joy, and in every death as the life that conquers by seeming to die. He is in the beggar, to whom we give a coin, as the secret rich reward that returns to the giver. He is in the miserable defeats of his servants as the victory that belongs to God alone. He is in our weakness as the strength that dares to let itself seem weak, because it is invincible. He himself is even right in the midst of sin as the mercy of everlasting life that is prepared to be patient to the end. He is present as the mysterious law and the innermost essence of all things--the law that triumphs and succeeds even when all order seems to be crumbling. He is with us like the light and air of day, which we do not

notice; like the mysterious law of a motion that we do not grasp, because the segment of this motion that we ourselves experience is too short for a formula to be deduced by us. But he is there. He is the heart of this earthly world and the mysterious seal of its eternal validity.

End of Readings