

THURSDAY 04.19.18

## A Continuation of the Easter Sermon by St Aelred of Rievaulx <sup>1</sup>

Christ's compassion has purged us of all sins through Baptism. But have we kept ourselves in that untainted state? What then shall we do? He has taught us how we are to be cleansed. In the same way as he was purged of the leavening of mortality we ought to be purged from the leavening of iniquity. Doubtless, he could somehow have purged himself of mortality without suffering pain. But since we cannot be purged of our iniquity except by temporal pains, he willed to provide an example for us.

Remember now that we said that our Lord Jesus Christ is bread. Think of him before the passion. Notice that he was, as it were, bread with leavening in it. He was hungry and thirsty, he wept, he slept, he felt tired. All these things belong not to the leavening of iniquity but to the leavening of infirmity and mortality. By all of them he demonstrated the compassion and charity he had towards us. All of them are various kinds of medicine that were characteristic of our infirmity. All of them, because they were characteristic of us in that he did not possess them himself, he took them on from us. But in us they are all mixed with sin. For our hunger and thirst are usually accompanied by evil obsessions, our sadness by complaining and despair or bitterness, our sleep by looseness, and our lethargy and laziness by listlessness. But our Lord untangled them and separated them. He rejected the sin and took on the infirmity. For a short time he hid what was his own and took upon himself what was ours. That is why Isaiah said: *That he may accomplish his work, his alien work.*

What work? Many are the works of the Lord, but here he is speaking of a particular work which belongs especially to him. The angels, the archangels and all the powers of heaven are his work. *Heaven, earth, the sea and all that they contain* are his work. But we know how he accomplished these works; he did not undertake alien works to accomplish these. *He spoke and they were made.* What then is this work of his that is so special, so singular, so wonderful, so unheard of? Let us listen then to what Scripture says: *His mercies are above all his works.* I see three types of work that belong to God. There is the work of his wisdom, the work of his mercy, and the work of his judgment. The work of his wisdom: *heaven and earth and everything that they contain.* The work of his judgment: *to render to each one according to his deeds.* But *his mercies are above all his works.* Therefore the work of his mercy is especially his work. It is his own work, his proper work, in which there appears to the utmost his goodness, his charity, and his kindness.

He accomplished the work of his wisdom when he created the world. But he had not yet accomplished the work of his mercy. For the work of his mercy corresponds to those who are wretched. He accomplished the work of judgment when he hurled the devil out of heaven for his pride. He accomplished the work of judgment when he expelled a human being from paradise for disobedience. Yet in these works he demonstrated his wisdom and power. He willed to show his mercy as well, *for his mercies are above all his works.* Therefore the work of his mercy is properly said to be his work.

But how would he accomplish this work if not by saving the wretched? Therefore the work of our salvation is the work of his mercy – that is, the work which is properly *his* work. What is the property of the Savior – that is, Jesus – if not to save? As you know, brothers, our Lord Jesus Christ is *wisdom*, he is strength, he is life. What is the opposite of wisdom and as it were foreign to it? Without doubt, folly. And what is the opposite of strength? Without doubt, infirmity. Similarly the only thing opposite death is life. Reflect now on how our Lord took on himself a work which was alien to him so that he might be able to accomplish his own work, that is, the work of his mercy. He who is wisdom willed to be, as it were, foolish. He who was strong willed to be infirm. That is why the apostle says: *The folly of God is wiser than the wisdom of human beings and the infirmity of God stronger than human strength.* That he may accomplish his work, his alien work, bread hungers, the fountain thirsts, strength grows tired and life dies.

But how does he accomplish his own work by means of this alien work? It is his hunger that feeds us, his thirst that inebriates us, his weariness that refreshes us, his death that brings us life. All this is the work of his mercy. By means of this alien work he accomplishes everything. Therefore, as we said, wisdom accomplishes its work by means of folly, strength accomplishes it by means of weakness, might accomplishes it by means of weariness, life accomplishes it by means of death. In order that he might accomplish the work of his mercy, the work of his wisdom and the work of his judgment became foreign to him. At length the time came when he willed to rid himself of this leavening. He applied fire – that is, his passion. In his passion all that leavening was destroyed, all corruption and all mortality were destroyed, and today he rose from earth, unleavened bread.

Well, brothers, let us celebrate the feast of unleavened bread. Let us eat this bread without leaven. Our bread is the body of the Lord. It is without leavening because, as the Apostle says: *Christ, once raised from the dead, is never to die again.* If we would eat this bread which is without leavening, we too must be free of leavening as the Apostle commands. Yet how are we to purge ourselves of it? Surely our Lord has taught us. In the same way as he himself rid himself of the leavening which he had taken upon himself for our sakes we must rid ourselves of the leavening which corrupts us. It is by way of insults, reviling, scourging, the cross and death that he came to the resurrection. At his resurrection he was rid of the leavening and now the flesh which he offers us is pure, immortal. What shall we think, brothers? Can we come to resurrection by any way other than that which he followed? Anyone who thinks so is wrong.

Let us imitate his passion so that we may be able to share his resurrection here in soul and on the day of judgment in both body and soul. Because this cannot be brought about by our own efforts, let us implore his mercy that he himself might deign to act in us, Jesus Christ our Lord.