

LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY

Vigils Readings

Second Week of Easter

April 8-14, 2018

**Sunday, April 8, 2018**

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

Thomas' profession of faith came swiftly when, eight days after he had declared his unwillingness to believe, Christ showed him his side and the nail marks in his hands and feet and removed every possible doubt.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has miraculously entered the room when the doors were closed. As this would have been impossible for an ordinary earthly body he reassured Thomas, and through him the other disciples, by letting him see his side and the wounds in his flesh.

Only Thomas is reported to have said: *Unless my hands touch the marks of the nails and I see them, and unless I put my hand into his side, I will not believe;* yet to some extent all the disciples were guilty of disbelief. Doubt remained in their minds even after they had told Thomas that they had seen the Lord. St. Luke's account says that *while they stood amazed, torn between joy and disbelief, Christ said to them: "Have you anything to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish and part of a honeycomb, which he took and ate before their eyes.* This surely proves that it was not only in the mind of Thomas that disbelieving thoughts still lurked, but in the minds of the other disciples as well. It was their very astonishment that made them slow to believe, but when it became impossible to disbelieve what they could see with their own eyes, blessed Thomas made his profession of faith: *My Lord and my God.*

Jesus said to him: *Because you have seen me, Thomas, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe.*" There was a wonderful providence behind these words of the Savior, and they can be of great help to us. They show once again how much he cares for our souls, for he is good and as Scripture says: *"He wants everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth"*. Even so, this saying of his may surprise us.

As always, Christ had to be patient with thomas when he said he would not believe and with the other disciples too when they thought they were seeing a ghost. Because of his desire to convince the whole world, he most willingly showed them the marks of the nails and the wound in his side, because he wished those who needed such signs as a support for their faith to have no possible reason for doubt, he even took food, although he had no need for it.

But when anyone accepts what he has not seen, believing on the word of his teacher, the faith by which he honors the one his teacher proclaims to him is worthy of great praise. Blessed, therefore, is everyone who believes the message of the holy apostles who, as Luke says, were eyewitnesses of Christ's actions and ministers of the word. If we desire eternal life and long for a dwelling place in heaven, we must listen to them.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year B – New City Press – 1993 – pg 50

**Monday, April 9, 2018**

**Sermon on the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary –**

**by St Bernard of Clairvaux [1](#)**

Behold , O Virgin, you have been told by the angel that you shall conceive and bear a Son; you have been told that this shall not be by man but by the working of the Holy Spirit. Behold the Angel now awaits your answer. We also, O Lady, await from your lips the sentence of mercy and compassion, we who are miserably groaning under the sentence of condemnation. O Virgin most loving, Adam, now exiled from Paradise with all his miserable offspring, implores this favor of you. For this does Abraham entreat you; for this David, for this all the other holy fathers, your own ancestors, who are now dwelling in the region of the shadow of death. See, the whole world, prostrate at your feet, awaits your answer. And not without cause. For on your word depend the consolation of the miserable, the redemption of the captives, the pardon of the condemned, the salvation of the children of Adam, of the entire human race. O Virgin, delay not to answer. Speak the word, O Lady, speak the word which all on earth, and all in limbo, and even all in paradise are waiting to hear. Christ Himself, the King and Lord of all, longs for your answer with a longing equal to the ardor with which He “has desired your

beauty”, for it by means of your consent that He has decreed to save the world. Until now you have pleased Him by your silence, but now your speech shall give Him more pleasure. For behold He calls to you from heave, saying: “O fairest among women, let your voice sound in my ears”. Make haste, therefore, to answer the Angel, or rather to answer the Lord through the Angel. Say the word and receive the Word. Utter your human word and conceive the divine Word. Pronounce the transitory word and embrace the Word everlasting. Believe, consent, and receive into your womb the Word of the Father. Let your humility take courage, let your modesty be confident. O happy Virgin, open your heart to faith, open your lips to consent, open your bosom to your Creator.

And Mary said: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word”. Divine grace is always found in intimate oneness with humility, because “God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble”. The Virgin therefore replies with humility, in order that the seat of grace may be prepared in her. “Behold”, she says, “the handmaid of the Lord”. O how sublime is the humility here manifested, which does not know how to yield to honor or to be elated with glory. She is chosen to be the Mother of God and she calls herself His handmaid! As if she says: “Let the Word, I pray, become to me not as a spoken word which passes away, but a Word conceived and abiding; a Word enclosed in a body of flesh, not a word expressed by the sound of the voice. Let Him become to me not an audible word which sounds in the ear, but a visible Word that my eyes may see Him, a tangible Word that my hands may hold Him. And let Him not become for me a written and silent word, but a Word incarnate and living; that is to say, not a word inscribed upon dead parchment, but the Word of God in humans form impressed on the living page of my chaste bosom, impressed not by the agency of mortal hand, but by the operation of the Holy Spirit. Therefore let the Word of God condescend to be made flesh in me and for me, according to your word. According to your word, let him be made flesh for the whole world, but in a more particular way for me.

1 St Bernard’s Sermons for Festivals of Year – vol. 1 – The Carroll Press – Westminster, MD, 1950 – pg 124f

**Tuesday, April 10, 2018**

**A reading about Christ's resurrection, from Rufinus' commentary on the Apostles' Creed.**<sup>1</sup>

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*"On the third day He rose again from the dead."* The glory of His resurrection brought out in Christ the splendor of everything that previously seemed feeble and weak. If a few moments ago you thought it impossible for One who was immortal to reach death, you can now perceive the impossibility of His being mortal who is declared to have vanquished death and to have risen again.

In this you should discern the Creator's goodness, in His readiness to follow you down to the depths to which your sins have plunged you. You should not, either, suggest that anything is impossible for God, the Creator of all things, imagining that His work could have been brought to an end by falling into an abyss to which He could not penetrate in order to accomplish salvation. "Underworld" and "upper world" are terms which we employ, limited as we are by the fixed circumference of our bodies and confined within the limits of the space assigned to us. But what is "underworld" or "upper world" to God, who is present everywhere and is nowhere absent? Notwithstanding, when He assumed a body, those dimensions found their place. The flesh which had been laid in the tomb was resuscitated in fulfillment of the prophet's words: *"Because you will not give your Holy One to see corruption."*

So He returned victoriously from the dead, bringing with Him spoils from hell. For He conducted forth those whom death held prisoners, as He Himself had prophesied in the words: *"When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all*

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<sup>1</sup> Trans. by J. N. D. Kelly, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 20, Westminster (Maryland), 1955, pp. 62-65.

*things to myself.*" The Gospel bears witness to this when it states: *"The graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints that slept arose, and they appeared to many, and entered into the holy city."* By this is meant, I am sure, the city intended by the Apostle when he wrote: *"But that Jerusalem, which is above is free: which is mother of us all."* He made the same point again to the Hebrews: *"For it became Him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, who had brought many children to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation by His passion."* By His passion, therefore, He made perfect that human flesh which had been brought down to death by the first man's sin, and restored it by the power of His resurrection: sitting on God's right hand, He placed it in the highest heavens. In view of this the Apostle says: *"Who has raised us up together, and has made us sit together in the heavenly places."* It was He, you see, who was the potter mentioned by the prophet Jeremias: *"The vessel which had fallen from His hand and was broken, He again raised up with His hands and formed anew, as it seemed good in His eyes."* So it seemed good to Him to raise the mortal and corruptible body He had assumed from the rocky tomb, and rendering it immortal and incorruptible to place it, no longer in an earthly environment, but in heaven at His Father's right hand.

The Old Testament Scriptures are full of these mystery-laden allusions. No prophet, no lawgiver, no psalmist is silent on this theme: almost without exception, the sacred pages all refer to these events. Hence it seems superfluous for us to linger collecting testimonies. I shall, however, set down just a few, referring anyone who craves for a fuller drought to the wellsprings of the inspired books themselves.

Thus in the Psalms, at the beginning, we find the remark: *"I have slept and have taken my rest: and I have risen up, because the Lord has protected me."* Again in another passage: *"By reason of the misery of the needy and the groans of the poor, not will I arise, says the Lord."* Elsewhere, too, as I pointed out above: *"You have brought forth, O Lord, my soul from hell: You have saved me from them that go down into the pit."*

These are a few passages selected from a large number.

**Wednesday, April 11, 2018**

**St. Stanislaus – Bishop of Cracow, Poland, Martyr**

- **From Butler's Lives of the Saints** <sup>1</sup>

Stanislaus was born on July 26, 1030 in Poland. He came of noble parents who had been childless for many years until this son was granted to them in answer to prayer. They devoted him from birth to the service of God, and encouraged the piety he showed from childhood. He was ordained a priest by the Bishop of Cracow, who gave him a canonry in the cathedral and subsequently appointed him his preacher and archdeacon. The eloquence of the young priest and his saintly example brought about a great reformation of morals among his penitents, clergy as well as laity. Upon the death of the Bishop, Stanislaus was appointed Bishop by Pope Alexander II, and was consecrated Bishop in 1072.

Poland at that time was ruled by Boleslaus, a prince whose finer qualities were eclipsed by his unbridled lust and savage cruelty. Stanislaus alone ventured to confront the tyrant and to remonstrate with him at the scandal his conduct was causing. At first the king tried to vindicate his behavior, but when pressed more closely he made some show of repentance. The good effects of the admonition, however, soon wore off and Boleslaus relapsed into his evil ways. There were acts of injustice which brought him into conflict with the Bishop and at length he created an outrage which caused general indignation. A certain nobleman had a wife who was very beautiful. Boleslaus cast lustful eyes upon this lady, and when she repelled his advances, he caused her to be carried off by force and lodged in his palace. The Polish nobles called upon the Archbishop of Gnesen and the court prelates to confront the monarch. But fear of offending the king closed their lips. St. Stanislaus, when appealed to, had no such hesitation. He went to Boleslaus and rebuked him for his sin. He threatened the prince that if he persisted in his evil course he would bring upon himself the censure of the Church.

Finding all remonstrance useless, Stanislaus launched against the king a formal sentence of excommunication. The tyrant professed to disregard the sentence, but when he entered the cathedral of Cracow he found that the services were at once suspended by order of the Bishop. Furious with rage, he

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<sup>1</sup> Butler's Lives of the Saints – Revised edition – edited by Michael Walsh – Harper – San Francisco – 1991 – pg 109

pursued the Bishop to the little chapel of St. Michael outside the city, where he was celebrating Mass, and ordered some of his guards to enter and slay him. The men however returned saying they could not kill the saint as he was surrounded by a heavenly light. Upraising them for cowardice, the king himself entered the chapel and dispatched the Bishop with his own hand. The guards then cut the body into pieces and scattered them abroad to be devoured by the beasts of prey. However the sacred relics were rescued three days later by the cathedral canons and privately buried at the door of the chapel where Stanislaus had been slain.

It is not true that the action of Boleslaus led to an immediate uprising of the people which drove him from Poland; but it certainly hastened his fall from power. Pope Gregory VII laid the country under an interdict, and nearly two centuries later, in 1253, St Stanislaus was canonized by Pope Innocent IV.

**Thursday, April 12, 2018**

**Christ Appears to his Disciples - from a Sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny<sup>2</sup>**

You know that when Christ came to the disciples the doors were locked and he stood among them, but they were startled and frightened and supposed they saw a spirit. But when he breathed on them saying: Receive the Holy Spirit, and when later he sent from heaven the same Spirit with another gift, these gifts were indeed undeniable proofs and testimonies of resurrection and life.

It is the Spirit who bears witness in the hearts and on the lips of the saints that Christ is the truth, the resurrection and the life. Thus the Apostles who had previously doubted even after seeing his living body, after tasting his life-giving Spirit with great power gave testimony to his resurrection. So it is much more important to receive Jesus in our hearts than to see him with our eyes or hear him with our ears. The Spirit makes a much deeper impression on the interior person

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<sup>2</sup> Gueric of Igny - Liturgical Sermons - vol. II - Cistercian Publications - CF32 -

Cistercian Publications - Spencer, MA - 1971

than material things make on the exterior senses. What room is left for doubt when he who bears witness and he who is the object of that witness is the one Spirit? If the Spirit is one there must be a complete understanding, everything fits together.

Now, my brethren, what witness to Christ's love does the joy of your hearts give you? I venture to judge, and rightly as you will see, that if you have ever loved Jesus alive or dead or risen from the dead, your heart rejoices within you today. As the tidings of his resurrection resound and re-echo again and again through the Church you will say to yourselves: They have told me that Jesus my God is still alive. On hearing it my spirit, which was asleep through weariness, languishing through tepidity, disheartened through timidity, has revived. For the joyful voice of this happy message raises even from death those buried deep in sin. Otherwise, if Christ, coming up from hell, left them there in the depths, there would certainly be no hope for them; their fate would be buried in forgetfulness. By this token you have clearly known that your soul lives again fully in Christ if it echoes this sentiment: It is enough for me that Jesus is still alive.

How faithful and worthy of a friend of Jesus is that voice, how pure that act of love which says: It is enough for me that Jesus is still alive. If he lives, I live, for my spirit acts through his. Yes, he is my life, my all in all. For what can I lack if Jesus is still alive? Rather everything else may be taken from me, nothing else matters to me so long as he lives. If he wishes then, let him take no account of me. It is enough for me that he still lives even if he only lives for himself. When the love of Christ so absorbs a person's affections that, unmindful and forgetful of himself, he has no feeling for anything but Jesus Christ and what pertains to him, then, I say, love has been made perfect in him. To one who so loves, poverty is no burden; he feels no hurt, laughs at insults, disdains misfortunes, and considers death as a gain. In fact he does not think in terms of death, knowing that he passes from death to life. And he confidently asserts: I will go and see him before I die.



**Friday, April 13, 2018**

**The Resurrection of Christ - from a Sermon by Bl Gueric of Igny <sup>3</sup>**

Let us go to see Jesus journeying to the mountain of the heavenly Galilee, where he awaits us. On the way our love will increase, and on our arrival at least, it will be perfected. On the way, the road, at first hard and difficult, will grow easier and the strength of the weak will increase. The flesh of Christ is our food for the journey, his Spirit our means of conveyance. He Himself is the food; he himself is the chariot and charioteer of Israel. When you arrive, all the goods, not of Egypt but of heaven, will be yours. There, in the best place in the kingdom, at the bidding of your Joseph you will take your rest. He who first sent angels, women and apostles as witnesses and messengers of his resurrection, now cries from heaven: Behold, I whom you have mourned as dead these three days did indeed die for you, but see, I live. And all power in heaven and earth is given unto me. Come to me all you that labor and are burdened with hunger, and I will refresh you. Come you blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you. @

Blessed and holy is he who has a share in the first resurrection. @ I am the resurrection and the life @, Jesus said. He indeed is the first resurrection; he is also the second resurrection. For rising from the dead as the first fruits of those who sleep Christ both brings about for us the first resurrection by the mystery of his own resurrection and by the example of that same resurrection will bring about for us the second. The first is that of souls, when he raises them together with himself to newness of life; the second will be that of bodies, when he forms this humbled body of ours anew, molding it into the image of his glorified body. Christ does well then to proclaim himself the resurrection and the life since it is through him and into him that we rise in order to live according to him and with him; now according to him in holiness and justice, afterwards with him in happiness and glory. Now the first resurrection of our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ,

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<sup>3</sup>Gueric of Igny - Liturgical Sermons - vol. II - Cistercian Publications - CF32 -

Cistercian Publications - Spencer, MA - 1971

is the cause and the proof of the second resurrection which will be that of his whole body. So also for each of us the first resurrection of the soul, by which it comes to life again from the death of sin, is the proof and the cause of its second resurrection, by which the body will be freed not only from the corruption of death but also from every tendency to corruption and death. That the one is proof of the other St Paul shows clearly in the words: Alif the Spirit of Christ who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he will also give life to your perishable bodies on account of his Spirit who dwells in you@.

**Saturday, April 14, 2018**

**How we Share in Christ=s Resurrection - from a Sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny<sup>4</sup>**

It is well said: ABlessed is he who has a share in the first resurrection.@ Holy, that is, on account of the first, which he has already obtained through the renewal of his soul; blessed on account of the second, which he happily awaits when the body is restored. The reason for this blessedness is indicated by the same passage of Scripture, which goes on: AOver these (who have a share, that is, in the first resurrection), the second death has no power@, even if the first death seemed to exercise its dominion over them for a passing hour. For death has reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin according to the likeness of Adam=s transgression. But as with Christ so with the Christian; rising from the dead he dies no more; death has no more dominion over him. So over those blessed neither has the second death any power nor will the first keep the power, which it had for a time. For the one death of Christ triumphed over both of ours, setting free from the one those who were already its captives, from the other, those who would be its captives. It prevented us from falling into the one, from remaining in the other.

How true, how devout and at the same time how magnificent is that threat he uttered as he died: Al will be your death, O death.@ How fittingly and

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<sup>4</sup> Gueric of Igny - Liturgical Sermons - vol. II - Cistercian Publications - CF32 -

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wonderfully he triumphed who tasted death on behalf of all and so swallowed up both his own death and all the dying of all peoples. Truly death has been swallowed up in victory. Free from fear he may mock at it, whomever that blessed one is who has a share in the first resurrection: AWhere is your victory, death? Where is your sting, death? You have been conquered, you who conquered all things. You have lost even the arms in which you trusted. For where is yours sting? The sting of death is sin, which when it once pricked the roots of the human race spread death=s incurable poison throughout the whole stock. As St Paul says: AThrough one man sin came and through sin death, and so it passed into all.@ Death reigned as conqueror then from the first Adam to the second; for just as by the law of its origin the whole human race was subject to the chains of sin, so also to the debt of death.

Thanks be to God who has given us the victory both over sin and over death, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Wholly innocent of sin and therefore free from the debt of death, he yet paid it, dying of his own will on our behalf; and rising he has set us free from sin. For as St Paul says: AChrist died for our sins and rose for our justification.@ By dying he underwent the punishment due to our sins, and by rising he established for us the form and the cause of everlasting justification. Christ rising from the dead dies no more, death has no further dominion over him. So also the Christian rising together with Christ, should no longer commit deadly sin nor should sin have any further dominion over him.

This is that holy and blessed one who has a share in the first resurrection, over whom the second death too will have no power; even the first death will be swallowed up in the victory of Christ=s resurrection. This is the one who has not only recognized but has also taken hold of the power of Christ=s resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings. He has been molded into the pattern of his death, so that he may arrive at resurrection from the dead.

END OF READINGS