

Sun May 27

A READING FROM THE FIRST LETTER TO SERAPION BY ST ATHANASIUS.¹

It will not be out of place to consider the ancient tradition, teaching and faith of the Catholic Church, which was revealed by the Lord, proclaimed by the apostles, and guarded by the fathers. For upon this faith the church is built, and if anyone were to lapse from it, that person would no longer be a Christian either in fact or in name.

We acknowledge the Trinity, holy and perfect, to consist of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In this Trinity there is no intrusion of any alien element or of anything from outside, nor is the Trinity a blend of creative and created being. It is a wholly creative and energizing reality, self-consistent and undivided in its active power, for the Father makes all things through the Word and the Holy Spirit, and in this way the unity of the Holy Trinity is preserved. Accordingly in the Church one God is preached, one God who is above all things and through all things and in all things. God is above all things as Father, for the Father is principle and source; God is through all things through the Word; and God is in all things in the Holy Spirit.

Writing to the Corinthians about spiritual matters, Paul traces all reality back to one God, the Father, saying: Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in everyone.

Even the gifts that the Spirit dispenses to individuals are given by the Father through the Word. For all that belongs to the Father belongs also to the Son, and so the graces given by the Son in the Spirit are true gifts of the Father. Similarly, when the Spirit dwells in us, the Word who bestows the Spirit is in us too, and the Father is present in the Word. This is the meaning of the text: My Father and I will come to him and make our home with him. For where the light is, there also is the radiance; and where the radiance is, there too are its power and its resplendent grace.

This is also Paul's teaching in his Second Letter to the Corinthians: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. For grace and the gifts of the Trinity are given by the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. Just as grace is given from the Father through the Son, so there could be no communication of the gift to us except in the Holy Spirit. But when we share in the Spirit, we possess the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the fellowship of the Spirit.

¹A Word in Season, vol III. Exordium, MD 1983. pp.224-225.

Mon 5.28.18

The Book of Judges – Commentary by Dom Damasus Winzen ¹

The conquest of the holy land under the leadership of Joshua marks the end of the first phase of Jewish history which began with the liberation of the chosen people from bondage in Egypt. It was the age of Israel's childhood, when God called his son out of Egypt, took him by his hand, and led him with cords of love. With the conquest of Palestine, Israel left the desert and entered upon the trials and temptations of adolescence. They are described in the book of Judges.

The youth who has escaped the bridle of the tutor and tastes for the first time the sweetness of liberty and independence seems to forget at once what he has learned in school, until the experience of life teaches him to accept through his own conviction what external training had not been able to impress upon him. This is what happened to Israel. After Joshua's death a new generation grew up which "knew not the Lord nor yet the work that he had wrought". Joshua's conquest had not been as complete and as final as it should have been. Many of the native tribes were left "to prove Israel by them". "They were as thorns in Israel's side, and their gods had become a snare to them. And the children of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim". In punishment for their faithlessness God delivers them into the hands of their enemies, until moved by their repentance and their groaning, he raises up a judge among them, as their liberator. After the death of the judge they relapse into their former servitude.

This cycle of apostasy, servitude, repentance, liberation and relapse, repeated six times, forms the pattern of the first part of the book of Judges. Three divine messages in which God reveals himself as the source of Israel's liberty divide the six cycles into three main groups. The first message, which is brought by "the angel of the Lord" opens that section of the book of Judges in which Israel's struggle for freedom against the kings is described. Othniel liberates Israel from the yoke of Cushan-rishathaim of Mesopotamia. Ethud, the left-handed Benjaminite, saves Israel from the oppression through the Moabites by killing the king Eglon, the fat one. Deborah, the prophetess, kindles the flame of resistance against Jabin, king of Canaan.

The second message, brought by a prophet, marks the beginning of Israel's liberation from the hordes of Midianites through the great champion Gideon. His rule is followed by the bastard Abimelech's abortive attempt to kill Israel's freedom from within by establishing a tyranny. The third message is directed to Israel by God Himself as introduction to the third part: Israel's fight against the Ammonites in the east, and Samson's daring exploits against the Philistines in the west. Six outstanding leaders, usually called the major judges, are thus counted in the book, with six minor ones inserted in between.

Tues May 29

THE MYSTERY OF DEATH, from the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World²

It is in the face of death that the riddle of human existence grows most acute. Not only are we tormented by pain and by the advancing deterioration of our bodies, but even more so by a dread of perpetual extinction. We rightly follow the intuition of our hearts when we abhor and repudiate the utter ruin and total disappearance of our own person. We rebel against death because we bear in ourselves an eternal seed which cannot be reduced to sheer matter. All the endeavors of technology, though useful in the extreme, cannot calm our anxiety; for prolongation of biological life is unable to satisfy that desire for high life which is inescapably lodged in our breast.

Although the mystery of death utterly beggars the imagination, the Church has been taught by divine revelation and firmly teaches that we have been created by God for a blissful purpose beyond the reach of earthly misery. In addition, that bodily death from which we would have been immuned had we not sinned will be vanquished, according to the Christian faith, when we who were ruined by our own doing are restored to wholeness by an almighty and merciful Savior.

For God has called us and still calls us so that with our entire being we might be joined to him in an endless sharing of a divine life beyond all corruption. Christ won this victory when he rose to life, for by his death he freed us from death. Hence to every thoughtful person a solidly established faith provides the answer to our anxiety about what the future holds for us. At the same time faith gives us the power to be united in Christ with our loved ones who have already been snatched away by death; faith arouses the hope that they have found true life with God...

Pressing upon the Christian to be sure, are the need and the duty to battle against evil through manifold tribulations and even to suffer death. But, linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope.

All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all people of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For since Christ died for all, and since our ultimate vocation is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to everyone the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.

Such is the mystery of humankind, and it is a great one, as seen by believers in the light of Christian revelation. Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful. Apart from his gospel, they overwhelm us. Christ has risen, destroying death by his death; he has lavished life upon us so that, as sons in the Son, we can cry out in the Spirit: Abba, Father!

may 29 Office for Dead

²GAUDIUM ET SPES, 18:22.

Weds May 30

The Meaning of Salvation History in the Old Testament. From History of the Old Testament.³

It was not the purpose of Biblical writers simply to chronicle the information they had gathered, but rather to instruct the reader along religious lines; accordingly they glide over many points which did not seem pertinent. Theirs is not a scientific approach to history - history for history's sake - but history for a supernatural purpose. Every event in the life of the individual or in the life of the nation, good fortune as well as misfortune, constituted acts of divine providence in their eyes. God is the reason behind all that happens, in nature, in the course of human life, and in the life of the nations. He makes everything serve His plan of salvation, even error and sin. Of special significance is this evaluation of events in the Books of Kings, the Book of Judges, the story of the desert wanderings, the lives of the patriarchs, and in the accounts of primitive times. The sacred writers sought to hold up a mirror to their contemporaries and to later generations: the good acts of nations and individuals should inspire imitation, their evil deeds a feeling of abhorrence and holy fear.

The religious evaluation of history is a peculiar contribution of the Old Testament. True, other peoples also saw in the events of history the activity of a higher power, acknowledged defeat as punishment from some divinity and ascribed victory to divine good favor. But the conviction that a God would and could not only punish but annihilate His own people was wholly foreign to them, because according to their religious ideology God would then receive no further honor. Moreover, in Biblical theology God's justice is vindicated by the afflictions and defeats with which He chastises His people, and these very misfortunes serve as a means of accomplishing His work of salvation; and this salvation will someday be extended to all the nations of the earth when Israel's God becomes the God of all peoples. Apart from revealed religion it is impossible to find the least trace of these basic concepts which required a foundation of monotheism.

Justification for presenting the history of Israel from a religious viewpoint lies in the fact that from the very beginning, viz., with the call of Abraham, Israel enjoyed a unique divine guidance, a guidance fundamentally unlike that of other peoples who are subject to God's will, are led by Him, accord favors to Him, and are punished by Him. For one who denies divine intervention it becomes impossible to explain how in Israel alone among all the nations of the Orient the knowledge and worship of one God implanted itself in spite of a strong popular inclination to idolatry and in spite of many religious and political reverses;

or how the religion of this tiny nation, having attained full perfection in Christianity, marched in triumph through all the world.

Thurs May 31 Visitation B.V.M.

A reading about the Visitation of Mary with Elizabeth, from the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* by St. John Paul II. 1

Immediately after the narration of the Annunciation, the Evangelist Luke guides us in the footsteps of the Virgin of Nazareth towards a *city of Judah* (Lk 1.39). Mary arrived there *in haste*, to visit Elizabeth her kinswoman. The reason for her visit is also to be found in the fact that at the Annunciation Gabriel had made special mention of Elizabeth, who in her old age had conceived a son by her husband Zechariah, through the power of God: *your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible* (Lk 1.36-37). The divine messenger had spoken of what had been accomplished in Elizabeth in order to answer Mary's question: *How shall this be, since I have no husband?* (Lk 1.34). It is to come to pass precisely through the *Power of the Most High*, just as it happened in the case of Elizabeth, and even more so.

Moved by charity, therefore, Mary goes to the house of her kinswoman. When Mary enters, Elizabeth replies to her greeting and feels the child leap in her womb, and being *filled with the Holy Spirit* she greets Mary with a loud cry: *Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!* (cf. Lk 1.40-42)... While every word of Elizabeth's greeting is filled with meaning, her final words, would seem to have fundamental importance: *And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord* (Lk 1.45). These words can be linked with the title *full of grace* of the angel's greeting. Both of these texts reveal an essential Mariological content, namely the truth about Mary who has become really present in the mystery of Christ precisely because she *had believed*. The fullness of grace announced by the angel means the gift of God himself. Mary's faith, proclaimed by Elizabeth at the Visitation, indicates **how** the Virgin of Nazareth **responded to this gift**.

As the Second Vatican Council teaches, The obedience of faith must be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God. This description of faith found perfect realization in Mary. The decisive moment was the Annunciation, and the very words of Elizabeth: *And blessed is she who believed* refer primarily to that very moment. -over-

Indeed, at the Annunciation Mary entrusted herself to God completely, with the full submission of intellect and will, manifesting the obedience of faith to him who spoke to her through his messenger. By accepting this announcement, Mary was to become the Mother of the Lord, and the divine mystery of the Incarnation was to be accomplished in her.... This fiat of Mary *let it be to me* was decisive, on the human level, for the accomplishment of the divine mystery [of the Incarnation. Mary uttered this fiat in faith. In faith she entrusted herself to God without reserve and devoted herself totally as the handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her son. And this Son, as the Fathers of the Church teach, she conceived in her mind before she conceived him in her womb: precisely in faith! Rightly therefore does Elizabeth praise Mary: *And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord*. These words have already been fulfilled: Mary of Nazareth presents herself at the threshold of Elizabeth and Zechariah's house as the Mother of the Son of God. This is Elizabeth's joyful discovery: *The mother of my Lord comes to me*.

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Friday June 1

A reading about the reasons for martyrdom, from the *First Apology* of St. Justin Martyr.⁴

We do not desire to live by lying. We are desirous of an eternal and good life; we strive for the abode of God, the Father and Creator of all; we make haste to profess our faith; we believe with firm conviction that they can attain these things who have shown God by their works that they follow Him and love to make their home with Him where there is no sin to cause disorder. In brief, this is what we look for and what we have learned from Christ and, in turn, teach to others.

We do not worship with many sacrifices and floral offerings the things human hands have made, set in temples, and called gods. We know that they are inanimate and lifeless and have not the form of God (for we do not think that God has that form which some say they reproduce in order to give honor to Him).

Why should we tell you, who already know, into what different shapes the artisans fashion their material, by carving, cutting, molding, and hammering? From vessels destined for vile purposes, by merely changing their shape and by skillfully giving them a new form, they often make what they call gods. Thus, His name is applied to corruptible things that need constant care. This, we think, is not only stupid but also disrespectful to God, who is of ineffable glory and form.

But we have learned from tradition that God has no need of our material gifts, since we see that He is the Giver of all things. We have been taught, are convinced, and do believe that he approves of only those who imitate His inherent virtues, namely, temperance, justice, love of neighbor, and any other virtue proper to God who is called by no given name. We have also been instructed that God, in the beginning, created in His goodness everything out of shapeless matter for our sakes. And if we by our actions prove ourselves worthy of His plan, we shall be found worthy to make our abode with Him and to reign with Him, free from all corruption and pain.

When you hear that we look forward to a kingdom, you rashly assume that we speak of a human kingdom, whereas we mean a kingdom which is with God. This becomes evident when, being questioned, we openly profess to be Christians, although we know well that for such a profession of faith the punishment is death. If we expected a human kingdom, we would deny that we are Christians that we might not be put to death, and we would try to hide from you, that we might attain what we expect.

That all these things should happen was foretold, I say, by our teacher, Jesus Christ, who is the Son and Apostle of God, the Father and Ruler of all, and from whom we have received our name of Christians. Hence, we are convinced of the truth of all the things He taught us, because whatever He foretold would happen is actually happening; this, indeed, is the practice of God, to speak of something before it takes place and then to show it taking place just as He predicted

⁴ Saint Justin Martyr, *The First Apology* (Fathers of the Church series), New York: , 1948, chapters 8-10, pp. 42-43.

Sat 06.02.18

The Book of Judges – Commentary by Dom Damasus Winzen ¹

The deeds of the judges are “signs” of the work of redemption to be wrought by Christ. As an example let us take the story of Eliud, who killed King Eglon of Moab. Ehud's deed is not very edifying, and it would not be worthy of being regarded in the annals of God's kingdom if it did not have a spiritual meaning reaching beyond the naked fact. Eglon, who was too fat to move, is the typical representative of that pompous spirit of self-confidence with which the great ones of the earth try to imitate the omnipotent Lord of heaven and earth. He stands for the “prince of this world”. Ehud's saving deed points to the way in which the saviour Christ frees mankind from the domination of the devil. Under the pretext that he has a “word of God” for Eglon, Ehud thrusts the sword into the king's belly. Now the word of God is very often called in Scripture a “sword”. When the author of the letter to the Hebrews writes: “The word of the Lord is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword; it reaches to the division of the soul and the spirit, of the joint also and the marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart”, we cannot help feeling that he has Ehud and his two-edged sword in mind. Is the law with its two commandments of the love of God and the love of neighbor not indeed a two-edged sword? Is it far-fetched to see in the two natures of Christ, as Son of God and son of man, this twofold essence of the law fulfilled? Once we see Christ Himself represented in Ehud's sword, we understand why the sword went into Eglon's belly blade and shaft. It prefigures the way Christ killed the prince of this world – by taking on the sins of humanity, by dying for them and by descending into hell. Holy Scripture does not tell Ehud's story to recommend murder but to point to the mystery of Christ, who made the sacrifice of his innocent life for the source of spiritual freedom for the new Israel.

Israel's fight for liberty against the kings reaches its climax in Deborah's rising against Jabin of Canaan. Tyranny always was, and always will be the fruit of idolatry. The Baalim of the Canaanites are local deities. They merge therefore with the local political power of the king. Israel's God, the one true God, stands for absolute justice for every person. He frees his servants from the arbitrary rule of local tyrants. “Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you? A people made free by the Lord”. This spirit of freedom under God was in danger of being suppressed under the iron rule of Jabin. His general Sisera resided in the fortress which has the significant name of Harosheth-ha-goiim, “silence of the nations”. Sisera has silenced the voice of the nations with his police force of nine hundred chariots of iron. All weapons had been confiscated. The people went underground. There were among the people no leaders.

The service of the true God is not a matter of violence and force. Those who serve him do so willingly, because he alone moves the hearts of men.

¹Pathways in Scripture – Dom Damasus Winzen – Word of Life – Ann Arbor, MI – 1976 – pg 99

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05/27/18