

**NT-MK07**

**06/17/18**

A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark by Peter Chrysologus [1](#)

Brothers and sisters, you have heard today how the kingdom of heaven, for all its vastness, can be compared to a mustard seed. A mustard seed! Is that the sum of believers' hopes? Is that what the faithful are longing for – a mustard seed, the blessed reward of virgins for their long years of self-restraint, the glorious prize won by martyrs at the cost of their blood? Is this the mystery no eye has seen, no ear heard, no human heart imagined: the mystery past telling that the Apostle assures us God has prepared for all who love him?

Let us not be too easily disappointed by our Lord's words. If we remember that *God's weakness is stronger than human strength, and God's foolishness wiser than human wisdom*, we shall find that this smallest seed of God's creation is greater than the whole wide world. It is up to us to sow this mustard seed in our minds and let it grow within us into a great tree of understanding reaching up to heaven and elevating all our faculties; then it will spread out branches of knowledge, the pungent savor of its fruit will make our mouths burn, its fiery kernel will kindle a blaze within us inflaming our hearts, and the taste of it will dispel our unenlightened repugnance. Yes, it is true: a mustard seed is indeed an image of the kingdom of God.

Christ is the kingdom of heaven. Sown like a mustard seed in the garden of the Virgin's womb, he grew up into the tree of the cross whose branches stretch across the world. Crushed in the mortar of the passion, its fruit has produced seasoning enough for the flavoring and preservation of every living creature with which it comes in contact. As long as a mustard seed remains intact, its properties lie dormant; but when it is crushed they are exceedingly evident. So it is with Christ; he chose to have his body crushed, because he would not have his power concealed.

We too must crush this mustard seed, in order to feel the force of this parable. Christ is king, because he is the source of all authority. Christ is the kingdom, because all the glory of the kingdom is within him. Christ is a man, because all humanity is restored in him. Christ is a mustard seed, because the infinitude of divine greatness is accommodated to the littleness of flesh and blood.

Do we need further examples? Christ became all things in order to restore all of us in himself. The man Christ received the mustard seed which represents the kingdom of God; as man he received it, though as God he had always possessed it. He sowed it in his garden, that is, in his bride, the Church. The Church is a garden extending over the whole world, tilled by the plow of the gospel, fenced by the stakes of doctrine and discipline, cleared of every harmful weed by the labor of the apostles, fragrant and lovely with perennial flowers: virgin's lilies and martyr's roses set amid the pleasant verdure of all who bear witness to Christ and the tender plants of all who have faith in him. -over

Such then is the mustard seed which Christ planted in the garden. When he promised a kingdom to the patriarchs the seed took root in them; with the prophets it sprang up, with the apostles it grew tall, in the Church it became a great tree putting forth innumerable branches laden with gifts. And now you too must take the wings of the psalmist's dove, gleaming gold in the rays of divine sunlight, and fly to rest for ever among those sturdy, fruitful branches. No snares are set to trap you there; fly off, then, with confidence and dwell securely in its shelter.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – vol. 2 Year B – New City Press – p 90

## OT-JUG14

### 06.18.19

A Commentary on the Book of Judges by St. Augustine [1](#)

As regards the fact that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter to God as a whole burnt offering, these are the facts: he had vowed that if he were to obtain victory, he would offer as a whole burnt offering whoever would come out of his house to meet him. Because he had vowed this and had won the battle and his daughter had been the one to meet him first, he fulfilled his vow. This event has become a difficult question to settle both for some who investigate the matter with piety and genuinely seek to know what this passage means and for some who out of ignorant impiety oppose the Holy Scriptures and call this a horrible misdeed that the God of the law and the prophets would have delighted in sacrifice, yes, even human sacrifices. First let us reply to their calumnies by noting that the whole burnt offerings of cattle did not delight the God of the law and the prophets – or as I prefer to say, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. What pleases God about those sacrifices was that they were full of meaning and a foreshadowing of future things. We, however, have the very substance which was foreshadowed by these sacrifices that he wished to commend to us. Moreover there is also a very pertinent reason why those sacrifices have been changed so that they no longer are commended but even forbidden: it is so that we may not think that God is pleased by such sacrifices according to some carnal passion.

But we rightly ask whether human sacrifices must have foreshadowed future events. But if this were true, this type of sacrifice would not displease God. But in fact the Scriptures themselves clearly testify that human sacrifices displeases him. For when God wanted and commanded all the firstborn to belong to him and to be his, he nonetheless wanted the firstborn of humankind to be redeemed by their parents, so that they would not entrust their firstborn children to God through immolation.

Now clearly God loves and rewards those sacrifices when a just man endures injustice and struggles for the truth even to the point of death or when he is killed by enemies whom he has offended for righteousness sake, as he has returned them good for evil, that is, love instead of hatred. In imitation of Abel, thousands of martyrs have struggled for the truth to the point of death and have been sacrificed by savage enemies. The Scripture says of them, “God has tested them like gold in a furnace and he has accepted them as a whole burnt offering.” So too the apostle says: “I am being sacrificed”.

But that is not how Jephthah made a whole burnt offering to the Lord out of his daughter. Rather he offered her as a literal sacrifice in the way that it was commanded for animals to be offered and forbidden for humans to be sacrificed. What he did seems rather similar to what Abraham did. In that instance the Lord gave him a special command that this ought to be done.

He did not offer him by way of a general commandment that such sacrifices should take place at some time. Indeed the general rule prohibited it.

1Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture – O.T. - vol. IV – InterVarsity Press – Downers Grove, IL – 2005 pg 138

**06SN1901**  
**06.19.18**

From the Life of St Romuald by St Peter Damian <sup>1</sup>

Romuald lived in the vicinity of the city of Parenzo for three years. In the first year he built a monastery and appointed an abbot with monks. For the next two years he remained there in seclusion. In that setting, divine holiness transported him to such a summit of perfection that, breathed upon by the Holy Spirit, he foresaw many future events and comprehended with the rays of his intelligence hidden mysteries of the Old and New Testaments.

Frequently he was seized by so great a contemplation of divinity that he would be reduced to tears with the boiling, indescribable heat of divine love. In this condition he would cry out: Beloved Jesus, beloved, sweet honey, indescribable longing, delight of the saints, sweetness of the angels, and other things of this kind. We are unable to express the ecstasy of these utterances, dictated by the Holy Spirit.

Wherever the holy man might arrange to live, he would follow the same pattern. First he would build an oratory with an altar in a cell; then he would shut himself in and forbid access.

Finally, after he had lived in many places, perceiving that his end was near, he returned to the monastery he had built in the valley of Castro. While he awaited with certainty his approaching death, he ordered a cell to be constructed there with an oratory in which he might isolate himself and preserve silence until death.

Accordingly his hermitage was built, since he had made up his mind that he would die there. His body began to grow more and more oppressed by afflictions and was already failing, not so much from weakness as from the exhaustion of great age. One day he began to feel the loss of his physical strength under all the harassment of increasingly violent afflictions. As the sun was beginning to set, he instructed two monks who were standing by to go out and close the door of the cell behind them; they were to come back to him at daybreak to celebrate Matins. They were so concerned about his end that they went out reluctantly and did not rest immediately. On the contrary, since they were worried that their master might die, they lay hidden near the cell and watched this precious treasure. For some time they continued to listen attentively until they hear neither movement nor sound. Rightly guessing what had happened, they pushed open the door, rushed in quickly, lit a candle and found the holy man lying on his back, his blessed soul snatched up into heaven. As he lay there, he seemed like a neglected heavenly pearl that was soon to be given a place of honor in the treasure of the King of kings.

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<sup>1</sup> The Liturgy of the Hours – vol III – Catholic Book Publishing Co – New York – 1975 – pg 1472

6/20/18

**A Reading about the honey in the mouth of the lion, from a book by Photina Rech.**<sup>2</sup>

The ancient world was familiar with stories about honey not only in connection with rites of birth, but also in connection with rites of sacred initiation or consecration, as in the mysteries of Attis and Mithras. Here honey had chiefly a purificatory function: honey was poured into the hand of the disciple of Mithras upon his consecration to the 'Lion', and his tongue was coated with honey. For people of an earlier age, honey, which was heaven's gift, and the work of pure bees, was indeed the proper 'food of innocence'; and just as in nature's household honey was thought to have cleansing properties, so also in the realm of worship, people ascribed to honey the property of cleansing from earthly stain. What is more, on the feast of the Babylonian deity Ea, the mouth of the god's statue was washed with honey and butter. More than just a simple preparatory religious purification, however, the eating of honey in the ancient initiation rites was meant to be a cleansing in the deeper sense of a renewal of life and a rebirth, which at the same time included the right to life in the world of the god-like.

The symbolic relationship between honey and the lion is surprising. This comes to the fore particularly in the case of the Mithraic mysteries, though the theme is also to be found elsewhere. In the myth and cult of the Persian god, who tears to pieces the vanquished World-beast--just as a lion rips his prey to shreds--Mithras is occasionally presented as a lion with bees hovering in front of his mouth; while his initiates have their hands and tongues purified with bee-honey, and are then fed on milk and honey. The connection is doubtless based on the fact that bees swarm when the sun stands in the constellation of the Lion; the Lion, however, is the symbol of the heat and warmth of the sun, which becomes incarnate in Mithras; and honey bears within itself the characteristic qualities of the sun. This connection of lion, bees, and honey is to be found, however, not only in the cosmo-mythic stream of ideas, but also in the Old Testament, in the story of Samson in the book of "Judges"(24:5-18). Samson (or Simson, the 'man of the sun') finds bee-honey in the carcass of the slain lion; and this experience gives him the idea for the riddle which, in keeping with the eastern custom, he proposes to his guests at the wedding-banquet he gives on the occasion of his marriage to one of the daughters of the Philistines: "Out of the eater came something to eat; out of the strong came something sweet."

The early Christians found the real solution to this riddle, and found it in Christ. Honey from the jaws of the slain lion! The lion is Death the all-devouring, who struck down even the Incarnate God; but in so doing, Death became the place wherein the source of Life is contained; so that now, pure sweetness flows forth from this 'Eater'. Indeed, Christ himself became for us the slain 'Lion of Judah', so that we might find in his dead Body the honey of his new life, and so that, as initiates of our divine Lion, we might satisfy our hunger on the

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<sup>2</sup>"Inbild des Kosmos. Eine Symbolik der Schoepfung", Salzburg-Freilassing, 1966; trans. of Second chapter, "Honey": "Liturgy", Vol 12, n. 3, pp 18-19.

Food of immortality. Thus the Old Testament marriage-riddle becomes an Easter parable of that fullness of life which is begotten through the Lord's victory over

**06SN2103**

**06.21.18**

St Aloysius of Gonzaga – From Butler's Lives of Saints [1](#)

The patron of youth, St Aloysius was born on March 9, 1568, in Lombardy. He was the eldest son of Ferrante, Marquis of Castiglione. His father's one ambition was that his eldest son should become a great soldier. In 1577 his father took him and his brother, Ridolfo, to Florence, and left them there under the charge of tutors to improve their Latin and to learn to speak the pure Italian of Tuscany. After two years, his father placed them in the court of the Duke of Mantua, Aloysius was then about eleven. Even then he had the intention to resign to his brother the right of succession to the marquisate of Castiglione. A painful kidney disease furnished him with excuse for appearing little in public, and he spent most of his time in prayer and reading the collection of the Lives of the Saints.

Another book he read about this time described the experiences of the Jesuit missionaries in India. This suggested to him the idea of entering the Society of Jesus in order to work for the conversion of the heathen. As a first step to a future missionary career he set about instructing the poor boys of Castiglione in the catechism during the summer holidays. At Casale-Monferrato, where the winter was spent, he visited the church of the capuchins and began to practice the austerities of a monk, fasting three days a week on bread and water and rising a midnight to pray on the stone floor of a room in which he would allow no fire to be lighted however bitter the weather.

He was now quite resolved to become a Jesuit. After much labor, he was able to convince his father to grudgingly give his consent. On November 25, 1585, he entered the Jesuit novitiate house of Sant' Andrea. Being under regular discipline he was obliged to take recreation and to eat more. Out of consideration for his precarious health he was recalled from Milan to Rome to complete his theological course in the City.

In 1591 an epidemic of plague caused great ravages in Rome. The Jesuits opened a hospital of their own. At his own entreaty, Aloysius was allowed to minister there. He instructed and exhorted the patients, washed them, made their beds, and performed with zeal the lowliest duties of the hospital. Several of the Fathers fell victims to the disease and Aloysius caught it. Contrary to expectation he recovered from the plague but fell into a low fever which reduced him to great weakness. He died on June 21 at the age of twenty-three. He was canonized in 1726.

[1](#)Butler's Lives of Saints – Revised edition – Harper – San Francisco – 1991 – pg 187



6/22/18

**SAMSON AS A FIGURE OF CHRIST, from Pathways in Scripture by Dom Damasus Winzen<sup>3</sup>**

Through his victory over the Ammonites, Jephthah had secured peace in the east. In the west the defeat of the Canaanites in the days of Deborah had freed the Israelites from any threat. But then a new power established itself in the fertile plains along the Mediterranean coast--the Philistines, from whom the whole country received the name Palestine. They came from the west, and brought with them much of early Greek civilization. Their political life was much better organized than that of the native Canaanites. They excelled in their metal-work, of which Goliath's armor is the outstanding example. (1Sam 17)

Against them God raises up Samson who is in every way the opposite of civilization, good manners, art and politics. No ropes are strong enough to hold him. The abundance of his vitality is the only law of his actions. He does not gather wealth or power. He has no education, no training, but he excels all in natural wit and sheer physical strength. It would be wrong, however, to see in the Samson stories only a protest against civilization in favor of a "return to nature."

The secret of Samson's greatness is his character as a Nazirite, a man who is separated from ordinary men and women to be consecrated to God. True, Samson's weakness does not allow him to keep the order of life which the vow imposes upon him, and therefore he ends in failure. But his death is, at the same time, the most glorious manifestation of his true nature as a figure of Jesus, the other great Nazirite (Mt 2:23). Both fight alone and singlehanded, in complete disregard of human cunning, in the supreme liberty which is present where the Spirit of God is. (2Cor 3:17) Samson reached in the grandeur of his death that freedom of the spirit which neither unbridled nature nor civilization can secure, but only the sacrifice of self.

Samson's

death, through which he killed more of his enemies than he had ever killed during his life, makes him truly a figure of Christ who overcame his enemies through his death, and by his victory over Satan "solved" Samson's riddle: "Out of the eater came forth food, and out of the strong one came forth sweetness".

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<sup>3</sup>PATHWAYS IN SCRIPTURE, by Damasus Winzen, (Word of Life, Ann Arbor, MI 1976) pp. 104-105.

**MY-58**  
**06.23.18**

**A Reading about Mary and Her Son, from a Book by Fr. Romano Guardini<sup>4</sup>**

Among those invoked in Christian prayer Mary, the mother of our Lord, holds a very special place. She is not merely the greatest of the saints but something altogether different and unique.

If one tries to explain wherein lies the special character and dignity of Mary, one can hardly do better than state the simple truth that she is the mother of the Redeemer: not just the mother of the man Jesus into whom, according to the Gnostics, the Logos entered, but of Jesus Christ, who is both God and Man. "And the angel answering, said to her: The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you. And therefore also the Holy One which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God." That infant which was the fulfillment of Mary's destiny as a woman was to become her Redeemer and ours. What more can be said? By becoming a mother, she became Christian. By living for her child, she grew to full Christian stature. Her life is linked to the life of the Redeemer not only as everyone who loves Him is linked to Him, but also as a mother to her son. She took part in His life. The Gospel tells us vividly how she followed Him even to the foot of the Cross, faithful in the truest sense of the word.

The Son of God was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man. In that hour the moving principle of creation held sway, not by commanding "Let there be" as it did when it created the world, but through the hearts and minds of those whom it called to fulfill its design. The message of the angel was at the same time an announcement, a demand and a question. To this the answer was given in humility and obedience but also in freedom. The event which signified for all humanity the coming of the Redeemer and for the world the beginning of the new creation, at the same time signified for Mary the entry into her own unique relationship with God. The life, passion, death and resurrection of our Lord, which are, for all, the guarantee and the beginning of salvation, were at the same time for her the true end

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<sup>4</sup>Prayer in Practice, New York 1957, 192-4

of her personal life. By contributing towards salvation in this unique way, she herself reached the fullness of Christian perfection.