

NT-MK41

07.08.18

A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark by by Symeon the New Theologian [1](#)

Many people never stop saying - I have heard them myself - "If only we had lived in the days of the apostles, and been counted worthy to gaze upon Christ as they did, we should have become holy like them." Such people do not realize that the Christ who spoke then and the Christ who speaks now throughout the whole world is one and the same. If he were not the same then and now, God in every respect, in his operations as in the sacraments, how would it be seen that the Father is always in the Son and the Son in the Father, according to the words Christ spoke through the Spirit: *My Father is still working and so am I?*

But no doubt someone will say that merely to hear his words now and to be taught about him and his kingdom is not the same thing as to have seen him then in the body. And I answer that indeed the position now is not the same as it was then, but our situation now, in the present day, is very much better. It leads us more easily to a deeper faith and conviction than seeing and hearing him in the flesh would have done.

Then he appeared to the uncomprehending Jews as a man of lowly station; now he is proclaimed to us as true God. Then in his body he associated with tax collectors and sinners and ate with them; now he is seated at the right hand of God the Father, and is never in any way separated from him. We are firmly persuaded that it is he who feeds the entire world, and we declare – at least if we are believers – that without him nothing came into being. Then even those of lowliest condition held him in contempt. They said: *Is this not the son of Mary, and of Joseph the carpenter?* Now kings and rulers worship him as Son of the true God, and himself true God, and he has glorified and continues to glorify those who worship him in spirit and in truth, although he often punishes them when they sin. He transforms them, more than all the nations under heaven, from clay into iron. Then he was thought to be mortal and corruptible like the rest of humankind. He was no different in appearance from other men. The formless and invisible God, without change or alteration, assumed a human form and showed himself to be a normal human being. He ate, he drank, he slept, he sweated, and he grew weary. He did everything other people do, except he did not sin. For

anyone to recognize him in that human body, and to believe that he was the God who made heaven and earth and everything in them was very exceptional.

This is why when Peter said: *You are the Son of the living God*, the master called him blessed, saying: *Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you -you do not speak of something your eyes have seen – but my Father who is in heaven.*

It is certain therefore that anyone who now hears Christ cry out daily through the holy Gospels, and proclaim the will of his heavenly Father, but does not obey him with fear and trembling and keep his commandments – it is certain that such a person would have refused to believe in him then, if he had been present, and seen him, and heard him teach. Indeed there is reason to fear that in his total incredulity he would have blasphemed by regarding Christ not as true God, but as an enemy of God.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year B – New City Press – 1993 – pg 96

7/9/18

THE THANKSGIVING OF HANNAH, from a Book by Dom Damasus Winzen¹

When the son is born Hannah calls him Samuel, "I have asked him of the Lord," and in a beautiful eucharistia--hymn of thanksgiving--she pours forth her gratitude. Hannah's song is re-echoed in the New Testament by the Magnificat of Mary. The two mothers understand that it is God's eternal design to save us not through power but through his descending, sacrificial love. The God of Israel, the Father of Jesus Christ, is not the God of the mighty but of those who stumble(2:4), not of those who are full but of those that are hungry. He is the God of the barren and the God of the poor.

But the real secret of his heart he shows when he takes his own son, kills him and makes him alive again, brings him down to the grave and up again. In this verse Hannah remembers the God of Moses who had brought his first born into the grave of Egypt only to give him a more glorious freedom. From its first appearance in the song of Moses, this theme became the ever repeated burden accompanying the whole of the Old Testament, until it was fulfilled in God's only begotten Son who "dies for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures"(1 Cor 15:3-4)

In the resurrection God "gave strength unto his king, and exalted the horn of his anointed."(2:10) In the very beginning of this new age of the Kings Hannah points as a true prophetess to the messianic king in whom the idea of the divine kingship finds its last fulfillment. In Jesus Christ, who entered the "city of the great king" humbly riding on an ass, who conquered death by dying on the cross, who established his throne by shedding his blood for the remittance of our sins, in him the heavenly Father "raised up the poor out of the dust, and lifted up the needy from the dung-hill, to make them sit with the princes and inherit the throne of glory"(2:8). Hannah's and Mary's songs form part of the eternal eucharistia of the Church in which she gratefully praises what proves to be the fundamental principle of salvation: "Not by arms, nor by force, but by my spirit, says the Lord of Hosts" (Zech 4:6), or as Hannah puts it: "By strength shall no one prevail" (2:9).

OT1SM14

¹PATHWAYS IN SCRIPTURE, by D. Winzen, (Word of Life, Ann Arbor, 1976) pp. 110-111.

07.10.18

A reading about the Hannah's dedication of Samuel to the Lord, from a book by Adrienne von Speyr. ¹

The essence of Samuel's mission lies in its aspect of continual confirmation by God, by events, by the people. The essential thing is not simply that Samuel remains pure, lives in obedience, and seeks counsel from God about the things he has to do; but, rather, that what he has done, what he is, what he represents...The people do not merely see him as a good man but constantly sense the nearness of God in and through him, run up against the mysterious in him, and thus experience it themselves. Samuel is, then, a mediator.

He is that, not because of his own nature, but because he has a mission from God that is already implicit in his mother's petition: she wants to conceive him only if he is to be dedicated to God, to see God always before him. God complies with her request by taking her promise seriously, indeed, by having ultimately exacted the promise from her in order to be able to present her with this son. The situation here is not, then, like that of the Mother of the Lord, who is approached by the angel and told of what is to happen to her and what will require her assent. Samuel's mother must give her assent in advance, must herself pronounce—in her later years when she is already regarded as barren—the Yes of fruitfulness and also attach such conditions to it as will allow both her son's mission and her own fore-mission to be recognized. She is one of those female figures situated within the spiritual environment of Christ who serve to herald his coming, and it is not just coincidental that precisely her son will anoint David to his kingship.

¹ *The Mission of the Prophets*, San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996, pp. 49-51.

07/11/18

The Meekness of St. Benedict as our holy Father. From a Sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny²

"**He sanctified him through his faith and meekness**". (Sir. 45:4) Moses is the real subject of this verse, but today I think it can be applied very well to Saint Benedict. Filled as he was with the spirit of all the saints, he must be considered much more to have not a little of the spirit of Moses. For if the Lord drew from the spirit of Moses and inspired with it every one of those who shared his ministry, how much more must it rest on him who more truly fulfilled on a more spiritual level the fullness of his whole ministry? Moses was the leader of those making their way out of Egypt; Benedict of those turning their backs on the world. They have both given a law. But the one was the minister of the letter that kills, the other, of the spirit that gives life. Moses, owing to the hardness of the hearts of the Jews, apart from a few guides to behavior, left no prescriptions adequate to the task of justification; Benedict however has handed on the unique purity of the Gospel teaching and the simplicity of its way of life. So many of the things about which Moses writes are difficult to understand, impossible or useless to perform. Benedict on the other hand wrote a most excellent Rule of life remarkable both for the lucidity of its style and for its discretion. Finally although Moses was the leader of the children of Israel when they left the land of Egypt he did not lead them into their promised resting-place; whereas our leader, like the standard bearer of the army of monks, has today gone before us along the straight path, the path leading eastward, into the kingdom of heaven. Therefore it is not absurd to consider his merits equal to those of Moses, whose ministry he is found even to have surpassed.

It will not be unfitting therefore to apply to him what we read was written about the other: "**He sanctified him through his faith and meekness,**" especially since it is of these two virtues, faith and meekness, that he is our teacher; he could never have lived otherwise than as he taught.

² Liturgical Sermons of Gueric of Igny. vol. 2, Cistercian Fathers Series. Cistercian Publications. Spencer, MA. 1971. p. 24f.

What could be more notable than his faith? While still a mere youth he scorned the world that smiled upon him. He trampled on the flowers of the world and of his own body as if they were already withered. He desired to suffer the hardships of the world for the sake of God rather than to make merry in it for the moment. What could be more like the faith of Moses, which the apostle praises in the words: **"By faith Moses, when he was grown up, denied himself to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter, rather choosing to be afflicted with the people of God than to have the pleasure of sin for a time."** (over)

And what could be holier than the meekness of our Father? He even refused to be provoked by the spite of those who were plotting to kill him, offering poison instead of wine. Moses indeed, so the Scripture tells us, was a man exceedingly meek, above all that dwelt upon the earth. But does it deny that his spirit was ever provoked? Does it not tell us that he was not only annoyed but terribly enraged against all who stood in his path? As for the gentleness of our teacher, I remember reading that it was remarkable not only toward those who spoke against him, but also toward those who tried to do him harm. Of his wrath I have no recollection. It must not however be considered prejudicial to the praise of holy meekness in either him or Moses if the just one burns with zeal against sinners, since this is the zeal without which meekness would sink to the level of tepidity or timidity. "Brethren, have peace among you," commands the Master, so meek and peace-loving. But before this he gives an admonition: "Have salt in you." For he realized without a doubt that the meekness of peace is the nurse of vice unless a demanding zeal first sprinkles it with searing salt, just as warm weather causes meat to decay unless it is salted. Therefore have peace among you, but a peace that is seasoned with the salt of wisdom. Seek after meekness, but a meekness that burns with faith.

OT1S

07.12.2018

A reading about the necessity of preaching hard truths, from a sermon by St. Caesarius of Arles. ¹

As often as it is necessary for both your and my salvation that I preach some hard and harsh truths, dearly beloved, you ought to consider my danger and accept it with calmness and patience. Harsh preaching provides remedies for souls that are sick, and arranges adornments for the healthy. what the Holy Spirit threatens the Lord's priests through the Prophet is not a slight matter. *"If you do not declare to the wicked his iniquity,"* [the Lord says to Ezekiel], *"I will require his blood at your hand;"* and again he says to Isaiah, *"Cry, cease not; lift up your voice like a trumpet, and show my people their sins."* [It is a hard] sentence a careless priest will endure, if he is unwilling to preach the word of God continually.

For this reason, dearly beloved, I absolve my conscience in the sight of God as often as I mention with humility a few words for the salvation of your soul. Indeed, I fear and shudder at the example of [Eli], the priest, for, when he heard that his sons were committing adultery, he [did not] kill them or suspend them from [the sacrifices and offerings], but only gently admonished them saying: *"My sons, it is no good report that I hear about you. If one man shall sin against another, the priest will pray for him, but if the priest himself sin, who shall pray for him?"* (1 Sam 2.24-25) Now, in spite of this admonition, he fell backwards from his stool and died of a broken neck, and his name was blotted out of the book of life, because he did not punish his sons with great severity. Moreover, on one day thirty thousand persons were killed, including his two sons, and the ark of the covenant was taken by the enemy. Behold how great was the evil done through the negligence of a priest who did not fear what was said above: *"If you do not declare to the wicked his iniquity, I will require his blood at your hand."*

This terrible sentence causes me overwhelming fear, compelling me to be burdensome to you and to shout more frequently. Now, since you have heard with how heavy a blow a careless priest was struck, let us see what the priest

¹ *Saint Caesarius of Arles: Sermons*, vol. I, sermon 5 (Fathers of the Church series), New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1956, pp. 32-37; translated by Sr. Mary Magdeleine Mueller, O.S.F.

Phineas deserved to hear from the Lord because he exercised holy severity. When he had killed two adulterers together by striking them with one blow, he merited to hear the Lord say: *“Phineas the priest, moved with my zeal, turned away my wrath that I might not destroy the people”* (Num 25.11). In the Psalm it is further written of him: *“Phineas stood up, and prayed; and the slaughter ceased. And it was reputed to him unto justice, from generation to generation for evermore”* (Ps 105.30-31).

...You have seen what evil the careless priest [Eli] incurred and what glory Phineas received in the Lord’s reward because he was moved by God’s zeal, willingly accept, as you usually do, what is preached to you, even if it sometimes seems bitter and harsh. You know very well that doctors do not always offer the sick pleasant potions, but, frequently, bitter and harsh ones; sometimes they even have to cut certain members with an iron instrument or burn them by cautery. All this the sick patiently endure, because they desire to recover continued health after brief distress.

...Since bodily health is sought with such great expense and so much pain, why is not the health of souls willingly sought by [us] when it is granted without any expense? Why is this, brethren? Because there are many people who exert greater care for their body than for their soul. They should, however, devote greater solicitude to the soul where the image of God exists. For, when the body which is loved so much now begins to be devoured by worms in the grave, the soul will be presented to God by the angels in heaven. Then, if it has been good, the soul will be crowned, while if it was wicked it will be cast into the darkness outside. From this darkness let us attentively pray that God’s mercy will deign to free us.

OT-1SM13
07.13.2018

A reading about the mission of the prophet Samuel, from a book by Adrienne von Speyr.¹

The essence of this mission lies in its aspect of continual confirmation by God, by events, by the people. The essential thing is not simply that Samuel remains pure, lives in obedience, and seeks counsel from God about the things he has to do; but, rather, that what he has done, what he is, what he represents and — in the eyes of God — had to represent through his mission, receives the confirmation of the people in general. The people do not merely see him as a good man but constantly sense the nearness of God in and through him, run up against the mysterious in him, and thus experience it themselves. Samuel is, then, a mediator.

Additionally, it is part of Samuel's mission to show how the natural and the supernatural, reason and obedience, human insight and prayer are related to one another. He is obliged to do what he does not want to do, to follow paths that are disagreeable to him and that, in terms of his faith and religious understanding, are not good paths. In the matter of choosing a king, he has to do what pleases the people, although he sees this as disobedience and has to have that disobedience subsequently explained to him by God. Because the people have estranged themselves from God, God consents to their choosing a king but will turn that bad development to good purpose—all of which illumines with particular clarity the nature of the prophet's mission, since he has a gift for bringing God and his people closer together.

And in everything that happens, one constantly finds Samuel holding some decided viewpoint, not wrong in itself, yet having, in each case, to obey and to change. God does not accept the things that Samuel does right but, rather, integrates them into something still better, allows the natural to be overcome by the supernatural, reason by faith, insight by obedience.

¹ *The Mission of the Prophets*, San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996, pp. 49-51.

Samuel knows that he is a mission-bearer who has been called three times by God. The [fact that] the high priest misunderstands it—which clearly stresses the element of having heard but not recognizing—better initiates Samuel into his mission than if things had gone totally smoothly. God...employs him as a wrestler, a gladiator, who fights, not for himself and his mission, but for the will of God and its fulfillment. He must continually learn to say *“not my will but thine”*.

It is a kind of Ignatian breaking of his own well-founded will for the sake of the greater glory of God, who then, however, not only shows him his wisdom and acquaints him with his divine intentions but also lets him experience the fact that he is acknowledged by the people, that they become the fruit of his prophecy, that God is satisfied with him, and that he has fulfilled the position reserved for him by God within the kingdom of his missions.

07SN1402

07.14.2018

A reading about Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, from a book by Daniel Sargent. [1](#)

On the fourteenth of October, 1682, a Frenchman living in Canada began a letter to a Frenchman living in France. He had seen many wonders in Canada, and was therefore eager to tell about them.

He was a missionary, a priest, a Jesuit, a certain Father Chauchetière, ...now only thirty-seven years old, and who had spent seven years already among the Indians of Canada whom he was trying to Christianize. The great astonishment of his life as a missionary had not been the size of the St. Lawrence River (he had heard of that in France), but the piety which he had found among the Indians at his St. Lawrence Mission. He had expected to be horrified by the Indians even though he was willing to give his life for them. Instead he had been edified by them. But how was he going to convince the Jesuit Superior, to whom he was writing his letter, of this Indian holiness? ...Lest it be thought that he believed that such fervor existed simply because he wanted it to exist, he dwelt on the inconvenience of this fervor: it led the Indians to adopt immoderate penances, and forced him to step in and restrain them. Only grudgingly did he add, as the sole flash of his enthusiasm, that "They would be admired in France if what they do were known there."

[Then] he came to what was most incredible of all: "During the past two years their fervor has greatly increased since God has removed from this world one of these devout savage women who live like nuns, and she died with the reputation of sanctity. Journeys are continually made to her tomb; and the savages, following her example, have become better Christians than they were. We daily see wonders worked through her intercession. Her name was [Kateri] Tekakwitha."

...Why did Fr. Chauchetière consider the sanctity of this Indian girl so little to be expected, so incredible even? The answer, I think, is not difficult to find. ...The European Christians of his day believed that God could be expected to make saints out of Europeans, for he had something to make them out of. Savages on the other hand were held scarcely to exist. When the first European explorers saw the American Indians they called them savages not to insinuate that they were

animals, or necessarily cruel, not indeed to insult them, but rather to pity them. They had been living outside of life. Grown of body, they were infants. They had no history....

...Yet, really, Tekakwitha's ancestors were an old people. Not merely that, they had had as many ancestors as any other person alive, but they remembered those ancestors. They carried the past with them in their traditions, from generation to generation. ...Primitive or near-primitive we may call them, but... religion exists often more sublimely among the primitives than among those with a little bit higher culture. The ancestors of [Tekakwitha] had been suffering and longing for ages. They had not waited, like care-free animals until, with the coming of the Christians, they acquired such concepts as eternal salvation to bother their heads with. The gaining of salvation had been their age-long preoccupation and occupation. Their campaign through the centuries had been to circumvent evil and death. They had made good marches and false marches, but they had always marched; they had always been growing older and older with marching, always more weighed down with their accumulating past experience.

...If we look at the past of [Tekakwitha's] ancestors, as Fr. Chauchetière did not and could not, and if we look at the story of the French missionaries, then the spiritual blossoming of this [Kateri Tekakwitha] becomes a climax of a long drama. Instead of exclaiming as Chauchetière did, "How suddenly she has come," our sigh is, "How long, how long, the world has waited!"

1*Catherine Tekakwitha*, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1940, pp. 1ff.