

NT-JN37

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A Commentary on the Gospel of John by St. Augustine [1](#)

The miracles wrought by our Lord Jesus Christ are truly divine works, which lead the human mind through visible things to a perception of the Godhead. God is not the kind of being that can be seen with the eyes, and small account is taken of the miracles by which he rules the entire universe and governs all creation because they recur so regularly. Scarcely anyone bothers to consider God's marvelous, amazing artistry in every tiny seed. And so certain works are excluded from the ordinary course of nature, works which God in his mercy has reserved for himself, so as to perform them at appropriate times. People who hold cheap what they see every day are dumb-founded at the sight of extraordinary works even though they are no more wonderful than the others.

Governing the entire universe is a greater miracle than feeding five thousand people with five loaves of bread, yet no one marvels at it. People marvel at the feeding of five thousand not because this miracle is greater, but because it is out of the ordinary.

Who is even now providing nourishment for the whole world if not the God who creates a field of wheat from a few seeds? Christ did what God does. Just as God multiplies a few seeds into a whole field of wheat, so Christ multiplied the five loaves in his hands. For there was power in the hands of Christ. Those five loaves were like seeds, not because they were cast on the earth but because they were multiplied by the one who made the earth.

This miracle was presented to our senses in order to stimulate our minds; it was put before our eyes in order to engage our understanding, and so make us marvel at the God we do not see because of his works which we do see. For then, when we have been raised to the level of faith and purified by faith, we shall long to behold, though not with our eyes, the invisible God whom we recognize through what is visible.

This miracle was performed for the multitude to see; it was recorded for us to hear. Faith does for us what sight did for them. We behold with the mind what our eyes cannot see; and we are preferred to them because of us it is said: *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.*

When the people saw the sign which Jesus had performed they said: Surely this must be a prophet. He was in fact the Lord of the prophets, the fulfiller of the prophets, the sanctifier of the prophets; yet he was still a prophet, for Moses had been told: *I will raise up for them a prophet like yourself.* The Lord is a prophet, and the Lord is the Word of God, and without the Word of God no prophet can prophesy. The Word of God is with the prophets, and the Word of God is a prophet. People of former times

were deemed worthy to have prophets inspired and filled by the Word of God; we have been deemed worthy to have as our prophet the Word of God himself.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year B – New City Press – 1999 – pg 102

Dead-05
07/30/18

A reading from a prayer for the future life, by St. Ephrem the Syrian. ¹

In that night when all sound, all human activity shall be silent, when the voices of all peoples and nations are still, may my soul through its good works shine out in You, O Jesus, Light of the Just. In that hour when darkness like a cloak shall be spread over all things may your grace, O Lord, shine on us in place of the earthy sun. In that night which brings to an end the course of this world and all its activities, may our souls behold your wonders in that quiet which is more than silence. In that hour, refreshing the weary through the sleep that lies over all, may our minds be inebriated with your delights, O Delight of all the Saints! In that time of dark night, may a New Sun arise for us. Then let us take wing in that hope which was laid up for us in your Resurrection.

Grant us O Lord, to imitate the watchfulness of those who waited for your Resurrection, so that day and night O Lord, we may be turned towards you. In that hour when we shall be separated from others and from the business of the world, be to us O Lord, a Giver of good things, bringing joy to our sadness. When confiding in your grace we have gone forth from this world, so that we are alone, may we behold O Lord, clearly and in deed the power of your help. Pour your peace into our hearts, and give your rest to all our striving that the darkness of that night may be to us as the day.

In that hour when we shall have been deprived of life, and night has hidden us in its darkness and we have been separated from others, may our consolation in you O Lord, increase. In that place that is empty of all things, where the voice of comfort is no more heard, awaken in our souls O Lord, a watchfulness free of all distraction. In that time when we lie in the sleep of final rest, may our minds not be sunk in the sleep of evil desires.

Grant us by your graces O Lord, that like the wise virgins who were ready by their good works, our way of life shall also be watchful, that we shall not sit in darkness with darkened souls, in darkness of mind, but that through prayer we may look for ever on the shining splendor of your grace. Expel, O Lord, by the daily light of your knowledge the nocturnal darkness of our mind, that being enlightened it may serve you in the purity of its regeneration.

Grant us with the just to watch by night in prayer, that in your revelations our lamps may burn brightly before your sun. In that time of night give consolation to our need, for the gloom of the night darkens us: through you may

¹ From *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, vol. IV, trans. by M. F. Toal, O.P. Chicago -London, 1963, p. 349.

we be comforted in our sadness. Grant that our minds may labor in the remembrance of your revelations, while our souls burn in the fire of your love. In that hour when the Saints were wont to give themselves to prayer; grant us, O Lord, to share in their watchfulness.

RULES FOR THE DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS by St Ignatius Loyola²

1. In the case of those who go from one mortal sin to another, the enemy is ordinarily accustomed to propose apparent pleasures. He fills their imagination with sensual delights and gratifications, the more readily to keep them in their vices and increase the number of their sins.

With such persons the good spirit uses a method which is the reverse of the above. Making use of the light of reason, he will rouse the sting of conscience and fill them with remorse.

2. In the case of those who go on earnestly striving to cleanse their souls from sin and who seek to rise in the service of God to greater perfection, the method pursued is the opposite of that mentioned in the first rule.

Then it is characteristic of the evil spirit to harass with anxiety, to afflict with sadness, to raise obstacles backed by fallacious reasonings that disturb the soul. Thus he seeks to prevent the soul from advancing.

It is characteristic of the good spirit, however, to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations, and peace. This he does by making all easy, by removing all obstacles so that the soul goes forward in doing good.

3. **Spiritual Consolations:** I call it consolation when an interior movement is aroused in the soul, by which it is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and as a consequence, can love no creature on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the Creator of them all. It is likewise consolation when one sheds tears that move to the love of God, whether it be because of sorrow for sins, or because of the sufferings of Christ our Lord, or for any other reason that is immediately directed to the praise and service of God. Finally, I call consolation every increase of faith, hope and love, and all interior joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one's soul by filling it with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord.

4. **Spiritual Desolation:** I call desolation what is entirely the opposite of what is described in the third rule, as darkness of soul, turmoil of spirit, inclination to what is low and earthly, restlessness rising from many disturbances and temptations which lead to want of faith, want of hope, want of love. The soul is wholly slothful, tepid, sad, and separated, as it were, from its Creator and Lord. For just as consolation is the opposite of desolation, so the thoughts that spring from consolation are the opposite of those that spring from desolation.

5. In time of desolation we should never make any change, but remain firm and constant in the resolution and decision which guided us the day before the desolation, or in the decision to which we adhered in the preceding consolation.

²THE TREASURY OF CATHOLIC WISDOM, Ed by John A. Hardon, S.J. (Doubleday NY, 1987) pp. 408-409.

For just as in consolation the good spirit guides and counsels us, so in desolation the evil spirit guides and counsels. Following his counsels we can never find the way to a right decision.

Though in desolation we must never change our former resolutions, it will be very advantageous to intensify our activity against the desolation. We can insist more upon prayer, upon meditation, and on much examination of ourselves. We can make an effort in a suitable way to do some penance.

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08.01.2018

A reading about St. Alphonsus Liguori, by Jean Delumeau. ¹

Alphonsus' destiny was not an ordinary one. Born into the Neapolitan nobility [in 1696], the son of a military man, a highly gifted student who was drawn to music, painting, drawing, and architecture, he became a lawyer at sixteen. Naples admired this brilliant young man who knew and esteemed [the brilliant philosopher of history, Giovanni Battista] Vico and who mingled with the finest intellects of the city. The Neapolitans were surprised when he became a priest against the will of his authoritarian father, and utterly amazed when they discovered him in the poorest neighborhoods, preaching to the illiterate in remarkable evening sermons.

One day, to the surprise of nearly everyone, he fled from Naples on a donkey to consecrate his life to preaching missions in the most abandoned rural areas. But it was difficult to found a new religious congregation... [since] there were already too many secular and regular priests and too many convents in this poor and badly administered country. ...He had to return to Naples far more often than he wanted to plead as a lawyer for the survival of his fragile institution, [the Redemptorists]. Badly shaved or unshaven, he argued endlessly, in his patched cassock, with government ministers who respected him and considered him a saint but who did not always give in to him.

Once established in the rural areas, he found] that country-people, and particularly those from the most backward regions, were under-Christianized, [and he] decided to devote [his] life to them and forbade [his] disciples to preach in the big cities. [He] did not neglect even the most modest hamlets and eliminated all embellishments and complexities from [his] preaching. [He] insisted more on catechism than on eloquence and aimed at simplicity with simple people. This was the reason for [his] popularity.

Alphonsus' originality lay in the fact that he was a musician, having frequented as a boy the Oratorians in Naples who preserved and developed the musical tradition started by Saint Philip Neri. This explains the quality of the fifty [songs] he composed: they do not exalt the God of vengeance so frequently found in French hymns of the same period. Their gentleness and warmth have entered into the Italian cultural patrimony. Speaking of [the song] *Tu Scendi Dalle Stelle*, Verdi said in 1890 that "without this pastoral hymn of St. Alphonsus, Christmas would not be Christmas."

Two tragic paradoxes marked the last thirty-five years of his life. He had sworn to himself that he would not become a bishop, but he had to accept the nomination on direct orders from Rome, where echoes of his saintliness had spread. Having finally succeeded in resigning from the bishopric for health reasons, he had hoped to end his days peacefully among his [religious] "sons". By the time of his death [in 1787, at 91 years of age], he had been excluded, together with his Neapolitan brothers, from the Congregation he had founded. ...Rome recognized only the Redemptorists of the Papal States and excluded from the Congregation those who continued to live and work further south.

It was not easy to be a saint, not easy to cut oneself off from a brilliant social milieu, or to go against a father's will, or to argue inch-by-inch with Church and State. Above all it was not easy to fight against oneself as Alphonsus did, for he was by nature quick-tempered and strong-willed. ...He was very hard on himself..., but his spiritual message to others was one of trust, hope and moderation. He was tormented by scruples but he tried to preserve others from them.... He gained self-mastery through fasting, mortification, work, and lack of sleep, so that he was generally seen by others as having a "heavenly face...gentle, joyful, and kind."

[1](#)Preface to *St. Alphonsus Liguori: Tireless Worker for the Most Abandoned*, by Théodule Rey-Mermet; Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1989, pp. 7-9.

GN-VOC11

08.02.18

The Meaning of Vocation – by St. John Paul II [1](#)

The lack of workers for God's harvest was already a challenge in the Gospel times, even for Jesus Himself. The gospel tells us that as he roamed through villages and towns, Jesus was moved with pity for the crowds which were “lying prostrate from exhaustion, like sheep without a shepherd. He tried to remedy that situation by teaching them at great length, but he wanted the disciples to join him in solving the problem and so he invited them, first of all, to pray: “Beg the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers to gather his harvest. He also teaches us today that with prayer we can and must influence the number of vocations. This prayer must be joined to efforts to encourage an increase in the responses to the divine call. Here too we find the prime example in the Gospel. After his first contact with Jesus, Andrew brings his brother Asimon to him. Certainly Jesus shows himself sovereign in his call to Simon, but on his own initiative Andrew played a decisive role in Simon's meeting with the Master.

Do not be afraid to go out into the streets and public places like the first apostles, who preached Christ and the good news of salvation in the squares of cities, towns and villages. This is no time to be ashamed of the Gospel. It is the time to preach it from the rooftops. Do not be afraid to break out of comfortable and routine modes of living in order to take up the challenge of making Christ known in the modern “metropolis”. It is you who must “go out into the byroads” and invite everyone you meet to the banquet which God has prepared for his people. The gospel must not be kept hidden because of fear or indifference. It was never meant to be hidden away in private. It has to be put on a stand so that people may see its light and give praise to our heavenly Father.

From the human point of view, a vocation in the Church begins with a discovery, with finding the pearl of great price. You discover Jesus: his person, his message, his call. After the initial discovery, a dialogue in prayer ensues, a dialogue between Jesus and the one called, a dialogue which goes beyond words and expresses itself in love.

Some experiences of religious enthusiasm, which the Lord sometimes grants, are only initial and passing graces which have the purpose of prodding one towards the decisive commitment of conversion, walking generously in faith, hope and love.

The calling of man first finds its source in God: in man's mind and in the choice which God himself makes and which man needs to read in his own heart, In clearly detecting this vocation that comes from God, man experiences the sense of his own insufficiency. He even attempts to defend himself against the responsibility of this calling. And so, almost without wanting it, the calling becomes an interior dialogue with God and, at times, even results in becoming a battle with God.

Faced with the hesitancy and difficulties human reason sets up, God offers the power of his grace. And by the power of his grace, man is able to fulfill his calling.

[11](#)The Meaning of Vocation – John Paul II – Scepter Publishers – Princeton, NJ – 1997 –
pg 15

** Reading for 8/3/2018 is unavailable **

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Prayer in the life of the Curé d'Ars:
a reading from an encyclical by St. John XXIII.

To the priests of this century, apt to be sensitive to the effect of action and easily tempted by a dangerous activism, how beneficial is that model of assiduous prayer in a life given up entirely to the care of souls, which was the Curé d'Ars! O What prevents us priests from being saints, he said. It is lack of reflection. We don't search our hearts; we don't know what we do. Reflection, prayer, union with God, are the things we need. He himself remained, according to contemporary evidence, in a state of continual prayer from which he was not distracted by the wearisome burden of confessions nor by his other pastoral cares. He preserved a constant union with God in the midst of an exceedingly busy life.

Let us listen to him again: he is unflinching on the subject of the joy and blessing of prayer. Man is a beggar who needs to be asking everything from God. How many souls we can convert by our prayers! And he would repeat: prayer is all man's happiness on earth. This happiness he long enjoyed himself with his eyes, lit by faith, contemplating the divine mysteries and, in adoration of the Word incarnate, his pure and simple soul lifted towards the Holy Trinity, the supreme object of his love. And the pilgrims who thronged the Church of Ars realized that the humble priest was confiding to them something of the secret of his own inner life with the frequent exclamation dear to him: A Being loved by God, united to God, living in the presence of God: oh, what happiness in life and in death!

We could wish that all priests might be convinced, by the witness of the holy Curé d'Ars, of the need to be men of prayer and of the possibility of being so, whatever the heavy and sometimes severe load of the labors of their ministry. But we need an intense faith, such as moved Jean-Marie Vianney and made him able to work miracles. What faith! exclaimed one of his colleagues. Enough to spread over a whole diocese!

With St. Pius X, let us consider it certain and well-founded that a priest, in order to occupy his station properly and fulfill his duty, must devote himself before all else to prayer. Above all he should obey Christ's precept: *We ought always to pray, a precept earnestly recommended by St Paul: Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. Pray constantly.*

The prayer of the Curé d'Ars, who, so to speak, spent the last thirty years of his life in his church where he was kept by his numerous penitents, was above all a prayer of thanksgiving. His devotion to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar was

indeed wonderful. He is there, he would say, he who loves us so much; how could we not love him? And most certainly he loved him and felt irresistibly drawn towards the tabernacle: We do not need many words to pray well, he explained to his parishioners. We know that God is there, in the holy tabernacle; we open our hearts to him; we rejoice in his holy presence. This is the best prayer of all.