

LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY

VIGILS READINGS: Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time

July 23-28, 2018

Sunday, July 23, 2018

A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark by Venerable Bede [1](#)

The apostles returned to Jesus and reported to him everything they had done and taught. As well as reporting to him what they themselves had done and taught, they told him what had befallen John the Baptist while they were teaching. And he said to them: Come away to some place where you can be alone by yourselves and rest awhile.

The following words show what real need there was to give the disciples some rest: *For many were coming and going and they had no time even to eat.* The great happiness of those days can be seen from the heard work of those who taught and the enthusiasm of those who learned. If only in our time such a concourse of faithful listeners would again press round the ministers of the word, not allowing them time to attend to their physical needs! For those denied the time needed to look after their bodies will have still less opportunity to heed the soul's or the body's temptations. Rather, people of whom the word of faith and the saving ministry is demanded in season and out of season have an incentive to meditate upon heavenly things so as not to contradict what they teach by what they do.

And they got into the boat and went away by themselves to a deserted spot. The disciples did not get into the boat alone, but took the Lord with them, as the evangelist Matthew makes clear.

Many people saw them set out and recognized them, and from all the towns they hastened to the place on foot and reached it before them. The fact that people on foot are said to have reached the place first shows that the disciples did not go with the Lord to the opposite bank of the Jordan, but crossed some stream or inlet to reach a nearby spot in the same region, within walking distance for the local people.

Thus when Jesus landed he saw a large crowd. He took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

Matthew relates more fully how he took pity on them. He says: *And he took pity on them and cured their sick. This is what it means really to take pity on the poor, and on those who have no one to guide them: to open the way of truth to them by teaching, to heal their physical infirmities, and to make them want to praise the divine generosity by feeding them when they are hungry as Jesus did according to the following verses.*

Jesus tested the crowd's faith, and having done so he gave it a fitting reward. He sought out a lonely place to see if they would take the trouble to follow him. For their part, they showed how concerned they were for their salvation by the effort they made in going along the deserted road not on donkeys or in carts of various kinds, but on foot. In return Jesus welcomed those weary, ignorant, sick and hungry people, instructing, healing, and feeding them as a kindly savior and physician, and so letting them know how pleased he is by believers' devotion to him.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year B – New City Press – 1999 – pg 100

MONDAY, JULY 24, 2018

**A reading about Israel's demand for a king,
from a sermon by John Cardinal Newman. ¹**

The Israelites seem to have asked for a king from an unthankful caprice and waywardness. The ill conduct, indeed, of Samuel's sons was the occasion of sin, but *Aan evil heart of unbelief,* to use Scripture language, was the real cause of it. They had ever been restless and dissatisfied, asking for flesh when they had manna, fretful for water, impatient of the wilderness, bent on returning to Egypt, fearing their enemies, murmuring against Moses. They had miracles even to satiety; and then, for a change, they wished a king like the nations. This was the chief reason for their sinful demand. And further, they were dazzled with the pomp

¹ *Parochial & Plain Sermons*, vol. 3, pp. 29-30

and splendor of the heathen monarchs around them, and they desired some one to fight their battles, some visible succor to depend on, instead of having to wait for an invisible Providence, which came in its own way and time, by little and little, being dispensed silently, or tardily, or (as they might consider) unsuitably. Their carnal hearts did not love the neighborhood of heaven; and, like the inhabitants of Gadara afterwards, they prayed that Almighty God would depart from their coasts. Y Samuel had too much of primitive simplicity about him to please them, they felt they were behind the world, and clamored to be put on a level with the heathen.

Saul, the king whom God gave them, had much to recommend him to minds thus greedy of the dust of the earth. He was brave, daring, resolute; gifted, too, with strength of body as well as of mind Ca circumstance which seems to have attracted their admiration. Y Both his virtues and his faults were such as became an eastern monarch, and were adapted to secure the fear and submission of his subjects. Pride, haughtiness, obstinacy, reserve, jealousy, caprice Cthese, in their way, were not unbecoming qualities in the king after whom their imaginations roved. On the other hand, the better parts of his character were of an excellence sufficient to engage the affection of Samuel himself.

As to Samuel, his conduct is far above human praise. Though injuriously treated by his countrymen, who cast him off after he had served them faithfully till he was *Aold and gray-headed, @* and who resolved on setting over themselves a king against his earnest entreaties, still we find no trace of coldness or jealousy in his behavior toward Saul. On his first meeting with him, he addressed him in the words of loyalty - *AOn whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house? @* Afterwards, when he anointed him king, he *Akissed him, and said, >Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over His inheritance?=@* When he announced him to the people as their king, he said, *ASee him whom the Lord hath chosen, that here is none like him among all the people? @*

[Samuel was not only a loyal subject and a zealous prophet to Saul, but also an attached friend;] and indeed, instances are recorded, in the first years of his reign, of forbearance, generosity, and neglect of self, which sufficiently account for the feelings with which Samuel regarded him.

TUESDAY, JULY 25, 2018

St. Sharbel Makhlouf – From Butler’s Lives of the Saints 2

Joseph Makhlouf was born in the remote village of Beqaa-Kafra, in the highest part of Lebanon, near the great cedars in 1828. His family was poor, and his father died in his early childhood, so he and his younger brothers were brought up by his mother and an uncle. It was a devout, almost monastic atmosphere. Joseph became a shepherd but was taught to read and write, served Mass and sang in the choir of the village church. As a boy, while tending his sheep, he found a cave where he could spend hours in prayer and meditation. He often visited the hermitage of Kozhaya, where two of his other uncles were monks, and learned about their way of life. In 1851, when he was twenty-three, he made a long and difficult journey over the mountains to the monastery of Our Lady of Maifouk and entered the novitiate there, taking the name Sharbel from a Syrian martyr of the second century. He was sent to the great monastery of St. Maro at Annaya, where he took solemn vows in 1853, then to the neighboring monastery of St. Cyprian of Knfan, where he studied theology and philosophy. He was ordained priest in 1859 and returned to Annaya, where he lived for fifteen years in all. The regime was a very austere one, combining long hours of prayer, silence, fasting and mortification with hard physical work, but Sharbel was content, delighting in singing the Office, working in the fields, and meditating on the mystery of the Mass.

While many Maronite monks engaged in pastoral and parochial work, the Order also made provision for those called to solitude; and in 1866 Sharbel, who had been drawn to what he had read of the lives of the early Desert Fathers, resolved to follow their way of life. He moved to a small hermitage called St. Peter and St. Paul’s, which was owned by the monastery and consisted of four tiny stone cells and a chapel. Food was brought to him once a day from the monastery. Here he lived for over twenty-three years, devoting himself entirely to preparing for, celebrating, and giving thanks for his daily Mass. He would rise while it was still dark and spend hours in preparation, praying in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke. He would celebrate the Mass at about eleven o’clock in the morning with great

reverence and recollection, and then spend most of the afternoon and evening kneeling before the holy tabernacle in adoration and contemplation.

He slept on a mattress stuffed with leaves on the floor, with a block of wood wrapped in an old habit for a pillow. He had no means of heating, even in the bitter winter. In this life of prayer and penance he experienced the temptations of the hermits of the early Christian period, and many people came to him for spiritual advice and healing.

In 1898 he celebrated a stroke while celebrating Mass in the Maronite rite, just before the prayer of consecration. Fr. Makarios, who was serving for him, took the chalice from his hand and set it down, then led him back to his cell. The prayer Sharbel was unable to finish runs: "Father of truth, behold your son who makes atoning sacrifice to you. Accept the offering: he died for me that I might have life. Behold the offering! Accept it..." He repeated this prayer before he died eight days later, on the night of Christmas eve.

He was buried in the nearby cemetery, and many pilgrims have visited his shrine: in 1950, they were said to average fifteen thousand a day. There have been many reports of miracles and conversions. He was beatified at the Second Vatican Council on December 5, 1965, and was canonized by Pope Paul VI in 1977.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 26, 2018

[A Homily of St. John Chrysostom on the Feast of St. James the Apostle.¹](#)

Let no one take scandal if we say now that the apostles were not perfect, for the mystery of the cross had as yet not been consummated; the grace of the Holy Spirit had not yet been infused into their hearts. If you are desirous of knowing their virtue, consider what kind of men they were after the grace of the Spirit had been given, and you will see that they overcame every perverse inclination in them. For this very purpose their imperfection is now revealed that you might clearly see what they suddenly became through the operation of grace.

That they once sought nothing spiritual, nor thought about the Kingdom of Heaven, is very clear. But still let us consider how they approached our Lord and what they said. "We desire," they said, "that whatsoever we ask of thee, thou wilt grant us." To which Christ replied, "What do you desire?" - certainly not because He did not know, but that He might compel them to answer and thereby might lay open the wound and thus apply the remedy. But they, blushing and held back by shame because they had come to Him motivated by human aspirations, took Christ apart from the rest and questioned Him. They moved aside lest perhaps they be heard by the rest. And so at last they said what they wished. I conjecture that they had heard that the disciples were to be seated on twelve thrones and they wished to ask for the place of honor in this assembly; they knew that at other times they were given precedence over the rest, but fearing that Peter might be put before them, they were bold enough to request, "Say that one may sit on thy right hand, the other on they left." And they pressed Him saying, "Speak thus." And what did He say? That He might show that they sought nothing spiritual, and did not even realize what they were asking - for had they known they would not have asked it - Jesus said to them, "You know not what you ask; you know not how great, how admirable a thing this is, far surpassing even the higher Powers." And He added further: "Can you drink the chalice which I shall drink, and be baptized with the baptism wherewith I am baptized?" Notice how He moves them from their present state of mind by bringing to their attention things entirely contrary. "For," He says, "you ask me for crowns and honors, but I speak to you of struggle and perspiration. This is not a time for rewards, nor will my glory appear at this time, but the present is the time of death and dangers." But observe how by His very manner of questioning He exhorts and consoles. He did not say, "Can you undergo suffering?"

Can you shed your blood?" But He said, "Can you drink the chalice?" Then by way of consolation He adds, "which I am to drink." So that by their very union with Him they might become more eager for hardships.

[1The Liturgical Readings. St. Meinrad's Abbey Press, 1943, pp. 422-423](#)

THURSDAY, JULY 26, 2018

From a Sermon by St John Damascene, Bishop 3

Ann was to be the mother of the Virgin Mother of God, and hence nature did not dare to anticipate the flowering of grace. Thus nature remained sterile, until grace produced its fruit. For she who was to be born had to be a first-born daughter, since she would be the mother of the first-born of all creation, *in whom all things are held together*.

Joachim and Ann, how blessed a couple! All creation is indebted to you. For your hands the Creator was offered a gift excelling all other gifts: a chaste mother, who alone was worthy of him.

And so rejoice, Ann, that *you were sterile and have not borne children; break forth into shouts, you who have not given birth*. Rejoice, Joachim, because from your daughter *a child is born for us, a son is given us, whose name is Messenger of great counsel and universal salvation, mighty God*. For this child is God.

Joachim and Ann, how blessed and spotless a couple! You will be known by the fruit you have borne, as the Lord says: "by their fruits you will know them". The conduct of your life pleased God and was worthy of your daughter. For by the chaste and holy life you led together, you have fashioned a jewel of virginity; she who remained a virgin before, during and after giving birth. She alone for all time would maintain her virginity in mind and soul as well as in body.

Joachim and Ann, how chaste a couple! While safeguarding the chastity prescribed by the law of nature, you achieved with God's help something which transcends nature in giving the world the Virgin Mother of God as your daughter.

While leading a devout and holy life in your human nature, you gave birth to a daughter nobler than the angels, whose queen she now is. Girl of utter beauty and delight, daughter of Adam and mother of God, blessed the loins and blessed the womb from which you come! Blessed the arms that carried you, and blessed your parent's lips, which you were allowed to cover with chaste kisses, ever maintaining your virginity. *Rejoice in God, all the earth. Sing, exult and sing hymns.* Raise your voice, raise it and be not afraid.

FRIDAY, JULY 27, 2018

How Saul lacked real faith in God, from a book by Dom Damasus Winzen. ⁴

With all the charming and fascinating qualities for which Samuel and David and all the others loved Saul so much, he lacked one thing: the fear of the lord. In the company of the prophets he prophesied. But his friends who knew him better asked with a skeptic smile: "Is Saul also among the prophets?"(10:11) Saul was not really a religious man. His was a complicated character, moody and fickle. One moment he would summon the priest, the next he would brush him away, and in the end he killed them all. Seven days he waited for Samuel to come and offer sacrifice. Then at the last moment he lost patience and offered the sacrifice himself, against the commandment of God.

One day he was seized with an unreasonable religious zeal and put the whole people under oath not to eat anything for a whole day of heavy fighting. He was ready even to kill his son Jonathan for having taken a little honey, unaware of his father's oath. Another time he disregarded again the express command of God in order to please the people and his own vanity by saving the spoils and sparing his brother-king, Agag of Amalek. In the beginning of his reign he cut off all the wizards from the land and put a ban on superstitious practices, but he ended up by asking the witch of Endor to divine for him by her talisman.

⁴ *Pathways in Scripture*, by Dom Damasus Winzen, (Word of Life, Ann Arbor, MI, 1976) pp. 112-114.

For all his natural virtues and talents, Saul lacked real faith in God. He had no deep-seated religious principles and convictions. What he possessed came to him without effort. Therefore he neglected to develop it, and as a result we see his character deteriorate rapidly. He put his own glory above everything else, and consequently jealousy over the successes of his son Jonathan and of David ate into his heart, making him cruel, resentful and hardhearted. He sank deeper and deeper into the abyss of gloom and hatred, until finally, surrounded by defeat and mortally wounded, he threw himself upon his own sword. "His history," says Newman in one of his sermons, "is a lesson to us, that the 'heart of unbelief' may exist in the very sight of God, may rule a person in spite of many natural advantages of character, in the midst of much that is virtuous, amiable and commendable." The Spirit of God, which seized upon him so suddenly and gave him 'a new heart', had not taken root, and therefore the evil spirit returned with seven others, and his last state became worse than his first. (Lk 11:24-26)

SATURDAY, JULY 28, 2018

A reading about Mary and the birth of her Son, from the writings of Pierre de Bérulle.

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The Virgin was so careful, as the gospel teaches us on two occasions, to gather up the actions and words of other people regarding her Son and to preserve them in her heart, not allowing a single word about such a great reality to fall to earth: *Mary kept every word (every, it says), reflecting on them in her heart* (Lk 2:19). How much more then should she be attentive to the interior and divine actions of her Son, which, although the world cannot see them, her insight made known to her? They are so much more excellent because their source is of greater worth. They can be imprinted only in the sacred heart and the divinized Spirit of Jesus. Therefore the Virgin is enraptured by Jesus and doubly delighted by him; delighted, I say, by his state within her and by the interior exercises of his Spirit, while he lives in her. For this is the most worthy object that exists after the Godhead itself.

⁵ AThe Life of Jesus@ in *ABérulle and the French School@*, New York, 1989, pp. 169-171.

Nevertheless, it is necessary that I discover some humiliation in the midst of these grandeurs, bitterness among the sweetness. I would wrong the author of these mysteries and the truth of this story if I did not present it as it is; if I did not describe truthfully what is happening, either in the state of the Son or in the state of the Blessed Mother. I must not omit, therefore, that in the midst of these grandeurs to which the Virgin is exalted, that in these raptures where she is established, I discover there the cross and humiliation. For our mysteries are for God himself both cross and humiliation.

She should have begot him as immortal. She begot him as mortal. He should have been born from her as he was born from the tomb, full of glory and splendor. She begot him vulnerable to our lowliness and misery. She should have begot him in paradise, in heaven, in the bosom of the Father. For he is his Son and will be one day elevated to the throne at the right hand, in the bosom of the Godhead. She begot him in Nazareth and gave birth to him in Bethlehem, in a stable on hay and straw. She recognizes the greatness of her Son and her own as well in relationship to her Son. She knows the Father's plan to humble his Son and the Son's plan to humble himself. She embraces these plans and agrees to be the humiliated Mother of the humiliated Son. Now this is the place and the time where she becomes aware of these truths and begins to accept the humiliation destined for her Son and for herself. For her Son's human filiation and for her divine Motherhood.

For it is in Nazareth, in this birth of Jesus in her, in this moment that these things are accomplished. They are known to her, born in her and experienced by her according to the splendor of her knowledge, the strength of her love and vitality of her sensitivity toward divine reality and the things of her Son and her God.

END OF READINGS