

LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY  
VIGILS READINGS: TWENTIETH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME  
AUGUST 19-25, 2018

**SUNDAY, AUGUST 19, 2018**

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

We have heard that unless we eat the flesh of the son we shall not have life. We must have unwavering faith, then, when we partake of the sacred mysteries, and not inquire “How?” Unspiritual people, that is, those led by a natural, human way of thinking, are not open to spiritual realities surpassing the natural order, and so lack understanding of the spiritual nourishment the Lord's flesh affords.

Those who do not share in this flesh will not share in eternal life because they reject Jesus, the true life. What is consumed is the flesh not of a mere man but of God, and being one with the Godhead, it has power to deify. This is real nourishment; its sustaining power does not last only for a time; it does not decompose like perishable food, but helps to us attain everlasting life. Likewise the cup of the Lord's blood is real drink, for it does not quench our thirst only for a timer, but keeps those who drink it free from thirst for ever; as the Lord said to the Samaritan woman: *Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never thirst again.* Whoever receives the grace of the Holy Spirit by sharing in the divine mysteries will never suffer from spiritual hunger and thirst the way unbelievers do.

*Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood live in me, and I live in them. As I draw life from the living Father who sent me, so whoever eats me will draw life from me.* From these words we can begin to understand the mystery of communion. Those who eat and drink the Lord's flesh and blood live in the Lord and the Lord lives in them. A marvelous and inexplicable union occurs by which God is in us, and we are in God. Does this not fill you with awe as you listen?

It is not God alone that we eat, for he is intangible and incorporeal; he can be apprehended neither by our eyes nor by our teeth; nor, on the other hand, is it simply the flesh of a man, which would avail us nothing. Rather, in a union defying explanation, God has made flesh one with himself, so that the flesh now has life-giving power. This is not because its nature is changed into the nature of God. Of

course not! A comparison may be made with iron put into the fire. It remains iron but displays the energy of fire. So also the Lord's flesh remains flesh, but it has life-giving power because it is the flesh of the word of God.

And so Christ says: *As I draw life from the Father*, or in other words, As I was born of the Father who is life, *so those who eat me will draw life from me*, because they will be united with me and as it were transformed into me, who am possessed of life-giving power.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers- Year B – New City Press – 1993 – pg 108

**MONDAY, AUGUST 20, 2018**

**St. Bernard as master of mystical and spousal love in Christ:**

**a reading from a letter of Pope St. John Paul II to the Cistercian Abbots General.**

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...The age in which St Bernard lived saw the beginnings of a new stage of intellectual life in Europe. In fact, while the study of man himself increased, there began an intellectual movement which later on was called humanism and which even in our own times continues with vigor. The Doctor of Clairvaux who knew the aspirations and anxieties of his age, understood thoroughly this new passion for man and did not simply reject it nor condemn it.

On the contrary, he affirmed that man, created according to the image and likeness of God, is an “exalted creature,” and because of this—a capacity to share in the very divine grandeur itself, but at the same time, this capacity also shows him to be miserable, poor, weak and insignificant. Christ saved the whole person in order to bring into eternal life not only his soul but also his body.

Thus, affirming openly the dignity of the human condition, St Bernard exclaimed: “How admirable is the goodness of God seeking man! How great, also, the dignity of man thus found!” And thus, from the consideration of man’s dignity which is revealed by creation and redemption, he showed that there arose, as from a double spring, a true Christian humanism. In fact, in affirming that the image of God remains in us even after sin, and that God became man in order to save man,;

St Bernard in theological doctrine contemplates at the same time the dignity and misery of man and in this way he avoids the danger of false “anthropocentrism.”

The christology of St Bernard offers an adequate foundation to the Christian humanism when he teaches with a certain forcefulness that the whole person was taken up in Christ. Actually, while we are living on this earth, in our human condition, we have access to God only through the law of the Incarnation. This “excellent doctor,” when he affirms that he does not yet see Christ in a form equal to the Father because he does not contemplate “God with God,” nevertheless added: “at least as a man, I present Him as man to men.” These words contain an understanding of the true sense of the word “humanism”: the recognition of the limitations as well as the exalted capacity and dignity of man who was created in Paradise, united in friendship with God and was called through the goodness of God to a much more intimate union which surpasses all human concepts and all expectations.

...In the spiritual school of St Bernard, the earthly life of Jesus is never found separated from the Eternal Word Incarnate; [it is both] present with the Father in glory and present among us by grace as the Spouse of the Church and of the soul. [It is he] who calls and leads his bride to the most intimate union [with him in the Father]. It is with reason then that the Abbot of Clairvaux was called Master of mystical and spousal love in Christ.

**TUESDAY, AUGUST 21, 2018**

### **A Reading on St Pius X by Leonard Von Matt.<sup>1</sup>**

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Pius X, the canonized Pope, holds a special place in the hearts of the faithful. But this devotion of the faithful did not begin only at his canonization, when the Church publicly proclaimed the holiness of his life: it began from the moment when he ascended the papal throne. At once there grew up an understanding between the Shepherd and his flock. The first to understand him were the simple, humble people, who recognized him for what he was.

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<sup>1</sup>St Pius X, Leonard Von Matt. Henry Regnery Co. 1955, p.85,86

...The obvious quality which led to his canonization was his outstanding holiness. With Pius X, sanctity seemed to be the most natural thing in the world. It quietly enlivened all that he said or did. Yet it would seem that Giuseppe Sarto's natural temperament inclined to a certain violence, easily inflamed, and no one will ever know how much struggle it cost him to achieve that gentleness and unruffled goodness for which he was so renowned. We can follow him on the narrow path which he set himself as church-student, curate, parish-priest, bishop, cardinal and Pope; but the moment of his vocation to the priesthood and the beginning of his heroic sanctity are secrets known to God alone. A certain holiness seems to have been his from the beginning: his striving after a virtuous life seems never to have been interrupted, his charity never diminished. But it was when he began what he called the Ascent of Mount Calvary, when he became Pope, that his great sanctity became evident. It was his conscientiousness that turned the enormous responsibility of the office into a crucifixion: he gave himself unstintingly to the service of the Church, and spent himself without reserve for the love of God and everyone. His sanctity lay in this total dedication: it was thus an inner and in a great measure a hidden sanctity: there were no spectacular penances, no remarkable practices beyond those of a normal, good Christian. It might almost be said that Pius X became a saint in spite of himself by sanctifying himself and his nature and by not resisting God's grace that drew him on.

**WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 22, 2018**

**ON THE QUEENSHIP OF MARY, from a Sermon by St Bernard<sup>1</sup>**

It is the time for all flesh to speak when the Mother of the Incarnate Word is taken up into heaven, nor ought human mortality cease to give praise when the nature of man is in the Virgin exalted above the immortal spirits. But neither does our devotion allow us to be silent, nor can our sterile thought conceive, nor our unlearned speech give forth, anything worthy concerning her glory. Hence it is that those princes of the heavenly court in the consideration of such an unheard-of

thing cry out with admiration: "Who is she who ascends from the desert abounding with delights?"

As though they said more manifestly: "How great is she, or whence is she, ascending indeed from the desert, so abounding in delights?" For delights are not found equal in us whom the impetus of the river rejoices in the City of the Lord, who are given to drink by the countenance of your glory from the torrent of pleasure. Who is she who ascends from under the sun, where there is nothing but suffering and sadness and affliction of spirit, abounding in spiritual delights? Why should I not call delights the glory of virginity with the gift of fecundity, and ensign of humility distilling the honeycomb of charity, the bowels of mercy, the plenitude of grace, the prerogative of a singular glory?

Ascending, therefore, from the desert the Queen of the world, as the Church sings, was made beautiful even to the holy angels and sweet in her delights. But let them cease to wonder at the delights of this desert, for the Lord has given goodness and our earth has yielded its fruit. Why do they wonder that Mary ascends from the desert of the earth abounding with delights? Let them wonder rather at Christ, being poor, descending from the plenitude of the heavenly Kingdom, for it seems by far a greater miracle that the Son of God deigned to be made a little less than the angels than that the Mother of God should be exalted above the angels. Indeed, his humiliation has been made our exaltation; his miseries are the delights of the world. Finally, being rich, he was made poor on account of us, that he might enrich us by his poverty.

[1](#)LITURGICAL READINGS, Compiled for the Office of the Brothers of St Meinrad's (St Meinrad IN 1943) p. 446.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 23, 2018

## A Commentary on the Book of Nehemiah by St. Bede <sup>2</sup>

Nehemiah is interpreted in Latin as “My consoler is the Lord” or “the consoler from the Lord”. For when Nehemiah restored Jerusalem’s walls and, after delivering them from the disdain of their enemies, raised up the people of God to the observance of the divine law, it was surely clear that by his word and deed and person he not unsuitably designates the mediator of God and people, the man Christ Jesus, who indicates that he was sent to console the poor in spirit when he said to his disciples as he was about to ascend to heaven: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete”, that is, a Consoler, by whom the psalmist showed that God’s holy city (namely, the church) would be rebuilt and also those who mourn would be consoled when he said, “The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted.”

Nehemiah writes that he was in the fortress of Susa when the men came who brought the news about Jerusalem. Susa is the capital city of the kingdom of the Persians, as we read in the book of Esther. Not only Nehemiah but also the prophet Daniel calls it a “fortress”, not because the city itself is a fortress, for as we have stated it is a capital city and a very powerful one, but because it is so solidly built that it looks like a fortress. Now Susa means “riding” or “returning”. The name aptly befits the defenses of the mind of the faithful, especially of those who are charged with the capture of Jerusalem, that is, for the salvation of those who are occasionally snatched away from the church through the devil’s attacks but by repenting are brought back to the church again by the grace of God. For such people are in a returning fortress – that is, in the strength of a mind called back from the lowest delights to a longing for the heavenly homeland. From which they had fallen in their first parents; such people are in the very strong cavalry of the hearts of the saints who carry God as their rider, according to the prophet’s saying: “Mounting your horses, and your riding is salvation.” For the Lord indeed mounts

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<sup>2</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture – O.T. vol V – InterVarsity Press – Downers Grove, IL 2008  
– p 334

his horses when he illuminates the hearts of preachers with the grace of his mercy so that he can rule them; and his riding is salvation because he not only carries to eternal salvation those over whom he presides by ruling them but also, so that he may likewise preside over them too, and through them make others sharers of this same everlasting salvation as well.

But even now in the holy church, people are rightly afflicted by a salutary sense of remorse when they consider the fact that their neighbors are still subject to sins, so that, through the negligence of those who, having reformed, could have been profitable to many, the devil has free entry into the church, as through the walls of a ruined city. It is even more lamentable if those very ones who should have been profiting others through their teaching and personal example show to observers an example of destruction in themselves by living corruptly. For this is what is meant by the fact that the gates of Jerusalem were burned down by enemy flames: that those who ought, by living and teaching well, to have been introducing worthy people into the assembly of the elect and keeping unworthy people out, perish instead in the fire of avarice, self-indulgence, pride, strife, envy, and the rest of the vices that the evil enemy is apt to bring in.

**FRIDAY, AUGUST 24, 2018**

**A reading about St. Bartholomew's quiet life, from a sermon by Bl. John Henry Newman. [1](#)**

When Philip told him that he had found the long-expected Messiah of whom Moses wrote, Nathanael (that is, Bartholomew) at first doubted. He was well read in the Scriptures, and knew that the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem, whereas Jesus dwelt at Nazareth, which Nathanael supposed in consequence to be the place of his birth--and he knew of no particular promises attached to that city, which was a place of evil report, and he thought no good could come out of it. Philip told him to come and see; and he went to see, as a humble single-minded man, sincerely desirous to get at the truth. In consequence, he was vouchsafed an interview with our Savior, and was converted.

Now from what occurred in this interview, we gain some insight into St Bartholomew's character. Our Lord said of him, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" and it appears, moreover, as if, before Philip called him to come

to Christ, he was engaged in meditation or prayer, in the privacy which a fig-tree's shade afforded him. And this, it seems, was the life of one who was destined to act the busy part of an apostle; quietness without, guilelessness within. This was the tranquil preparation for great dangers and sufferings! We see who make the most heroic Christians, and are the most honored by Christ!

An even, unvaried life is the lot of most people, in spite of occasional troubles or other accidents; and we are apt to despise it, and to get tired of it, and to long to see the world--or, at all events, we think such a life affords no great opportunity for religious obedience. To rise up, and go through the same duties, and then to rest again, day after day--to pass week after week, beginning with God's service on Sunday, and then to our worldly tasks--so to continue till year follows year, and we gradually get old--an unvaried life like this is apt to seem unprofitable to us when we dwell upon the thought of it. Many indeed there are, who do not think at all--but live in their round of employments, without care about God and religion, driven on by the natural course of things in a dull irrational way like the beasts that perish.

But when we begin to feel we have a soul, and work to do, and a reward to be gained, greater or less, according as we improve the talents committed to us, then we are naturally tempted to be anxious from our very wish to be saved, and we say, "What must I do to please God?" And sometimes we are led to think we ought to be useful on a large scale, and go out of our line of life, that we may be doing something worth doing, as we consider it.

Here we have the history of St Bartholomew and the other apostles to recall us to ourselves, and to assure us that we need not give up our usual manner of life, in order to serve God; that the most humble and quietest station is acceptable to him, if improved duly--nay, affords means for maturing the highest Christian character, even that of an apostle. Bartholomew read the Scriptures and prayed to God; and thus was trained at length to give up his life for Christ, when he demanded it.

1*Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. 2, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, pp 437-438.

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 25, 2018**



### A Commentary on the Prophecy of Nehemiah by St Bede 3

In the spiritual sense, whenever the walls of the church have been built by gathering new nations to the faith or by setting straight those who have erred, immediately the doors of regular discipline must be set in place so that the ancient enemy, who “prowls around like a roaring lion,” might not in any place be able to invade the fold of the faithful. Gatekeepers, singers and Levites must be appointed to guard these same doors; it is clear that the character of all these accords with holy teachers. For the gatekeepers are those who have received “the keys to the kingdom of heaven” so that they might receive those who are worthy and humble but prevent the proud and the impure from entry into the heavenly city by saying, “You have no part or lot in this business, for your heart is not right before God.” The singers are those who with a devout voice preach the sweetness of this same heavenly homeland to their hearers; the Levites are those who always remain vigilant in regard to the observance of divine worship. Now Nehemiah ordered that “the gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot” (that is, throughout the whole night), doubtless either in case the enemy invaded under the cover of darkness or else in case any of the citizens were to go out incautiously and be captured by the enemy and killed. Likewise, throughout the night of this age also, guardians of souls must act diligently to ensure that the observance of devout living is not neglected, allowing the devil to sneak in and disturb the company of the faithful or to seize and destroy one of their number. But when the “Sun of righteousness” appears and the light of future blessedness shines forth, no longer will there be a need for barriers of self-restraint, because adversaries will no longer be given the ability to attack or tempt the faithful, since they will be condemned to eternal punishment along with their leader. Thus in his Apocalypse John says about the future glory of the holy city, “And its gates will not be shut ever, for there will be no night in that place.”

**END OF READINGS**