

**LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY**  
**VIGILS READINGS**

TWENTY-FOURTH Week in Ordinary Time

September 16-22, 2018

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2018**

**A Homily on the Gospel of Mark by Caesarius of Arles <sup>1</sup>**

When the Lord tells us in the Gospel that anyone who wants to be his follower must renounce himself, the injunction seems harsh; we think he is imposing a burden on us. But an order is no burden when it is given by one who helps in carrying it out.

To what place are we to follow Christ if not where he has already gone? We know that he has risen and ascended into heaven: there, then, we must follow him. There is no cause for despair – by ourselves we can do nothing, but we have Christ's promise. Heaven was beyond our reach before our Head ascended there, but now, if we are his members, why should we despair of arriving there ourselves? Is there any reason? True, many fears and afflictions confront us in this world; but if we follow Christ, we shall reach a place of perfect happiness, perfect peace, and everlasting freedom from fear.

Yet let me warn anyone bent on following Christ to listen to Saint Paul: *One who claims to abide in Christ ought to walk as he walked.* Would you follow Christ? Then be humble as he was humble; do not scorn his lowliness if you want to reach his exaltation. Human sin made the road rough but Christ's resurrection leveled it; by passing over it himself he transformed the narrowest of tracks into a royal highway.

Two feet are needed to run along this highway; they are humility and charity. Everyone wants to get to the top – well the first step to take is humility. Why take strides that are too big for you – do you want to fall instead of going up? Begin with the first step, humility, and you will already be climbing.

As well as telling us to renounce ourselves, our Lord and Savior said that we must take up our cross and follow him. What does it mean to take up one's cross? Bearing every annoyance patiently. That is following Christ. When someone

begins to follow his way of life and his commandments, that person will meet resistance on every side. He or she will be opposed, mocked, even persecuted, and this not only by unbelievers but also by people who to all appearances belong to the body of Christ, though they are really excluded from it by their wickedness; people who, being Christians only in name, never stop persecuting true Christians.

If you want to follow Christ, then take up his cross without delay. Endure injuries, do not be overcome by them. If we would fulfill the Lord's command: *If anyone wants to be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me*, we must strive with God's help to do as the Apostle says: *As long as we have food and clothing, let this content us*. Otherwise if we seek more material goods than we need and desire to become rich, we may fall prey to temptation. The devil may trick us into wanting the many useless and harmful things that plunge people into ruin and destruction. May we be free from this temptation through the protection of our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers - Year B – New City Press – 1993 – pg 116

**MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2018**

**From a Treatise On The ascent of the Mind to God by St. Robert Bellarmine <sup>1</sup>**

*Sweet Lord, you are meek and merciful.* Who would not give himself wholeheartedly to your service, if he began to taste even a little of your fatherly rule? What command, Lord, do you give your servants? *Take my yoke upon you*, you say. And what is this yoke of yours like? *My yoke*, you say, *is easy and my burden light*. Who would not be glad to bear a yoke that does not press hard but caresses? Who would not be glad for a burden that does not weigh heavy but refreshes? And so you were right to add: *And you will find rest for your souls*. And what is this yoke of yours that does not weary, but gives rest? It is, of course, that first and greatest commandment: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart*. What is easier, sweeter, more pleasant than to love goodness, beauty and love, the fullness of which you are, O Lord my God?

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<sup>1</sup> The Liturgy of the Hours – vol. IV – Catholic Book Publishing Co – New York – 1975 – pg 1411

Is it not true that you promise those who keep your commandments a reward more desirable than great wealth and sweeter than honey? You promise a most abundant reward, for as your apostle James says: *The Lord has prepared a crown of life for those who love him.* What is this crown of life? It is surely a greater good than we can conceive of or desire, as Saint Paul says, quoting Isaiah: *Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it so much as dawned on man what God has prepared for those who love him.*

Truly then the recompense is great for those who keep your commandments. The first and greatest commandment helps the one who obeys, not the God who commands. In addition, the other commandments of God perfect the one who obeys them. They provide one with what is needed. They instruct and enlighten him and make him good and blessed. If you are wise, then, know that you have been created for the glory of God and your own eternal salvation. This is your goal; this is the center of your life; this is the treasure of your heart. If you reach this goal, you will find happiness. If you fail to reach it, you will find misery.

May you consider truly good whatever leads to your goal and truly evil whatever makes you fall away from it. Prosperity and adversity, wealth and poverty, health and sickness, honors and humiliations, life and death, in the mind of the wise one, are not to be sought for their own sake, nor avoided for their own sake. But if they contribute to the glory of God and your eternal happiness, then they are good and should be sought. If they detract from this, they are evil and should be avoided.

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2018**

**Jeremiah=s message of judgment foreshadowing that of the Lamb of God, from *Pathways in Scripture* by Damasus Winzen<sup>2</sup>**

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Jeremiah=s message was judgment. He did not say what people liked to hear. *AAwful and appalling thing has happened in the Land! The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests make profit through them; and my people love to have it so. But*

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<sup>2</sup> Ann Arbor, MI: Word of Life, 1976, pp. 211-213.

*what will you do when the end comes?* (5:31) Jeremiah knew the human heart: *Deep beyond sounding is the heart, and sick beyond cure, who can know it?* (17:9) Mercilessly he denounced its main sickness: adultery and pride... Death and chaos are fruits of sin, and nobody has described them as vividly as Jeremiah: *I looked at the earth, and lo! it was chaos; at the heavens, and their light was gone. I looked at the mountains, and lo! they were quaking; and all the hills swayed to and fro. I looked, and lo! there was no man or woman, and all the birds of the air had flown. I looked, and lo! the garden land was desert, and all its cities were sacked before the Lord, before his fierce anger* (4:23-26).

If Jeremiah is of great importance to us as a trumpet of divine judgment calling to repentance and conversion, he is still closer to us as an image of the suffering servant who during this passio-time redeems us through his death and resurrection. The words of Jeremiah *I was like an innocent lamb, that is led to the slaughter* are, in the mind of the Church, the key to understanding the prophet's life and mission (11:19). There can be no doubt that through this expression the prophet alludes to the paschal lamb which the Israelites had offered and eaten in the night of their deliverance.

The paschal lamb is a symbol of the chosen people and of their destiny. It shows that the price which God asks for their deliverance is their willingness to live as a priestly nation, ready to serve God in his work of salvation. The promised land was given to them, not as a political domain, but as an altar upon which to offer themselves in obedience to God's will. As the symbol of this readiness a lamb was offered in the temple every morning and every evening.

Jeremiah clearly understood and accepted his mission as the innocent lamb. His advice to surrender to the king of Babylon was not the fruit of considerations, nor was it the result of discouragement and defeatism. His motive was exclusively religious. He accepted the chalice of God's punishment. He was willing to suffer for the sins of the people, he who had been sanctified in his mother's womb and who had never been unfaithful to God's word. For the same reason it was he, the only one in Israel who had kept himself free from the general spirit of apostasy, who longingly sang, *O that I had in the desert a wayfarer's lodge! For fain would I leave my people, and go clean away!*, he who stayed with his people to the bitter end

(9:2). He foreshadowed the Lamb of God who emptied himself to take upon himself our sins.

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2018**

**A reading about the concept of sin in the Old Testament, from a book by John Oesterreicher.**<sup>1</sup>

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The biblical message is not one of ease. There are few pages of Scripture that do not tell the frightening story of man's failure: graced by God, he is able to "disgrace" himself. Made unto salvation, he often chooses doom instead. He is no less than God's image, but oddly enough, one that can dim, darken, even distort it—one that even refuses to shine. Man's character as the one divine likeness among earthly creatures cannot be forfeited—it is a constituent of his nature—but he is at liberty to turn this likeness into a caricature. Endowed with freedom, he, who ought to be God's representative, can change into God's adversary. Known, loved, and thus called to know and love, man has the power to disrupt the fellowship with God that ought to crown his existence....

As a rule, the inspired writers do not dwell on the distinctions that are the indispensable equipment of moral theologians...though the degrees of evil and its many masks are far from unknown to them. *Every sin is a horror in the sight of God—this is the relentlessness as well as the simplicity of their teaching....* Israel's providential role was not to discuss the many subtleties of moral science but to shout to the world the one unbending fact: Sin is "ir-response," disobedience, insubordination. Not only has the man of sin grown weary of service, he spurns, despises his Master, refuses to answer him, makes himself deaf to his call. The worst ever said about the men ungrateful for the favors showered on them is the word of God himself, calling them "*those that hate me.*"

For all its negativity, sin is an act of great consequence. Nothing could be more mistaken than to belittle it: it has eminence and grandeur—a perverted grandeur, a hollow eminence. To trifle with it, as our age so often does, shows a value blindness that can no longer distinguish evil from playfulness, the spectacle of hell

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<sup>1</sup> John M. Oesterreicher, *The Israel of God: On the Old Testament Roots of the Church's Faith* (Foundations of Catholic Theology series); Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963; pp. 26 ff.

from the antics in a nursery.... Seen with the eyes of faith, it is a tremendous reality: the taking of a stance, the severing of a love bond, a break with God, an assault on his heart. Through it, person turns from Person. Unless the “turning away” becomes again a “turning to,” the end is loss of intimacy with God, indeed, a disintegration of man’s innermost life.

...The overall message of the Old Testament, however, is that every sin is an act against God *and* man. [Not that the offense against one was confused with the one directed against the other.] God is the Protector, the Guarantor of the rights of every man. He is, in particular, the Defender of the poor, the Guardian of orphans and widows, the Friend of the needy. As the prophets never cease to remind us, oppressors and exploiters blaspheme the Lord’s name.

...From this, there is only a short step to the realization that whoever touches his [neighbor] touches God. The injurer of a neighbor injures the One whose unseen presence is with every man. Obviously, the injury inflicted on God must not be taken literally; ...[as God says to Jeremiah], *“Is it I whom they hurt [by their idol-worship], says the Lord; is it not rather themselves, to their own confusion?”* (Jer 7.19) There seems almost no limit to the damage sin can do [in harming] the people of God. It was this social dimension of every misdeed that the prophets sought to hammer into the hearts of their hearers: sin is an attack on God’s covenant, be it with the Israel of old or with the Israel renewed.

This is why a Catholic confesses his guilt not only in the privacy of his heart but in the confessional, in the sight, as it were, of the community of the faithful.... As the priest represents God as well as God’s people, so the contrite sinner mends not only the torn bond between himself and his heavenly Father, but also that between himself and his fellow members in the body of Christ.

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2018**

**Love and perseverance are the crown of faith:**

**a reading from the final exhortation of Andrew Kim Taegon, priest and martyr.** <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Pro Corea Documenta*, ed. Mission Catholique Seoul (Seoul-Paris, 1938) v. 1, pp. 74-75; trans. in NCCB Newsletter, v. 21, August/September 1985.

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My brothers and sisters, my dearest friends, think again and again on this: God has ruled over all things in heaven and on earth from the beginning of time; then reflect on why and for what purpose he chose each one of us to be created in his own image and likeness.

In this world of perils and hardship if we did not recognize the Lord as our Creator, there would be no benefit either in being born or in our continued existence. We have come into this world by God's grace; by that same grace we have received baptism, entrance into the Church, and the honor of being called Christians. Yet what good will this do us if we are Christians in name alone and not in fact? We would have come into the world for nothing, we would have entered the Church for nothing, and we would have betrayed even God and his grace. It would be better never to have been born than to receive the grace of God and then to sin against him.

Look at the farmer who cultivates his rice fields. In season he plows, then fertilizes the earth; never counting the cost, he labors under the sun to nurture the seed he has planted. When harvest time comes and the rice crop is abundant, forgetting his labor and sweat, he rejoices with an exultant heart. But if the crop is sparse and there is nothing but straw and husks, the farmer broods over his toil and sweat and turns his back on that field with a disgust that is all the greater the harder he has toiled.

The Lord is like a farmer and we are the field of rice that he fertilizes with his grace and by the mystery of the incarnation and the redemption irrigates with his blood, in order that we will grow and reach maturity. When harvest time comes, the day of judgment, those who have grown to maturity in the grace of God will find the joy of adopted children in the kingdom of heaven; those who have not grown to maturity will become God's enemies and, even though they were once his children, they will be punished according to their deeds for all eternity.

Dearest brothers and sisters: when he was in the world, the Lord Jesus bore countless sorrows and by his own passion and death founded his Church; now he gives it increase through the sufferings of his faithful. No matter how fiercely the powers of this world oppress and oppose the Church, they will never bring it down.

Even since his ascension and from the time of the apostles to the present, the Lord Jesus has made his Church grow even in the midst of tribulation.

For the last fifty or sixty years, ever since the coming of the Church to our own land of Korea, the Faithful have suffered persecution over and over again. Persecution still rages and as a result many who are friends in the household of the faith, myself among them, have been thrown into prison and like you are experiencing severe distress. Because we have become the one Body, should not our hearts be grieved for the members who are suffering? Because of the human ties that bind us, should we not feel deeply the pain of our separation? But, as the Scriptures say, God numbers the very hairs of our head and in his all-embracing providence he has care over us all. Persecution, therefore, can only be regarded as the command of the Lord or as a prize he gives or as a punishment he permits.

Hold fast, then, to the will of God and with all your heart fight the good fight under the leadership of Jesus; conquer again the diabolical power of this world that Christ has already vanquished. I beg you not to fail in your love for one another, but to support one another and to stand fast until the Lord mercifully delivers us from our trials. There are twenty of us in this place and by God's grace we are so far all well. If any of us is executed, I ask you not to forget our families. I have many things to say, yet how can pen and paper capture what I feel? I end this letter. As we are all near the final ordeal, I urge you to remain steadfast in faith, so that at last we will reach heaven and there rejoice together. I embrace you all in love.

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2018**

**Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist, from *The Saints*, ed. John Coulson<sup>4</sup>**

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Few people love the tax collector. Even in these days when the relation between taxpayer and taxed is, no doubt, scrupulously correct, his name strikes cold. Much more was this so in the Palestine of the first century, when it was in his interests to bully and harry and falsify. But even the mild and honest tax collector was not acceptable to official Judaism: he did business with the gentile and handled his money; he was legally impure, socially outcast. A Jewish Rabbi would be bold indeed to invite him

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<sup>4</sup>The Saints, ed. John Coulson, Guild Press-NY, 1957, p. 538-541.



to join his inner circle of disciples: it would be a gesture of defiance to the established prejudice. And so the formula 'publicans and sinners' slipped even into the phrase book of the evangelist and, quaintly enough, into the Gospel of Matthew the publican. This term 'publican' by the way does not accurately describe Matthew's profession but flatters it. The Pharisees might despise it, but the trade was a profitable one and much sought after: whether it be pursued honestly or dishonestly would depend on the character of the officer.

"And Jesus passed further on, he saw Levi, the son of Alpheus, sitting at work in the customs-house and said to him, "Follow me"; and he rose and followed him. That this was a call to the apostolate there is no doubt - its terms too closely match those of the call of Simon and Andrew to be otherwise. Yet 'Levi' does not appear in any list of the Twelve. Now the vocation of the tax collector is reported in the first Gospel too, but there he is called 'Matthew', thus identifying him with the Matthew who appears in all the apostolic lists. The widely accepted and most natural explanation is that Matthew and Levi are one person with two Semitic names. It may be that our Lord himself gave him the name Matthew (Mattai, 'gift of God', in Aramaic) as he gave Kepha to Simon.

This Matthew then got up from his registers and henceforth - at our Lord's suggestion - took a lesson from the lilies and birds that never did a day's calculation in their lives. His master was no longer Antipas, the shrewd 'fox' but one who, unlike the foxes, had not even a home. The change destroyed all Matthew's worldly prospects: Simon and Andrew might return to their fish, but Matthew had thrown over a coveted business and could never recover it. He left it gladly, it seems and completely - at least it was not he but Judas who kept the accounts for the apostolic group.

After the incident of his call Matthew disappears from the New Testament except as a name in the apostolic lists. What became of him? We have a sentence from a book by Bishop Papias of Hieropolis. "Matthew wrote an ordered account of the oracles (of our Lord) and each interpreted these oracles according to his ability." Time had had its revenge. When the need for a written gospel record began to be felt, upon which of the Apostles would the choice fall? Upon one who used the pen, no doubt. Poor Matthew was back where he started, but this time with an eager will and high purpose. In Palestine, some time between the years 40 and 50,

this ex-civil servant produced not the lively and artless Gospel of St. Mark but the orderly, almost ledger like, treatise, which we know as 'The Gospel according to St. Matthew.'

And so Matthew's old trade entered a new service; the accountant became an evangelist. It is not surprising that he alone records his Master's words; "Every scholar whose learning is of the kingdom of heaven...knows how to bring both new and old things out of his treasure house. For there is no poor tool of ours that God's service will not perfect and dignify.

It is commonly but not unanimously affirmed he died a martyr's death; but we know for certain that he lived a martyr's life - and that is enough. And for us he will always be the man who knew what money was and what it was not.

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2018**

**When Gabriel Appeared to Mary, from the Hymns on the Nativity,  
by St. Ephrem the Syrian.<sup>5</sup>**

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What indeed was the pure woman doing at the moment  
when Gabriel was sent down to her?  
She saw him perhaps at the moment of prayer,  
for Daniel was also at prayer when he saw Gabriel,  
for prayer is next of kin to good tidings.  
It is right that they should delight one another  
as Mary did Elizabeth, her next of kin.  
The dove bore good tidings for prayer.  
By Abraham's prayer good tidings proliferated.  
Hezekiah's prayer hastened and proclaimed good tidings to him.  
The centurion's good tidings caused his prayers to be joyful.  
and on the roof terrace Simon was made joyful,  
And Zechariah at the reward of his incense;  
his good tidings came because of his incense.

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<sup>5</sup>Ephrem the Syrian, Paulist Press CWS, 1989. "Hymns on the Nativity, Hymn 2" p.79-81

All good tidings came to the harbor of petition;  
this greatest of all good tidings, the cause of all rejoicing,  
found Mary at prayer and eagerly desired her.  
For Gabriel, inhabiting an honorable old man,  
entered and greeted her so that she would not tremble,  
so that the modest girl would not see  
a youthful face and be sad.  
To two pure old men and to a virgin girl,  
to them alone Gabriel was sent with good tidings.  
In the will their natures are similar and resemble one another.  
The virgin and the barren woman and Daniel the faithful:  
One brought forth the revelation of the word,  
and the other a voice for the wilderness,  
and the virgin the Word of the Most High.  
Lest He bewilder the onlookers by His greatness,  
He drew Himself up from all the land of the Hebrews  
and from all Judah and all Bethlehem  
until He filled a small womb,  
and as if he were a seed in our garden  
or a small flash of light for our pupil,  
He shone forth and diffused and filled the earth.

END OF READINGS