

LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY

VIGILS READINGS—Thirty-third Week in Ordinary Time

November 18-24, 2018

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2018

A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark by Gregory Palamas ¹

All those who hold to true faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and show proof of their faith by good works, guarding themselves from sins or cleansing themselves from their stains by confession and repentance, who practice the virtues opposed to those sins – temperance, chastity, love, almsgiving, justice and fair dealing – all these, I say, will rise again to hear the king of heaven himself saying to them: *Come my Father's blessed ones, inherit the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.* So will they reign with Christ, receiving as their inheritance that heavenly kingdom which cannot be shaken, living forever in the ineffable light that knows no evening and is interrupted by no night, having fellowship with all the saints who have lived from the beginning of time, and enjoying delights beyond description in Abraham's embrace, where all pain has fled away, and all grief and groaning.

For just as there is a harvest for inanimate sheaves of wheat, so for the rational wheat which is the human race, there is a harvest that cuts people away from unbelief, and gathers into faith those who accept the Lord's apostles and their successors, and in the course of time the teachers of the Church. Of them the Lord said: *The reaper receives his wages, and gathers a crop for eternal life,* for teachers who instruct others in piety will in their turn receive from God such recompense as befits those who gather the obedient into eternal life.

But there is yet another harvest: the transfer of each one of us by death from this present life into that which is to come. The reapers of this harvest are not the apostles but the angels, who have a greater responsibility than the apostles, because after the harvesting they sort out the good and separate them from the wicked like wheat from dandelion. The good they send on to the kingdom of heaven, but the wicked they throw into hell fire.

As for us, who in this present age are God's chosen people, a priestly race, the Church of the living God separated from all the impious and ungodly, may we be found separated from the darnel in the age to come as well, and united to those who are saved in Christ our Lord, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year B – New City Press – 1993 – pg 134

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2018

Some of St. Mechtilde's Practical Counsels taken from her "Book of Special Grace"¹

If any obstacle arises in our service of God, whether from the attitude of others, from external circumstances, from our own desires, memories, or from any other cause - whatever the impediment, we should take it as a messenger from God, sending it back to Him, so to speak, with praise and thanksgiving.

Three things very pleasing to God are: first, never to abandon one's neighbors in their needs, and to excuse their shortcomings and sins as much as possible; second, in tribulation to seek refuge only in God, abandoning to Him alone all that disquiets the heart; third, to walk with Him in truth.

When it is time to eat or to sleep, say in your heart: "Lord, in union with the love with which you created this useful thing for me, and yourself made use of it when you were on earth, I take it for your eternal praise and for my bodily need." The Blessed Virgin tells us: "if you wish to be truly holy, stay close to my Son; he is holiness itself, making all things holy."

We should be lovingly grateful not only for the spiritual blessings God gives us, but for all bodily necessities, such as food and clothing, receiving them with a sincerely thankful heart and considering ourselves unworthy of them. We should also thank God for everything that he has given to his Mother and to the angels.

Works which give no human satisfaction may nevertheless be very pleasing to God. What best pleases God in members of religious orders is purity of heart, holy desires, gentle kindness in conversation, and works of charity. When you are alone, raise your heart constantly to God, speak with him and direct all your

desire to him with great intensity. You can never be in so large a crowd that you are not alone with him.

When those who receive from lord the gift of a fine orchard, they cannot taste the fruit until it is ripe. Likewise, when one receives a special grace, any interior joy is not experienced until by the practice of mortification one has broken the hard rind of earthly pleasure.

1 Scholars and Mystics. Sr. Mary Jeremy OP. Henry Regnery Co., Chicago 1962, pp. 38-39

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2018

A Commentary on the Prophecy of Jeremiah by Ephrem the Syrian ¹

“He shall break the obelisks of the city of the sun, which is in Egypt, and the temples of the gods of the Egyptians he shall burn with fire.” The city of the sun is Egyptian Heliopolis, which was known for excessive demonic veneration and worship of futile idols. It has tall obelisks of amazing size. The height of each was up to sixty cubits, the capitals on top of the obelisks were from shining brass that weighed up to a thousand or more pounds. On these obelisks were standing images and likenesses of people and animals that the Gentiles were worshipping. Also, those obelisks were inscribed with sacred writings of pagan mysteries. It was written about these obelisks that the Lord would break them. It does not speak so much about divine destruction and demolition of these obelisks as such, as about the destruction of the worship of demons and idols, images of those who were engraved on these obelisks. It was demolished, destroyed and stopped when the Lord Christ was incarnated and came to this world. This is exactly what Isaiah proclaimed when he said: “The Lord is seated on the light cloud and comes to Egypt, and handmade Egyptian idols will tremble in front of his face.” The cloud on which the Lord is riding symbolizes for us the virgin Mary, who gave birth to God; it also symbolizes the living and clear message of the Lord’s gospel and the

¹ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture – O.T. vol XII – InterVarsity Press – Downers Grove, IL 2009 – pg 241

holy name of Christ that was proclaimed by the apostles (those divine preachers). On them, as on the light cloud, the Lord was seated and was proclaimed to the ends of the earth. Also, these clouds mystically symbolize holy prophets. Just as Isaiah writes that God, in a figurative image of the vineyard, was talking about the people of Israel, and that he would break their fence and “order the clouds that they rain no rain on it,” so likewise in this passage clouds mean prophets who rain a heavenly rain on us.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2018

The Virgin Mary and the Temple, by Fr. Yves Congar²

The only occasion on which the Gospels expressly mention the Virgin Mary in connection with the Temple are in the account of her Purification and of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (LK 2:23-38) and the finding of the child Jesus in the Temple after four days' absence on his part and three anxious searching by his parents (LK 2:42-50). To these very brief indications, the piety of Christians very soon added the idea of the presentation of Mary in the Temple at the age of three to be consecrated to the service of God. We are dealing here with a symbolical representation of a profound spiritual reality about which the tradition and the doctrine of the Church provide us with valid information. Mary, predestined to be the Mother of Jesus, true God and true man, and to be worthy of her vocation, was prepared by the gift of exceptional graces and lived with unflinching fidelity a most pure life of inner consecration to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As the type of all faithful souls and of the Church herself, Mary expressed spiritually and supremely in her life the "presentation" which, for each one of us, is to begin by the service of faith and to be consummated in heaven.

It is obvious that the tradition and doctrine of the Church may, without falling prey to the imaginary productions of the apocrypha, propound statements concerning the status of the Mother of God in relation either to the Jewish messianic temple going far beyond what we are explicitly told in the three short passages from the Gospel which narrate the incidents mentioned above. If Mary is the Mother of God,

²The Mystery of the Temple, Westminster(Maryland) 1962, p.254-255.

she has a special relation to the body of Christ which is the true temple--to his physical body and doubtless also, in a certain sense, to his body the Church. She is herself a temple of God in a quite specific and sublime way, both because Christ was within her from the moment of his conception until that of his birth, and because of the exceptional spiritual gifts she received in preparation for her divine motherhood and as a reward for her free acceptance of this vocation (LK 1:38), not only after the Annunciation but during the whole of her life. Hence the liturgy--the Oriental liturgy in particular--shows a profound understanding of the mystery of Mary when it constantly uses the texts concerning the Temple and the tabernacle in order to express it.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2018

A reading on St. Cecilia, from a homily by Ronald Knox. 1

The legends of the early Roman saints, among whom Y St. Cecilia is numbered, do not always command great attention from the critically minded historian. YBut whether the story of St. Cecilia as it is told in her acts is all true or only partly true, there is a simplicity about the whole story and a simplicity about St. Cecilia=s character in the story which demands a retelling. Let me remind you in the most general way of her story: how she was married to a young pagan called Valerian, but persuaded him to respect her vow of virginity, because her guardian angel would make him sorry for it if he did otherwise; how Valerian wanted to see this guardian angel, but Cecilia, with her innocent craft, said he could not do that unless he was baptized first; how he was baptized, and saw the angel at her side as she prayed; how he made a convert of his brother Tiburtius, and how first the two brothers, and then Cecilia herself were punished with death for professing the

Christian religion. It is an old story, and a familiar one: and while we do all homage to other great saints for their public witness to Christ, we shall always need St. Cecilia as well, quietly working at home for the conversion of her own husband and his family.

Not that St. Cecilia herself was in the position of a modern wife. Like so many Christian ladies of her time, she had taken, in imitation of our blessed Lady, a vow of perpetual virginity. These virgin martyrs were martyrs because they were virgins: it was because they insisted on keeping their vow when their parents wished them to marry that the secret of their attachment to the Christian faith was discovered; and it was their persistency in maintaining it that led to their martyrdom. It would be hard to estimate, I think, how much the unpopularity in Roman society of the Christian faith owed to its tradition of virginity. Virginity is an ideal which the pagan had no right to misunderstand. For, in theory, they, too, honored it; and it should have commended itself to their heathen instinct for sacrifice. For the point of a sacrifice is that the victim should be spotless, the best of its kind. You must offer not what you can well afford to spare, but what will cost you something. That is the pagan idea of sacrifice; and the Christian idea of sacrifice is based on the same principle. In order to give up something to God, we forgo, not the sinful pleasures which we have no right to in any case, but the lawful pleasures which he has given us to enjoy if we will. So, let St. Cecilia's feast remind us to take our Christian vocation seriously, to follow out in our lives the words we profess with our lips. And may this Roman maiden pray for us who worship here and for those who minister to us, that when Christ, the Master she served, comes again in judgment, we may be found blameless before almighty God.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2018

On Discretion. From the Rule of St. Columban for Monks.³

How necessary discretion is for monks is shown by the mistake of many, and indicated by the downfall of some, who beginning without discretion and passing their time without a sobering knowledge, have been unable to complete a

³ Sancti Columbani Opera. edited by G.S.M. Walker. The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. 1957. p.135.

praiseworthy life; since, just as error overtakes those who proceed without a path, so for those who live without discretion intemperance is at hand, and this is always the opposite of virtues which are placed in the mean between each extreme. Therefore we must pray God continually that He would bestow the light of true discretion to illumine this way, surrounded on every side by the world's thickest darkness, so that His true worshippers may be able to cross this darkness without error to Himself. So discretion has got its name from discerning, for the reason that it discerns in us between good and evil, and also between the moderate and the complete. For from the beginning either class has been divided like light and darkness, that is, good and evil, after evil began through the devil's agency to exist by the corruption of good, but through God's agency Who first illumines and then divides.

What things then are good? Doubtless those which are untouched, and have remained in the undefiled state of their creation; which God alone created and prepared, according to the Apostle, that we should walk in them; which are the good works in which in Christ Jesus we were created, namely goodness, innocence, righteousness, justice, truth, pity, love, saving peace, spiritual joy, together with the fruit of the Spirit - all these with their fruits are good. Since this is so, the good must be firmly held by those that have God's help, which is ever to be prayed for in prosperity and in adversity, lest either in prosperity we be lifted up to pride, or in adversity be cast down to despair. Thus we must always restrain ourselves from either danger, that is, from all excess by a splendid temperance and true discretion, which cleaves to Christian lowliness and opens the way of perfection to Christ's true soldiers, namely by ever discerning rightly in doubtful cases.

Thus between the little and the excessive there is a reasonable measure in the midst, which ever recalls us from every superfluity on either side, and in every case provides what is universally fixed by human need, and spurns the unreasonable demand of superfluous desire. And this measure of true discretion, weighing all our actions in the scales of justice, in no way allows us to err from what is just, or to suffer a mistake, if we ever follow straight behind it as our leader. For while we must always restrain ourselves from either side, according to that saying: "Keep

yourselves from the right and from the left," we must ever proceed straight forward by discretion, that is, by the light of God, while very often we say and sing the victorious psalmist's verse: "My God, enlighten my darkness, since in You I am rescued from temptation. For temptation is the life of humans on earth."

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2018

The martyrs' share in Christ's victory, from a letter of St Paul Le-Bao-Tinh. ⁴

I, Paul, in chains for the name of Christ, wish to relate to you the trials besetting me daily, in order that you may be inflamed with love for God and join with me in his praises, Afor his mercy is for ever.@ The prison here is a true image of everlasting hell: to cruel tortures of every kind B shackles, iron chains, manacles B are added hatred, vengeance, calumnies, obscene speech, quarrels, evil acts, swearing, curses, as well as anguish and grief. But the God who once freed the three children from the fiery furnace is with me always; he has delivered me from these tribulations and made them sweet, Afor his mercy is for ever.@

In the midst of these torments, which usually terrify others, I am, by the grace of God, full of joy and gladness, because I am not alone B Christ is with me. Our Master bears the whole weight of the cross, leaving me only the tiniest, last bit. He is not a mere onlooker in my struggle, but a contestant and the victor and champion in the whole battle. Therefore upon his head is placed the crown of victory, and his members also share in his glory.

How am I to bear with the spectacle, as each day I see emperors, mandarins, and their retinue blaspheming your holy name, O Lord, Awho are enthroned above the Cherubim and Seraphim@? Behold, the pagans have trodden your cross underfoot! Where is your glory? As I see all this, I would, in the ardent love I have for you, prefer to be torn limb from limb and to die as a witness to your love. O Lord, show your power, save me, sustain me, that in my infirmity your power may

⁴ *Le Clerge Tonkinois et Ses Pretres Martyrs*, A. Launay (Paris: Paris Foreign Mission Society, 1925), pp. 80-83.

be shown and may be glorified before the nations: grant that I may not grow weak along the way, and so allow your enemies to hold their heads up in pride.

Beloved brothers, as you hear all these things may you give endless thanks in joy to God, from whom every good proceeds; bless the Lord with me, Afor his mercy is for ever.@ AMy soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor@ on his lowly servant and from this day all generations will call me blessed, Afor his mercy is for ever.@

AO praise the Lord, all you nations, acclaim him, all you peoples,@ for AGod chose what is weak in the world to confound the strong, God chose what is low and despised@ to confound the noble. Through my mouth he has confused the philosophers who are disciples of the wise of this world, Afor his mercy is for ever.@ I write these things to you in order that your faith and mine may be united. In the midst of this storm I cast my anchor toward the throne of God, the anchor that is the lively hope in my heart.

Beloved brothers, for your part Aso run that you may attain the crown,@ put on the Abreastplate of faith@ and take up Athe weapons@ of Christ Afor the right hand and for the left,@ as my patron Saint Paul has taught us. Alt is better for you to enter life with one eye or crippled@ than, with all your members intact, to be cast away. Come to my aid with your prayers, that I may have the strength to fight according to the law, and indeed Ato fight the good fight@ and to fight until the end and so finish the race. We may not again see each other in this life, but we will have the happiness of seeing each other again in the world to come, when, standing at the throne of the spotless Lamb, we will together join in singing his praises and exult for ever in the joy of our triumph.

END OF READINGS