

SUN 12.02.18

A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke by St Gregory the Great ¹

The Lord says: *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.* He means: “Nothing that is lasting in your world lasts for eternity without change; and everything that in me is perceived as passing away is kept firm, without passing away. My utterance, which passes away, expresses thoughts that endure without change.”

My friends, what we have heard is now clear. Daily the world is oppressed by new and growing evils. You see how few of you remain from a countless people; yet daily afflictions still oppress us, sudden disasters crush us, new and unforeseen misfortunes afflict us. In youth the body is vigorous, the chest remains strong and healthy, the neck is straight, the arms muscular; in later years the body is bent, the neck scrawny and withered, the chest oppressed with difficult breathing, strength is failing, and speech is interrupted by wheezing. Weakness may not yet be present, but often in the case of the senses their healthy state is itself a malady. So too the world was strong in its early years, as in its youth: lusty in begetting offspring for the human race, green in its physical health, teeming with a wealth of resources. Now it is weighed down by its old age, and as troubles increase it is oppressed as if by the proximity of demise.

Therefore, my friends, do not love what you see cannot long exist. Keep in mind the apostle's precept, in which he counsels us *not to love the world or the things in the world, because if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* The day before yesterday, my friends, you heard that an old orchard was uprooted by a sudden hurricane, that homes were destroyed and churches knocked from their foundations. How many persons who were safe and unharmed in the evening, thinking of what they would do the next day, suddenly died that night, caught in a trap of destruction?

We must reflect that to bring these things about our unseen Judge caused the movement of a very slight breeze; he called a storm out of a single cloud and overthrew the earth; he struck the foundations of many buildings, causing them to fall. What will the Judge do when he comes in person, when his anger is burning to punish sinners, if we cannot bear him when he strikes us with an insignificant cloud? What flesh will withstand the presence of his anger, if he moved the wind and overthrew the earth, stirred up the air and destroyed so many buildings? Paul referred to this severity of the Judge who is to come and said: *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Dearly beloved, keep that day before your eyes, and whatever you now believe to be burdensome will be light in comparison with it. The Lord says of this day through the prophet: *Yet once more and I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.*

You see how he moved the air, as I said, and the earth did not withstand it. Who then will bear it when he moves the sky? What shall we call these terrors we see but heralds of the wrath to come? We must reflect that these troubles are as much unlike the final one as the herald's role is unlike the judge's power. Give hard thought to that day, dearly beloved; amend your lives, change your habits, resist and overcome your evil temptations. The more you now anticipate his severity by fear, the more securely will you behold the coming of your eternal Judge.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year C – New City Press – 1994 – pg 10

MON 12.03.18

St. Francis Xavier – from Butler’s Lives of the Saints ¹

Francis Xavier was born in Spanish Navarre at the castle of Xavier, near Pamplona, in 1506, the youngest of a large family. He entered the college of St, Barbara and in 1528 gained the degree of licentiate. It was here that he met Ignatius Loyola, and later joined with him in the first band of seven who vowed themselves to the service of God at Montmartre in 1534. With them he received the priesthood at Venice three years later and in 1540 Ignatius appointed him to join Fr. Simon Rodriguez on the first missionary expedition the Society sent out to the East Indies.

They arrived at Lisbon about the end of June and together lodged in a hospital in order to attend and instruct the sick. They made this place their ordinary dwelling, but catechized and instructed in the town. Sundays and holidays were taken up in hearing confessions at the court, for the king, John III, had a high regard for these religious; so much so that Rodriguez was eventually retained by him at Lisbon. Before he at last sailed, on his thirty-fifth birthday in 1541, the king delivered briefs from the Pope in which Francis Xavier was constituted Apostolic Nuncio in the East.

They arrived at Goa, India on May 6, 1542, after a voyage of thirteen months. Francis opened the mission with the Christians of Goa, instructing them in the principles of religion and forming the young to the practice of virtue. He walked through the streets ringing a bell to summon the children and slaves to catechism. He offered Mass with lepers each Sunday. For the instruction of the very ignorant or simple he versified the truths of religion to fit popular tunes, and this was so successful that the practice spread till these songs were being sung everywhere, in the streets and fields and workshops.

After five months Francis was told that on the Pearl Fishery coast, there were people called Paravas who had been baptized by the Portugese, but for want of instruction still retained their superstitions and vices. Xavier went to help these people. Then he preached to those Paravas to whom the name of Christ was still unknown and had great success in this. The Paravas were a low caste people and Francis had a much more difficult time among the Brahmans.

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In the spring of 1545 Francis set out for Malacca, on the Malay peninsula, where he spent four months. He was received with great reverence and cordiality, and his efforts at reform met with some success. From there he departed for India again. But before he left he heard about Japan for the first time from Portuguese merchants. The next fifteen months were spent in endless traveling between Goa, Ceylon and Cape Comorin, consolidating his work and preparing for an attempt on that Japan into which no European had yet penetrated. In April 1549 Francis set out, accompanied by a Jesuit priest and lay-brother and three Japanese converts. On the feast of the Assumption they landed in Japan, at Kagoshima on Kyushu.

Francis set himself to learn Japanese. A translation was made of a simple account of Christian teaching, and recited to all who would listen. The fruit of twelve months labor was a hundred converts, but then the authorities began to get suspicious and forbade further preaching. So, leaving one of the Japanese converts in charge of the neophytes, Francis pressed further with his companions and went by sea to Hirado, north of Nagasaki. Before leaving Kagoshima he visited the fortress of Ichiku, where the baron's wife, her steward and others accepted Christianity. Xavier left the rest in the care of the steward, and twelve years later the Jesuit lay-brother, Luis de Almeida, found these isolated converts still retaining their first fervor and faithfulness.

At Hirado the missionaries were well received by the ruler and they had more success in a few weeks than they had had at Kagoshima in a year. Xavier's objective was Miyako (Kyoto), then the chief city of Japan. In due time he was able to be received by the authorities, who gave him permission to preach and provided an empty Buddhist monastery for a residence. He preached with such fruit that he baptized many in that city.

Francis decided to revisit his charge in India, from whence he hoped to extend his mission to China. After dealing with matters in India, Xavier set sail for China. In August 1552 the convoy reached the desolate island of Shang-chwan, half-a-dozen miles off the coast and a hundred miles south-west of Hong Kong. Here Xavier fell sick with a fever and died on December 3. He was buried on the island, but his body which was found to be incorrupt, was later moved to Goa. He was canonized in 1622 at the same time as Ignatius of Loyola.

TUES 12.04.2018

A Reading from the Fourth Sermon for Advent, by Blessed Gueric of Igny.²



By the wonderful favor of God's loving care, in this solitude of ours we have the peace of solitude and yet we do not lack the consolation and comfort of holy companionship. It is possible for each of us to sit alone and be silent, because we have no one to disturb us with interruptions, and yet it cannot be said of us: "Woe to him who is alone, since he has nobody to console him or if he should fall has none to lift him up" (Ecc4:10). We are surrounded by companions, yet we are not in a crowd. We live as it were in a city, yet we have to contend with no tumult, so that the voice of one crying in the wilderness can be heard by us, provided only that we have interior silence to correspond to the exterior silence that surrounds us. "The words of the wise heard in quiet," Solomon says, "are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools." And now, if the depths of your soul were to keep a quiet silence, the all-powerful Word would flow secretly into you from the Father's throne. Happy then is the one who has so fled the world's tumult, who has so withdrawn into the solitude and secrecy of interior peace that he can hear not only the Voice of the Word but the Word himself: not John but Jesus.

Meanwhile let us hear what the Voice of the Word calls to us, so that one day we may progress from the Voice to the Word. "Prepare the way of the Lord," he says, "make straight his paths." He prepares the way who amends his life; he makes straight the path who directs his footsteps along the narrow way. An amended life is certainly the straight road by which the Lord, who in this very conversion is already there before us, may come to us. For indeed it is by the Lord that our steps are directed, and he wants the road to be such that coming along it joyfully toward us he may continually walk with us. For unless he who is the Life, the Truth, and the Way anticipates his own advent to us, our way cannot be corrected according to the model of truth, and so cannot be directed to the way of eternity. By what does a young man correct his way, if not by observing his words, if not by following in the footsteps of him who made himself the Way by which we might come to him? O that my ways may be directed to keeping your ways, O Lord, so that because of the words from your lips I may follow

²Gueric of Igny, *Liturgical Sermons*, Cistercian Fathers Series: no.8. Cistercian Publ. Spencer MA 1970. pp23-25. (Sermon 4 for Advent).

even difficult ways. And if they should seem hard to the flesh that is weak they will seem sweet and pleasant to the spirit if it is resolute. "His ways are pleasant ways and all his paths make for peace," says the inspired writer. The ways of Wisdom are not only at peace, they bring peace; for when our ways please the Lord he even makes his enemies aspire to peace..

And so, my brothers, whatever happens to you on the way of the Lord, run the way of God's commandments with a joyful and generous heart, because though the way seems narrow to the fainthearted, still it is straight, and though it seems difficult it is blameless.

WED 12.05.2018

A Reading about the fruitfulness of the desert; from a sermon by Gueric of Igny. ³

A voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord. Before anything else I think we should consider the grace of the desert, the blessedness of the desert, which right from the beginning of grace has deserved to be consecrated to the repose of the saints. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, John preaching and bestowing the baptism of repentance in the desert, certainly consecrated for us his dwelling-place in the wilderness. Yet even before him the solitude had always been dearly loved by the holiest of the prophets as a place where they could listen to the Holy Spirit. But a far greater and more divine grace came to the desert to sanctify it when Jesus took the place of John. Even before he began to preach to those doing penance he prepared a place for penitents. For forty days while he was living in the wilderness, purifying it and dedicating it as a new place for the new life, he conquered the tyrant who brooded there and all his malice and subtlety, not so much for himself as for those who would be its future inhabitants.

If then you have fled away to remain in the solitude continue to stay there; wait there for the One who will save you *from pusillanimity of spirit and the storm* (Ps 54:9). However much the storm of battles may assail you, however much you may feel the lack even of sustenance in the desert, do not because of pusillanimity of spirit return in mind to Egypt. The desert will feed you more abundantly with manna, that is, the bread of angels, than Egypt with its fleshpots. Jesus himself fasted indeed in the wilderness but the multitude that followed him into the desert he fed often and in a wonderful manner. And much more frequently and in an even more wonderful way will he satisfy the needs of all you who have followed him into the desert and whose service is all the more pleasing since your purpose is so much holier.

When you think that Jesus has forgotten you for rather too long, he himself, not unmindful of his goodness, will console you and say to you: *I remember the devotion of*

³ Sermon 4 for Advent in *Liturgical Sermons* (C F 8), Cistercian Publications, Spencer, Mass., 1970, pp. 22-23.

your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness. Then will he make your wilderness like the garden of delight, and you yourself will confess that the glory of Lebanon has been given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. For just as in many places today we are seeing fulfilled to the letter the prophecy: *The beautiful places of the wilderness shall grow fertile, strangers shall eat in the deserts now become fruitful;* so places in Scripture which previously seemed fruitless and dry will quite suddenly be filled for you at the blessing of God with a wondrous and spiritual abundance, so that from the fullness of your heart you will sing a hymn of praise, saying: *Let them praise the Lord for his mercy, for his wonderful works to the people, for he satisfied him who is thirsty and the hungry he filled with good things*(Ps 106:8f).

THUR 12.06.2018

A Reading About the Season of Advent, from *The Eternal Year* by Fr. Karl Rahner. 1

The term Advent connotes not only an arrival, but also that which is yet to come. The very word itself expresses a strange inter-penetration of the present and the future, of what now exists and what is yet to come, of possession and expectation. So too, in the liturgy of Advent, the present and the future of Christian salvation are mysteriously interwoven. The incarnation of the Word of God took place in the past and still continues in the present. Christ's return to judge all and to complete his redeeming work is an event of the future, and yet he is constantly on the point of coming. The expectation of this return and the memorial of his entrance into the world are both celebrated in the liturgy.

At one and the same time the Advent liturgy's remembrance unites all of these within itself. It unites the past, the Old Testament longing for the coming of salvation that was still hidden in God alone; the present, the salvation that is now taking place in the world but which is still hidden in Christ; and the future, the salvation that will be unveiled with the transformation of the world at the end of time. The Church must make memorial of and re-experience all three mysterious stages of salvation history. The inwardness of the salvation-less past must remain, because otherwise we would not be aware of what we are when we are left to ourselves alone, and because we would otherwise forget that if we are to possess God's grace, it must come to us from him alone. The inwardness of the salvation that is already taking place and being accomplished must remain, because it is ours only if we have grasped it in faith as that which belongs to us in the present. The inwardness of the future must remain, because the present is present only if we have seized it as the earnest that promises definitive redemption.

From this vantage point we shall once again, during this Advent, grasp more deeply what Advent faith is, and thus make our hearts ready for it. Our conception of the Christian faith is often too one-sided. We conceive it only as a set list of determined

facts that must be held as true. These facts, however, are fundamentally an event that still endures. We are situated right in the midst of this event, and we are, precisely through faith, drawn into it, so that we are caught up in it.

Here is the moment to conquer the melancholy of time, here is the moment to say softly and sincerely what we know by faith. This is the season for the word of faith to be spoken in faith: I believe in the eternity of God who has entered into our time, my time. Beneath the wearisome coming and going of time, life that no longer knows death is already secretly growing. It is already there, it is already in me, precisely because I believe. In the act of believing, I bear patiently with time, with its hard and bitter demand that brings death in its wake. And I dwell no longer on the thought that time has the last word to say, which is a denial.

Listen, my heart, God has already begun to celebrate in the world and in you his Advent. He has taken the world and its time to his heart, softly and gently, so softly that we can miss it.

FRI 12.07.18

A Reading about our reception of the Word of God, from a treatise of St Ambrose.⁴

May the study of wisdom be ever in our heart and on our lips. Let our tongue speak of justice, and the law of your God be in your heart. Hence, Scripture says: "Speak of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest."(Dt 6:7) Therefore, let us speak of the Lord Jesus, for he is wisdom, he is the word, and the Word of God.

Indeed, it is also written: "Open your mouth to the Word of god." Diffuse this word which resounds with his discourses and meditate on his words. Let us always speak of him. When we speak of wisdom, he is present; when we expound on the virtues, he is present; when we treat of justice, he is present; when we discuss peace, he is present; when we speak of truth, life, and redemption, he is present.

"Open your mouth to the Word of God," it has been written. (Pro 31:8Vulg.) You open, and he speaks. Hence, David said: "I will hear what God proclaims," (Ps 85:9) and the Son of God himself says: "Open wide your mouth, and I will fill it." (Ps 81:11) However, not everyone can understand the perfection of wisdom as Solomon did, and not everyone can understand it as Daniel did. Yet to everyone the spirit of wisdom is poured out in accord with the capability of each--but only to those who are faithful. If you believe, you will possess the spirit of wisdom.

Therefore, meditate always, speak of the things that are of God, "sitting at home."(Dt 6:7) By the word "home: we can understand the Church, and our innermost

⁴Explanations of the Psalms, 36, 65-66: CSEL 64, 123-125.

part, and so speak within ourselves. Speak thoughtfully in order to avoid sinning, lest you fall by speaking too much. When sitting, speak to yourself as if you were the one who judges. Speak on the street, so that you may never be unoccupied. You speak on the street if you speak about Christ, for the street is Christ. On the street, speak to yourself, speak to Christ.

Listen to how you can speak to him: "It is my wish," he has said, "that in every place the men shall offer prayers with blameless hands held aloft, and be free from anger and dissension."(1Tim 2:8) Speak, O believer, when you are sleeping. so that the sleep of death will not take you by surprise. Listen to how you could speak when sleeping: "I will give my eyes no sleep, my eyelids no rest, till I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob."(Ps 132:4-5)

When you rise or awake, speak of him, in order to fulfill what is commanded you. Listen to how Christ awakens you. Your soul says: "I heard my brother knocking"; and Christ exclaims: "Open to me, my sister, my beloved."(Sng 5:2Vulg) Listen to how you can awaken Christ. The soul says: "I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, arouse and stir up love."(Sng 3:5) Love is Christ.

SAT 12.08.18

A Homily for the Immaculate Conception of Mary by Sophronius of Jerusalem 1

Hail full of grace, the Lord is with you. Truly blessed are you among women, for you have changed the curse of Eve into a blessing and caused Adam, once accursed, to be blessed through you. Truly blessed are you among women, for it was through you that the Father's blessing dawned on humankind and freed it from the ancient curse. Truly blessed are you among women, for through you your ancestors will be saved, since you are going to bear the Savior who will gain them God's salvation. Truly blessed are you among women, for without seed you produced the fruit that brings blessing to all the earth, releasing it from the curse that made it bear thorns. Truly blessed are you among women, for though by nature you are a woman, you will in very truth become the mother of God: if he who is to be born of you is truly God incarnate, then, since you will be giving birth to God, you will with perfect justice be called the mother of God.

Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God that can never be lost. You have won from God a most glorious favor, a grace long desired, a grace of great splendor, a saving grace, an unfailing grace, a grace that will last for ever. Many before you have been holy, but no one has been as favored as you, no one as blessed as you, no one as perfectly sanctified as you, no one as highly praised as you. No one else has like you been possessed from the first by purifying grace, no one else has been enlightened like you, or exalted like you, for no one has approached so close to God as you, or been enriched with such divine gifts, or endowed with such heavenly grace.

You surpass all human desire; you surpass all the gifts given by God to the whole human race, for God's dwelling within you has made you richer than all others. No one else has been able to contain God as you do; no one else has been capable of receiving God as you have; no one else has deserved to be so enlightened by God. And therefore you have not only received God, the Creator and Lord of the universe, but He has in an unheard-of way taken flesh from you; you bear him in your womb, and will later give birth to him who will redeem humankind from the Father's sentence, and confer on it eternal salvation.