

LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY
VIGILS READINGS: Second Week in Advent
December 9-15, 2018

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2018

A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke by Origen of Alexandria [1](#)

The word of God was addressed to John, son of Zechariah, in the desert, and he went through all the Jordan valley. Where else could he go but through the Jordan valley, where there would be water at hand to baptize those wishing to amend their lives?

Now the word Jordan means descent or coming down. Coming down and rushing in full flood is the river of God, the Lord our Savior, in whom we were baptized. This is the real, life-giving water, and the sins of those baptized in it are forgiven.

So come, catechumens, and amend your lives so that you may have your sins forgiven in baptism. In baptism the sins of those who cease to sin are forgiven, but if anyone comes to be baptized while continuing to sin, that person's sins are not forgiven. This is why I urge you not to present yourselves for baptism without thinking very carefully, but to give some evidence that you really mean to change your way of living. Spend some time living a good life. Cleanse yourselves from all impurity and avoid every sin. Then when you yourselves have begun to despise your sins, they will be forgiven you. You will be forgiven your sins if you renounce them.

The teaching of the Old Testament is the same. We read in the prophet Isaiah: *A voice cries out in the desert: Prepare a way for the Lord. Build him a straight highway.* What way shall we prepare for the Lord? A way by land? Could the Word of God travel such a road? Is it not rather a way within ourselves that we have to prepare for the Lord? Is it not a straight and level highway in our hearts that we are to make ready? Surely this is the way by which the Word of God enters, a way that exists in the spaciousness of the human body. The human heart is vast, broad, and capacious, if only it is pure. Would you like to know its length and breadth? See then what a vast amount of divine knowledge it can contain.

Solomon says: He gave me knowledge of all that exists: he taught me about the structure of the universe and the properties of the elements, the beginning and the end of epochs and the periods between, the variations in the seasons and the succession of the months, the revolution of the year and the position of the stars, the nature of living things and the instincts of wild animals, the force of the winds and the thoughts of human beings, the various kinds of plants and the medicinal properties of roots.

You must realize that the human heart is not small when it can contain all of this. You ought to judge it not by its physical size but by its power to embrace such a vast amount of knowledge of the truth.

But so that I may convince you that the human heart is large by a simple example from daily life, let us consider this. Whatever city we may have passed through, we have in our minds. We remember its streets, walls, and buildings, what they were like and where they were situated. We have a mental picture of the roads we have traveled. In moments of quiet reflection our minds embrace the sea that we have crossed. So, as I said, the heart that can contain all this is not small!

Therefore, if what contains so much is not small, let a way be prepared in it for the Lord, a straight highway along which the Word and Wisdom of God may advance. Prepare a way for the Lord by living a good life and guard that way by good works. Let the Word of God move in you unhindered and give you a knowledge of his coming and of his mysteries. To him be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year C – New City Press – 1994 – pg 12

MONDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2018

ADVENT AS PARTICIPATION IN THE KENOSIS OF CHRIST, from a Book by Thomas Merton¹

[We must try to] understand the kenotic quality of the Advent mystery. The Christ who emptied himself taking the form of a servant, dying on the Cross for us, brought us the plenitude of his gifts and of his salvation. But he continues in us

¹SEASONS OF CELEBRATION, by Thomas Merton (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, NY 1965) pp. 93-95.

a kenotic and hidden existence. The fullness of time is the time of his emptiness in us. The fullness of time is the time of our emptiness, which draws Christ down into our lives so that in us and through us he may bring the fullness of his truth to the world.

Here is where we must beware of our own biased concepts of "fullness" and of "fulfillment". It is true that the glory and the presence of Christ have sometimes visibly overflowed not only in spiritual charismata, but also in what one might call the charism of culture. But obviously this "charism" is at best metaphorical or analogous, since it involves the "baptizing" of forms that are very limited both in time and in geography. The more we are "full" with these fulfillments, and the more we identify the countenance of a prosperous culture with the face of the glorified Kyrios, the more we tend to be deceived by projection and wish-fulfillment, the greater the danger that our Christianity will become a vain "boast" in the sight of God. In such a case, the Advent of the Lord demands nothing more or less than a return to the "emptiness" of faith. It may even mean the destruction of the false image which we had set up in honor of our own achievement or which, set up in honor of the Lord, was yet not worthy of Him.

If the Lord wishes to live in us His self-emptying, his kenosis, it is not likely that he will tolerate in us the fullness and self-congratulation of collective arrogance. Upon whom will his Spirit rest but upon the humble and poor? This does not mean that occasional or even widespread pride may validly cast doubts upon the truth of the Church: but it does mean that the strength and holiness of the Church are not, at that moment, where they are supposed and claimed to be. Indeed, it may happen that the best Christians are among those who think themselves for some reason or other bad Christians. This, too, may be part of the mystery of Advent, and it can remind us of Christ's way, as recorded in the Gospels: He came most readily and most willingly to those who had most need of him, that is to the unfortunate, the sinful, the destitute--those who were "empty"

The Advent mystery is then a mystery of emptiness, of poverty, of limitation. It must be so. Otherwise it could not be a mystery of hope.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2018

The Sacrament of Advent in the Thought of St. Bernard. From a book by Thomas Merton.²

The **sacramentum** which St. Bernard finds in Advent is the **sacramentum**, the **mysterium** of which St. Paul writes to the Ephesians. It is the "sacrament" (or "mystery") of the divine will, according to the design which it pleased God to form in Christ, to be realized in the fullness of time, **to unite all things in Christ**. This mystery is the revelation of God Himself in His Incarnate son. But it is not merely a manifestation of the Divine Perfections; it is the concrete plan of God for the salvation of all peoples and the restoration of the whole world in Christ.

This plan is envisaged not as a future prospect but as a present **fact**. The "last things" are already present and realized in a hidden manner. The Kingdom of God is thus already "in the midst of us". But, the mystery can only be known by those who enter into it, who find their place in the Mystical Christ, and therefore find the mystery of Christ realized and fulfilled in themselves. For these the Kingdom of God is mysteriously present. They not only enter the Church, or enter Christ, but Christ becomes their life ("For me to live in Christ"). They participate in the glory of the saints in light. In a certain sense they become the "Church" since they live entirely by the Church, and the Church lives in them.

Bernard sees the Sacrament of Advent is the **Presence of Christ in the world** as Savior. In his theology Advent does not merely commemorate the Incarnation as a historical event, nor is it a mere devotional preparation for the Feast of Christmas, nor an anticipation of the Last Judgment. It is above all the "sacrament" of the Presence of God in the world and in time in His Incarnate

² Seasons of Celebration. Thomas Merton. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. New York. 1965.p.63

Word, in His Kingdom, above all His presence in **our own** lives as **our** Savior. The sacrament of Advent is the "necessary presence of Christ". Here he repeats in more concrete and practical terms his statement of the necessity of our finding Christ the Savior here and now among us, that was brought out at the beginning of St. Bernard's First Advent Sermon. There are three reasons for our misery and helplessness:

we are easily seduced - we are deceived in our judgments of good and evil;

we are weak in acting - our attempts to do good fail, lead to nothing;

we are fragile to resist - we do not succeed in our efforts to resist evil.

The presence of Christ in us overcomes these obstacles. By **faith** He dwells in our heart and shows us how to judge between good and evil. "For if He is in us, who can deceive us?" He cannot deceive or be deceived. He is the wisdom of God, always ready to teach us. Yet in order to have His light, we must use the grace He gives us to turn to Him in our difficulties. By **fortitude** He strengthens our weakness, so that we can do all things in Him. He never grows tired, for He is the power of God, ever ready to revive us and lift us up. But we must call upon Him for help in our battles. Finally, He "stands for" us, He resists within us. If He be for us, who is against us?

The secret of spiritual fortitude is for us to abandon ourselves to Christ, the power of God, and then He Himself will overcome evil and deliver us from forces that we would never be capable of resisting by ourselves. This is the fortitude of faith.

Christ lives in the world in those who take Him for their light, their strength and their protection. It is for them that He came into the world in His Incarnation.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2018

The appearance of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Guadalupe, Mexico: a reading from the first account in the Aztec Tongue. ³

Upon his reaching the top of the hillock, Juan Diego catches sight of a woman, one who has been taking her stand there. She beckons him to come on, closer up to herself. Upon reaching her presence, he greatly marvels at her extreme, her surpassing, her perfect wonderfulness.

Her garments are as the sun, gleaming, glittering. Even the boulder, the crag, on which she takes her stand sparkles in resplendence, like fine emerald jade or a bangle when it shines, like the swarming glow of a rainbow in the gloom. Even the soil, the brambles and prickles and the rest of the varied weeds that struggle to survive there are shining like emerald, like divine turquoise, to the tip of every leaf; are glittering like the golden scourings of the gods up every stalk and twig and thorn.

In her presence he prostrates; he listens to her utterance, her declaration. These are as of one who sets others at ease, one whose manner is to attract, one whose attitude is to esteem. She addresses him: "Do listen to me, my littlest one, Juanito! Whither are you betaking yourself?"

He in turn makes reply: "My sovereign, O Woman, my Maiden, it is yonder that I am bound, to your dwelling in Mexico-Tlatilolko, in pursuit of things divine which they minister to us, which they teach to us, those representatives of the Person of our Sovereign, who are our priests." Forthwith she informs him, she

³ GUADALUPE, a translation of the NICAN MOPOHUA by Fr Martinus Cawley, OCSO; CARA Studies on Popular Devotion, vol.II; Guadalupan Studies Monograph No. 6.

presents to him her sacred wish. She addresses him: "Do know this, do be assured of it in your heart, my littlest one, that I myself, I am the entirely and ever Virgin Saint Mary, Mother of the True Divinity, God Himself: Because of Him, life goes on, Creation goes on; His are all things afar, His are all things near at hand, things above in the heavens, things here below on the earth. How truly I wish it, how greatly I desire it, that here they should erect me my temple! Here would I show forth, here would I lift up to view, here would I make a gift of all my fondness for my dear ones, all my regard for my needy ones, my willingness to aid them, my readiness to protect them. For truly I myself, I am your compassionate mother, yours, for you yourself, for everybody here in the land, for each and all together, for all others too, for all folk of every kind, who do but cherish me, who do but raise their voices to me, who do but seek me, who do but raise their trust to me.

For here I shall listen to their groanings, to their saddenings; here shall I make well and heal up their each and every kind of disappointment, of exhausting pangs, of bitter aching pain."

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2018

THE VIRGIN-MIND IN OUR LIVES, from a book by Caryll Houselander⁴

REGAINING

The whole process of contemplation through imitation of Our Lady can be gone through, in the first place, with just that simple purpose of regaining the virgin-mind, and as we go on in the attempt we shall find that over and over again there is a new emptying process; it is a thing which has to be done in contemplation as often as the earth has to be sifted and the field ploughed for seed.

At the beginning it will be necessary for each individual to discard deliberately all the trifling unnecessary things in his life, all the hard blocks and congestions; not necessarily to discard all his interests for ever, but at least once to stop still, and having prayed for courage, to visualize himself without all the extras, escapes, and interests other than Love in his life: to see ourselves as if we had just

⁴THE REED OF GOD, Caryll Houselander (Arena Lettres, NJ 1978) pp. 3-4.

come from God's hand and had gathered nothing to ourselves yet, to discover just what shape *is* the virginal emptiness of our own being, and of what material we are made. We need to be reminded that every second of our survival does really mean that we are new from God's fingers, so that it requires no more than the miracle which we never notice to restore to us our virgin-heart at any moment we like to choose.

Our own effort will consist in sifting and sorting out everything that is not essential and that fills up space and silence in us and in discovering what sort of shape this emptiness in us, is. From this we shall learn what sort of purpose God has for us. In what way are we to fulfill the work of giving Christ life in us. Are we reed pipes? Is He waiting to live lyrically through us? Are we chalices? Does He ask to be sacrificed in us? Are we nests? Does He desire of us a warm, sweet abiding in domestic life at home? These are only some of the possible forms of virginity; each person may find some quite different form, his own secret... It is the purpose for which something is made that decides the material which is used...

The purpose for which human beings are made is told to us briefly in the catechism. It is to know, love and serve God in this world and to be happy with Him for ever in the next. This knowing, loving, and serving is far more intimate than that rather cold little sentence reveals to us. The material which God has found apt for it is human nature; blood, flesh, bone, salt, water, will, intellect. It is impossible to say too often or too strongly that human nature, body and soul together, is the material for God's will in us. There are many people in the world who cultivate a curious state which they call "the spiritual life." They often complain that they have very little time to devote to the "spiritual life." The only time that they do not regard as wasted is the time they can devote to pious exercises: praying, reading, meditations, and visiting the church.

All the time spent in earning a living, cleaning the home, caring for the children, making and mending clothes, cooking, and all the other manifold duties and responsibilities, is regard as wasted. Yet it is really through ordinary human life and the things of every hour of every day that union with God comes about.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2018

“Love of the Cross: Some Thoughts for the Feast of St. John of the Cross;” an essay by St. Edith Stein. ¹

We hear repeatedly that St. John of the Cross desired nothing for himself but to suffer and be despised. We want to know the reason for this love of suffering. Is it merely the loving remembrance of the path of suffering of our Lord on earth, a tender impulse to be humanly close to him by a life resembling his? This does not seem to correspond to the lofty and strict spirituality of the mystical teacher. And in relation to the Man of Sorrows, it would almost seem that the victoriously enthroned king, the divine conqueror of sin, death and hell is forgotten. Did not Christ lead captivity captive? Has he not transported us into a kingdom of light and called us to be happy children of our heavenly Father?

The sight of the world in which we live, the need and misery, and the abyss of human malice, again and again dampens jubilation over the victory of light. The world is still deluged by mire, and still only a small flock has escaped from it to the highest mountain peaks. The battle between Christ and the Antichrist is not yet over. The followers of Christ have their place in this battle, and their chief weapon is the cross.

What does this mean? The burden of the cross that Christ assumed is that of corrupted human nature, with all its consequences in sin and suffering to which fallen humanity is subject. The meaning of the way of the cross is to carry this burden out of the world. The restoration of freed humanity to the heart of the heavenly Father, taking on the status of a child, is the free gift of grace, of merciful love. But this may not occur at the expense of divine holiness and justice. The entire sum of human failures from the first Fall up to the Day of Judgment must be blotted out by a corresponding measure of expiation. The way of the cross is this expiation. The triple collapse under the burden of the cross corresponds to the triple fall of humanity: the first sin, the rejection of the Savior by his chosen people, the falling away of those who bear the name of Christian.

¹ from *The Hidden Life*, volume 4 of The Collected Works of Edith Stein, edited by L. Gelber and Michael Linnssen; translated by Waltraut Stein; Washington, D. C.: ICS Publications, 1992, pp. 91-93.

The Savior is not alone on the way of the cross. Not only are there adversaries around him who oppress him, but also people who succor him. The archetype of followers of the cross for all time is the Mother of God. ...Everyone who, in the course of time, has borne an onerous destiny in remembrance of the suffering Savior or who has freely taken up works of expiation has by doing so canceled some of the mighty load of human sin and has helped the Lord carry his burden.... The disciples, both men and women, who surrounded [the Savior] during his earthly life, assist him on the second stretch. The lovers of the cross whom he has awakened and will always continue to awaken anew in the changeable history of the struggling church, these are his allies at the end of time. We, too, are called for that purpose.

Thus, when someone desires to suffer, it is not merely a pious reminder of the suffering of the Lord. Voluntary expiatory suffering is what truly and really unites one to the Lord intimately. When it arises, it comes from an already existing relationship with Christ. For, by nature, a person flees from suffering. And the mania for suffering caused by a perverse lust for pain differs completely from the desire to suffer in expiation. Such lust is not a spiritual striving, but a sensory longing no better than other sensory desires, in fact worse, because it is contrary to nature. Only someone whose spiritual eyes have been opened to the supernatural correlations of worldly events can desire suffering in expiation, and this is only possible for people in whom the spirit of Christ dwells, who as members are given life by the Head, receive his power, his meaning, and his direction. Conversely, works of expiation bind one closer to Christ, as every community that works together on one task becomes more and more closely knit and as the limbs of a body, working together organically, continually become more strongly one.

But because *being* one with Christ is our sanctity, and progressively *becoming* one with him our happiness on earth, the love of the cross in no way contradicts being a joyful child of God. Helping Christ carry his cross fills one with a strong and pure joy, and those who may and can do so, the builders of God's kingdom, are the most authentic children of God. And so those who have a predilection for the way of the cross by no means deny that Good Friday is past and that the work of

salvation has been accomplished. Only those who are saved, only children of grace, can in fact be bearers of Christ's cross. Only in union with the divine Head does human suffering take on expiatory power. To suffer and to be happy although suffering, to have one's feet on the earth, to walk on the dirty and rough paths of this earth and yet to be enthroned with Christ at the Father's right hand, to laugh and cry with the children of this world and ceaselessly sing the praises of God with the choirs of angels — this is the life of the Christian until the morning of eternity breaks forth.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2018

Advent as a time of hope; a reading from the book *Seasons of Celebration* by Thomas Merton.⁵

St. Gregory the Great said that all Christians should continue the prophetic mission of John the Baptist and point out the presence of Christ in the world. This may mean many different things. John was able to point out Christ at the Jordan, in a moment of fulfillment, which gave meaning to his whole life. But John also had to witness to Christ in prison, in face of death, in failure, when even the meaning of his other glorious moment seemed to have been cancelled out.

So too, we may at times be able to show the world Christ in moments when all can clearly discern in history some confirmation of the Christian message. But the fact remains that our task is to seek and find Christ in the world as it is, and not as it **might be**. The fact that the world is other than it might be does not alter the truth that Christ is present in it and that His plan has been neither frustrated nor changed: indeed, all will be done according to His will. Our Advent is the celebration of this hope. What is uncertain is not the "coming" of Christ but our own reception of Him, our own response to Him, our own readiness and capacity to "go forth to meet Him." We must be willing to see Him and acclaim Him, as John did, even at the very moment when our whole life's work and all its meaning seem to collapse. Indeed, more formidable still, the Church herself may perhaps be called upon some

⁵ New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965, p. 90.

day to point out the Victorious Redeemer and King of Ages amid the collapse of all that has been laboriously built up by the devotion of centuries and cultures that sincerely intended to be Christian.

The Advent of Christ in history is not essentially bound up with the development and progress of a Christian **civilization**. "Christendom" is, and has been a great thing, but it has never been an absolute and unqualified good or an end in itself. **Christendom** is not **Christianity**. It is not "the Kingdom" and it is not the Mystical Christ.

The reality of Christian culture certainly flows from the presence of Christ in the world, but it is not identical with that presence. Our Advent is, then, not a celebration of mere traditional cultural values, however great, however worthy of perpetuation. Advent is not a mere return, a recurrence, and a renewal of the old. It cannot be a return to childhood, whether personal or social. The coming of the Lord, which is the same as His "presence", is the coming of the new, not the renewal of the old, and Sacred History is like the Heraklitean river in which no one steps twice. *=over*

Yet, since the Kingdom is the "fullness of time" it does in some sense make the past present in its fulfillment. But the past fulfilled is not the past, it is not merely renewed, it is completely transformed into the present. Baptism is the fulfillment of the Exodus, not its commemoration. The Eucharist is the Sacrifice of the Lord made present in its eternal reality, not reenacted in a ritual drama which revives the past.

We believe that He who has come and will come is present here and now: that we are in His Kingdom. Not only that, but we **are** His Kingdom. And I think that explains why we are not always too happy about asking John's question, since it implies a questioning of ourselves, of our life, of our part in history, of the very meaning of Christ in His Church.

The fullness of time is the time of Christ's emptiness in us. The fullness of time is the time of our emptiness, which draws Christ down into our lives so that in us and through us He may bring the fullness of His truth to the world.

END OF READINGS