

**THE GIVING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE BAPTISM OF JESUS,
from a homily by Bede the Venerable¹**

And John gave testimony, saying, 'I saw the Spirit descending like a dove from heaven, and it rested on him'. It is good that the Spirit descended upon the Lord in the form of a dove, so that the faithful may learn that they cannot be filled with his Spirit unless they are simple, unless they possess true peace with their brothers and sisters, which is signified by the kiss of doves. Ravens also have kisses, but they tear flesh (which a dove does not do at all), signifying those *who speak peace with their neighbor, but wicked things are in their hearts.* A dove, which by nature is innocent of the tearing of flesh, most suitably fits those innocents who pursue peace and sanctity with everyone, *solicitous to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* And so the Spirit, by descending as a dove, does not represent merely its own innocence and simplicity, or that of him on whom it descended, but likewise that of those who *think of him in goodness and seek him in simplicity of heart.* The Lord himself says in praise of the piety that they share with one accord, and of the gentleness granted by a spiritual grace, *One is my dove; she is the only one of her mother, the elect of her progenetrix.* Indeed, he calls the grace of the Spirit 'the mother and progenetrix of the Church'. By that inspiring grace she too receives the capacity of being rightly called a dove. Accordingly, in Hebrew, the language in which holy scripture was set forth, 'spirit' is a name that is feminine in gender. On this account, the Church is appropriately given the name 'the one dove of Christ,' and 'the elect of her mother and progenetrix,' for undoubtedly it is not because of her own merits, but because of gift of spiritual grace she has received, that she is gathered into the unity of the Christian faith from many nations, that she is gladdened by a mutual dove-like peace, and that she is blessed by her share in election.

'And I,' John says, *'was not aware of him'.* You understand what is implied: 'I did not recognize him as sublimely as I recognized him when the Spirit descended upon him'. *'But he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "The one upon whom you will see the Spirit descending and resting upon him, he it is who baptizes with the Holy Spirit."* The Lord baptizes with the Holy Spirit, pardoning sins through the gift of the Holy Spirit. For either he would first baptize some of his disciples with water, through whom the river of baptism would flow to the rest of the faithful; he would baptize them too with the Spirit by unloosing them from

¹HOMILIES ON THE GOSPEL, Bede the Venerable, Trans. by L. Martin & D. Hurst (Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo MI 1991) pp. 150-152.

their sins and administering the gifts of the Spirit--or else his faithful, calling upon his name, would baptize the elect with water and anoint them with sacred chrism. Nevertheless, he himself baptizes them in the Holy Spirit, for no one except him is capable of releasing the bonds of sins or of bestowing the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The Prophecy of Jeremiah – From a Commentary by Fr Lawrence Boadt, C.S.P.²

Ch. 49 contains a series of shorter oracles against foreign powers. These are usually single poems. Ch. 49:1-6 are directed against the Ammonites Ammon covered the area inland from the Jordan River just above and east of the Dead Sea. Its capital, Rabbath-Ammon, still flourishes as Amman, the modern capital of Jordan. Because of its location away from the Jordan River, Ammon was bound to come into conflict with the Israelite tribe of Gad that also lived on the East bank of the river. Fights and border struggles were common.

The oracle of Jeremiah begins with a reminder of how Ammon took over the land belonging to Gad, then launches into the threatening prediction that “the days are coming” when this shall be reversed in a terrible battle and the people of Ammon shall go into exile the same as Israel’s people had.

² Old Testament Message – vol. 10 – Michael Glazier. Wilmington, DE 1982 – pg.

A Reading on the greatness of obedience, from the book *Christ, The Ideal of the Monk* by Dom Columba Marmion.³

The virtue [of obedience] is only acquired and strengthened by corresponding acts [of obedience]. Now, in the measure that we advance in maturity of mind or are inclined to take more initiative, we realize the more the truth of these words of the Psalmist recalled by our Holy Father: *You have placed authorities over our heads.* Our holy Legislator gives us moreover to understand that obedience can become very hard to [our] nature; in his fourth degree of humility he speaks of *hard and contrary things, even injuries,* which may befall us in the course of obedience: he warns us that *narrow is the way,* but he adds - *which leads to life.* If indeed we submit with faith we may be assured, as St. Benedict guarantees, that each of our acts done under these difficult circumstances will turn to good, and our virtue will go on strengthening. God's glory triumphs precisely in using our frailty and errors for the good of those who trust in God.

Our holy Father's words should then be ever before our eyes. The more we see Christ in the Abbot, the more we enter into this life of faith, the more too will the Abbot become for us a cause of eternal salvation and of perfection.

There is yet more. The soul who yields itself up by a like obedience into God's hands can be compared to an arrow of election, shot by the hand of a mighty archer. The soul that possesses this supernatural suppleness of obedience is capable of great things, because if it can count upon God, God can count upon and be sure of it; and very often, God uses these souls for work wherein God's glory is particularly at stake. But God uses them through obedience, in order to preserve them in humility. However high be the aim, the fully obedient soul reaches it; however arduous be the work, it accomplishes it to perfection, for the strong God is with this soul which has at its disposition the very power of God.

We are therefore not surprised at the prodigies performed by those who, forgetting themselves and stripped of self, are invested by obedience with power from on high. A very remarkable example of this is given in the well-known episode recounted in the Dialogues of St. Gregory. The young Placid having fallen into the Lake of Subiaco, St. Benedict orders his disciple Maurus to go and pull the child out of the water, and St. Maurus, in the promptitude of his obedience, walks on water, and brings back St. Placid safe and sound.

It is this faith alone that can assure the security of our monastic life. As long as we see Christ in the Superior, we shall participate, like St. Peter walking upon the waves, in the Divine immunity; as soon as the breath of doubt touches our heart, we shall sink. The soul who obeys in faith in God's word is not supported solely by natural strength; it has the right of counting upon the very power of God. Do not be astonished in that I have insisted so much upon the part that faith holds in religious obedience. It is a most

³ B. Herder Book Co., 1926, pp. 271-272.

important part. Faith makes our obedience safe and guarantees its fruitfulness; it also makes its greatness.

The Divine Call – from a book by Hans Urs von Balthasar ⁴

Christian revelation is primarily a revelation of hearing, not of seeing. Although the image of seeing is not excluded – for “we see now through a mirror in an obscure manner” (I Cor 13:12); wisdom, when it appears, is the “mirror ... and image” of the divine goodness (Wis 7:26); and Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15) so that, in seeing him, we also see the Father (Jn 14:9) – nevertheless the comparison with hearing is the dominant one in revelation: the Second Person is heard primarily as “Word” (Jn 1:1) and faith in him comes by hearing (Rom 10:17). The hearing of the Word is by no means a temporary substitute for the seeing that is wanting to us here below. On the contrary, it is the lasting proof that God never is and never will be a mere “object” of knowledge to us, but is rather the infinitely sovereign majesty of a Trinity of Persons that makes itself known in whatever way and to whomever it wills. That God speaks to us in his personal word is a greater grace than that we are allowed to see him: That we are deemed worthy of his word is the grace of graces that makes us partners in a divine, even Trinitarian, conversation. That the word of God is spoken to us is the highest revelation and honor the personal God can bestow upon us, for it presumes that God considers us capable of understanding his word through the gift of his grace and of possessing the Spirit who “searches all things, even the deep things of God, that we may know all things that have been given us by God” (I Cor 2:10,12). So tremendous is this grace that the creature thus addressed by God must forget its own wishes and desires, even its longing for “eternal happiness” and for the “vision of God” so that, trembling in the depths of its being, it may fall to the ground and hear his voice (cf. Acts 9:4) only to ask: “What shall I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10)

But one who has been thrown to the ground by the impact of this compelling voice is also “set upon his feet” by it. When God speaks, He wants a partner. He wants one who is erect, who, hearing his voice, is yet able to stand upon his feet and answer: “...I fell upon my face, and I heard the voice of the one that spoke. And he said to me: Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I will speak to you. And the Spirit entered into me after he spoke to me, and he set me upon my feet; and I heard him speaking to me...” (Ezek 2:1-2). When God speaks personally, he wants to be understood personally; when he utters his personal word into the world, he wants that word to be returned to him, not as a dead echo, but as a personal response from his creature in an exchange that is genuinely a dialogue even though it can be conducted only in the unity of the divine Word that mediates between the Father and us. But just as that divine Word proceeds from the Father, yet is not the Father, but only declares the Father, so the creature can give back to the Father this word it has received by uttering itself in it – or better, by letting itself be uttered by it.

⁴ The Christian State of Life – Hans Urs von Balthasar – Ignatius Press – San Francisco – 1983
– pg 393

The Ascetical Discourse of St. Anthony. From the Life by St. Athanasius.¹

All the monks were one day gathered around Anthony so as to hear his words. He said to them with the authority of a prophet: "The Holy Scriptures are sufficient for our instruction; nevertheless it is a good thing to encourage each other mutually in the faith and to urge one another in discourse. You, therefore, in a filial manner, bring what you know to your father, and I, your elder, will transmit to you something of what I have experienced.

In the first place, let us all endeavor together not to become lax after having begun well, and not to be discouraged in the face of difficulties. Let us not say to ourselves: We have been living the ascetical life for a long time. On the contrary, let us increase our ardor every day as if we were just beginning, for a person's whole life is very short compared with the centuries to come, and the whole of time present is nothing compared with eternal life. Everything in this world is sold at its value, or exchanged for something of the same worth, but the promise of eternal life is bought cheaply. After combatting on earth we shall obtain no earthly inheritance but a celestial one, and when we have left this corruptible body we shall receive it again incorruptible. Therefore, dear sons, let us not be discouraged nor find the time long. Let us not believe ourselves doing too much, for 'The sufferings of this present time cannot be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us.' (Rom. 8:18)

For this reason, my sons, let us remain firm in asceticism and flee from sloth. The Lord is working with us, as it is written: 'God collaborates for good with the one who has chosen what is good.' (Rom.8:28). In order to avoid negligence we will do well to meditate upon the Apostle's words: 'I die every day' (I Cor. 15:31). If, in fact, we live as if each day were that of our death, we shall not sin. This means that every day, on waking, we must think that we shall not last until evening; and every night, in falling asleep, we must think that we shall not reawaken.

Having thus begun and walked along the path of virtue, let us press straight on, straining forward. Let no one look back, like Lot's wife, especially as the Lord has said: 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.' (Lk. 9:62) Looking back is nothing else than feeling regret, and renewing a taste for things of the world.

Do not fear, on hearing talk of virtue, that it will remain foreign to you. It is not far from us nor outside of us. It is a work which is taking place within us, and an easy thing if only we wish it. The Greeks leave their country and cross the sea to gain learning, but as for us we have no need to travel to obtain the kingdom of heaven, nor to cross the ocean to become instructed in virtue.

The Lord indeed said: 'The kingdom of God is within you.' (Lk. 17:21). So virtue has need only of our will, as it is in us and finds its source in ourselves. To have a righteous soul is just a matter of keeping one's soul in conformity with its nature and in the state in which it was created. It is when it deviates and turns away from its nature that one calls it vicious. It is not a difficult thing then if we remain in the state in which we were created, we are in virtuousness; but if, on the contrary, we give ourselves up to evil thoughts we shall be condemned as wicked. If we had to go outside of ourselves to acquire virtue, it would be difficult; but since it is actually within us, let us keep ourselves from evil thoughts and preserve our soul for the Lord as a trust received from him, to the end that he may recognize his handiwork, for it is in the state in which he formed it.

[1 The Writings of the Saints: The Holy Monks of the East.](#) Life of St. Anthony by St. Athanasius. A.I.M. Center, St. Louis, Mo.

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The Prophecy of Jeremiah - From a Commentary by Fr Lawrence Boadt, C.S.P. ⁵

God is a redeemer, the one who releases a relative from prison, pays the debts, buys the property to keep it in the family if a member has to sell. It captures the essence of the God of Exodus c.6. Many of the laws regarding human “redeemers” can be found in Leviticus ch. 25.

Throughout ch. 50, a theme of God’s work or plan is hinted at repeatedly. Isaiah had used this point in his preaching to call Israel to obedience to the covenant and away from political alliances with pagan nations. It implies a trust that God controls the destinies of nations and that he will protect the good as well as punish the wicked. Spoken here against Babylon, it implies God’s vengeance will be inexorable. Nothing shall reverse it until it is completed.

⁵ Old Testament Message – vol 10 Michael Glazier, Inc. – Wilmington, DE – 1982 – pg 142

A reading about Mary and the birth of her Son, from the writings of Pierre de Bérulle.⁶

The Virgin was so careful, as the gospel teaches us on two occasions, to gather up the actions and words of other people regarding her Son and to preserve them in her heart, not allowing a single word about such a great reality to fall to earth: *Mary kept every word (every, it says), reflecting on them in her heart* (Lk 2:19). How much more then should she be attentive to the interior and divine actions of her Son, which, although the world cannot see them, her insight made known to her? They are so much more excellent because their source is of greater worth. They can be imprinted only in the sacred heart and the divinized Spirit of Jesus. Therefore the Virgin is enraptured by Jesus and doubly delighted by him; delighted, I say, by his state within her and by the interior exercises of his Spirit, while he lives in her. For this is the most worthy object that exists after the Godhead itself.

Nevertheless, it is necessary that I discover some humiliation in the midst of these grandeurs, bitterness among the sweetness. I would wrong the author of these mysteries and the truth of this story if I did not present it as it is; if I did not describe truthfully what is happening, either in the state of the Son or in the state of the Blessed Mother. I must not omit, therefore, that in the midst of these grandeurs to which the Virgin is exalted, that in these raptures where she is established, I discover there the cross and humiliation. For our mysteries are for God himself both cross and humiliation.

She should have begot him as immortal. She begot him as mortal. He should have been born from her as he was born from the tomb, full of glory and splendor. She begot him vulnerable to our lowliness and misery. She should have begot him in paradise, in heaven, in the bosom of the Father. For he is his Son and will be one day elevated to the throne at the right hand, in the bosom of the Godhead. She begot him in Nazareth and gave birth to him in Bethlehem, in a stable on hay and straw. She recognizes the greatness of her Son and her own as well in relationship to her Son. She knows the Father=s plan to humble his Son and the Son=s plan to humble himself. She embraces these plans and agrees to be the humiliated Mother of the humiliated Son. Now this is the place and the time where she becomes aware of these truths and begins to accept the humiliation destined for her Son and for herself. For her Son=s human filiation and for her divine Motherhood.

For it is in Nazareth, in this birth of Jesus in her, in this moment that these things are accomplished. The are known to her, born in her and experienced by her according to the splendor of her knowledge, the strength of her love and vitality of her sensitivity toward divine reality and the things of her Son and her God.

⁶ AThe Life of Jesus@ in ABérulle and the French School@, New York, 1989, pp. 169-171.