

**NT-LK8A**

**02.17.19**

**A Commentary by St John Chrysostom <sup>1</sup>**

Only Christians have a true sense of values, their joys and sorrows are not the same as other people's. The sight of a wounded boxer wearing a victor's crown would make someone ignorant of the games think only of the boxer's wounds and how painful they must be. Such a person would know nothing of the happiness the crown gives. And it is the same when people see the things we suffer without knowing why we do so. It naturally seems to them to be suffering pure and simple. They see us struggling and facing danger, but beyond their vision are the rewards, the crowns of victory – all we hope to gain through the contest!

When Paul said, *We possess nothing, and yet we have everything*, what did he mean by "everything"? Wealth of both the earthly and the spiritual order. Did he not possess every earthly gift when whole cities received him as an angel, when people were ready to pluck out their eyes for him, or bare their neck to the sword? But if you would think of spiritual blessings, you will see that it was in these above all that he was rich. The King of the universe and Lord of angels loved him so much that he shared his secrets with him. Did he not surpass all others in wealth then? Did he not possess all things? Had it been otherwise, demons would not have been subject to him, nor sickness and suffering put to flight by his presence.

We too, then, when we suffer anything for Christ's sake, should do so not only with courage, but even with joy. If we have to go hungry, let us be glad as if we were at a banquet. If we are insulted, let us be elated as though we had been showered with praises. If we lose all we possess, let us consider ourselves the gainers. If we provide for the poor, let us regard ourselves as the recipients. Anyone who does not give in this way will find it difficult to give at all. So when you wish to distribute alms. Do not think only of what you are giving away; think rather of what you are gaining, for your gain will exceed your loss.

And not only in the matter of almsgiving, but also with every virtue you practice: do not think of the painful effort involved, but of the sweetness of the reward; and above all remember that your struggles are for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then you will easily rise above them, and live out your whole lifetime in happiness; for nothing brings more happiness than a good conscience.

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<sup>1</sup> Journey with the Fathers – Year C = New City Press – 1994 – pg 80

OT-GEN33.WPD

02.18.19

**A reading about Abraham's affection for Ishmael, from a homily by St. John Chrysostom.**

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When the time of suckling was over, *“Sarah saw the son born to Abraham by Hagar the Egyptian”* the text goes on, *“playing with her son Isaac. She said to Abraham, 'Send away this maidservant and her son: surely the son of the maidservant will not share the inheritance with my son Isaac.'”*

Now this remark about his son struck Abraham as severe. In this instance, once again Sarah does not tolerate the brashness of Ishmael and is unable to put up equably with the maidservant's son being reared with Isaac. So just as she previously wished to check Hagar's arrogance and in her extreme irritation had her sent packing, so in this case too she wanted to nip Ishmael's forwardness in the bud [because she did not want] to see the son born of grace and of the very gift of God being reared along with that of the Egyptian maidservant. ...She was afraid that, in the event of her and Abraham's sudden passing, [since they were so old,] Ishmael would ... endeavor to thrust himself into his father's inheritance and become a sharer of it with Isaac; hence Sarah said, *“Send away from here the maidservant and her son.”* Let her learn at this stage, she is saying, that the son of the maidservant has nothing in common with my son Isaac. It is, in fact, not fair that the slave's son should be reared with that of the mistress, my son.

For her own part, however, Sarah was not guilty of acting unreasonably; ...even God agreed with the words she spoke. The patriarch, on the other hand, being affectionate and well-disposed towards Ishmael, did not take kindly to her remarks. It was not ... that he took much interest in Hagar; rather, he was well disposed towards his son for the reason that he was then still in his youth. Yet, consider the extraordinary considerateness of the loving God: in fidelity to his characteristic loving kindness and wishing to strengthen the bonds of harmony between them, the Lord said to Abraham, *["Do not be displeased, but whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you."]* Accept everything she now says to you about Ishmael and Hagar, and heed her. Don't be ready to distress the woman who ... has given evidence of such great affection for you on more than one occasion so as to save you from death by surrendering herself for your welfare and proving the occasion of your wonderful prosperity. On the first occasion she caused you to leave Egypt with all that wealth, and later she was responsible for your being accorded remarkable esteem by Abimelech. So don't allow yourself to follow a course of action contrary to what is advised by her; nor in fact will things turn out otherwise. Your descendants will be called after Isaac, the child born of her, and he will be your successor. *“But this son of the maidservant I shall cause to become numerous; I shall make him grow into a might nation since he is your offspring.”*

Now great peace and harmony began to reign over their life together, God's goodness strengthening their relationship. Notice [Abraham's] utterly correct attitude in giving evidence in every way of his godly purpose. I mean, when he heard Sarah's words, they struck him as severe; but when the Lord gave him orders, he immediately carried them out and gave no further thought to his natural affections. In other words he said to himself, When it is he that commands, let all feelings take no further part; after all, the one who commands is the Lord of nature. So Abraham *“arose early next morning, took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder along with the child, and sent her away.”*

... The merciful and loving God, however, surpassing ... a mother's and father's affection in his care for us... had pity on the child; he felt for Hagar's plight, he allowed her to experience her isolation, and at once granted her relief at his hands. ...What loving kindness on the Lord's part! Far from ignoring her as a menial, he deigned to show her such wonderful concern.... In her neediness the Lord granted her means, and, when she found herself so much at a loss and lacking all hope of survival, he showed his characteristic generosity by consoling her and at the same time exercising care for the child, [who himself would become a mighty nation because of the providence of God's hands.]

**The Call of God – from a book by Hans Urs von Balthasar <sup>2</sup>**

Every call of God is a proclamation of the eternal election by which he “chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish in his sight in love”; by which he “predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ as his sons” (Eph 1:4-5). It is an act of love, and its goal is the holiness that is always a form of love. Because it has been formed and shaped by the laws of love, it can be comprehended only in terms of love.

It follows that God can issue the commandment of love, which is the essential content of every genuine call, in varying degrees of urgency and clarity. For many, its sound is dissipated; they regard it as something to be taken for granted, as something that does not require their special attention. Of course God demands love; of course there is such a thing as a first and greatest commandment; of course every Christian is called to obey it, whether well or badly, to the best of his ability. And God will help our weakness, and, we hope, forgive our failings. So far as its content is concerned, the commandment of love sounds plainly enough, but it strikes no answering chord in the one who hears it. It compels him to no conclusions that could force him out of the rut he is in.

The call to love God boundlessly is always, at the same time, God’s offering of his own love to the one thus called. Because this is so, the call bears in itself the possibility not only of understanding, but also of responding to the love to which it calls. Indeed every special form of the divine call contains also the special grace of the response. All forms of God’s special call are forms of love and, for that reason, different from the mere command that a master might issue to his servant. Nevertheless, the manner and the very sound of God’s voice can be different depending on whether the call is to the priestly state or to the state of the counsels.

The word “counsel” is not fully adequate to convey the personal love of God that is reflected in the invitation to personal discipleship.

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<sup>2</sup> The Christian State of Life – Hans Urs von Balthasar – Ignatius Press – San Francisco – 1983 – pg426

**From a Homily by St. John Chrysostom <sup>3</sup>**

*Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.* What love for God he had! What strength of mind! What intense devotion that enabled him to overcome his natural human feelings! *He took the knife to kill his son.* Which should amaze me, astonish me more – the steadfastness of the father or the obedience of the son? For the boy made no resistance or objection, but submitting to whatever his father did, he lay like a lamb on the altar, waiting for his father to strike.

However, once the interior sacrifice had been made, without any omission, the good Lord showed that his command was given not from any desire for the boy's death, but only to reveal the holy patriarch's virtue. Therefore, accepting the patriarch's intention of making the complete sacrifice, he rewarded the holy man for his resolve by showing his own goodness.

*The angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said: Abraham! Abraham! Do not lay your hand on the boy or do him any harm." Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by his horns in a thicket. He went and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of Isaac his son.*

All this was a foreshadowing of the Cross, which is why Christ said to the Jews: *Your father Abraham rejoiced to think that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.* How did he see it when he lived so long before? Through a symbol and a foreshadowing. As the sheep was then offered for Isaac, so the spiritual lamb was offered for the whole world. It was only fitting for the reality to be portrayed beforehand by a symbol – see how faithfully everything was prefigured. Then there was an only son; now too there is a beloved and legitimate Son, for God says in the Gospel: *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.* Isaac was delivered up by his father as a burnt offering; Jesus too was delivered up by his Father, as Paul declares when he says: *He did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all. How then can He fail to give us every other gift as well?*

So much for the foreshadowing: the reality far surpasses it. For this spiritual lamb that was offered for the whole world has cleansed the whole world. He has freed us from error and brought us back to the truth. He has made earth heaven, not by changing its physical composition, but simply by showing us how to lead a heavenly life here on earth. Thanks to him, the worship of demons has come to an end. Human beings no longer adore sticks and stones; creatures endowed with reason do not bow down before senseless objects. On the contrary, all error has taken flight, and the light of truth has illumined the whole world.

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<sup>3</sup> A Word in Season 0 vol. VII – Augustinian Press – 1999 – pg 51

**02SN2104**

**02/21/19**

**St. Peter Damian - from a Discourse of Pope Benedict XVI <sup>1</sup>**

St Peter Damian was one of the most significant figures of the 11th century ... a lover of solitude and at the same time a fearless man of the Church, committed personally to the task of reform."

Born during 1007 in the Italian city of Ravenna, Peter belonged to a large family but lost both his father and mother early in life. An older brother took the boy into his household, yet treated him poorly. But another of Peter's brothers, a priest, took steps to provide for his education; and the priest's own name, Damian, became his younger brother's surname.

Peter excelled in school while also taking up forms of asceticism, such as fasting, wearing a hair shirt, and spending long hours in prayer with an emphasis on reciting the Psalms. He offered hospitality to the poor as a means of serving Christ, and eventually resolved to embrace voluntary poverty himself through the Order of Saint Benedict.

The monks he chose to join, in the hermitage of Fonte Avellana, lived out their devotion to the Cross of Christ through a rigorous rule of life. They lived mainly on bread and water, prayed all 150 Psalms daily, and practiced many physical mortifications. Peter embraced this way of life somewhat excessively at first, which led to a bout with insomnia.

Deeply versed in the Bible and the writings of earlier theologians, Peter developed his own theological acumen and became a skilled preacher. The leaders of other monasteries sought his help to build up their monks in holiness, and in 1043 he took up a position of leadership as the prior of Fonte Avellana. Five other hermitages were established under his direction.

Serious corruption plagued the Church during Peter's lifetime, including the sale of religious offices and immorality among many of the clergy. Through his writings and involvements in controversies of the day, the prior of Fonte Avellana called on members of the hierarchy and religious orders to live out their commitments and strive for holiness.

In 1057, Pope Stephen IX became determined to make Peter Damian a bishop, a goal he accomplished only by demanding the monk's obedience under threat of excommunication. Consecrated as the Bishop of Ostia in November of that year, he also

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<sup>1</sup> From the Internet - Catholic News Service

joined the College of Cardinals and wrote a letter encouraging its members to set an example for the whole Church.

With Pope Stephen's death in 1058, and the election of his successor Nicholas II, Peter's involvement in Church controversies grew. He supported Pope Nicholas against a rival claimant to the papacy, and went to Milan as the Pope's representative when a crisis broke out over canonical and moral issues. There, he was forced to confront rioters who rejected papal authority.

Peter, meanwhile, wished to withdraw from these controversies and return to the contemplative life. But Nicholas' death in 1061 caused another papal succession crisis, which the cardinal-bishop helped to resolve in favor of Alexander II. That Pope kept the Cardinal Bishop of Ostia occupied with a series of journeys and negotiations for the next six years.

In 1067, Peter Damian was allowed to resign his episcopate and return to the monastery at Fonte Avellana. Two years later, however, Pope Alexander needed his help to prevent the German King Henry IV from divorcing his wife. Peter lived another two years in the monastery before making a pilgrimage to Monte Cassino, the birthplace of the Benedictine order.

In 1072, Peter returned to his own birthplace of Ravenna, to reconcile the local church with the Pope. The monk's last illness came upon him during his return from this final task, and he died after a week at a Benedictine monastery in Faenza during February of that year.

Never formally canonized, St. Peter Damian was celebrated as a saint after his death in many of the places associated with his life. In 1823, Pope Leo XII named him a Doctor of the Church and extended the observance of his feast day throughout the Western Church.

02SN2204

02.22.19

**From a homily by Paul the Deacon <sup>1</sup>**

The early Church called today's feast Saint Peter's Chair because Peter, the first of the apostles, was said on this day to have taken his seat as bishop. It is quite right, therefore, that churches all over the world should observe the anniversary of that see which the apostle received for their salvation when the Lord said: *You are Peter, and upon this rock I shall build my Church*. Upon this rock means upon our Lord and Savior, who bestowed on his faithful witness a share in his own title.

*And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* The gates of hell are the tortures and flatteries of persecutors, which frighten some into losing their faith, and open the way to eternal death. Hell possesses many gates, but none of them prevails over the Church founded on the rock.

It is right, then, for all the churches to honor Peter. As head of the Church, firm as the hardest rock, he confounded the enemies of Christ by the authority of the Holy Spirit, conquering by the strength of tireless endurance. As was prophesied, the gates of hell did not prevail against him who made the eternal gates open to him by confessing the king of glory. The gateway of life could hardly remain closed to one who, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed the inscrutable secret of the single majesty of God which unites the Father and the Son, and who also taught and made known that in one and the same Son of God there exists both the humanity he assumed and the divinity which was his by right. He actually heard the Savior himself saying: *I and the father are one and Whoever sees me sees my Father as well.*

Peter's acknowledgement made him worthy of honor on earth and glory in heaven. It is the reason why the Lord called him the foundation of the Church. And so the universal Church gives recognition to this foundation upon which its structure rises to the heights. The Psalmist aptly says: *Let them exalt him in the gathering of the people, and praise him where the elders are installed.* It is fitting, then, for the Church to honor this foundation upon which it rises to heaven.

<sup>1</sup>Word in Season – vol. IV – Augustinian Press – 1999 - 31

**02SN2301**

**2.23.19**

**From a letter on the martyrdom of St Polycarp by the Church of Smyrna <sup>4</sup>**

When the pyre was ready, Polycarp took off all his clothes and loosened his undergarment. He made an effort also to remove his shoes, though he had been unaccustomed to this, for the faithful always vied with one another in their haste to touch his body. Even before his martyrdom he had received every mark of honor in tribute to his holiness of life.

There and then he was surrounded by the material for the pyre. When they tried to fasten him also with nails, he said: "Leave me as I am. The one who gives me strength to endure the fire will also give me strength to stay still on the pyre, even without the precaution of your nails." So they did not fix him to the pyre with nails, but only fastened him instead. Bound as he was, with hands behind his back, he stood like a mighty ram, chosen out for sacrifice from a great flock, a worthy victim made ready to be offered to God.

Looking up to heaven, he said: "Lord, almighty God, Father of your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have come to the knowledge of yourself, God of angels, of powers, of all creation, of all the race of saints who live in your sight, I bless you for judging me worthy of this day, this hour, so that in the company of the martyrs I may share the cup of Christ, your anointed one, and so rise again to eternal life in soul and body, immortal through the power of the Holy Spirit. May I be received among the martyrs in your presence today as a rich and pleasing sacrifice. God of truth, stranger to falsehood, you have prepared this and revealed it to me and now you have fulfilled your promise.

"I praise you for all things, I bless you, I glorify you through the eternal priest of heaven, Jesus Christ, your beloved son. Through him be glory to you, together with him and the Holy spirit, now and for ever. Amen."

When he had said "Amen" and finished the prayer, the officials at the pyre lit it. But, when a great flame burst out, those of us privileged to see it witnessed a strange and wonderful thing. Indeed, we have been spared in order to tell the story to others. Like a ship's sail swelling in the wind, the flame became as it were a dome encircling the martyr's body. Surrounded by the fire, his body was like bread that is baked, or gold and silver white-hot in a furnace, not like flesh that has been burnt. So sweet a fragrance came to us that it was like that of burning incense or some other costly and sweet-smelling gum.

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<sup>4</sup> The Liturgy of the Hours – vol. III – Catholic Book Publishing Co – New York – 1975 – pg 1396