

NT-LK8A

2.24.19

A Commentary by St John Chrysostom ¹

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

¹ Journey with the Fathers – Year C = New City Press – 1994 – pg 80

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.

OT-GEN23.DOC
2/25/19

The mystery of the marriage of Isaac; a reading from the book *From Shadows to Reality* by Jean Danielou.²

Origen borrows from Philo the idea of giving a mystical sense to Isaac's marriage. He envisages this as the marriage of Christ with the soul and equally with that of the Church with Christ. St. Ambrose draws both of these themes into one. Rebecca came already endowed with heavenly mysteries: she came laden with ornaments in her ears and hands, showing how the Church's beauty shines forth both in word and action. Therefore either the Patriarch's soul beholding the mystery of Christ, and seeing Rebecca coming with all her gold and silver ornaments, like the Church with her train of the nations, adores the beauty of the Word and speaks of his mysteries: >Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth=; or Rebecca seeing the true Isaac, that true joy and gladness, wishes herself to be kissed. Think either of the Church awaiting for so long a time the coming of her Lord which the Prophets had foretold for long ages, or of the soul which raises itself above the body by the renunciation of all luxury and bodily delights, and wishes to experience the divine presence and the grace of the word of salvation.@

Isaac is the son of the promise: his miraculous birth of a barren woman is, as Ambrose saw, a prefiguring of the virginal maternity, and according to the divine plan it will make this latter less difficult to believe, by putting it at the end of a series of God's works of a similar kind. Also his displacing of Ishmael prepares the way for the displacing of the Chosen People by the Gentiles. It is further noted by St. Paul that the miraculous birth is not without its connection with this replacement of racial inheritance by divine election.

Finally Origen and Ambrose have given a Christian turn to this symbolism, finding in the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca a type of the marriage of the

² Newman Press. 1960. p.143.

Word with the Church. This interpretation is based on the Christological significance of Isaac. St. Justin writes: In the marriages of Jacob certain divine plans and prophecies were fulfilled. The marriages of Jacob were types of what would be fulfilled in Christ. Leah represented your people and the synagogue, Rachel is a type of the Church. And Origen again develops this: You think that these are myths, and that the Holy Spirit only records history in the Scriptures. Here is an instruction for the soul and spiritual teaching which instructs you to come daily to the wells of the Scriptures... All that has been written are mysteries: Christ wishes to wed you too, and for that reason sends his servant to you. This servant is the word of the prophets. You cannot be wed to Christ if you have not first received him.

DEAD-32
02.26.19

A Reading about the passing of Paul the Hermit, from St Jerome's Life of Paul.³

As day returned to the earth, the Blessed Paul spoke to Antony. "From old time, my brother, I have known that you were a dweller in these parts: from old time God had promised that you, my fellow-servant, would come to me. But since the time has come for sleeping, and (for I have ever desired to be dissolved and to be with Christ) the race is run, there remains for me a crown of righteousness; you have been sent by God to shelter this poor body in the ground, returning earth to earth."

At this Antony, weeping and groaning, began pleading with him not to leave him but take him with him as a fellow-traveller on that journey.

But Paul said, "You must not seek your own, but another's good. It would be good for you, when the burden of the flesh is flung down, to follow the Lamb: but it is good for the other brethren that they should have your example for their grounding. And so, I pray you, unless it be too great a trouble, go and bring the cloak which Athanasius the Bishop gave you, to wrap around my body." This indeed the Blessed Paul asked, not because he much cared whether his dead body should rot covered or naked, for indeed he had been clothed for so long time in woven palm-leaves: but he would have Antony far from him, that he might spare him the pain of his dying.

Then Antony, amazed that Paul should have known of Athanasius and the cloak, dared make no answer: it seemed to him that he saw Christ in Paul, and he worshipped God in Paul's heart: silently weeping, he kissed his eyes and his hands, and set out on the return journey to the monastery. His steps indeed could not keep pace with his spirit: yet though length of days had broken a body worn out with fasting, his mind triumphed over his years. Exhausted and panting, he reached his dwelling, the journey ended. Two disciples who for a long time had ministered to him, ran to meet him, saying, "Where have you been so long, Master?"

"May God have mercy on me," he made answer, "for I falsely bear the name of monk. I have seen Elias, I have seen John in the desert, yes, I

³Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers*, Ann Arbor 1957 pp 29ff.

have seen Paul in paradise." And so, with tight-pressed lips and his hand beating his breast, he carried the cloak from his cell. To his disciples eager to know more of what was happening, he answered, "There is a time to speak, and there is a time to be silent." And leaving the house, and not even taking some small provision for the journey, he again took the road by which he had come: athirst for him, longing for the sight of him, eyes and mind intent. For he feared as indeed it happened, that in his absence, Paul might have rendered back to Christ the spirit that he owed Him.

And now the second day dawned upon him, and for three hours he had been on the way, when he saw amid a host of angels and amid the companies of prophets and apostles, Paul climbing the steeps of heaven, and shining white as snow. And straightway falling on his face he threw sand upon his head and wept saying, "Paul, why did you send me away? Why do you go with no leave taking? So late to be known, are you so swift to go?" - *over*

In aftertime the Blessed Antony would tell how speedily he covered the rest of the road. Entering the cave, he saw on its bent knees, the head erect and the hands stretched out to heaven, the lifeless body: yet first, thinking he yet lived, he knelt and prayed beside him. yet no accustomed sigh of prayer came to him: he kissed him, weeping, and then knew that the dead body of the holy man still knelt and prayed to God, to whom all things live.

A spiritual interpretation of the birth of Esau and Jacob by Origen. 1

The Lord said to Sarah: *Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples shall be divided out of your womb. And one people shall overcome the other, and the elder shall serve the younger* (Gen 25.23).

How Aone people has risen above the other, @Yis well known and very commonplace to everyone. Let us add this, if it is agreeable, which can edify and instruct each of us who hear these words.

I think that this can be said also of us as individuals, that Atwo nations and two peoples are within you. @ For there is both a people of virtues within us and there is no less a people of vices within us. *For from our heart proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, thefts, false testimonies* (Mt 15.19), but also *deceits, contentions, heresies, jealousies, revelings and such like* (Gal 5.20-21). Do you see how great a people of evils is within us? But if we should deserve to utter that word of the saints: *From fear of you, Lord, we have conceived in the womb and have brought forth; we have wrought the spirit of your salvation on the earth* (Is 26.18), then also another people, begotten in the spirit, is found within us. *For the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, gentleness, temperance, purity* and such like (Gal 5.22-23). You see another people which is also itself within us. But this one is less, that one greater. For there are always more evil than good people and vices are more numerous than virtues. But if we should be such as Rebecca and should deserve to conceive from Isaac, that is, from the word of God, *one people shall overcome the other and the elder shall serve the younger* even in us, for the flesh shall serve the spirit and vices shall yield to virtues.

And her days were fulfilled, the text says, that she should give birth, and there were twins in her womb. This statement, that is, *her days were fulfilled that she should give birth*, is almost never written except of holy women. For this is said of this Rebecca and of Elizabeth the mother of John [the Baptist] and of Mary the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whence a birth of this kind seems to me so show something extraordinary and beyond other human beings. The fulfillment of the days seems to indicate the birth of perfect offspring.

YBut what those prerogatives of birth are, why either the one *supplanted his brother* and was born smooth and simple, although certainly Yboth sons were conceived from the one father, Isaac, or why the other was born *hairy all over* and shaggy and, so to speak, enwrapped in the squalor of sin and vileness is not mine to discuss. For if I shall wish to dig deeply and open the hidden veins *of living water* [in the Scripture], immediately the Philistines will be present and will strive with me. They will stir up disputes and malicious charges against me and will begin to refill my wells with their earth and mud. YAnd for this reason, leaving this well and calling it Aenmity,@ let us dig another.

OT-GEN35.wpd

02.28.2019

A reading about the wells which Isaac dug and which were filled by the Philistines, from a homily by Origen. 1

We are always encountering [in Scripture] the habitual works of the patriarchs regarding wells. Here Scripture relates that Isaac, after *Athe Lord blessed him and he was greatly magnified,*@ undertook a great work. And he began, the text says, to dig wells....

Well does the holy Apostle [Paul] say, *AFor these things, who is sufficient* [to explain them]? ...[And] we are far inferior to him, so we also, seeing such great depth in the mysteries of the wells, say [also] *Awho is sufficient?*@ For who is able worthily to explain either the mysteries of such great wells or of those things which are related to have been done for the wells, unless we invoke the Father of the living Word and he himself should deign to put the word in our mouth so that we may be able to draw, for you who thirst, a little *Aliving water*@ from those wells which are so copious and numerous?

[These are] wells which the servants of Abraham dug, but the Philistines had filled [them] with earth. Isaac, therefore, undertakes first to clear these wells. The Philistines hate water; they love earth. Isaac loves water; he is always seeking wells; he cleans old wells, he opens new ones. ...Each one of us who serves the word of God digs wells and seeks *Aliving water,*@ from which he may renew his hearers. YIf we are servants of Isaac, let us love *Awells of living water*@ and springs. Let us withdraw from those who are contentious and contrive malicious charges and leave them in the earth which they love. But let us never cease digging *Awells of living water.*@ And by discussing now indeed things that are old, and again things that are new, let us become like that scribe in the Gospel, of whom the Lord said: *AHe brings forth from his treasures new things and old.*@

So, therefore, the wells which Abraham dug, that is the Scriptures of the Old Testament, have been filled with earth by the Philistines, or evil teachers, Scribes and Pharisees, or even hostile powers; and their veins have been stopped up lest they provide a drink for these who are of

Abraham. For that people cannot drink from the Scriptures, but suffers a
thirst for the word of God, until Isaac should come and open them that
his servants may drink.

Thanks, therefore, to Christ, the son of Abraham... who has come and
opened the wells for us. For he opened them for those who said: *Was not
our heart burning in us when he opened to us the Scriptures?* ...He
opened the wells and taught us, that we might not seek God in some one
place, but might know that *a sacrifice is offered to his name in every land.*

OT-GEN80
03.01.19

How the Lord Blessed Isaac. From a Reading by Origen of Alexandria ⁴

Let us see now how, after the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac his son. *The Lord blessed Isaac, the text says, and he dwelt at that well of vision.* This is the whole blessing with which the Lord blessed Isaac: that he might dwell at the well of vision. That is a great blessing for those who understand it. But consider this more carefully, that Isaac deserved to receive such a great blessing from the Lord that he might dwell at the well of vision. But when shall we deserve to pass by the well of vision? He deserved to dwell and remain in the vision; we, what little we have been illuminated by the mercy of God, can scarcely perceive or surmise a single vision.

If, however, I shall have been able to perceive some one meaning of the visions of God, I shall appear to have spent one day at the well of vision. But if I shall have been able to touch not only something according to the letter, but also according to the spirit, I shall appear to have spent two days at the well of vision. But even if I have not been able to understand everything, if I am nevertheless busily engaged in the divine scriptures and I meditate on the law of God day and night and at no time at all do I desist inquiring, discussing, investigating, and certainly what is greatest, praying God and asking for understanding from him who teaches man knowledge, I shall appear to dwell at the well of vision.

But if I should be negligent and be neither occupied at home on the word of God nor frequently enter the church to hear the word, as I see some among you who only come to the church on festive days, those who are of this sort do not dwell at the well of vision.

You therefore, hasten and act sufficiently that that blessing of the Lord may come to you, that you may be able to dwell at the well of vision, and may receive from it living water, which may become in you a fountain of water springing up into eternal life.

⁴ A Word in Season – vol. VII – Augustinian Press – 1999 – pg 64

MY-60

03.02.19

From a Sermon by Saint Sophronius, bishop.⁵

"Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you." What joy could surpass this, O Virgin Mother? What grace can excel that which God has granted to you alone? What could be imagined more dazzling or more delightful? Before the miracle we witness in you, all else pales; all else is inferior when compared with the grace you have been given. All else, even what is most desirable, must take second place and enjoy a lesser importance.

"The Lord is with you." Who would dare challenge you? You are God's mother; who would not immediately defer to you and be glad to accord you a greater primacy and honor? For this reason, when I look upon the privilege you have above all creatures, I extol you with the highest praise: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you." On your account joy has not only graced us, but is also granted to the powers of heaven.

Truly, "You are blessed among women." For you have changed Eve's curse into a blessing; and Adam, who hitherto lay under a curse, has been blessed because of you.

Truly, you are blessed among women. Through you the Father's blessing has shone forth on humankind, setting them free of their ancient curse.

Truly, you are blessed among women, because through you your forebears have found salvation. For you were to give birth to the Savior who was to win them salvation.

Truly, you are blessed among women, for without seed you have borne, as your fruit, him who bestows blessings on the whole world and redeems it from that curse that made it sprout thorns.

Truly, you are blessed among women, because, though a woman by nature, you will become, in reality, God's mother. If he whom you are to bear is truly God made flesh, then rightly do we call you God's mother. For

⁵Oratio 2, in sanctissimae Deipararæ Annuntiatione, 21-22.26: PG 87, 3, 3242, 3250

you have truly given birth to God.

Enclosed within your womb is God himself. He makes his abode in you and comes forth from you like a bridegroom, winning joy for all and bestowing God's light on all.

You, O Virgin, are like a clear and shining sky, in which God "has set his tent." From you "he comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber." Like a giant running his course, he will run the course of his life which will bring salvation for all who will ever live, and extending from the highest heavens to the end of them, it will fill all things with divine warmth and life-giving brightness.