

SUN 02.03.19

A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke by St Cyril of Alexandria ¹

Desiring to win over the whole world and bring its inhabitants to God the Father, raising all things to a higher condition and, in a sense, renewing the face of the earth, the Lord of the universe took the form of a servant and brought the good news to the poor. This, he said, was why he had been sent.

Now by the poor we may understand those who were then deprived of all spiritual blessings and who lived in the world without hope and without God, as the scripture says. They are those among the Gentiles who, enriched by faith in Christ, have gained the divine, the heavenly treasure, which is the saving proclamation of the Gospel. Through this they have become sharers in the kingdom of heaven and companions of the saints. They have inherited blessings impossible to express or comprehend. *For eye has not seen, says scripture, nor ear heard, nor human heart conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.*

To the brokenhearted Christ promises healing and release, and to the blind he gives sight. For those who worship created things, and say to a piece of wood, "*You are my father,*" and to a stone, "*you gave me birth.*" Thus failing to recognize him who is really and truly God, are they not blind? Are not their hearts devoid of the spiritual and divine light? To these the Father sends the light of true knowledge of God. Having been called by faith, they know God, or rather, they are known by Him. They were children of the night and of darkness, but they have become children of the light. The Day has shown upon them, the Sun of Righteousness has risen, the Morning Star has appeared in all its brilliance.

All that has been said, however, could also be applied to the Israelites, for they too were poor, brokenhearted, captives in a certain sense, and in darkness. But Christ came, and it was to the Israelites first that he made known the purpose of his coming: he came to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of retribution. That was the acceptable year, when Christ was crucified for us, for then we became acceptable to God the Father. Through Christ we bear fruit, as he himself taught us when he said: *I tell you truly that unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains as it is, a single grain; but if it dies, it bears a rich harvest;* and again: *When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw the whole world to myself.* Moreover on the third day he came to life again, after trampling death's power under foot. He then addressed these words to his disciples: *All power has been given to me in heaven and on earth.*

¹ Journey with the Fathers – Year C –New City Press – 1994 – pg 76

*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father,
and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

MON 02/04/19

NOE, from Holy Pagans, by Jean Danielou.²

With Noah a new problem is set which concerns the mystery of the covenant. It is in connection with him that the momentous notion of a covenant appears for the first time in Holy Scripture. The covenant is one of the essential characteristics, the most characteristic quality perhaps, of the God of the Bible. It signifies that God communicates certain good things to humanity, and that this is in the nature of an irrevocable settlement. Thus it allows man to depend upon these benefits, not in virtue of any right he has to them but by reason of God's fidelity to His word.

The covenant made with Noah is connected with the cosmic religion and bears essentially upon God's fidelity in the order of the world. This is expressed in several instances in Genesis. It is first of all a question of a covenant not with a particular people but with humanity as a whole and even the cosmos...Moreover, it is a question of an eternal, irrevocable covenant.

By this covenant God pledges himself not to destroy life upon the earth, whatever may be the sins of humanity: 'I will establish my covenant with you, and all flesh shall no more be destroyed by the waters of a flood'. God's fidelity will be expressed particularly in the regularity of the laws of the cosmos, in the recurrent seasons: 'All the days of the earth, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, night and day, shall not cease'. This revelation, says St. Paul, is given to all men amongst whom God has not left Himself without testimony, giving them rains and fruitful seasons. This revelation constitutes the authentic basis of the pagan religions for which the recurrent seasons are the foundations of worship.

By this covenant, God gives, as it were, an official document which bears witness to His pledge for all the generations to come. This document is the rainbow: 'I will set my bow in the clouds and it shall be the sign of a covenant between me and between the earth. And when I shall cover the sky with clouds, my bow shall appear in the clouds; and I will remember my covenant with you.' Thus as the Paschal Lamb is to be the memorial of the

²Holy Pagans of the Old Testament, Jean Danielou, trans. Felix Faber, Longmans, Green and Co., NY, 1957, p.78-81.

Mosaic covenant, as the Holy Eucharist is the sacrament of the new eternal covenant replacing the ancient, so the rainbow is the memorial and sacred sign of the cosmic covenant which persists throughout the establishment of new and more perfect covenants...

The covenant made with Noah introduces a new element. It is a property of this covenant that it concerns a unilateral arrangement wherein God's pledge is not at the mercy of human fidelity.. Certainly this does not mean to say that God demands nothing from man.

As a counterpart to His promises, He gives Noah commandments. Humanity's infidelity can deprive them of the spiritual benefits attached to the covenant, of knowledge of God and closeness to Him; but it cannot cause the covenant to be revoked.

TUE 02.05.19

St. Agatha - From Butler's Lives of the Saints

St Agatha has retained her place in the Universal Calendar following the reforms of 1969, even though nothing that can be called historical fact is known of her life. There is, however, good evidence of an early cult, with many versions of her legend recorded in both Greek and Latin, the Greek being the earlier, with the Latin dating from the sixth century. This means that however fictitious the details of her Acts, she cannot be dismissed as a mere fiction altogether. Her Acts, though, are more of an indication of the type of woman held up for veneration as a saint in the early centuries than anything else.

She is described as a wealthy woman who had dedicated her virginity to Christ. This, then, rather than her life, is the most precious thing she has to offer. Her birthplace is assigned to either Palermo or Catania in Sicily, and she is said to have died at Catania, which has the stronger historical claim to be her birthplace. Among those who try to take the precious gift she has vowed to Christ from her is a consul named Quintianus. He used the imperial edict against Christians to have her brought before him, then placed in a brothel run by a woman with the appropriate name of "Aphrodisia" and her assistants, referred to as her daughters. All tricks, assaults and threats to make her yield her virginity fail, and so she stands as an example of "virginity as a sacred power, a concrete realization within this world of the divine spirit".

Quintianus then handed her over to be tortured, and her Acts dwell on the tortures inflicted on her, culminating in the cutting off of her breasts, which were placed on a platter. Perhaps because further details of her tortures involve her being rolled over live coals, she is invoked against fire in general. This may, though, be an extension of her protection against eruptions from Mount Etna, because she is associated with Sicily, and her legend states that after her death a flow of lava from Mount Etna was miraculously diverted by her silken veil held up on a staff. This is last recorded as happening in the 1840s, and her veil is still carried in solemn procession on her feast day in Catania. By extension she protects against earthquakes everywhere. She is also patron saint of bell-founders. The association is ancient and certain, but the reason has not been determined. It may be that it derives from her protection against volcanic eruptions and fire, as bells were rung to warn of both. Another explanation given is that the molten metal involved in casting bells suggests the flow of molten lava. Her breasts also brought a more appropriate patronage, as she is invoked

against diseases of the breast. Her breasts on a dish were often mistaken for loaves in the Middle ages, from which arose the custom of blessing bread on a dish at her altar on her feast day.

Pope Damasus I composed a hymn in her honor. Two churches were dedicated to her in the sixth century. Pope St Gregory the Great had rich shrines made for some of her relics in Rome, then moved them to the monastery of San Stefano on the island of Capri. Other relics remained in Catania until 1840, when they were moved to Constantinople.

Whatever the facts behind her legend, Agatha remains one of the best-loved and most invoked saints in the Christian devotional life.

THUR 02.07.19

The great virtue of Abraham in the face of his trials; a reading from a homily by St. John Chrysostom. ¹

The grace of the Spirit arranges for the virtues of all good people to be handed down so that we might have a consistent instruction and might order our own life in the direction of zealous imitation of these good people. So let us heed what Sacred Scripture wishes today also to outline to us about the patriarch [Abraham]....

Despite such wonderful promises and guarantees given him by God, he saw himself beset by such imposing difficulties and encountering such varied and differing trials; yet he stood unshaken like some piece of steel, showing his godly attitude and proving no less resolute in any of the problems surrounding him. See in the present instance too, dearly beloved, the kind of trial that befell him at Gerar and the wonderful caliber of the just man's virtue, how what everyone else found unbearable and could not bring themselves to accept he put up with without complaint and without demanding from the Lord explanation of what happened, as many people do, even though weighed down with countless burdens of sin. When they encounter some difficulties they become meddlesome and inquisitive, saying, Why has this or that happened? The just man, on the contrary, didn't behave like that; hence he enjoyed greater favor from on high. This, after all, is truly the mark of a dutiful servant, not to pry into reasons for what is done by the master but to accept everything in silence and with deep thanks.

Consider how through the very trials that ensued the just man's virtue became more resplendent, as God rendered him conspicuous in every way... *"Now, Abraham said about his wife Sarah,"* the text says, *"She is my sister.' For he was afraid to say, She is my wife, in case the men of the city should kill him on account of her"* (Gen 20.2). See how the just man's spirit is beset with the most violent feelings, and fear overwhelms him. Yet while it is true that his former fear, the fear of losing his wife, was extremely distressing, the fear of death overcame it. [In order] to dispel that fear, he was prepared to see with his own eyes the one who shared his very life fall into the hands of the king. Now, how

¹ *Homilies on Genesis 45* (FC 82), translated by Robert C. Hill; Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 1990, pp. 470-473.

unbearable this is, those who have wives know.... But see how on account of the fear of death the just man nobly bore this heavy trial so intolerable to everyone.

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This is the way things happen with bodily passions: when two of them at the same time affect our body, the intensity of the one cancels out the other so that we are completely preoccupied with its pain and often have no sensation of the other, since the stronger pain overwhelms us and does not allow us to feel anything of the lesser one. In just the same way, too, this just man in the present instance saw the fear of death affecting him and considered all other things tolerable. But when you hear this, dearly beloved, don't judge the just man guilty of faintheartedness for fearing death; marvel instead at the surpassing love shown us by the Lord of all in the fact that Christ has now made an object of scorn that death which in those times was dreaded by those good and holy people, and what those virtuous people feared even while having a wonderful confidence in God is now despised by youths and tender maids. It is no longer death, you see, but a dream and departure, a change from a worse life to a better. The death of our Lord, in fact, has granted us freedom from death, and by descending into hell he has broken its bonds and crippled its force; what was fearful and cruel he has rendered so much and object of scorn that some people rush forward in haste to their departure from here. Hence Paul also shouts aloud, *"To depart and to be with Christ is far better"* (Phil 1.23).

This however, is the present situation, after the coming of Christ, after the breaking down of the iron doors, after the Sun of Justice has shone throughout the entire world. But in [Abraham's] days death still bore a terrible aspect and shook the resolve of those just men – hence they easily bore all other things, even if these happened to be unbearable. For this reason this just man was also afraid of the plotting of the inhabitants of Gerar, and in making his stay there he introduced Sarah not as his wife but as his sister.

FRI 02.08.19

**Abraham as an example of faith for all;
a reading from a sermon by Bl. John Henry Newman.** ³

The lesson to be gained from the history of Abraham and Lot is obviously this—that nothing but a clear apprehension of things unseen, a simple trust in God's promises, and the greatness of mind arising from this, can make us act above the world—indifferent, or almost so, to its comforts, enjoyments, and friendships; or in other words, that its goods corrupt the common lot even of religious people who possess them. Lot, as well as Abraham, left his own country by faith, in obedience to God's command; yet on a further trial, in which the will of God was not so clearly signified, the one was found without spot and blameless, the other was saved so as by fire. Abraham became the father of all that believe; Lot obscured the special hope of his calling—impaired the privileges of his election—for a time allowed himself to resemble the common lot of people, who are religious to a certain point, and inconsistent in their lives, not aiming at perfection.

Abraham and Lot had given up this world at the word of God; but a more difficult trial remained. Though never easy, yet it is easier to set our hearts on religion, when we have nothing else to engage them—or to take some decided step, which throws us out of our line of life, and in a manner forces upon us what we should naturally shrink from; than to possess in good measure the goods of this world, and yet love God supremely. Many a person might make a sacrifice of worldly interests from impulse; and then having little to unsettle one, is enabled to hold fast to religion and serve God consistently and acceptably. Of course those who make such sacrifices, often evidence much strength of character in making them, which doubtless was Lot's case when he left his country. But it is even a greater thing, it requires a clearer, steadier, nobler faith, to be surrounded with worldly goods, yet to be self-denying; to consider ourselves but stewards of God's bounty, and to be faithful in all things—committed to us.

³ *Parochial and Plain Sermons*. Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1987, p. 704.

SAT 02.09.2019

Mary comes as a mother⁴

From a book by Fr Raymond Flanagan, OCSO

You have noticed of course that when a child is afraid it will run to its mother, but when the child is in danger, it is the mother who runs - and she runs to her child. That is the whole meaning of the many apparitions of Mary with which this past century has been blessed. We "children of larger growth" were too sophisticated to be wise; we were not afraid of the very real dangers that threatened us. So our Lady-Mother ran to us in 1830 by appearing to Catherine Laboure in Paris. Sixteen years later she was found weeping at LaSalette, begging her children to "change their minds and hearts." No one prays unless they remember their humanity. No one does penance unless they remember that God is outraged by sin. So Mary came to cure our amnesia. In 1858 she was at the Grotto of Massabielle, near Lourdes, praying the Rosary with Bernadette and using the one word "penance." Twelve years later she blazoned the sky over Pontmain with the burning plea: "My children, pray!" And in our own century did she not come on the 13th of every month from May to October to that lonely place in Portugal, appearing as the Lady of Light, who asked but one thing of humanity - a metanoia - prayer and penance?

There is something exquisitely tender in this sending of God's Mother to us in this mad twentieth century. She is sent at a time when our sins have merited a flood of Sodom's fire. She comes at a time when the world is pagan - and does not know it! When it is worshiping Mars, Mammon, and Moloch - and does not know it! When Venus, Bacchus, and Pirapus have been placed forward in the modern pantheon, when all America has as its idol what Lloyd Morris rightly called the "bitch goddess" - Success. She comes to us from heaven as "Our life, Our Sweetness, and Our Hope!" She is not a prophet but the Queen of Prophets. She comes not with threats of vengeance, but promises of peace, not foretelling destruction, but our restoration - if we would but have metanoia; if we will but remember.

Yet in that very tenderness there is a terrifying element. Mary is the Queen of Prophets and the Mother of God. The fact that it is she who comes to us makes it look as if the plea of Dives, the rich man, won hearing from God; makes it look as if no angel, archangel, prophet, or saint would do.

⁴God, A Woman, and the Way. Fr Raymond OCSO, Bruce, '54, pp.14-19.

The dogma of the infinite value of each human being is before us. God and God's Mother have walked parallel Ways for the eternal happiness of every one of us. Those ways have met. That is why each of us can be utterly fearless though skies fall, continents disappear, oceans dry up; for we can walk the Way that leads to everlasting peace!