

Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey  
Vigils Readings: Eighth Week in Ordinary time  
March 3-9, 2019

**Sunday, March 3**

**A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke by Cyril of Alexandria <sup>1</sup>**

The disciples were to be the spiritual guides and teachers of the whole world. It had therefore to be clearly seen by all that they held fast to the true faith. It was essential for them to be familiar with the gospel way of life, skilled in every good work, and to give teaching that was precise, salutary, and scrupulously faithful to the truth they themselves had long pondered, enlightened by the divine radiance. Otherwise they would be blind leaders of the blind. Those imprisoned in the darkness of ignorance can never lead others in the same sorry state to knowledge of the truth. Should they try, both would fall headlong into the ditch of the passions.

To destroy the ostentatious passion of boastfulness and stop people from trying to win greater honor than their teachers, Christ declared: *The disciple is not above his teacher*. Even if some should advance so far as to equal their teachers in holiness, they ought to remain within the limits set by them, and follow their example. Paul also taught this when he said: *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ*. So, then, if the Master does not judge, why are you judging? He came not to judge the world, but to take pity on it.

What he is saying, then, is this: "If I do not pass judgment, neither must you, my disciple. You may be even more guilty of the faults of which you accuse another. Will you not be ashamed when you come to realize this?" The Lord uses another illustration for the same teaching when he says: *Why do you look for the speck in your brother's eye?*

With compelling arguments he persuades us that we should not want to judge others, but should rather examine our own hearts, and strive to expel the passions seated in them, asking this grace from God/ He it is who heals the contrite of heart and frees us from our spiritual disorders. If your own sins are greater and worse than other people's, why do you censure them, and neglect what concerns yourself?

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<sup>1</sup> Journey with the Fathers – Year C – New City Press – 1994 – pg 84

This precept, then, is essential for all who wish to live a holy life, and particularly for those who have undertaken the instruction of others. If they are virtuous and self-restrained, giving an example of the gospel way of life by their own actions, they will rebuke those who do not choose to live as they do in a friendly way, so as not to break their own habit of gentleness.

**Monday, March 4**

**From a Sermon by St Augustine of Hippo <sup>1</sup>**

Jacob the patriarch set a stone under his head and while he slept, with that stone under his head, he saw the heavens open and a ladder stretching from heaven to earth, and angels ascending and descending. After seeing this, he woke up, he anointed the stone, and departed. In this stone he understood Christ, that is why he anointed it. Just take a look at what forms the basis preaching Christ. What is meant by that act of anointing the stone, especially in the time of the patriarchs, who worshiped the one God? And this was done symbolically, and then he left. For he did not anoint the stone, and keep going back there to worship, and to sacrifice there. What happened was this: expression was given to a mystery, it was not the grand opening of a sacrilege. And take a look at the stone: *The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone*. And it was because Christ is the head of man that the stone is placed at the head. Take note of this great symbol: the stone is Christ. *A living stone, says Peter, rejected by humankind, but specially chosen by God*. And the stone is at the head, because Christ is the head of the man. And the stone is anointed because the name Christ derives from anointing.

And as Christ unfolds this picture, a ladder is seen, from earth to heaven, or from heaven to earth, and angels ascending and descending. What this is all about we shall see better when we have rehearsed the testimony of the Gospel as spoken by the Lord himself. You know that Jacob himself is Israel. He wrestled with an angel and won; he was blessed by the one over whom he prevailed. His name was changed and he was called Israel. This was just like the situation with Jesus and the Jews. The people of Israel prevailed over Christ in such a way as to crucify him, and yet in the case of those who believed in Christ, Israel was blessed by the one over whom it prevailed.

But many did not believe, and this is why Jacob has a limp – blessing and limping both. Blessing refers to those who have believed. For we know that afterward many from that nation did believe. But limping refers to those who have not believed. And because many have not believed, and few have believed, the angel touched the broad part of his thigh to bring about this limping. What is meant by the broad part of his thigh? The great number of his descendants. - over

You can therefore see that ladder. When the Lord saw Nathaniel in the gospel, he said: *Look, someone who is really an Israelite, in whom there is no guile.* For this is the sort of language used about Jacob himself: *And Jacob was free from guile and he lived at home.* The Lord remembered this when he saw Nathaniel free from guile, a member of that race and that people. *Look,* he said, *someone who is really an Israelite, in whom there is no guile.* He called him an Israelite, in whom there was no guile because of Jacob. And Nathaniel said: *How do you know me?* And the Lord said: *When you were beneath the fig tree I saw you.* This means, when you were within the Jewish people and under the law, when you covered over that people with a bodily shadow, that is where I took pity on you. And Nathaniel thought back to when he was under the fig tree, and he was amazed because he thought that he had been seen by nobody when he was there. He made his confession and said: *You are the Son of God, you are the king of Israel.* Who said this? The person who had heard that he was a true Israelite, and that in him there was no guile. And the Lord said: *It is because I saw you under the fig tree that you have believed. You shall see greater things than these.* He is speaking with Israel, with Jacob, with the one who placed a stone under his head. *You shall see things greater than these.*

What greater things? The fact that already that stone is by the head. *Truly I tell you, you shall see the heavens opened up, and God's angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man.* Let God's angels ascend and descend on that ladder. Let this happen in the Church. God's angels are heralds of the truth: let them ascend and see: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word.* Let the angels descend and see that *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.* Let them ascend so as to lift up those who are grown-ups. Let them descend so as to nourish the little ones. Watch Paul ascending: *If I have taken leave of my senses, it is to God that I am talking.* Watch him descending: *If I am making sense,*

*then I am talking to you. Watch him ascending: I am speaking of wisdom among the perfect. Watch him descending: I have given you milk to drink, not solid food.*

This is happening in the Church: God's angels ascend and descend on the Son of Man. This is because the Son of Man is above. They ascend to him in their heart, that is, his head. And the Son of Man is below, that is his body. His limbs are here, his head is up above. One rises up to the head, comes down to the limbs. It is the same Christ here and there. For were he there only, and not here, what would be the point of saying: *Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*

[1](#)Word in Season – vol. VII – Augustinian Press – 1999 – pg 69

**Tuesday, March 5**

**Jacob and the Happy Life. by Saint Ambrose.<sup>2</sup>**

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Jacob came to Laban and pastured Laban's sheep. Wrongdoing remains unattended, whereas wisdom does not forgo its task of government. It does not know how to be unoccupied even among strangers, nor does it know how to be an exile even among foreigners. The just man Jacob comes in like a hired hand and yet is the master who, in his ministry of preaching the Gospel, gathered together a flock that is resplendent in the brilliance of its many signal virtues. Thus when the flock came to drink, he would set before them in the troughs the bough of storax and walnut and that from the plane tree; those who felt desire for the mysteries of the most blessed Trinity that were prefigured there could engender offspring that were not at all discolored, by conceiving them in a devout mind.

Good were the sheep that produced the offspring that were good works and that were not degenerate in holy faith. By the storax is meant the incense and the evening sacrifice that is offered to God the Father in the

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<sup>2</sup> The Fathers of the Church, vol 65. Saint Ambrose: Seven Exegetical Works. Catholic University of America Press. Washington DC. 1971. p.155.

psalm; by the walnut bough, the priestly gift that is offered by Christ. For this is Aaron's bough, that blossomed when it was set down, and through it the grace of priestly holiness was manifested. By the plane tree is meant an abundance of spiritual fruit, because a vine attaches itself to this tree so that the tree may be fertile through the symbiosis and pour itself out into rich offspring. Even so, the addition of the grace of the Spirit has generally nurtured the gifts of the Lord's passion as well as the forgiveness of all sins.

Accordingly, as Scripture says, Jacob became rich by such means and reared a very good flock for Christ. He improved it with the title of faith and a diversity of virtues, the marks of a glorious name. And so he did not consider himself poor, for he was rich with the wealth of faith. He provoked the hostility of Laban's sons on grounds of his very great wealth, since he had increased his own flock by adding the other to it. And God said to him, "Return to the land of your father and to your own kin, and I will be with you," showing that nothing is lacking to the one who has the fullness of all things. This alone is enough for the one who was been perfected, in it all things subsist, and to it all things are referred; nothing is strange to it, nothing further is necessary to it, peace and faith are sufficient for it, so that through them it might reconcile what at first had been in discord. And no wonder if Jacob possessed peace, for he had set up a column and anointed it to God, and that column is the Church. Now the column has been called "the mainstay of the truth". That one anoints it who pours the ointment of faith upon Christ and that of compassion upon the poor.

### **Wednesday, March 6**

#### **The Manner of Keeping the Lenten Observance. From a Sermon by St. Bernard<sup>3</sup>**

I beseech you, most dearly beloved, to enter with all possible fervor upon this Lenten time, which is commended to us not only by the law of abstinence, but also and much more by the mystery it contains. Oh, with what devotion should we observe what has been transmitted to us as an inheritance from the righteous Moses who, by a special privilege granted to

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<sup>3</sup>St. Bernard's *Sermons for the Seasons & Principal Festivals of the Year*. vol. II. Bernard of Clairvaux. The Carroll Press. Westminster, MD. 1950. p. 84.

no other prophet, spoke to the Lord face to face. With what eagerness should we embrace a practice commended to us by the example of Elias, who was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot. We are encouraged to undertake this fast by the example of Moses and Elias, who, illustrious though they may be, are still our fellow-servants. But much greater encouragement should be given in the example of our Lord Jesus Christ Who also fasted for forty days. What kind of monk, or even what kind of Christian, would one be who would submit only with reluctance to an observance given to us by Christ? Besides, we ought to imitate His example with all the more fervor knowing that He fasted not for His own sake but for ours.

Let us fast, therefore, dearest brethren, and let us fast with devotion during this holy season of Lent. But let us also remember that the time of our Lent must not be limited to forty days. We are required to continue it all the days of this miserable existence, during which, with the help of divine grace, we are to fulfill the ten commandments of the law. They are clearly in error who suppose that these few days are sufficient for the practice of penance, since it is obvious that the whole period of our earthly life is ordered for no other purpose. "Seek the Lord," says the prophet, and not only during forty days, but "while He may be found". "Call upon Him while He is near". For the time of calling upon Him will then have gone by when God shall be near to no one, but to some intimately present and from others far remote. From the fact that He is declared to be **near**, it is clear that He is not yet present, not yet possessed, but it is equally evident that He can be found and possessed without difficulty. "Who seemed to you to have been neighbor to him that fell among robbers"? Doubtless "the one who showed mercy to him". Therefore since the Lord is near during all this time of mercy, "seek Him," most dearly beloved, "seek Him while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near."

Nevertheless we ought to seek Him with greater ardor during these forty days of Lent, which is not only a part, but the most sacred part of the whole season of mercy. If, then, at other times we have allowed our zeal to grow slack, it is fitting that our hearts should now be warmed with a renewal of spiritual fervor. If the stomach alone has sinned, let the stomach alone fast, and that suffices. But if the other members have sinned also, why should they not be made to fast as well as the stomach? Therefore let the "eye which has wasted the soul" be made to fast. Let the ear, too, be

made to fast, and the tongue, and the hand, and even the soul herself. Let the eye fast from curious looks, so that, wholesomely humbled, it may now be kept in penitential restraint. Let the ear fast from news and idle tales and from all that is vain and worthless with regard to salvation. Let the tongue fast from detraction and murmuring, from unprofitable, vain and frivolous words, and - because of the great importance of silence - sometimes even from words that seem necessary. Let the hand fast from every work not sanctioned by obedience. But above all, let the soul fast from vice and the following of her own will. For without this kind of fasting, all the rest will have no value in the eyes of God. For we read in the prophet Isaias that when the people said to the Lord: "Why have we fasted and you have not regarded?", they received this answer: "Behold in the day of your fast your own will is found."

**Thursday, March 7**

**On Lenten Prayer and Fasting. From a Sermon by St. Bernard.<sup>4</sup>**

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Notice in this Lenten observance how prayer and fasting assist each other like two allies, as it is written: "When a neighbor helps a neighbor, both shall be comforted". Prayer obtains the strength for fasting and fasting merits the grace to pray. Fasting renders prayer more powerful, and prayer responds by sanctifying the fast and presenting it to the Lord. What would our fast profit us if - God forbid - it were allowed to remain on the earth? Let it therefore be lifted up on the wing of prayer. But since this one wing may not be sufficient, it is necessary to add a second. "The prayer of the just one pierces the heavens", says Ecclesiasticus. Consequently, in order that our fast may be easily lifted up to heaven, let it be provided with the two wings of prayer and justice.

Now what is justice but the virtue which inclines us to render everyone their due? Therefore it is not enough to have regard only to God. You are a debtor also to your human superiors, and a debtor to your equals. It is certainly not the will of God that you should despise those whom He is far

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<sup>4</sup>St. Bernard's Sermons for the Seasons & Principal Festivals of the Year, vol. II. Bernard of Clairvaux. The Carroll Press. Westminster, MD. 1950. p. 91.

from despising. You may have said to yourself, "It is enough for me if I have the approval of God alone for my conduct. Why should I be concerned about the judgment of others?" But be assured of this: that the Lord is pleased with no action of yours which either gives scandal to His children or which is done contrary to the will of the one whom you are obliged to obey as God's representative. Joel says: "Sanctify the fast; call a solemn assembly". What is it to "call a solemn assembly" but to preserve unity, to foster peace, to "love the family of believers"? The proud Pharisee fasted; he also returned thanks to God. But he did not call the assembly, since he rather isolated himself by saying, "I am not as others". And therefore his fast, borne up on only one wing, was unable to ascend to heaven. See to it carefully that your fast shall have two wings, "peace, namely, and holiness, without which no one shall see God". "Sanctify the fast," that is to say, let a pure intention and devout prayer offer it to the Divine Majesty; and "call a solemn assembly," that is to say, your fast should not be singular or detrimental to unity.

Since I have spoken about justice and fasting, it is right that I should say something concerning prayer. Now just as this holy exercise is more efficacious when discharged as it ought to be, so the adversary strives to hinder it. Sometimes he obstructs prayer by inspiring "smallness of spirit" and immoderate fear. This happens when a person is so taken up with consideration of their own unworthiness that they lose sight altogether of the goodness of God. The psalmist says: "Abyss calls on abyss": the abyss of light on the abyss of darkness, the abyss of mercy on the abyss of misery. For the human heart is deep and unfathomable. But although my iniquity is great, much greater, O Lord, is Your goodness. And consequently, whenever my soul disquiets me, I shall be "mindful of the multitude of Your mercies" and so shall be comforted.

**Friday, March 8**

**A Reading on the Virtue of Compassion, from a Homily of St. Asterius of Amasea.<sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>5</sup>Homily 13: PG 40, 355-359C-D. [CR VI 221] [cf. also WS II 176].



If you desire to resemble God, for you have been created in God's own image, imitate your model. You, Christians. whose very name calls to mind love, imitate Christ's love. Consider and wonder at the wealth of Christ's love for us. When he was about to show himself to us in our own nature, he sent John to preach repentance by word and example. Before John he sent all the prophets. They too were to teach people to amend their lives. Then he came himself and with his own voice cried out: *Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.* And how did he receive those who listened to his call and followed him? He readily forgave them their sins, instantly relieving them of all their cause for grief. The Word has sanctified them and the Spirit has confirmed them. Their old self was buried in the waters of baptism and a new self born; their youth was renewed by grace. And the result? Enemies of God became his friends, strangers to him became his children, idolaters became worshipers of the true God.

You, therefore, who are harsh and unable to show gentleness, learn goodness from your Creator. Do not act as bitter judges and severe arbiters toward those who are your companions in service, as you wait for the coming of One who will reveal the secret recesses of the heart and, as the Almighty Lord, will assign to each person their proper place in the life beyond.

Do not pass severe judgements that you may avoid being judged with the same severity, being pierced yourselves by the words of your own mouth as by sharp-pointed teeth. For it is against this kind of fault that the words of the gospel seem indeed to warn us where it is said: *If you want to avoid judgement, stop passing judgement, your verdict on others will be the verdict passed on you.*

Christ does not thereby mean that he wants to banish discernment and wisdom. What he condemns is a condemnation that is too severe. So, lighten as much as possible the weight of your measurement of others, if you want your own actions not to be considered excessively heavy when our lives are weighed at the divine judgement....Do not refuse to act

mercifully that you yourselves may not be sent away unpardoned at the time when you will need forgiveness.

**Saturday, March 9**

**From a sermon by St. Peter Chrysologus on prayer and fasting** <sup>6</sup>

There are three things, my brethren, by which faith stands firm, devotion remains constant, and virtue endures. They are prayer, fasting and mercy. Prayer knocks at the door, fasting obtains, mercy receives. Prayer, mercy and fasting: these three are one, and they give life to each other.

Fasting is the soul of prayer; mercy is the lifeblood of fasting. Let no one try to separate them; they cannot be separated. If you have only one of them or not all together, you have nothing. So if you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy; if you want your petition to be heard, hear the petition of others. If you do not close your ear to others you open God's ear to yourself.

When you fast, see the fasting of others. If you want God to know that you are hungry, know that another is hungry. If you hope for mercy, show mercy. If you look for kindness, show kindness. If you want to receive, give. If you ask for yourself what you deny to others, your asking is mockery.

Let this be the pattern for all peoples when they practice mercy: show mercy to others in the same way, with the same generosity, with the same promptness, as you want others to show mercy to you.

Therefore let prayer, mercy and fasting be one single plea to God on our behalf, one speech in our defense, and a threefold-united prayer in our favor.

Let us use fasting to make up for what we have lost by despising others. Let us offer our souls in sacrifice by means of fasting. There is nothing more pleasing that we can offer, as the Psalmist said in prophecy: AA sacrifice to God is a broken spirit; God does not despise a bruised and humbled heart@.

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<sup>6</sup> The Liturgy of the Hours - vol. II - pg. 231 - Catholic Book Publishing Co - 1976

Offer your soul to God; make him an oblation of your fasting, so that your soul may be a pure offering, a holy sacrifice, a living victim, remaining your own and at the same time made over to God. Whoever fails to give this to God will not be excused, for if you are to give him yourself you are never without the means of giving.

To make these acceptable, mercy must be added. Fasting bears no fruit unless it is watered by mercy. Fasting dries up when mercy dries up. Mercy is to fasting as rain is to the earth. However much you may cultivate your heart, clear the soil of your nature, root out vices, sow virtues, if you do not release the springs of mercy, your fasting will bear no fruit.

When you fast, if your mercy is thin your harvest will be thin; when you fast, what you pour out in mercy overflows into your barn. Therefore do not lose by saving, but gather in by scattering. Give to the poor, and you give to yourself. You will not be allowed to keep what you have refused to give to others.

END OF READINGS