

NT-LK10

03.24.19

A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke by St. Augustine ¹

It is my Father's glory, Christ said, that you should bear abundant fruit and become my disciples. But even when we have glorified the Father by bearing much fruit and becoming Christ's disciples, we still have no right to claim the credit for it as though the work were ours alone. The grace to carry out the work had first to come to us from God, and so the glory is his, not ours. That is why Christ is recorded in another place as saying: *Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works* – and here, lest they be tempted to attribute those good works to themselves, he immediately added: *and may give the glory for them to your heavenly Father.* This, then, is the Father's glory, that we should bear abundant fruit and become Christ's disciples, since it is only through God's mercy in the first place that we can become disciples of Christ. *We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the performance of good works.*

As the Father has loved me, Jesus says, so I have loved you. Abide in my love. There we have the source of every good work of ours. How do they come to be ours? Only because faith is active in love. And how could we ever love, unless we ourselves were loved first? In his first letter John the evangelist made this quite clear. *Let us love God, he wrote, because he first loved us.* The Father does indeed love us, but he does so in his Son; we glorify the Father by bearing fruit as branches of the vine which is his Son and becoming his disciples.

Abide in my love, he says to us. How may we do that? In the words that follow you have your answer. If you observe what I have commanded you, then you will truly abide in my love But is it love that makes us keep God's commandments, or is it the keeping of them that makes us love him? There can be no doubt that love comes first. Anyone devoid of love will lack all incentive to keep the commandments. When, therefore, Christ says to us: *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love*, he is telling us that the observance of the commandments is not the source but rather the gauge and touchstone of our love. It is as though he said to us: Do not suppose you are abiding in my love if you are not keeping my commandments, for it is by observing them that you will abide in my love. That is to say, your observance of my commandments is the proof, the outward manifestation, of the fact that you abide in my love.

Let no one, then, who neglects to keep the divine commandments deceive himself by protesting his love for God. It is only to the extent to which we keep the Lord's commandments that we abide in his love; insofar as we fail to keep them we fail to love. Yet even when we do keep God's commandments, it is not something we do in order to make God love us, for unless He loved us first we should not be able to keep them. It is the gift of his grace, a grace which is accessible to the humble of heart, but beyond the reach of the proud.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year C – New City Press – 1994 – pg 34

03SN2504

03.25.19

From a Sermon by Blessed Gueric of Igny ¹

The solemnity of the Lord's annunciation providentially interrupts the days of our Lenten observance, so that we are able to refresh ourselves with spiritual joy in the midst of the physical austerities which weigh so heavily on us. Having been humbled by penitential sorrow, we are now encouraged by the announcement of the one who takes away the sins of the world. This is just what Scripture says: *Grief makes the heart heavy, but a kind word makes it glad.*

It is indeed a kind word, *a reliable word in which you can believe*, this gospel of our salvation which the angel sent by God announced to Mary on this day. It is a joyful word which day utters unto day, the angel to the virgin, concerning the incarnation of the Word. It promises a son to the Virgin, and at the same time pardon to sinners, redemption to captives, release to the imprisoned, life to those in the grave. In foretelling the Son's kingdom and announcing the glory of the righteous it makes hell fearful and gives joy to heaven. By the revelation of these mysteries and by the new joys it brings them, it seems to have increased the perfection of the angels.

Is there an afflicted person who would not be cheered by this kind word, or anyone whose lowliness it would not console? *Remember your word to your servant by which you gave me hope*, sang David. *It was this which consoled me when I was brought low.* He received only a promise, a word which did not show any sign of coming true. The delay in the fulfillment of his desire distressed him, but he took comfort by hoping firmly in the good faith of the one who had made the promise. If David could sustain his spirit with just the hope of the salvation which was being kept for us, with what joy and delight ought we not to greet its realization? - over -

Blessed are the mourners because they will be comforted, blessed those whose hearts are afflicted by a holy grief because they shall be gladdened by a kind word. Clearly the kind word which consoles is your all-[powerful Word, O Lord, which came today from the heavenly throne into the womb of a virgin. There, too, he made a royal throne, and from there he consoles those who mourn on earth even while he sits as king surrounded by the hosts of angels in heaven.

¹ A Word in Season – vol/ IV – Augustinian Press p 1991 – pg 52

LNT-44

03.26.19

From a letter of St Maximus the Confessor ²

God=s will is to save us, and nothing pleases him more than our coming back to him with true repentance. The heralds of truth and the ministers of divine grace have told us this from the beginning, repeating it in every age. Indeed, God=s desire for our salvation is the primary and preeminent sign of his infinite goodness. It is precisely in order to show that there is nothing closer to God=s heart that the divine Word of the Father, with untold condescension, lived among us in the flesh, and did, suffered and said all that was necessary to reconcile us to God the Father, when we were at enmity with him, and to restore us to the life of blessedness from which we had been exiled. He healed our physical infirmities by miracles; he freed us from our sins, many and grievous as they were, by suffering and dying, taking them upon himself as if he were answerable for them, sinless though he was. He also taught us in many different ways that we should wish to imitate him by our own kindness and genuine love for one another.

So it was that Christ proclaimed that he had come to call sinners to repentance, not the righteous, and that it was not the healthy who required a doctor, but the sick. He declared that he had come to look for the sheep that was lost, and that it was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel that he had been sent.

To give the same lesson he revived the man who, having fallen into the hands of brigands, had been left stripped and half-dead from his wounds; he poured wine and oil on the wounds, bandaged them, placed the man on his own mule, and brought him to an inn, where he left sufficient money to have him cared for, and promised to repay any further expense on his return.

Again, he told of how that Father. Who is goodness itself, was moved with pity for his profligate son who returned and made amends by repentance; how he embraced him, dressed him once more in the fine garments that befitted his own dignity, and did not reproach him for any of his sins.

So too, when he found wandering in the mountains and hills the one sheep that had strayed from God=s flock of a hundred, he brought it back to the fold, but he did not exhaust it by driving it ahead of him. Instead, he placed it on his own shoulders and so, compassionately, he restored it safely to the flock.

So also he cried out: ACome to me, all you that toil and are heavy of heart. Accept my yoke@, he said, by which he meant his commands, or rather the whole way of life that he taught us in the Gospel. He then speaks of a burden, but that is

² The Liturgy of the Hours - vol II - pg 304 - Catholic Book Publishing co - 1976

only because repentance seems difficult. In fact, however, My yoke is easy, he assures us, And my burden is light@.

Then again he instructs us in divine justice and goodness, telling us to be like our heavenly Father, holy, perfect and merciful. Forgive@, he says, And you will be forgiven. Behave toward other people as you would wish them to behave toward you@.

TM-LNT49

03/27/19

A Sermon of St. Maximus ³

We must accept with all reverence, brethren, the sacred days of Lent, and not repine because of the length of the season; for the longer the days of our fasting, the greater the grounds of our forgiveness; the longer the time of our self-denial, the greater the price paid for our soul's salvation; the severer the treatment of our wounds, the more sure the healing of our offenses. For God who is the Physician of our souls has initiated an appropriate time; sufficient for the just to make reparation, and for sinners to ask for mercy; the one praying for peace, the other imploring pardon.

For the days of Lent are suited to our purpose; not short, so that we may plead in prayer; not long, for our need to gain merit. For in this fast of forty days any offense may be wiped out, and the severity of any judge softened. The time may be long and tedious for the one who neither pleads for his sins, nor hopes for forgiveness. For he who despairs will neither confess his sin, nor hope in the mercy of the Judge.

Holy and salutary therefore is the time of Lent, in which the Judge is moved to mercy, the sinner to repentance, and the just to peace. For in these days the Divinity is inclined to be more merciful, the sinner to repent, and grace to be earned. All things are now prepared: the heavens to pardon, the sinner to confess, the tongue to plead.

Mystical and salutary is this number, forty. For when in the beginning the iniquity of man covered the face of the earth, God, dissolving the clouds of heaven for the space of this number of days, covered the whole earth with a flood. You see then already that in this time the Mystery is put before us in Figure. For as it then rained for forty days, to cleanse the world, so now does it also. Yet the deluge of these days must be called mercy, in that through it iniquity was crushed, and justness upheld. For it took place out of mercy, to deliver the just and so that the wicked might no longer sin. We see clearly it was through mercy it came, as a sort of baptism, in which the face of the earth was renewed, that is, so that man who wallowed in sin might come to grace in the dwelling of

³ The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers – vol. 2 – Henry Regnery Co – Chicago – 1958 – pg 92

Noah, and so that he who was then an abode of iniquity, might become a dwelling place of holiness.

The Flood of those days was, as I say, a Figure of Baptism. For that was then prefigured which is now fulfilled; that is, just as when the fountains of water overflowed, iniquity was imperiled, and justness alone reigned; sin was swept into the abyss, and holiness upraised to heaven. Then, as I said, that was prefigured which is now fulfilled in Christ's Church. For as Noah was saved in the Ark, while the iniquity of men was drowned in the Flood, so by the waters of Baptism the Church is borne close to heaven, and the faith reigns on earth which came forth from the Ark of the Savior.

3/28/19

A Reading about the Experience of God, from the book *The Eternal Year*, by Karl Rahner.⁴

There is a distance of God that permeates the pious and the impious, that perplexes the mind and unspeakably terrifies the heart. The pious do not like to admit it, because they suppose that such a thing should not happen to them (although the Lord himself cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"); and the others, the impious, draw false consequences from the admitted facts.

If this God-distance of choked-up hearts is the ultimate bitterness of the fasting season of our *life*, then it is fitting to ask how we are to deal with it, and (for us it is the very same question) how we can today celebrate the fasting season of the *Church*. For when the bitter God-distance becomes a divine service, the fasting season of the world changes into the fasting season of the Church.

The first thing we have to do is this: stand up and face this God-distance of a choked-up heart. We have to resist the desire to run away from it either in pious or in worldly business. We have to endure it without the narcotic of the world, without the narcotic of sin or of obstinate despair. What God is really far away from you in this emptiness of heart? Not the true and living God; for he is precisely the intangible God, the nameless God; and that is why he can really be the God of your measureless heart. Distant from you is only a God who does not exist: a tangible God, a God of our small thoughts and our cheap, timid feelings, a God of earthly security, a God whose concern is that the children don't cry and that philanthropy doesn't fall into disillusion, a very venerable - idol! That is what has become distant....

Do not be frightened over the loneliness and abandonment of your interior dungeon, which seems to be so dead - like a grave. For if you stand firm - this is already a wonder of grace - then you will suddenly perceive that your grave-dungeon only blocks the futile finiteness; you will become aware that your deadly void is only the breadth of God's intimacy, that the silence is filled up by a word without words, by the one who is above all name and is all in all. That silence is God's silence. It tells you that God is there.

⁴The Eternal Year, K. Rahner, Helicon: Baltimore MD 1964. pp 68ff.

That is the *second* thing you should do in your despair: notice that God is there. Know with faith that he is with you. Perceive that for a long time now he has been waiting for you in the deepest dungeon of your blocked-up heart, and that for a long time he has been quietly listening to you, even though you, after all the busy noise that we call our life, do not even let him get a word in edgewise, and his words to the person-you-were-until-now seem only deadly silence. You shall see that you by no means make a mistake if you give up your anxiety over yourself and your life, that you by no means make a mistake if you relax your hold on self, that you are by no means crushed with despair if once and for all you despair of yourself, of your wisdom and strength, and of the false image of God that is snatched away from you...

If we do this, then peace comes all by itself. Peace is the most genuine activity: the silence that is filled with God's word, the trust that is no longer afraid, the sureness that no longer needs to be assured, and the strength that is powerful in weakness - it is, then, the life that rises through death. There is nothing more in us then but God: God and the almost imperceptible and yet all-filling faith that he is there, and that we are.

LNT-45

03.29.19

From a Homily by St Gregory Nazianzen on sharing in the Passover ⁵

We are soon going to share in the Passover, and although we still do so only in a symbolic way, the symbolism already has more clarity than it possessed in former times, because under the law, the Passover was, if I may dare to say so, only a symbol of a symbol. Before long, however, when the Word drinks the new wine with us in the kingdom of his Father, we shall be keeping the Passover in a yet more perfect way and with deeper understanding. He will then reveal to us and make clear what he has so far only partially disclosed. For this wine, so familiar to us now, is eternally new.

It is for us to learn what this drinking is, and for him to teach us. He has to communicate this knowledge to his disciples, because teaching is food, even for the teacher.

So let us take our part in the Passover prescribed by the law, not in a literal way, but according to the teaching of the Gospel; not in an imperfect way, but perfectly; not only for a time, but eternally. Let us regard as our home the heavenly Jerusalem, not the earthly one, the city glorified by angels, not the one laid waste by armies. We are not required to sacrifice young bulls or rams, beasts with horns and hoofs that are more dead than alive and devoid of feeling; but instead let us join the choirs of angels in offering God upon his heavenly altar a sacrifice of praise. We must now pass through the first veil and approach the second, turning our eyes toward the Holy of Holies. I will say more: we must sacrifice ourselves to God each day and in everything we do, accepting all that happens to us for the sake of the Word, imitating his passion by our sufferings, and honoring his blood by shedding our own. We must be ready to be crucified.

If you are a Simon of Cyrene, take up your cross and follow Christ. If you are crucified beside him like one of the thieves, now, like the good thief, acknowledge your God. For your sake, and because of your sin, Christ himself was regarded as a sinner; for his sake, therefore, you must cease to sin. Worship him who hung on the cross because of you, even if you are

⁵ The Liturgy of the Hours - vol II - pg 392 - Catholic Book Publishing Co - 1976

hanging there yourself. Derive some benefit from the very shame; purchase salvation with your death. Enter paradise with Jesus, and discover how far you have fallen. Contemplate the glories there, and leave the other scoffing thief to die outside in his blasphemy.

If you are a Joseph of Arimathea, go to the one who ordered his crucifixion, and ask for Christ=s body. Make your own the expiation for the sins of the whole world. If you are a Nicodemus, like the man who worshiped God by night, bring spices and prepare Christ=s body for burial. If you are one of the Mary=s or Salome or Joanna, weep in the early morning. Be the first to see the stone rolled back, and even the angels perhaps, and Jesus himself.

TM-LNT50

03/30/19

A Sermon of St.Ambrose ⁶

Give thanks, brethren, to the Divine Mercy Which has brought you safely half-way through the season of Lent. For this favor they give praise to God, thankfully and with devotion, who in these days have striven to live in the manner in which they were instructed at the beginning of Lent: that is, those who, coming with eagerness to the church, have sought with sighs and tears, in daily fasting and almsdeeds, to obtain the forgiveness of their sins.

They, however, who have neglected this duty, that is to say, those who have not fasted daily, or given alms, or those who were indifferent or unmoved in prayer, they have no reason to rejoice, but cause rather for mourning. Yet let them not mourn as if they had no hope; for He who could give back sight to the man blind from birth can likewise change those who now are lukewarm and indifferent into souls fervent and zealous in His service, if with their whole heart they desire to be converted unto Him.

Labor therefore, beloved children in the Lord, labor while it is yet day; for as Christ our Lord says, *The night comes, when no man can work.* Daytime is this present life; night is death and the time that follows death. If after this life there is no more freedom to work, as the Truth tells us, why then does every person not labor while yet there is time, that is, while he still; that is while he still lives in this world?

Be fearful, brethren, of this death. All those who now work evil are without fear of this death, and because of this when they depart from this life they shall encounter everlasting death. Labor while you yet live, and particularly in these days; fasting from dainty fare, withholding yourselves at all times from evil works. For those who abstain from food, but do not withhold themselves from wickedness, are like the devil, who while he eats not, never ceases from evildoing.

⁶ The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers – vol. 2 – Henry Regnery Co – Chicago – 1958 – pg 82

