

**LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY**  
**VIGILS READINGS**

First Week of Lent  
March 10-16, 2019

**SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 2019**

**A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke by St John Chrysostom <sup>1</sup>**

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.* What does “then” mean? After the Spirit descended, after the voice from heaven said: *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.* The amazing thing is that Scripture says it was the Holy Spirit who led him there!

All that Jesus did and suffered was for our instruction. He consented to be led into the desert and to do battle with the devil so that when the baptized were assailed by greater temptations after baptism than before they would not be troubled as though this were something unexpected, but would remain steadfast, bearing them all nobly. You did not receive weapons so that you might sit at ease, but so that you might fight!

The reasons God does not prevent the onslaught of temptations are these: First, so that you may learn that you have become now much stronger; then, so that you may remain modest, for you will not be puffed up by the greatness of your gifts if temptations can humble you; next, because the wicked demon may doubt at first whether you have really renounced him, and the test of temptation will convince him of your total desertion; fourth, to confirm you, who are now stronger and steadier than iron; fifth, to give you clear evidence of the treasures committed to you. The devil would not have attacked you if he had not seen that you have been raised to a position of great honor.

Notice where it was that the spirit led Jesus – not into the city or the market place, but into the desert. Since Jesus wished to entice the devil he

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<sup>1</sup> Journey with the Fathers – Year C – New City Press – 1994 – pg 30

gave him his opportunity not only by his own hunger, but also by his choice of place. The devil usually attacks people when he sees them alone by themselves. He does not dare to do so when he sees them together with others. It is for this reason especially that we should frequently meet with one another. If we do not we may become an easy prey for the devil. And so, the devil finds Jesus in the desert, in a trackless wilderness. - *over*

Consider how vile and wicked the devil's approach is, and what sort of opportunity he watches for. He does not come near when Jesus is fasting, but only when he is hungry. You should learn from this the great value of fasting and that no weapon is more powerful against the devil. After baptism you should not be filled with food and drink from a well laden table, but should rather devote yourself to fasting. Jesus fasted not because he himself had any need to do so, but to give us an example.

**MONDAY, MARCH 11, 2019**

**Sermon of St Caesarius of Arles for Lent<sup>2</sup>**

Behold, dearest brethren, through the mercy of God the season of Lent is upon us. Therefore I beseech you, beloved, with God's help let us celebrate these days, salutary for bodies and healing for the soul, in so holy and spiritual a manner that the observance of a holy Lent may lead to progress for us and not judgment. For if we lead a careless life, involving ourselves in too many occupations, refusing to observe chastity, not applying ourselves to fasting and vigils and prayers, neither reading Sacred Scripture ourselves nor willingly listen to others reading it, the very remedies are changed into wounds for us. As a result of this we shall have judgment, where we could have had a remedy.

For this reason I exhort you, dearest brethren, to rise rather early for the vigils, and above all to come to terce, sext and none. Let no one withdraw himself from the holy Office unless either infirmity or public service or at least great necessity keeps him occupied. Let it not be enough for you that you hear the divine lessons in Church, but read them

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<sup>2</sup>St Caesarius of Arles, Sermons, vol.3, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 66, Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC, 1973, pg. 41

yourselves at home or look for someone else to read them and willingly listen to them when they do. Remember the thought of our Lord, brethren, when He says: Alif he were to gain the whole world and destroy himself in the process, what can a man offer in exchange for his very self?@ Above all keep in mind and always fear greatly what is written: AThe burdens of the world have made them miserable.@ Therefore busy yourself in your home in such a way that you do not neglect your soul. Finally, if you cannot do more, at least labor as much on behalf of your soul as you desire to labor for the sake of your body.

For this reason, dearest brethren, AHave no love for the world, nor the things the world affords,@ because Athe world with its seductions is passing away@. What, then, remains in a man except what each one has stored up in the treasury of his conscience for the salvation of his soul by reading or prayer or the performance of good works? For miserable pleasure, still more wretched lust and dissipation, through a passing sweetness prepare eternal bitterness; but abstinence, vigils, prayer and fasting lead to the delights of paradise through the briefest hardships. The Truth does not lie when He says in the Gospel: AStraight and narrow is the road that leads to eternal life, and how few there are that find it!@ Not for long is there rejoicing on the broad way, and not for long is there labor on the straight and narrow road. After brief sadness those who travel the latter receive eternal life, while those who travel the former, after short joy, suffer endless punishment.

For this reason, dearest brethren, by fasting, reading and prayer in these forty days we ought to store up for our souls provisions, as it were, for the whole year. Although through the mercy of God you frequently and devoutly hear the divine lessons throughout the entire year, still during these days we ought to rest from the winds and the sea of this world by taking refuge, as it were, in the haven of Lent, and in the quiet of silence to receive the divine lessons in the receptacle of our heart. Devoting ourselves to God out of love for eternal life, during these days let us with all solicitude strive to repair and compose in the little ship of our soul whatever throughout the year has been broken or destroyed or damaged or ruined by many storms, that is, by the waves of sins. And since it is necessary for us to endure the storms and tempests of this world while we are still in this frail body, as often as the enemy wills to lead us astray by means of the

roughest storms or to deceive us by the most voluptuous pleasures, with God's help may he always find us prepared against him

Therefore I beseech you again and again. During these holy days of Lent if you cannot cut off the occupations of this world, at least strive to curtail them in part. By fleeing from this world, through an expedient loss and a most glorious gain you may take away from earthly occupations a few hours in which you can devote yourselves to God. For this world either laughs at us or is laughed at by us; either we yield to it and are despised, or we despise it in order to obtain eternal rewards. Thus you either reject and despise the world, or you yield to it and are pursued or even trampled upon by it.

If in accord with your usual practice you both willingly heed and strive faithfully to fulfill, dearest brethren, the truths which we are suggesting for the salvation of all by presuming on your obedience, you will celebrate Easter with joy and happily come to eternal life. May He Himself deign to grant this, who together with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

## **TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 2019**

### **A Reading from a Sermon of St Leo the Great on Lent <sup>3</sup>**

At the beginning of my sermon to you, beloved brethren, on this the greatest and most sacred of the fasts, what more fitting opening than to begin with the words of the Apostle, in whom Christ spoke, and declare again: Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold now is the day of salvation. For though there is no season that is not filled with the divine gifts, and though at each moment we have, through His grace, access to the Divine Mercy, yet now is the time in which the souls of all mortals should be stirred with greater fervor towards spiritual perfection, and inspired with greater confidence; now when the return of that day when we were redeemed invites us once more to the fulfillment of all our sacred duties, so that purified in body and soul we may celebrate the supreme Mystery of

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<sup>3</sup> The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers, vol. 2, Henry Regnery Co, Chicago, 1958, pg. 29

the Passion of Our Lord. Indeed such unending reverence and unceasing devotion is due to these sacred mysteries, that should we ever be in the Presence of God as we now are obliged to be for the worthy celebration of the Paschal Feast.

But since there are few that have this strength of soul, and since because of the weakness of our flesh, the more severe observance is relaxed, and since the manifold duties of the present life take up so much of our care, it will happen that even the most devout of heart are stained with the dust of earth. Accordingly, with great solicitude has this divine means been given us, so that these forty days of reflection may assist us to restore the purity of our souls, and so that during them we may by good works make satisfaction for our past sins, and by devout mortification purge ourselves of them.

As we are therefore beginning this sacred season, dedicated to the purification of the soul, let us be careful to fulfill the Apostolic command that we cleanse ourselves from all defilement of the flesh and of the spirit, so that restraining the conflict that exists between the one and the other substance, the soul, which in the Providence of God is meant to be the ruler of the body, may regain the dignity of its rightful authority, so that, giving offence to no one, we may not incur the punishment of evildoers. For the sum total of our fasting does not consist in merely abstaining from food. In vain do we deny our body food if we do not withhold our heart from iniquity, and restrain our lips that they speak no evil.

We must then so moderate our rightful use of food that our other desires may be subject to the same rule. For this is also a time for gentleness and patience, a time of peace and serenity, in which having put away all stains of evil doing we strive after steadfastness in what is good. Now is the time when generous Christian souls forgive offences, pay no heed to insults, and wipe out the memory of past injuries. Now let the Christian soul exercise itself in the armor of justice, on the right hand and on the left, so that amid honor and dishonor, evil report and good, the praise of men will not make proud the virtue that is well rooted, the conscience that has peace, nor dishonor cast it down. The moderation of those who worship God is blameless.

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 2019**

## Continuation of the sermon of St Leo the Great on Lent <sup>4</sup>

During this holy time we should not hear the sound of discord coming from those to whom the consolations of holy joy are never wanting. And when you are engaged in works of mercy, do not fear a lessening of your own earthly possessions. Christian poverty is ever rich; for that which it possesses is greater than that which it does not possess. Neither should he fear to work on in poverty to whom has been given to possess all things in the Lord of all things.

But be certain, dearly beloved, that the devil, the enemy of all virtue, will look with envy upon these pious practices to which we trust you freely give yourselves; and he will bring against them all the force of his malice, so that from piety itself he may weave snares against piety, so that those he could not destroy through despair he will seek to undo through vainglory. For standing close at hand to all our actions is the iniquity of pride; and vanity lies ever in wait for virtue; for it rarely happens that the praise of men is not given to those who live worthy lives, unless, as was written, Whoever glories, let him glory in the Lord@.

Let us therefore, dearly beloved, be watchful against the deceits of the devil, not only against the enticements of gluttony, but even in our very purpose of fasting. For he who knew how to bring death upon all by means of food, knows how to injure us even in our fast. For just as by a serpent he brought it about that what was forbidden was eaten by Adam and Eve, so by the same serpents he persuades mortals to shun what is lawful.

Whatever is given us as food and as drink is clean and holy, no matter what it may be. But if it is indulge in with unmeasured appetite it will dishonor both those who eat it and those who drink it. Yet it is not the nature of the food that defiles us. For Aall things are clean to the clean; but to those that are defiled and to unbelievers, nothing is clean, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled@.

But you, dearly beloved, the holy offspring of the Catholic Mother, whom the Spirit of God has taught in the School of Truth, use your freedom of action with right reason, knowing that it is good to abstain, even from

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<sup>4</sup> The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers, vol 2, Henry Regnery Co, Chicago, 1958, pg 30

what is lawful; and when you must practice self-denial, so abstain from food as merely putting aside its use, not as condemning its nature.

Enter then with pious devotion upon these holy days of Lent; and prepare for yourselves the works of mercy, that you may merit the Divine Mercy. Extinguish the fires of anger, wipe away all hate, love the bond of unity, give way to each other in the simplicity of true humility.

Rule your servants with justice, and likewise all who are subject to you. Let there be an end to vengeance. Let offences be forgiven. Let harshness be changed to mildness, disdain to gentleness, and discord into peace. Let us all strive to be modest, let all be gentle, all be kind, so that our fasting may be pleasing to God. To Him we shall offer a true sacrifice of self-denial and devotion if we keep ourselves from all iniquity; being helped in all things by almighty God, who with the Son and the Holy Spirit is One in divinity, one in Majesty, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### **THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 2019**

#### **Continuing the Sermon of St Leo the Great on the spirit of Lent <sup>5</sup>**

Let us then, dearly beloved, observe these venerable practices of this most acceptable time, and with anxious care clean the windows of our soul. For however chastely and soberly we live in this mortal life, we shall yet be soiled by some dust in the course of our earthly journey, and the brightness of our soul, formed to God=s image and likeness, is not so remote from the smoke of every vanity that it will be unclouded by any stain and never need to be polished. And if this is needed for even the most guarded souls, how much more is it needed for those who pass almost the whole year in carelessness and perhaps in total neglect? Let us with all charity remind such as these not to flatter themselves, because we cannot see into their consciences, since not even the walls of houses, nor remoteness of place, can conceal anything from the eyes of God. And not alone are thoughts and actions known to Him, but all that shall yet be thought and done. Such is the knowledge of the supreme Judge, such is the power of His sight, to whom all that is solid is open, all that is secret is laid bare, to whom things

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<sup>5</sup> The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers, vol 2, Henry Regnery Co., 1958, pg 127

hidden are clear, to whom the dumb answer, the silence cries out, and the soul speaks without voice.

Let no one despise the patience of God's goodness because his own sins go unpunished; and think that because he has not felt the wrath of God he has not offended God. The days of grace of this mortal life are not prolonged, nor the time allotted to the foolish of heart before they cross over to the pains of eternal punishment, unless while justice holds its hand they seek for the medicine of penance.

Let us then take refuge in the ever present mercy of God, and, so that we may with fitting reverence celebrate the holy Pasch of the Lord, let all the faithful seek to make holy their own hearts. Let harshness give way to mildness, let wrath grow gentle, forgive one another your offences, and let him who seeks to be forgiven be not himself a seeker of vengeance. For when we say: 'Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors', we bind ourselves in the most enduring bonds unless we fulfill what we profess. And if the most sacred contract of this prayer has not in every respect been fulfilled, let every person examine his conscience, and gain the pardon of his own sins by forgiving those of others.

For when the Lord says: 'If you will forgive men their offences, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your offences', what he is here asking is close to each one of us: for the sentence of the Judge will depend on the clemency of the suppliant. For the Just and Merciful Receiver of the prayers of mortals has laid it down that our own generosity is the measure of His fairness to ourselves; so that He will not treat with strict justness those whom He finds not eager for revenge. And generosity is becoming to kind and gentle souls. Nothing is more fitting than that a person imitate his Maker, and that as best he can he is a doer of the works of God.

He who has no need of a helper to perform His works of mercy, so orders His own omnipotence that it is by means of mortals that He comes to the aid of mortals. It is because of this the Lord Himself said to His disciples: 'So let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven', who with the same Father and the Holy spirit lives and reigns God forever and ever. Amen

**FRIDAY, MARCH 15, 2019**



## **A Sermon of St Leo the Great of the Lenten practices <sup>6</sup>**

Among all the Christian solemnities the Paschal Mystery holds chief place, dearly beloved; for this the practices of the whole preceding year prepare us to worthily and rightly celebrate it. But earnest devotion is required of us especially in these days which are close to this most sublime mystery of the divine mercy. So it was right that the holy Apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit, should ordain that during these days we are to observe severer fasts, so that we also, by a common sharing of Christ's Cross, might suffer a little of that He endured for us, as the Apostle says: If we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified with him. For where there is a sharing of the passion of the Lord, there is a sure and certain expectation of our promised happiness.

There is no one, dearly beloved, to whom, because of the state of times, this fellowship of glory is denied, as though the tranquility of peace gave us no opportunity for the practice of heroic virtue! For the Apostle foretold that All who live godly lives in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecutions. So where people live in Christ there shall be no lack of trials or persecutions. The Lord Himself says to us: Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me, is not worthy of me. Nor should we doubt that these words were directed not only to the disciples of Christ, but also to all the faithful who are all taught unto salvation.

And as at all times we must live worthily, so at all times we must bear the Cross, which for each one is rightly called his or her own, for it is borne by each one in his own way and measure.

Iniquity does not dwell in peace with virtue; drunkenness hates sobriety; falsehood has nothing in common with truthfulness. Pride has no regard for humility, wantonness for modesty, greed for generosity. And this division awakens such enduring conflicts that though it may outwardly seem to subside, yet never does it cease from disturbing the inmost soul of the just of heart, so that it is indeed true that All who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecutions; and true as well that all this life is a warfare. Let each faithful soul, learning from his own experiences, arm himself with the Cross of Christ, that he may be found worthy of Christ.

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<sup>6</sup> The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers, vol. 2, Henry Regnery Co., 1957, pg 146

So now I wish to awaken your devotion in regard to what this holy season requires of us: that you beautify your holy and salutary fasting with works of piety. And since we are especially to labor for the pardon of our sins, you can be assured of the unfailing divine mercy if you likewise in your dealings with others change every offence into pardon.

For it is but fitting that the members of the Church of God should come together for this great festival in gentleness and harmony of spirit; and that the harshness of punishments should be mitigated more in the hearts of Christians. Rather the solicitude of the sanctified should be intent upon this: that no one suffer cold, that no one hunger, that no one shall be in want, that no one be left to pine away in sorrow, that no one be bound in chains, that the jails should hold no prisoner.

For no matter how great the offenses between one person and another, yet we should rather keep in mind not so much the enormity of the offense, as the fact that we share a common nature; so that with what mercy we judge another, we shall obtain mercy from God. For Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy@ from God.

## **SATURDAY, MARCH 16, 2019**

### **From a Sermon by St Leo the Great on Lent <sup>7</sup>**

In the gospel of John the Lord says: Aln this will all people know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another@. In a letter of the same apostle we read: ABeloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God; whoever does not love does not know God, for God is Love@.

The faithful should enter into themselves and make a true judgment on their attitudes of mind and heart. If they find some store of love=s fruit in their hearts, they must not doubt God=s presence within them. If they would increase their capacity to receive so great a guest, they should practice greater generosity in doing good, with persevering charity.

Any time is the right time for works of charity, but these days of Lent provide a special encouragement. Those who want to be present at the Lord=s Passover in holiness of mind and body should seek above all to win

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<sup>7</sup> The Liturgy of the Hours - vol II - pg 295 - Catholic Book Publishing Co - 1976

this grace, for charity contains all other virtues and covers a multitude of sins.

As we prepare to celebrate that greatest of all mysteries, by which the blood of Jesus Christ did away with our sins, let us first of all make ready the sacrificial offerings of works of mercy. In this way we shall give to those who have sinned against us what God in his goodness has already given to us.

Let us extend to the poor and those afflicted in different ways a more open-handed generosity, so that God may be thanked through many voices and the relief of the needy supported by our fasting. No act of devotion on the part of the faithful gives God more pleasure than that which is lavished on his poor. Where he finds charity with its loving concern, there he recognizes the reflection of his own fatherly care.

In these acts of giving do not fear a lack of means. A generous spirit is itself great wealth. There can be no shortage of material for generosity where it is Christ who feeds and Christ who is fed. In all this activity there is present the hand of him who multiplies the bread by breaking it, and increases it by giving it away.

The giver of alms should be free from anxiety and full of joy. His gain will be the greatest when he keeps back least for himself. The holy Apostle Paul tells us: AHe who provides seed for the sower will also provide bread for eating; he will provide you with more seed, and will increase the harvest of your goodness@, in Christ Jesus our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy spirit for ever and ever. Amen

**END OF READINGS**