

SUN

3/17/19

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

With three chosen disciples Jesus went up the mountain. Then he was transfigured by a wonderful light that made even his clothes seem to shine. Moses and Elijah stood by him and spoke with him of how he was going to complete his task on earth by dying in Jerusalem. In other words they spoke to him of the mystery of his incarnation, and of his saving passion on the cross. For the law of Moses and the teaching of the holy prophets clearly foreshadowed the mystery of Christ. The law portrayed it by types and symbols inscribed on tablets. The prophets in many ways foretold that in his own time he would appear, clothed in human nature, and that for the salvation of all our race he would not refuse to suffer death upon the cross.

The presence of Moses and Elijah, and their speaking together, was meant to show unmistakably that the law and the prophets were the attendants of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was heir master, whom they had themselves pointed out in advance in prophetic words that proved their perfect harmony with one another. The message of the prophets was in no way at variance with the precepts of the law.

Moses and Elijah did not simply appear in silence; they spoke of how Jesus was to complete his task by dying in Jerusalem, they spoke of his passion and cross, and of the resurrection that would follow. Thinking no doubt that the time for the kingdom of God had already come, Peter would gladly have remained on the mountain. He suggested putting up three tents, hardly knowing what he was saying. But it was not yet time for the end of the world; nor was it in this present time that the hopes of the saints would be fulfilled – those hopes founded on Paul's promise that Christ *would transform our lowly bodies into the likeness of his glorious body*. Only the initial stage of the divine plan had as yet been accomplished. Until its completion was it likely that Christ, who came on earth for love of the world, would give up his wish to die for it? For his submitting to death was the world's salvation, and his resurrection was death's destruction.

As well as the vision of Christ's glory, wonderful beyond all description, something else occurred which was to serve as a vital confirmation, not only of the disciple's faith, but of ours as well. From a cloud on high came the voice of the Father saying: *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.*

MON 03.18.2019

A reading about Lent and the Rule of St. Benedict, from a meditation by Dom Alban Boultwood. ¹

In Chapter 49 of the Holy Rule, On the Observance of Lent, St. Benedict begins by saying that the spiritual man ought really to be living at all times in the spirit of Lent, that is, in wholehearted conversion to God. Our frailty causes us to fail often in this, but if we do not try to live in this spirit during the holy season of Lent, when shall we ever do so?

St Benedict sees the spirit of Lent not as one of unhappiness, but rather as a spirit of free and joyful oblation: As that everyone of his own will may offer to God, with joy and the holy spirit, something beyond the measure appointed to him (RB 49). The Church herself has been preparing us for this, first by drawing us and inspiring us by the sublime glimpse of divine love unveiled at Christmas, and then by summoning us to hear the Savior's call as he manifests his divine mission and power after the Epiphany. And now we are called to follow him, in the work of his oblation and redemptive sacrifice which he now so lovingly takes up. Our Lord calls us to unite ourselves with him in his oblation to his Father's will, for this is his mission.

Our response to this divine invitation has led us to the oblation by which as [monks] we offer ourselves wholly to God, and it seems specially fitting for us during Lent, to renew, solemnly, sincerely, reflectively, our formal [offering] of ourselves to God through the Rule of St. Benedict. It is true that our [offering] is really made once and for all but the point lies in the renewal of the spirit of our [offering]. It is not enough to set up a religious program in our life, Even in the monastery itself, where the vows and the whole rule of life establish a wonderful religious machinery to guide and speed us towards God, yet these things still remain in themselves just the machinery of our life; and we soon find, here too, precisely that tendency for things to become mechanical in the bad sense. And so we are always having to renew our spirit, deepening, clarifying, purifying, reaffirming, our interior [offering], as the years bring us the daily opportunities of fulfillment.

We must go forward in faith and in hope and in love, one step at a time, trying to be ready to recognize God's will as it comes to us day by day, and trying to give ourselves to it with all our heart. As occasion arises, the instruments of good works [which St. Benedict mentions] will be offered to us; so many spiritual tools, yet all but a part of the first great one *C to love the Lord with your whole heart.*

¹ *Alive to God* [Benedictine Studies VII], Baltimore-Dublin, 1964, pp. 72-75.

TUE 03.19.2019

A Reading about St Joseph, from the book *The Eternal Year*, by Fr Karl Rahner.²

The Catholic Church today celebrates the feast of her patron, her heavenly protector. We can understand such a feast only if we believe in the Communion of Saints, if we know by faith that God is not a God of the dead, but a God of the living, if we confess that whoever has died in God's grace lives with God and precisely for that reason is close to us, and if we are convinced that these citizens of heaven intercede for us on earth in the eternal liturgy of heaven.

The meaning of such a feast can be grasped only if we believe that after death all the events of this earthly life are not simply gone and past, over and done with forever, but that they are preparatory steps that belong to us for eternity, that belong to us as our living future. For our mortality does not change to eternity in an instant; rather, it is slowly transformed into life.

The blessed with whom we have fellowship in the Communion of Saints are not pale shadows. Rather, they have brought over into the eternal life of God the fruits of their earthly life, and thus have brought with them their own personal uniqueness.

Their God even calls them by name in the one today of eternity. They are ever the same as they were in the unique history of their own lives. We single out one individual from among them to honor him as our heavenly protector and intercessor, because his own individuality means something unique and irreplaceable to us. We mean that between him and us there exists a specific rapport that makes him a special blessing for us and assigns a special duty to us, if we are to be worthy of his protection.

From this point of view, is it possible to think that Joseph, the spouse of the Blessed Virgin and foster father of our Lord, is particularly suited to be a patron of twentieth century people? Is it possible to think that those living today will be able to see themselves reflected in Joseph? Are there not people today who, if they are true to their character as willed by God, are a people of small means, of hard work, of only a few words, of loyalty of heart and simple sincerity? Certainly every christian and every christian nation is charged with the entire fullness of christian perfection as a duty that is never completed. But

²The Eternal Year, Helicon: Baltimore 1964. pp.73-74.

every nation and every person has, so to speak, their own door, their own approach, through which they alone can come nearer to the fullness of Christianity. Not all of us will find access to the boundless vistas of God's world through the gate of surging rapture and burning ardor. Some must go through the small gate of quiet loyalty and the ordinary, exact performance of duty. And it is this fact, I am inclined to think, that can help us to discover a rapport between heaven and earth, between christians today and their heavenly intercessor St Joseph.

WEDS 03.20.19

A Homily of St Faustus for Lent ³

Our Lord and Savior exhorts us through the prophet and advises us how we ought to come to Him after many negligences, saying: ACome let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord who made us@; and again: AReturn to me with your whole heart, with fasting, with weeping and mourning@. If we notice carefully, dearest brethren, the holy days of Lent signify the life of the present world, just as Easter prefigures eternal bliss. Now just as we have a kind of sadness in Lent in order that we may rightly rejoice at Easter, so as long as we live in this world we ought to do penance in order that we may be able to receive pardon for our sins in the future and arrive at eternal joy. Each one ought to sigh over his own sins, shed tears and give alms in such a way that with God=s help he may always try to avoid the same faults as long as he lives. Just as there never has been, is not now, and never will be a soul without slight sins, so with the help and assistance of God we ought to be altogether without serious sins.

Now in order that we may obtain this, if burdens of the world keep us occupied at other times, at least during the holy days of Lent let us reflect on the law of the Lord, as it is written, by day and by night. Let us so fill our hearts with the sweetness of the divine law that we leave no place within us devoid of virtues so that vices could occupy it. Just as at the time of the harvest or vintage, brethren, enough is gathered so that the body may be fed, so during the days of Lent as at a time of spiritual harvest or vintage we ought to gather the means whereby our soul may live forever. Whenever a careless person fails to gather anything at the time of harvest or vintage, he will be distressed by hunger throughout the entire space of the year. In the same way if anyone at this season neglects to provide and gather spiritual wheat and heavenly wine in the storehouse of his soul by fasting, reading and prayer, he will suffer forever the most severe thirst and cruel want. Know for sure, dearest brethren, that the soul which is not fed continuously by the word of God is like a body which receives food only after many days. Just as the body becomes thin and dehydrated, almost like a shadow, through hunger and want, so the soul which is not fed on God=s word is found to be parched and useless, fit for no good work. Consider, brethren, if every year we fill the barn and wine cellar and storehouse in order that our body may have food for one year, how much do you think we ought to store up so that our soul may be nourished forever?

³ St Caesarius of Arles, Sermons, vo. 3, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 66, Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC, 1973, pg. 48

THURS 03.21.19

^ A Reading on Lent by Thomas Merton ⁴

The Paschal Mystery is above all the mystery of life, in which the Church, by celebrating the death and resurrection of Christ, enters into the Kingdom of Life which He has established once for all by His definitive victory over sin and death. We must remember the original meaning of Lent, as the *ver sacrum*, the Church's holy spring in which the catechumens were prepared for their baptism, and public penitents were made ready for penance for their restoration to the sacramental life in a communion with the rest of the Church. Lent is then not a season of punishment so much as one of healing. There is joy in the salutary fasting and abstinence of the Christian who eats and drinks less in order that his mind may be more clear and receptive to receive the sacred nourishment of God's word, which the whole Church announces and meditates upon in each day's liturgy throughout Lent. The whole life and teaching of Christ pass before us, and Lent is a season of special reflection and prayer, a forty-day retreat in which each Christian, to the extent he is able, tries to follow Christ into the desert by prayer and fasting.

Some, monks and ascetics, will give themselves especially to fasting and vigils, silence and solitude in these days, and they will meditate more deeply on the Word of God. But all the faithful should listen to the Word as it is announced in the liturgy or in Bible services, and respond to it according to their ability. In this way, for the whole Church, Lent will not be merely a season simply of a few formalized penitential practices, half understood and undertaken without interest, but a time of *metanoia*, the turning of all minds and hearts to God in preparation for the celebration of the Paschal Mystery in which some will for the first time receive the light of Christ, others will be restored to the communion of the faithful, and all will renew their baptismal consecration of their lives to God, in Christ.

It is a time in which joy and grief go together hand in hand: for that is the meaning of compunction - a sorrow which pierces, which liberates, which gives hope and therefore joy. Compunction is a baptism of sorrow, in which the tears of the penitent are a psychological but also deeply religious purification, preparing and disposing him for the sacramental waters of baptism or for the sacrament of penance. Such sorrow brings joy because it is at once a mature acknowledgment of guilt and the acceptance of its full consequences: hence it implies a religious and moral adjustment to reality, the acceptance of one's actual condition, and the acceptance of reality is always a liberation from the

⁴Seasons of Celebration - Farrar, Straus & Giroux - NY - 1965 - pg. 113f

burden of illusion which we strive to justify by our errors and sins. Compunction is a necessary sorrow, but it is followed by joy and relief because it wins for us one of the greatest blessings: the light of truth and the grace of humility. The tears of the Christian penitent are real tears, but they bring joy.

Only the inner rending, the tearing of the heart, brings this joy. It lets out our sins, and lets in the clean air of God=s spring, the sunlight of the days that advance toward Easter. Rending of the garments lets in nothing but the cold. The rending of the heart which is spoken of in Joel is that tearing away from ourselves and our *vetustas* - the oldness of the old man, wearied with the boredom and drudgery of an indifferent existence, that we may turn to God and taste His mercy, in the liberty of His sons and daughters.

When we turn to Him, what do we find? That AHe is gracious and merciful, patient and rich of mercy@. He even speaks to us in His own words, saying Behold I will send you corn and wine and oil and you shall be filled with them: and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations@. This at the beginning of a forty days fast!

It is necessary that at the beginning of this fast, the Lord should show Himself to us in His mercy. The purpose of Lent is not only expiation, to satisfy the divine justice, but above all a preparation to rejoice in His love. And this preparation consists in receiving the gift of His mercy - a gift which we receive in so far as we open our hearts to it, casting out what cannot remain in the same room with mercy.

Now one of the things we must cast out first of all is fear. Fear narrows the little entrance of our heart. It shrinks up our capacity to love. It freezes up our power to give ourselves. If we were terrified of God as an inexorable judge, we would not confidently await His mercy, or approach Him trustfully in prayer. Our peace, our joy in Lent are a guarantee of grace.

FRI 03/22/19

Continuing a reading on Lent from Thomas Merton ⁵

There is confidence everywhere in Lent, yet that does not mean unmixed and untroubled security. The confidence of the Christian is always a confidence in spite of darkness and risk, in the presence of peril, with every evidence of possible disaster. Let us emend for the better in those things in which we have sinned through ignorance: lest suddenly overtaken by the day of death we seek space for repentance and are not able to find it. The last words are sobering indeed. And note, it is the sins we have not been fully aware of that we must emend. Once again, Lent is not just a time for squaring conscious accounts: but for realizing what we had perhaps not seen before. The light of Lent is given us to help us with this realization.

Nevertheless the liturgy of Lent is not focused on the sinfulness of the penitent but on the mercy of God. The question of sinfulness is raised precisely because this is a time of mercy, and the just do not need a Savior. Nowhere will we find more tender expressions of the divine mercy than at this season. His mercy is kind. He looks upon us according to the multitude of Your tender mercies. In the Introit for Ash Wednesday we sing: You have mercy upon all, O Lord, and hate none of those which You have made, overlooking the sins of all for the sake of repentance and sparing them, because You are the Lord our God.

How good are these words of Wisdom in a time when on all sides the Lord is thought by mortals to be a God who hates. Those who deny Him say they do so because evil in the world could be the work only of a God that hated the world.

But even those who profess to love Him regard Him too often as a furious Father, who seeks only to punish and revenge Himself for the evil that is done against Him - One who cannot abide the slightest contradiction but will immediately mark it down for retribution, and will not let a farthing of the debt go unpaid.

This is not the God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who Himself hides our sins and gets them out of sight, like a mother making quick and efficient repairs on the soiled face of a child just before entering a house where he ought to appear clean. The words of the Lenten liturgies know Him only as the God who desires not the death of the sinner, who is moved by humiliation and appeased by satisfaction. He is everywhere shown to us as plenteous in mercy.

And from the infinite treasure of His mercies He draws forth the gift of compunction. This is a sorrow without servile fear, which is all the more deep and tender as it receives pardon from the tranquil, calm love of the merciful

⁵Seasons of Celebration - Farrar, Straus & Giroux - NY - 1965 - pg. 118

Lord: a love which the Latin liturgy calls, in two untranslatable words, *serenissima pietas*. The God of Lent is like a calm sea of mercy. In Him there is no anger.

This hiding of God's severity is not a subterfuge. It is a revelation of His true nature. He is not severe, and it is not theologically accurate to say that He becomes angry, that He is moved to hurt and to punish.

He is love. Love becomes severe only to those who make Him severe for themselves. Love is hard only to those who refuse Him. It is not, and cannot be Love's will to be refused. Therefore it is not and cannot be Love's will to be severe and punish.

But it is the very nature of Love that His absence is sorrow and death and punishment. His severity flows not from His own nature but from the fact of our refusal. Those who refuse Him are severe to themselves, and immolate themselves to the blood-thirsty god of their own self-love. It is from this idol that Love would deliver us. To such bitter servitude, Love would never condemn us.

SAT 03.23.19

A Sermon of Bl. Gueric of Igny for Lent ⁶

O happy the humility of those who repent; O blessed the hope of those who confess. How mighty you are with the Almighty; how easily you conquer the unconquerable; how quickly you turn the dreadful judge into a devoted father. We have heard to our great edification of the prodigal son=s sorrowful journey, tearful repentance and glorious reception. He was so gravely guilty and had not yet confessed but only planned to; had not yet made satisfaction but only bent his mind to it. Yet by merely intending to humble himself he immediately obtained a pardon, which others seek for so long a time with such great desire, beg for with such tears, strive for with such diligence. The thief on the cross was absolved by a simple confession, the prodigal by only the will to confess.

As said, Scripture says, As will confess my transgression to the Lord; and you did forgive the guilt of my sin. Everywhere mercy precedes. It had preceded the will to confess by inspiring it; it preceded also the words of confession by forgiving what was to be confessed. When he was still far off, we read, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and running to meet him fell upon his neck and kissed him. These words seem to suggest that the father was even more anxious to pardon his son than the son was to be pardoned. He hastened to absolve the guilty one from what was tormenting his conscience, as if the merciful father suffered more in his compassion for his miserable son than the son did in his own miseries. We do not mean to attribute human feelings to the unchangeable nature of God; we intend rather that our affection should be softened and moved to love that supreme goodness by learning from comparison with human feelings that he loves us more than we love him.

See how where sin abounded grace abounds still more. The guilty one could scarcely hope for pardon; the judge, or rather not now the judge but the advocate, heaps us grace. Quick, he says, bring forth the best robe and clothe him in it, put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet; fetch the fatted calf and kill it, let us eat and make merry, for this son of mine who had died has come back to life. To pass over all these: the best robe, that is, the sanctification of the Spirit with which the one who is baptized is clothed and the penitent clothed afresh; the ring of faith by which he pledges his loyalty; the shoes by which he is fortified to trample on poisonous serpents or to preach the gospel; the fatted calf which he offers in sacrifice on the altar; those festive days enjoined for the son=s reception and celebrated by all the host of heaven; to say nothing of all these and leave them to be treated by the more learned, let us consider only

⁶ Gueric of Igny - Liturgical Sermons - vol. 1 - CF #8 - Cistercian Publications
- Spencer, MA - 1970

that embrace and kiss of the devoted father. What a wealth of graciousness and sweetness, what an abundance of most blessed joy, what torrents of most holy delight do they not contain? He fell upon his neck and kissed him. @

When he thus showed his affection for him, what did he do by his embrace and his kiss but take him to his bosom and cast himself into his son's bosom, breathe himself into him, in order that by clinging to his father he might become one spirit with him, just as by clinging to harlots he had been made one body with them? It was not enough for that supreme mercy not to close the bowels of his compassion to the wretched. He draws them into his very bowels and makes them his members. He could not bind us to himself more closely, could not make us more intimate to himself than by incorporating us into himself. Both by charity and by ineffable power he unites us not only with the body he has assumed but also with his very spirit. If such is the grace accorded to the repentant what will be the glory of those who reign? If such are the consolations of the wretched, what will be the joys of the blessed? And since he gives us so much in advance while we are still on the way, what treasures is he not keeping stored up for us when we arrive in our fatherland? Indeed, what has not entered into the heart of man: that we should be like him and that God should be all in all.