

SUN 03.31.19

A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke by St John Chrysostom ¹

All that God looks for from us is the slightest opening and he forgives a multitude of sins. Let me tell you a parable that will confirm this.

There were two brothers: they divided their father's goods between them and one stayed at home while the other went away to a foreign country, wasted all that he had been given, and then could not bear the shame of his poverty. Now the reason I have told you this parable is so that you will understand that even sins committed after Baptism can be forgiven if we face up to them. I do not say this to encourage indolence but to save you from despair, which harms us worse than indolence.

The son who went away represents those who fall after baptism. This is clear from the fact that he is called a son, since no one is called a son unless he is baptized. Also, he lived in his father's house and took a share of all his father's goods. Before baptism no one receives the Father's goods or enters upon the inheritance. We can therefore take all this as signifying the state of believers, Furthermore, the wastrel was the brother of the good man, and no one is a brother unless he has been born again through the Spirit.

What does he say after falling into the depths of evil? *I will return to my father.* The reason the father let him go and did not prevent his departure for a foreign land was so that he might learn well by experience what good things are enjoyed by the one who stays at home. For when words would not convince us God often leaves us to learn from the things that happen to us.

When the profligate returned after going to a foreign country and finding out by experience what a great sin it is to leave the father's house, the father did not remember past injuries but welcomed him with open arms. Why? Because he was a father and not a judge. And there were dances and festivities and banquets and the whole house was full of joy and gladness.

Are you asking: "Is this what he gets for his wickedness?" Not for his wickedness, but for his return home; not for sin, but for repentance; not for evil, but for being converted. What is more, when the elder son was angry at this, the father gently won him over, saying: *You were always with me, but he was lost and has been found; he was dead and has come back to life.* "When someone who was lost has to be saved," says the father, "it is not the time for passing judgment or making minute inquiries, but only for mercy and forgiveness.

¹Journey with the Fathers – Year C – New City Press – 1994 – pg 36

MON 04.01.2019

A reading about the Christian Mystery, from a book by Louis Bouyer.

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To say that the Easter observances are the center of the ecclesiastical year leaves much untold: they are the center where the entire liturgy converges and the spring whence it all flows. All Christian worship is but a continuous celebration of Easter: the sun, rising and setting daily, leaves in its wake an uninterrupted series of Eucharists; every Mass that is celebrated prolongs the pasch. Each day of the liturgical year and, within each day, every instant of the sleepless life of the Church, continues and renews the pasch that Our Lord had desired with such great desire to eat with His disciples while awaiting the pasch He should eat in His kingdom, the pasch to be prolonged for all eternity. The annual pasch, which we are constantly recalling or anticipating, preserves us ever in the sentiment of the early Christians, who exclaims, looking to the past, AThe Lord is risen indeed@, and, turning towards the future, ACome, Lord Jesus! Come! Make no delay@.

The Christian religion is not simply a doctrine: it is a fact, an action, and an action, not of the past, but of the present, where the past is recovered and the future draws near. Thus it embodies a mystery of faith, for it declares to us that each day makes our own the action that Another accomplished long ago, the fruits of which we shall see only later in ourselves.

St. Paul has persistently set forth this mystery in all his epistles. Writing to the Ephesians, he states simply that the mystery that unites Christ to the Church is great, as if nothing adequate could ever be said of it. A few lines earlier he revealed to us the substance of this mystery: it is that *Christ so loved the Church and handed Himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish* (Eph 5.25-27). To this end the glorifying action which He has accomplished in flesh like ours and by which this flesh has found life in death must become our own.

The action accomplished of old by Him is the pasch of two thousand years ago; becoming ours today, that action is the pasch we celebrate. The glory that will result therefore is for us as it has resulted for Him is the eternal pasch celebrated by the elect in heaven: the feast of the Lamb, immolated and glorious. For Christ died for us, not in order to dispense us from dying, but

¹ *The Paschal Mystery*, Chicago, 1950, pp. xiii-xvii.

rather to make us capable of dying efficaciously, of dying to the lie of the old man, in order to live again as the new man who will die no more.

Here is the meaning of the pasch; it points out to us that the Christian in the Church must die with Christ in order to rise with Him. And not only does it point out, as one might indicate with the forefinger something beyond one's reach (that is what the pasch of the Old Testament did), but it accomplishes the very thing it points out. The Pasch is Christ, who once died and rose from the dead, making us die in His death and raising us to His life. Thus the pasch is not a mere commemoration: it is the cross and the empty tomb rendered actual. But it is no longer the Head who must stretch Himself upon the cross in order to rise from the tomb: it is His Body, the Church, and of this body we are the members.

TUES 04.02.2019

**Continuing the reading about the Paschal Mystery of Christianity,
by Louis Bouyer. ¹**

Our death with Christ and this resurrection with Him, giving us the life hidden with Christ in God, who will appear when Christ Himself will appear, is the whole mystery that St. Paul tells us God had reserved for these later times C our own. Writers have often stressed the extraordinary frequency of grammatical compounds containing the word “with” in the writings of St. Paul, and have rightly observed that it is a characteristic feature of his whole conception of the Christian life. Indeed, for him, the Christian life, the life of the Church or that of each Christian, is a life with Christ. It is important to grasp all that that implies.

Jesus of Nazareth, who died and rose under Pontius Pilate and is now seated at the right hand of the Father until the day He will come to judge the living and the dead, has never been for St. Paul B nor for any Catholic theologian B a hero whose epic must leave the impression that His achievements are too wonderful ever to be duplicated in ourselves. Surely no poet has dreamed of a hero more sublime than the One of whom the Apostle wrote: *Despoiling the principalities and the powers, he made a public spectacle of them, leading them away in triumph* (Col 2.15). But it is for us that He triumphed thus, and we must know that by Him and with Him, dead as we were, God has *raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus* (Eph 2.6).

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Yes, Christ accomplished all that in us, for, if the sense of our own weakness is what faith, in cutting at the very root of our pride, first thrusts upon us, it does so only to make clear to us that *strength is made perfect in weakness* (2 Cor 12.9), and that we can do all things in Him who strengthens us (Phil 4.13) C that is, Jesus Christ.

That the Church celebrates Easter, that today she suffers and weeps with her Head, then rises and exults with Him, is the sign that the relation between Christ and the Church, between Christ and us, is quite different from that existing between any historic personages of different epochs, even between a master and his disciples. For the authors of the New Testament, even for the evangelists whose immediate end is to recount the earthly life of Jesus of

Nazareth, this Christ can never be considered simply as a man whose life and death might inspire sentiments analogous to those awakened by, say, the life and death of a Socrates, even though those sentiments were incomparably deepened and purified.

WEDS 04/03/2019

Continuing the reading about the Paschal Mystery of Christianity, by Louis Bouyer. 1

If the apostles set out across the world to evangelize it, they did so primarily because the Holy Spirit had given them after the Resurrection, the certitude expressed in these simple words: AJesus is the Lord@. The word ALord@ has become so commonplace in our writing and speech that we find it difficult to realize all that this statement expressed. AThe Lord@ was **Adonai**, the reverent paraphrase by which the Jews replaced the awesome name of **Yahweh**; the **Kyrios** by which the Seventy, so styled traditionally, had religiously translated this same name in their Greek version [of the Bible called the Septuagint]. To say AJesus is the Lord@ was to declare that He who had been known in the flesh was now known in the spirit; that this man, this AHoly child of God@, was the corporal dwelling place of divinity; and that divinity, unimpeded, inundated his risen humanity, forever setting at defiance death and the devil.

But all this still falls short of the whole truth. Paradoxically, it misses the important point C the point in the gospel, which concerns us so directly that the apostles, as soon as they recognized it, set out to disseminate it. The good tidings, in their opinion, were that this Man-God was also the Second Adam; just as humanity had borne the likeness of the terrestrial Adam, so they were now called to resemble the heavenly Adam. Baptized in Him, they would Aput him on@ and would know that if anyone is in Christ, he is a Anew creature.@ *I live, yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me* (Gal 2.20) C this was the cry of the Church on the days following the Resurrection and Pentecost; such it has remained through the centuries.

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In other words, Christ is not for the Church “the individual Jesus” that profane historians attempt to deduce from the sum total of the dogma she teaches: He is rather the divine Head of the Body that is the Church, the Head from which she receives all life and light. He is the Bridegroom and she is the Bride, two in one flesh, for the Bride is only *the fullness of the One who fills all things in every way* (Eph 1.23).

Christ is not a part of the Church; rather, the Church might be called a part of Christ, grafted upon Him, living by Him and for Him, suffering with Him in

order to rule with Him. The ultimate end of the Incarnation, according to St. Augustine, is the total Christ: Christ Jesus the Head and we the members constituting henceforth but one in the ineffable interchange of grace between the One who gives all and those who receive all; for this giving of oneself to Him who has given everything to us is but the supreme fruit of His grace.

Rightly understood, the imitation of Jesus Christ is the very essence of the Christian life. We must have in us the mind that Christ had; we must be crucified and buried and rise with Him. This, of course, does not mean that we fallen human beings are to copy clumsily the God-Man. The whole matter is a mystery signifying that we are to be grafted upon Him so that the same life which was in Him and which He has come to give us may develop in us as in Him and produce in us the same fruits of sanctity and love that it produced in Him.

The whole life of the Church is indeed the imitation of the life of Jesus Christ, but it is not a copy of that life. For the life of the Church is the life of Jesus Christ propagated, reproducing itself in people of all the ages, watered by that river of living water that flows forever over this earth, from the throne where the immolated Lamb is seated in the glory of His immolation.

Just as Jesus Christ, in that pasch for which He had come, expressed through His crucifixion the love that animated his whole existence B an obedient love for His Father and a compassionate love of His brethren B so, at each recurring paschal season, the Church externalizes this same love that flowed as water and blood from the heart of Christ to pour itself, through the sacraments, into the hearts of all people, becoming for them eternal life. At this time, together with its changeless Head, the Mystical Body, ever renewed, partakes of the Last Supper, is stretched upon the cross, and descends into the tomb to rise again on the third day. This is the paschal mystery.

THUR 04/04/19

A sermon from St. Leo the Great ¹

Apostolic teaching, Beloved, exhorts us that we *put off the old man with his deeds*, and renew ourselves from day to day by a holy manner of life. For if we are the temple of God, and if the Holy Spirit is a Dweller in our souls, as the Apostle says: *You are the temple of the living God*; we must strive with all our vigilance that the dwelling of our heart be not unworthy of so great a Guest. And just as in houses made with hands, we see to it with praiseworthy diligence that whatever may be damaged, either through the rain coming in, or by the wind in storms, or by age itself, is promptly and carefully repaired, so must we with unceasing concern take care that nothing disordered be found in our souls, that nothing unclean be found there. For though this dwelling of ours does not endure without the support of its Maker, nor would the structure be safe without the watchful care of the Builder, nevertheless, since we are rational stones, and living material, the Hand of our Maker has so fashioned us, that even he who is being repaired may cooperate with his Maker.

Let human obedience then not withdraw itself from the grace of God, nor turn away from that Good without which it cannot be good. And should it find in the fulfillment of His commands something that is difficult to accomplish or beyond its powers, let it not remain apart, but rather turn to Him who commands us, and Who has laid on us this precept that He may both help us and awaken in us the desire of Him, as the Prophet tells us: *Cast your care upon the Lord, and He will sustain you*. Or perhaps there is someone who prides himself beyond due measure, and who imagines himself to be so untouched, so unblemished, that he has now no need to renew himself such a belief is wholly deceiving, and he will grow old in folly. All things are filled with dangers, filled with snares. Desires inflame us, allurements lie in wait for us, the love of gain beguiles us, losses frighten us.

But in holding fast to virtue, so faltering is our control, so uncertain our discernment, that though a person may observe with the utmost fidelity the lines between what is good and what is bad, it is difficult for the person of upright conscience to escape the wounding tongue of the slanderer, or for one who loves justice to avoid the reproaches of the wicked.

When, dearly beloved, should we more fittingly have recourse to the divine remedies than when, by the very law of time, we are once again reminded

¹ The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers – vol. 2 – Henry Regnery Co – Chicago – 1958 – pg 125

of the mysteries of our redemption? And that we may the more worthily commemorate them, let us earnestly prepare ourselves by these days of Lent. For as the apostle says: *Whoever thinks that he stands, let him take heed lest he fall*, no one is sustained by such strength of mind that he can be certain of his own constancy in virtue.

FRI 04/05/19

Continuation of a Sermon of St Leo the Great ²

Let us take refuge in the ever present mercy of God, and so that we may with becoming reverence celebrate the holy Pasch of the Lord, let all the faithful seek to make holy their hearts. Let harshness give way to mildness, let wrath grow gentle, forgive one another your offenses, 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 their conscience, and gain the pardon of his own sins by forgiving those of others.

For when the Lord says: *If you will forgive others their offences, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your offenses*, 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 supplicant. For the Just and Merciful Receiver of the prayers of men 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. For when the hungry are fed, the naked clothed, the sick assisted, are not the hands that minister but completing the help that God gives, and is not the generosity of the giver also a gift from God?

He who has no need of a helper to perform His works of mercy, so orders His own omnipotence that it by means of mortals that He comes to the aid of mortals. And rightly do we give thanks to God for the ministers of that charity whose works of mercy are seen in His servants. It was 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.*

² The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers – vol. 2 – Henry Regnery Co – Chicago – 1958 – pg 127

SAT 4.06.19

A Reading about the Passion of Christ and the return of Summer, from the treatise "On Loving God" by St Bernard of Clairvaux.³

The faithful know how totally they need Jesus and him crucified. While they admire and embrace in him that charity which surpasses all knowledge, they are shamed at failing to give what little they have in return for so great a love and honor. Easily they love more who realize they are loved more: "He loves less to whom less is given." Indeed, the Jew and Pagan are not spurred on by such a would of love as the Church experiences, who says: "I am wounded by love," and again: "Cushion me about with flowers, pile up apples around me, for I languish with love." The Church sees King Solomon with the diadem his mother had placed on his head. She sees the Father's only Son carrying his cross, the Lord of majesty, slapped and pierced by nails, wounded by a lance, saturated with abuse, and finally laying down his precious life for his friends. As she beholds this, the sword of love transfixes all the more her soul, making her repeat: "Cushion me about with flowers, pile up apples around me, for I languish with love."

These fruits are certainly the pomegranates the bride introduced into her Beloved's garden. Picked from the tree of life, they had changed their natural taste for that of Christ's blood. At last she sees death dead and the defeat of death's author. She beholds captivity led captive from hell to earth and from earth to heaven so that in the name of Jesus every knee must bend in heaven, on earth and in hell. She beholds the earth which produced thorns and thistles under the ancient curse blooming again by the grace of a new blessing. And in all this she thinks of the psalm which says: "And my flesh flourished again; with all my will I shall praise him." She wishes to add to the fruits of the Passion which she had picked from the tree of the Cross some of the fruits of the Resurrection whose fragrance will induce the Bridegroom to visit her more often.

The heavenly Bridegroom enjoys so much those perfumes that he enters willingly and often the chamber of the heart he finds decked with these flower and fruits. Where he sees a mind occupied with the grace of his Passion and the glory of his Resurrection, he is willingly and zealously present there. Understand that the tokens of the Passion are like last year's fruit, that is, of all the past ages spent under the domination of sin and death, until they appear in the fullness of time. But notice that the signs of the Resurrection are like this year's flowers, blossoming in a new summer under the power of grace. Their fruit will come forth in the end at the future general resurrection and it will last forever. As it is said: "Winter is over, the rain is past and gone. flowers appear in our land" showing summer has come back with him who changed death's coldness

³"De Diligendo Deo", III, n. 7; trans--CF 13, p 98-100.

into the spring of a new life, saying: "Behold I make all things new." His flesh was sown in death and rose again in the resurrection. By his fragrance the dry grass turns green again in the fields of the valley; what was cold grows warm again and what was dead comes back to life.