

A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke by Bruno of Segni 1

Everything our Savior did was full of sacred teaching. In every situation his actions were meant to point beyond themselves. For example, his outward actions in the hillside village of Bethany are repeated every day in his holy church. Daily the Lord Jesus enters in, not thinking frequent visits beneath his dignity. There he is welcomed by Martha who takes him into her home.

Let us see then what Martha stands for, and what Mary symbolizes. Each of them denotes something important, for these two make up the entire church.

One of them, namely Martha, symbolizes the active life; the other, Mary, the contemplative. That is why Scripture says it was Martha, not Mary, who received Christ into her house. Mary, of course, does not own a house, since the contemplative life entails the renunciation of all worldly possessions. All that contemplatives want to do is sit at the feet of the Lord – to read, pray, and give themselves up to contemplating God is their whole desire. It is enough for them to be always listening to the word of God and feeding their minds rather than their stomachs. Such as these were the apostles and prophets, such are many others who leave everything, flee from the world and cling to the Lord. They seem to possess nothing, yet they have everything. Only good people can live this kind of life, whereas both good and bad alike can lead active lives.

Now the reason the active life is so called is because it consists of constant activity, weariness and toil, so that scarcely a moment's quiet can be found in it. We are not referring here though to that kind of active life that occupies thieves, impels tyrants, tempts misers, stirs up adulterers, and incites all wicked people to commit evil deeds. For just as we speak only of one Martha who was Mary's sister, so we are referring only to that type of active life which is most closely related to the contemplative life, that is, an active life that is pure and blameless.

When the apostle preached and baptized, worked with his hands to gain a livelihood, journeyed from city to city, and showed solicitude for all the churches, was he not living the active life? In the same way then our text says of Martha that she was *busy with much serving*. In fact, right down to the present day we see prelates in charge of the churches and the other clergy devotedly hurrying to and fro about their work, hot and bothered, sweating over the needs of their brothers and sisters in various ways, so that we may rightly describe them also as *busy with much serving*. The contemplative life then is superior to the active because it is free from anxiety and will never end. Nevertheless the active life is so indispensable that in this life the contemplative life itself cannot exist without it.

A reading about the vigilant watch of Mary Magdalen at the tomb of Jesus, from a sermon by Blessed Gueric of Igny. 1

Brethren, this is the day which the Lord has made, let us exult and rejoice in it. Let us exult in the hope it brings, that we may see and rejoice in its light. Abraham exulted that he might see the day of Christ and by this token he saw and rejoiced.

You too, if you keep watch daily at the doors of wisdom, steadfast at its threshold, if you stay awake through the night with Magdalen at the entrance of his tomb, if I am not mistaken you will experience with Mary how true are the words we read of the Wisdom which is Christ: *AShe is easily seen by those who love her and she is found by those who seek her. She anticipates those who desire her and shows herself to them first. He who, as soon as it is light, keeps watch for her will not have to toil, for he will find her seated at his doors.*@ (Wis 6.13ff.) So did Christ, Wisdom himself, promise in the words: *Al love those who love me, and they who from early morning keep watch for me ill find me.*@ (Prov 8.17) Mary found Jesus in the flesh. For this she was keeping watch. Over his tomb she had come to mount guard while it was still dark. You, who no longer ought to know Jesus according to the flesh but according to the spirit, will be able to find him spiritually if you seek him with a [similar] desire, if he finds you likewise vigilant in prayer. Say then to the Lord Jesus with the desire and the affection of Mary: *AMy soul has longed for you during the night, my spirit too, deep within me; from early morning I will keep watch for you*@ (Isa 26.9). Say with the voice and the mind of the Psalmist: *AGod, my God, for you as loon as it is light I keep watch, my soul is athirst for you*@ (Ps 62.2). And see if it is not your lot to sing with him: *AWe have been filled early in the morning with your mercy, we have exulted and been delighted*@ (Ps 89.14).

Keep watch then, brethren, intent in prayer; keep watch and carefully guard your actions; especially since the morning of that day which has no sunset has already shone upon us. For already eternal light has come back to us from the nether regions, more serene and more pleasing, and the morning has given its welcome to the newly restored Sun. Indeed it is time now for us to arise from sleep; the night has passed away, while the day has drawn near. Keep watch, I say, that the morning light may rise for you, that is Christ, whose coming forth has been made ready like the dawn, ready to renew often the mystery of the morning of his resurrection in those who keep watch for him. Then you will sing with jubilant heart: *AGod the Lord has shone upon us. This is the day which the Lord has made; let us exult and rejoice in it*@ (Ps 117.27, 24). For then he will give you a glimpse of the light which he has hidden in his hands, telling his friend that it is his possession and he can attain to it.

A reading about praying for our dead, from a sermon by Karl Rahner.²

Because we love our dead and we still love them we must be with them always. But are they also with us? Do they belong to this love and to the celebration of this love? They have departed, they are silent. No word from them reaches our ears; the gentle kindness of their love no longer fills our heart. How quiet the dead are, how dead they are! Do they want us to forget them, as we forget a casual acquaintance on a trip, with whom we exchanged a few insignificant words? If life is not taken away from those who depart this life in God's love, but changed into eternal, measureless, superabundant life, why then should it seem to us that they no longer exist? Is the inaccessible light of God into which they have entered so faint that it cannot penetrate to us down here? Does even their love (and not only their bodies) have to abandon us in order to live with God in his light? Does their silence imitate the silence of their God, to whose home they have gone?

That is the way it is. For God is silent just like the dead. For us to celebrate his feasts in our hearts, this silent God must certainly be with us, even though he seems so distant and so silent. We certainly must love him, too, as we love our dead, the distant and silent dead, who have entered into the night. Does he not give to our love an intelligible answer when we call him to the feast of the heart, and ask him for a sign that his love exists for us and is present to us? And that is why we cannot lament the silence of the dead, for their silence is only an echo of God's silence. But if we keep silent and meek, if we listen to this silence of God's, then we begin to grasp with a comprehension that exceeds our own power to evoke or even to understand why both God and the dead are so silent. Then it dawns on us that they are near us precisely when we remember and pray for them. God's silence is the boundless sphere where alone our love can produce its act of faith in his love. He has veiled his love in the stillness of his silence so that our love might reveal itself in faith. God has apparently forsaken us so that we can find him. For if his presence in our midst were obvious, in our search for him we would find only ourselves. We must, however, go out from ourselves, if we are to find him where he is really himself. Because his love is infinite, it can dwell openly and radiantly only in his own infinity; and because he wants to show us his infinite love, he has hidden it from us in our finiteness, whence he calls out to us. Our faith in him is nothing but the dark road in the night between the deserted house of our life with its puny, dimly lit rooms, and the blinding light of his eternal life. His silence in this world is nothing but the earthly appearance of the eternal word of his love.

² From *The Eternal Year*, Helicon Press, 1964, pp. 140-141.

**OUR LIVES ARE TO BE AN OFFERING TO THE WILL OF GOD IN THE SPIRIT OF UNSELFISH LOVE,
from the writing of Dom Damasus Winzen on the Book of Joshua³**

The crossing of the Jordan shows in every detail that this is not simply an "invasion" of a foreign country for the sake of political conquest. The ark of the covenant preceding the people into the waters of the river, carried by the priests and Levites who embody the teaching office of God's Church, confirms the basic principle of spiritual conquest through the word of God. The ark is not a magic object. It contains the law--God's holy will--which is "our sanctification"(1Thess 4:3). That it is called here "the ark of the Lord of all the earth"(3:11), is a reminder of the fact that it is the Lord of all the earth who gives this land to his people, and that the taking possession of Palestine is only the figure of a more universal conquest: that of the entire world through the risen Saviour who reigns at the right hand of the Father.

Wherever the word of God is announced to us, a division takes place, a "crisis" begins, symbolized here in the division of the waters of the Jordan. Those at the right hand stop and form a mountain, those at the left ebb away into the salty waters of the Dead Sea, just as those who hear the Word of God are divided between those who keep it and form the mountain of the Church, and those who, forgetting, drop away and get lost in the Dead Sea of this world. This process will come to an end when "the Lord of all the earth," coming on the clouds of heaven, shall divide the sheep from the goats and say to the sheep on his right hand: "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepare for you from the foundation of the world," and to them on his left: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire!"(Mt 25:31f).

It is on the tenth day of the first month that the people come up from the Jordan and camp in Gilgal. This is the day when the paschal lamb is chosen and brought into the house, before it is killed on the fourteenth (Ex 12:3). Israel is the lamb which now is being brought into the "home" not so much to conquer but to be an offering to the will of God in the spirit of unselfish love. First the Israelites set up a memorial of twelve stones to remember forever that they crossed the Jordan on dry ground through God's power and not their own. Their life in the new country should, therefore, be a continuous thanksgiving: "Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name give the glory, for your mercy and for truth's sake"(Ps 115:1). Then they undergo, at the command of Joshua, the circumcision which is the solemn pledge to overcome the

³PATHWAYS IN SCRIPTURE, Dom Damasus Winzen (Word of Life, Ann Arbor MI 1976) pp. 93-94.

selfishness of nature in order to serve God. Freedom from self enables them to celebrate their first passover feast in the promised land, the feast of their independence and their salvation through the blood of the lamb. Through both these rites the Israelites profess that the possession of the holy land does not so much depend on shedding the blood of their enemies as on shedding their own blood in a sacrifice of redemption. The majority of them never understood this fundamental principle, through it was fulfilled by Jesus and applied to the new Israel of the Church through the sacraments of Baptism and the eucharist. When they are thus sanctified, the "captain of the army of the Lord" appears to Joshua to make it clear that behind Joshua there is another one, greater than he, who is the real leader in this campaign. He shows the true nature of his power in the capture of Jericho, the first city to be taken, and a picture of the Church's conquest of the world at the end of time.

07SN2501

07/25/19

A Homily of St. John Chrysostom on the Feast of St. James the Apostle.¹

Let no one take scandal if we say now that the apostles were not perfect, for the mystery of the cross had as yet not been consummated; the grace of the Holy Spirit had not yet been infused into their hearts. If you are desirous of knowing their virtue, consider what kind of men they were after the grace of the Spirit had been given, and you will see that they overcame every perverse inclination in them. For this very purpose their imperfection is now revealed that you might clearly see what they suddenly became through the operation of grace.

That they once sought nothing spiritual, nor thought about the Kingdom of Heaven, is very clear. But still let us consider how they approached our Lord and what they said. "We desire," they said, "that whatsoever we ask of thee, thou wilt grant us." To which Christ replied, "What do you desire?" - certainly not because He did not know, but that He might compel them to answer and thereby might lay open the wound and thus apply the remedy. But they, blushing and held back by shame because they had come to Him motivated by human aspirations, took Christ apart from the rest and questioned Him. They moved aside lest perhaps they be heard by the rest. And so at last they said what they wished. I conjecture that they had heard that the disciples were to be seated on twelve thrones and they wished to ask for the place of honor in this assembly; they knew that at other times they were given precedence over the rest, but fearing that Peter might be put before them, they were bold enough to request, "Say that one may sit on thy right hand, the other on they left." And they pressed Him saying, "Speak thus." And what did He say? That He might show that they sought nothing spiritual, and did not even realize what they were asking - for had they known they would not have asked it - Jesus said to them, "You know not what you ask; you know not how great, how admirable a thing this is, far surpassing even the higher Powers." And He added further: "Can you drink the chalice which I shall drink, and be baptized with the baptism wherewith I am baptized?" Notice how He moves them from their present state of mind by bringing to their attention things entirely contrary. "For," He says, "you ask me for crowns and honors, but I speak to you of struggle and perspiration. This is not a time for rewards, nor will my glory appear at this time, but the present is the time of death and dangers." But observe how by His very manner of questioning

He exhorts and consoles. He did not say, "Can you undergo suffering? Can you shed your blood?" But He said, "Can you drink the chalice?" Then by way of consolation He adds, "which I am to drink." So that by their very union with Him they might become more eager for hardships.

[1The Liturgical Readings. St. Meinrad's Abbey Press, 1943, pp. 422-423](#)

From a Sermon by St John Damascene, Bishop 4

Ann was to be the mother of the Virgin Mother of God, and hence nature did not dare to anticipate the flowering of grace. Thus nature remained sterile, until grace produced its fruit. For she who was to be born had to be a first-born daughter, since she would be the mother of the first-born of all creation, *in whom all things are held together*.

Joachim and Ann, how blessed a couple! All creation is indebted to you. For your hands the Creator was offered a gift excelling all other gifts: a chaste mother, who alone was worthy of him.

And so rejoice, Ann, that *you were sterile and have not borne children; break forth into shouts, you who have not given birth*. Rejoice, Joachim, because from your daughter *a child is born for us, a son is given us, whose name is Messenger of great counsel and universal salvation, mighty God*. For this child is God.

Joachim and Ann, how blessed and spotless a couple! You will be known by the fruit you have borne, as the Lord says: "by their fruits you will know them". The conduct of your life pleased God and was worthy of your daughter. For by the chaste and holy life you led together, you have fashioned a jewel of virginity; she who remained a virgin before, during and after giving birth. She alone for all time would maintain her virginity in mind and soul as well as in body.

Joachim and Ann, how chaste a couple! While safeguarding the chastity prescribed by the law of nature, you achieved with God's help something which transcends nature in giving the world the Virgin Mother of God as your daughter. While leading a devout and holy life in your human nature, you gave birth to a daughter nobler than the angels, whose queen she now is. Girl of utter beauty and delight, daughter of Adam and mother of God, blessed the loins and blessed the womb from which you come! Blessed the arms that carried you, and blessed your parent's lips, which you were allowed to cover with chaste kisses, ever maintaining your virginity. *Rejoice in God, all the earth. Sing, exult and sing hymns*. Raise your voice, raise it and be not afraid.

7/27/19

Reading about the Mary, the Model of Christian Death & Resurrection, from a book by Fr Hans Urs von Balthasar.⁵

Just as Mary was redeemed in advance so that the Word could become Flesh, so too--now that heaven is accessible to us through Christ's death and resurrection--the holy City, the universal Church, the Communion of Saints is there already in full perfection, so that those who are sanctified can be incorporated into it. All of this results from an in-depth meditation on the biblical texts if they are seen alongside each other and if their interior consequences are thought through. It is not of moment that the insight into this perfecting of Mary cannot be traced back to the very earliest Christian centuries: the thorough reflection on revelation and its deeper implications requires a certain span of time. And the hidden truth concerning Mary-the Church entered very early as an essential aspect of the truth about the Son of the Father and the conditions for his incarnation not only into the consciousness of isolated theologians, but of the Christian people which has the instinct for the faith.

Surely it cannot be doubted that Mary really died a human death; she did not simply pass from an earthly into a heavenly state. Even if death, as we know it today, "came into the world through sin", nevertheless Christ took precisely this death of sin upon himself in order to expiate it from within and transform it into an act of free self-surrender to the Father.

If we learn to die from her who learned to die in the manner of her Son, then we need not be worried about what will become of our human totality after our death. It will be God's business that we reach him not as mere halves of ourselves, but as whole persons. With Christ and with Mary the created world has already been taken up into transformation and transfiguration, and the Last Day has already begun. World history does indeed continue still, but in eternal life there is no time that corresponds to historical time. We cannot, of course, plumb the mystery of our bodily resurrection; it is quite enough for us to know that the heavenly City--Christ, Head and Body, Christ, Bridegroom and Bride--will be there corporeally when we make our crossing to take us up into itself. And just as this Christ in heaven is, at the same time, the Christ who distributes himself eucharistically on earth and thus builds up the earthly Church, so even our heavenly joy will in part consist in our working with Christ in the perfecting of our earthly brothers and sisters and in our being connecting links between earth and heaven.

⁵"The Threefold Garland", San Francisco, 1982, 129-132.