

Commentary on the Gospel of Luke by Gregory of Nyssa <sup>1</sup>

When the Lord says: *Let your loins be girded and your lamps lit*, he is warning us to stay awake, for a light shining in one's eyes drives away sleep, and a tightly fastened belt also makes sleep difficult, as the discomfort prevents relaxation. But the real meaning of the parable is perfectly clear: a person girded with temperance lives in the light of a clear conscience before God. And so, with the light of truth shining, the soul stays awake and is not deceived. It does not dally with illusive dreams.

If following the guidance of the Word we attain this goal, our lives will in a way be like those of the angels, for we are compared with them on the divine command: *You must be like people waiting for their master to return from a wedding, ready to open the door immediately when he comes and knocks*. It was the angels who were awaiting the Master's return from the wedding. They sat with unsleeping eyes at the heavenly gates, so that when he returned the King of glory might pass through them once more into the heavenly bliss from which, as the psalm says, he had come forth like a bridegroom from his tent. He took us to himself as his virgin bride, our nature once prostituted to idols being restored by sacramental rebirth to virginal incorruptibility. After the marriage, when the Church had been wedded to the Word – as John says, *He who has the bride is the bridegroom* – and admitted to the bridal chamber of the sacred mysteries, the angels awaited the King of glory's return to the blessedness which is his by nature.

And so the Lord said our lives should be like theirs. Just as they, living lives far removed from sin and error, are ready to receive the Lord at his coming, so we also should keep watch at the entrance of our houses, and prepare ourselves to obey him when he comes to our door and knocks. *Blessed*, he says, *are those servants whom the master finds so doing when he comes*.

---

<sup>1</sup> Journey with the Fathers – Year C – New City Press – 1994 – pg 106

## GN-WILLIAM05

08.12.19

### Meditation Three of William of St Thierry <sup>1</sup>

I dare not now, Lord, look upon your face, for all that I desire it even unto death, for you said to Moses, "There shall no man see me and live." I do indeed desire to die that I may see, or see that I may die; and yet I hide my face, as Moses did, not venturing to meet you eye to eye. For so it is written, "And Moses hid his face, for he dared not look upon the Lord." He would have looked upon the Lord, perhaps, if he had tried to see, not who God is, but what. For who God is he had already heard: "I am the God of Abraham," God said, "the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

And yet to this same Moses who on hearing that his death was near, was all aflame with this selfsame desire and prayed that you would let him see your glory, you replied, "I will show you All Good." And where, Lord, is All Good, save in your face? That is why David, burning with the same desire, says, "You shall fill me with joy from your face." Forgive me, Lord, forgive my heart's impatience for you; I seek your face, by your own gift I seek your countenance, lest you should turn it from me at the last.

I know indeed and I am sure, that those who walk in the light of your countenance do not fall but walk in safety, and by your face their every judgment is directed. They are the living people, for their life is lived according to that which they read and see in your face, as in an exemplar. O Lord, I dare not look upon your face against your will, lest I be further confounded. Needy and poor and blind, I stand in your presence, seen by you though I do not see you. And, standing thus, I offer you my heart full of desire for you, the whole of whatever I am, the whole of whatever I can do, the whole of whatever I know, and the very fact that I so yearn and faint for you. But the way to find you, that I do not find.

Where are you, Lord, where are you? And where, Lord, are you not? This much at least I know, and that most certainly, that you, in whom we move and have our being, are in a manner present here with me, and that from that most healthgiving presence comes the longing and fainting of my soul for your salvation. I know in very truth, I am aware most healthfully, that you are with me. I know, I feel, I worship, and I render thanks. But if you are with me, why am I not with you? What hinders it? What is the obstacle? What gets in the way? If you are with me, working for my good, why am I not in the same way with you, enjoying

you, the supreme Good of all? Is it because of my sins? But where is he who took them out of the way and nailed them to his cross? And surely it is not because I do not love him! Would I not die a hundred and a thousand times for you, Lord Jesus? If this is not enough for you, no more is it for me; for nothing satisfies my soul, nor does she seem to herself to love you at all, if she has no joy of you. But she cannot enjoy you, until you grant her to see you and know you after her own manner.

But why does she not see you? As I now love you even unto death, so would I love unto eternal life. Already, Lord, some of your nameless fragrance reaches me; if I could only sense it perfectly, henceforward I should search no more. You do indeed send me at times as it were mouthfuls of your consolation; but what is that for hunger such as mine? O you, Salvation of my soul, tell her, please tell her, why you have breathed this longing into her; surely it is not mere to torment and rend and slay! And yet, if only it would slay! Lord, I implore you; is this then my hell? Very well, so be it! Go on putting me to torture ceaselessly, knowing no respite from its pains one single day, or hour, or moment even, till I appear before your presence and behold your glory, and the eternal feast day of your face has shone upon my soul!

GN-VOC12

8/13/19

The Meaning of Vocation – by St John Paul II <sup>1</sup>

Faith and love are not just words or vague feelings. Believing and loving God means a consistent life, lived wholly in the light of the Gospel. This is not easy. It often calls for great courage in going against the trends of fashion and the opinions of our world. But this is the one requirement for a truly successful and happy life.

If, in spite of your personal effort to follow Christ you are sometimes weak and do not live in conformity to the law of love, to the commandments, do not be discouraged. Christ continues to wait for you. He, Jesus, is the Good Shepherd who searches for the lost sheep and who tenderly bears it on his shoulder. Christ is the friend who never lets you down.

In the gospel story we see that the young man, having affirmed that he has kept the commandments, adds: “What do I still lack?” The young heart, moved by God's grace, felt a desire for greater generosity, more commitment, greater love. This desire for more is characteristic of youth; a heart that is in love does not calculate, does not begrudge, it wants to give of itself without measure. “Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, come, follow me.”

To those who entered the path of life by observing the commandments, the Lord proposes new horizons; the Lord proposes to the means that are loftier and calls them to commit themselves to his love without reserve. To discover this call, this vocation, is to realize that Christ is looking on you and inviting you by his glance to give yourself totally in love. Before this glance, before his love, the heart opens its doors gradually and is capable of saying *yes*.

If some of you hear the call to follow Christ more closely, to dedicate your entire heart to him, like the apostles John and Paul, be generous, do not be afraid, because you have nothing to fear when the prize that you await is God Himself, for whom, sometimes without ever knowing it, all young people are searching.

Young people who are hastening to me, young people who more than anything else want to know what you must do to gain eternal life, always say yes to God and he will fill you with his happiness.

“There is one thing you lack, come, follow me”. Is Jesus perhaps repeating to some of you today: “There is one thing you lack?” Is he perhaps asking for even more love, more generosity, more sacrifice? Yes, the love of Christ involves generosity and sacrifice. To follow Christ and to serve the world in his name requires courage and strength. There is

no place for selfishness – and no place for fear! Do not be afraid, then, when love makes demands. Do not be afraid when love requires sacrifice.

To each one of you I say, therefore: Heed the call of Christ when you hear him saying to you: “Follow me!” Walk in my path! Stand by my side! Remain in my love! There is a choice to be made: a choice for Christ and the way of life, and his commandment of love.

1The Meaning of Vocation – St John Paul II – Scepter Publishers – Princeton, NJ – 1997 – pg 18

8/14/19

**A Reading from a testimony from the Beatification Process of St Maximilian Kolbe.<sup>2</sup>**

---

Fr Kolbe and I worked together in May or June 1941. We were bringing sand up from the Sola River. This was some of Auschwitz's heaviest work, so our squad had a very hard time indeed. The work itself was very painful; we were lightly and very insufficiently dressed, and yet we had to wade into the cold water to dig the sand. In addition the guards beat us cruelly or sometimes killed prisoners outright. From the first time I saw Father Maximilian I was struck by his dignity and calm, so different from others. In spite of the terrible conditions and bad treatment, he never complained nor did he curse. Instead he tried to comfort the other prisoners and lift our spirits. During the three weeks we worked together, I sometimes saw the capo beat Father Kolbe with a big stick. Each time, Father Kolbe took it without a murmur.

The news of his death was an enormous shock to the whole camp. We became aware someone among us in this spiritual dark night of the soul was raising the standard of love on high. Someone unknown, like everyone else, tortured and bereft of name and social standing, went to a horrible death for the sake of someone not even related to him. Therefore it is not true, we cried, that humanity is cast down and trampled in the mud, overcome by oppressors, and overwhelmed by hopelessness. Thousands of prisoners were convinced the true world continued to exist and that our torturers would not be able to destroy it. More than one individual began to look within himself for this real world, found it, and shared it with his camp companion, strengthening both in this encounter with evil. To say that Father Kolbe died for one of us or for that person's family is too great a simplification. His death was the salvation of thousands. And on this, I would say, rests the greatness of that death. That's how we felt about it. And as long as we live, we who were at Auschwitz will bow our heads in memory of it as at that time we bowed our head before the bunker of death by starvation. That was a shock full of optimism, regenerating and giving strength; we were stunned by his act, which became for us a mighty explosion of light in the dark camp night.

---

<sup>2</sup>Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Maximiliani M Kolbe, Sacerdotis Professi Ordinis Fratrum Minor Conventualium, Cracow, 1971, in Patricia Treece, "A Man For Others", San Francisco, 1982, pp 139, 178-179.

Sermon of St Aelred of Rievaulx on the Assumption <sup>3</sup>

Among all those who are Christ's, she who tastes his goodness more intimately and more delicately is of greater excellence, more blessed, and more attractive. She is to him not only a creature, a handmaid, a friend, and a daughter, but also a mother. So then it is only right that we welcome her feast with greater delight and gladness. But today even more we should rejoice with her because today her joy was completely fulfilled. Great was her joy when the angel greeted her. Great was her joy when she felt the coming of the Holy Spirit, when that marvelous fusion of the Son of God with her flesh took place in her womb, so that he, one and the same, was the Son of God and her Son. Great was her joy when she held such a Son in her arms, when she listened to his words, when she saw his miracles. And because her sorrow was so great at the Passion, she took wondrous joy again in his resurrection and greater still at his ascension. But all these joys were surpassed by the joy which she receives today.

Up to this day, brothers, Mary, the blessed Mother of God, knew her dearest Son in the flesh. Although she fastened all her desires and all her love there, where he was, after her dearest Son and Lord ascended into heaven, so long as she remained in this corruptible flesh, what she had seen of him in the flesh could not fade from her memory. For his deeds and words were always coming to her mind and above all there lingered in her heart the features of his exquisite face. Today, however, she passed from this world and went up to the heavenly kingdom. There she began to contemplate his brightness, power, and divinity, and her joy and her longing were fulfilled. So with good reason could she say: "I have found him whom my soul loves". She holds him and she does not let him go.

Previously she had found him whom her flesh loved, since the flesh still appreciated flesh, a human being another human nature. She held him but she let him go. She held him – but in the flesh – and therefore through death she lost him to some extent – but in the flesh. Today she found him whom her soul loves because, although she was taken up into heaven with her body, that body had, however, been made spiritual, so that all the love with which she loves her Lord, her Son, is not according to the flesh but according to the spirit. Today she has found him whom her soul loves, she has found him in spirit, she loves him in spirit, she holds him in spirit and therefore she will never again lose him. Today she has found him because today the shadow of night has retreated and the Light of light has risen on her.

---

<sup>3</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx – The Liturgical Sermons #20 – Cistercian Fathers Series #58 – Cistercian Publications – Kalamazoo – 2001 – pg 275

First, before the coming of the Lord, she sought him and longed for him. She sought, that he might come to earth as he had promised, that he might redeem the world, that he might set her, together with others, free from their miserable captivity. This is Our Lady, Saint Mary, in whose most sacred breast the flame of love had not died down. She loved him more than anyone else did, so she yearned for him more than anyone else did, and therefore sought him more persistently. But him whom until now her flesh loved, now her soul loves. And now she says: "I will rise and go the rounds of the city". Today the Blessed Virgin went up into heaven and went round the whole of that heavenly city in the full natural vigor of her mind. Today she entered that heavenly court. She saw the white robes of the virgins, the ruddy crowns of the martyrs, the thrones of the apostles, and in the midst of them she found her Son reigning. Ascending higher than the very highest of the saints, she has arrived at such knowledge of the divinity that she then glories in having found him for the first time.

O blessed soul, who left behind not only the patriarchs and prophets, the apostles, martyrs, confessors, and virgins, but also the angels, thrones and dominations, the cherubim and seraphim and all heaven's array, and so reached her dearest Son. Then she utterly found him whom now her soul loves utterly. She found him and she held him. She holds him in the embraces of an utterly perfect love and she can never lose him because she can never love him any less.

Let us lift up our hearts therefore, brothers, to Our Lady, our Advocate. Let us reflect on how much hope we have in her. Just as she surpasses every creature in excellence, so also she is more merciful and kinder than any creature. Let us then confidently entreat her who can by her excellence assist us and by her mercy chooses to do so, that she may implore her Son for us so that as he deigned to be born of her for us, he may through her deign to have mercy on us.



GN-WILLIAM09

08.16.19

A Reading from the Golden Epistle of William of St Thierry <sup>1</sup>

As one star differs from another in brightness, so cell differs from cell in its way of life: there are beginners, those who are making progress and the perfect. The state of beginners may be called "animal", the state of those who are making progress "rational" and the state of the perfect "spiritual". Those who are still animal may on occasion claim forbearance in some respects in which no indulgence should be shown to those who are considered as already rational. Again certain things are tolerated in the rational which are not tolerated in the spiritual: everything in them must be perfect, calling for imitation and praise rather than blame.

Every religious institute is made up of these three kinds of men. As each is marked by a name proper to it, so each is recognized by distinct pursuits. All of those who are born of the light should consider carefully in the light of the present day what is lacking to them, whence they have come, how far they have come, the progress of the day and of the hour.

There are animal, who of themselves are not governed by reason nor led by affection, yet stimulated by authority or inspired by teaching or animated by good example they acquiesce in the good where they find it and like blind men, led by the hand, they follow, that is, imitate others. Then there are the rational, whom the judgment of their reason and the discernment that comes of natural learning endow with knowledge of the good and the desire for it, but as yet are without love. There are also the perfect, who are led by the spirit and are more abundantly enlightened by the Holy Spirit; because they relish the good which draws them or they are called wise. They are also called spiritual because the Holy Spirit dwells in them as of old he dwelt in Gideon.

The first state is concerned with the body, the second with the soul, the third finds rest only in God. Each of them makes progress after its own fashion and each of them has a certain measure of perfection proper to itself.

The beginning of good in the animal way of life is perfect obedience; progress for it is to gain control of the body and bring it into subjection, perfection for it is when the habitual exercise of virtue has become a pleasure. The beginning of the rational state is to understand what is set before it by the teaching of faith; progress is a life lived in accordance with that teaching; perfection is when the judgment of the reason passes into a spiritual affection. The perfection of the rational state is the beginning of the spiritual state; progress in it is to look upon

God's glory with face uncovered; its perfection is to be transformed into the same likeness, borrowing glory from that glory, enabled by the Spirit of the Lord.

However, turned to God the animal state becomes holy simplicity, that is, the will always the same in its attachment to the same object. For properly speaking simplicity is a will that is wholly turned toward God, seeking one thing from the Lord with all earnestness, without any desire to disperse its energies in the world. Or again, simplicity is true humility in conversion, more concerned with the inner reality of virtue than with a reputation for it. The simple man does not mind seeming to be foolish in the eyes of the world that he may be wise in the sight of God. Or again simplicity is the will alone fixed on God, not yet formed by reason so as to be love (for that is what a formed will is), not yet enlightened so as to be charity, that is the delight of love.

Simplicity then possesses in itself some beginnings of God's creation, that is, a simple and good will, the shapeless material, as it were, of what will be a good man, and at the outset of its conversion it offers this to its maker to be formed. For since together with good will it already has a beginning of wisdom, that is the fear of the Lord, from it it learns that it cannot be formed by itself and that nothing is so advantageous for a fool as to serve a wise man.

Accordingly it submits to a man for God's sake, entrusting to him its good will to be formed in God, in the feelings and spirit of humility. Already the fear of God is beginning to develop all the plenitude of virtues: justice, because it defers to a superior; prudence, because it does not trust in itself; temperance, because it refrains from deciding for itself; fortitude, because it submits itself wholly to obedience, concerned not to judge but only to do what is bidden.

1The Golden Epistle – William of St Thierry – Cistercian Fathers Series #12 – Cistercian Publications – Kalamazoo, MI – 1971 – pg 25

GN-WILLIAM10

8/17/19

Continuation of a Reading from The Golden Epistle by William of St Thierry <sup>1</sup>

In the first place then the newcomer to the desert must be taught to follow the teaching of the Apostle Paul and offer up his body as a living sacrifice, consecrated to God and worthy of his acceptance, the workshop due from him as a rational creature. Therefore the body is to be treated strictly, so that it will not rebel or grow wanton, yet in such a way that it will be able to serve, for it has been given to the spirit to serve it. It is not to be regarded as the purpose of life but as something without which we cannot live. For we cannot break off the fellowship which we have with the body whenever we want, but we must wait patiently for it to be broken up in a lawful way and in the meantime observe the conventions of a valid partnership.

This training would involve heavy labor and minute calculations, with the danger of serious mistakes, were it not for the common observance in all its fullness which the law of obedience and of the cell gives once and for all.

Regulating his food and clothing, his work and his rest, his silence and solitude and everything to do with the formation or the needs of the outward man, it leaves the brother who is obedient, patient and tranquil, free from trouble and anxiety. Its provisions so banish and remove, once and for all, what is superfluous, so confine what is needful within the bounds of a proper sufficiency and an austerity within the reach of all, that there is something left for the strong to desire while the weak need not shrink away.

The new monk is then to be trained to follow the common observance and so bring under control the inordinate desires of his flesh by continual penance for his past life, and, in order to despise all else, to cultivate a contempt for himself.

He must at all times be fortified in advance against the temptations which are more savage in their assault upon the solitary who is a novice. The servant of God, who is serving God gratuitously, is unceasingly beset by vices that try to make him accept the wages they offer him in the form of pleasures. This comes at the devil's suggestion, the flesh making its desires felt and the world providing material for them. The Lord our God also tempts us, to see whether we love him or not. Not that he does not know and wishes to find out. It is in order that we ourselves may realize the truth more fully as a result of the temptation.

But it is easy to overcome and meet with reason temptations which give grounds for suspicion or at first sight are obviously evil. It is those which insinuate themselves under the appearance of good that are more difficult to recognize

and more dangerous to entertain. Just as it is very difficult to observe due measure in what is believed to be good and not every desire for something good is safe.

The place, however, where all temptations and evil and useless thoughts collect, is idleness. For the greatest evil which can befall the mind is unemployed leisure. The servant of God should never be idle, although he is at leisure to devote himself to God. A name which gives rise to such suspicion and suggests such waste of time and such an absence of manliness must not be given to a matter of such unquestionable value, of such holiness, of such seriousness. Is leisure to devote one's time to God idleness? Rather it is the activity of all activities. Anyone who in his cell is not faithful and fervent in this activity is indeed idle, whatever else he may do that is not done for the sake of this.

In this regard it is ridiculous to take up idle pursuits in order to avoid idleness. A pursuit is idle which either has no usefulness or does not tend to some useful purpose. The aim of activity should not be merely to pass the day more or less enjoyably or at least without becoming too weary of leisure but also that when the day is over it always leaves something in the mind that will contribute to the soul's advancement and that some fresh treasure is added each day to the heart's store. A good monk should consider that he has lost a day of his life if during the day he cannot remember having done any of the things for which a man lives in solitude.

1The Golden Epistle – William of St Thierry – Cistercian Fathers Series # 12 – Cistercian Publications – Kalamazoo, MI – 1971 – pg 35