

## NT-LK24

09.01.13

### Commentary on the Gospel of Luke by Bruno of Segni <sup>1</sup>

Invited to a wedding feast, the Lord looked around and noticed how all were choosing the first and most honorable places, each person wanting to take precedence over the others and to be raised above them. He told them this parable, which even taken literally is most useful and appropriate for all who like to be honored, and fear being put to shame. To those of lower station it accords courtesy, and to those of higher condition respect. However, since it is called a parable, it must have some other interpretation besides the literal one. Let us see then what this wedding feast is, and who are the people invited to it.

This wedding feast takes place in the Church every day. Every day the Lord makes a wedding feast, for every day he unites faithful souls to himself, some coming to be baptized, others leaving this world for the kingdom of heaven. We are all invited to this wedding feast – all of us who have received faith in Christ and the seal of baptism. This table set before us is that of which it is said: *You have prepared a table before me in the sight of those who trouble me*. Here is the showbread, here the fatted calf, here the lamb who takes away the sins of the world. Here is the living bread come down from heaven, here placed before us is the chalice of the New Covenant, here are the gospels and the letters of the apostles, here the books of Moses and the prophets. It is as though a dish containing every delight was brought and set before us. What more can we desire? What reason is there for choosing the first seats? There is plenty for all no matter where we sit. There is nothing we shall lack.

But whoever you may be who still desire the first place here – go and sit in the last place. Do not be lifted up by pride, inflated by knowledge, elated by nobility, but the greater you are the more you must humble yourself in every way, and you will find grace with God. In his own time he will say to you: *Friend, go up higher, and then you will be honored by all who sit at table with you*. Moses sat in the last place whenever he had the choice. When the Lord wishing to send him to the Israelites, invited him to take a higher place, his answer was: *I beg you, Lord, send someone else. I am not a good speaker*. It was the same as saying: “I am not worthy of so great an office.” Saul, too, was of small account in his own eyes when the Lord made him king. And Jeremiah, similarly, was afraid of rising to the first place: *Ah, Lord, God, he said, look, I cannot speak – I am only a child*.

In the church, then, the first seat, or the highest place, is to be sought not by ambition but by humility; not by money but by holiness.

<sup>1</sup>Journey with the Fathers – Year C – New City Press – New York – 2000 – pg 112

Through work man must earn his daily bread and contribute to the continual advance of science and technology and, above all, to elevating unceasingly the cultural and moral level of the society within which he lives in community with those who belong to the same family. And work means any activity by man, whether manual or intellectual, whatever its nature or circumstances: it means any human activity that can and must be recognized as work, in the midst of all the many activities of which man is capable and to which he is predisposed by his very nature, by virtue of humanity itself. Man is made to be in the visible universe an image and likeness of God himself, and he is placed in it in order to subdue the earth. From the beginning, therefore, he is called to work. Work is one of the characteristics that distinguish man from the rest of creatures, whose activity for sustaining their lives cannot be called work. Only man is capable of work, and only man works, at the same time by work occupying his existence on earth. Thus work bears a particular mark of man and of humanity, the mark of a person operating within a community of persons. And this mark decides its interior characteristics; in a sense it constitutes its very nature.

Man's life is built up every day from work, from work it derives its specific dignity, but at the same time work contains the unceasing measure of human toil and suffering, and also of the harm and injustice which penetrate deeply into social life within individual nations and on the international level. While it is true that man eats the bread produced by the work of his hands – and this means not only the daily bread by which his body keeps alive but also the bread of science and progress, civilization and culture – it is also a perennial truth that he eats this bread by “the sweat of his brow”, that is to say, not only by personal effort and toil but also in the midst of many tensions, conflicts and crises, which, in relationship with the reality of work, disturb the life of individual societies and also of all humanity.

The question of human work is, in a way, a constant factor both of social life and of the Church's teaching. The Church is convinced that work is a fundamental dimension of human existence on earth. The source of the Church's conviction is above all the revealed word of God. Relating herself to man, she seeks to express the eternal designs and transcendent destiny which the living God, the Creator and Redeemer, has linked with him. When man, who had been created “in the image of God... male and female,” hears the words: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it”, even though these words do not refer directly and explicitly to work, beyond any doubt they indirectly indicate it as an activity for man to carry out in the world. Indeed, they show its very deepest

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<sup>1</sup> The Encyclicals of John Paul II – edited by J. Michael Miller – Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division – Huntington, IN 46750 – 1996 – pg 166f

essence. In carrying out this mandate, man, every human being, reflects the very action of the Creator of the universe.

09sn0302

09.03.19

**A reading about contemplation, from the *Homilies on Ezechiel* by St. Gregory the Great.<sup>1</sup>**

There is in contemplation a great effort of the mind, when it raises itself up to heavenly things, when it fixes its attention on spiritual things, when it tries to pass over all that is outwardly seen, when it narrows itself that it may be enlarged. And sometimes indeed it prevails and soars above the resisting darkness of its blindness, so that it attains to somewhat of the unencompassed Light by stealth and scantily; but for all that, to itself straightaway beaten back it returns, and out of that light into which panting it had passed, into the darkness of its blindness sighing it returns. In the wrestling of Jacob with the Angel, the Angel symbolizes the Lord, and Jacob, who contends with the Angel, represents the soul of each perfect one, who exercises contemplation. Such a soul, when it strives to contemplate God, as if placed in a wrestle, now comes uppermost, because by understanding and feeling it tastes somewhat of the unencompassed Light; and now falls underneath, because in the very tasting it faints away. Therefore, so to say, the Angel is worsted when by the innermost intellect God is apprehended.

Almighty God, when He is now known through desire and intellect, dries up in us every fleshly pleasure; and whereas before we seemed to be both seeking God and cleaving to the world, after the perception of the sweetness of God, the love of the world grows feeble in us, and the love of God alone waxes strong; and while there increases in us the strength of inmost love, without doubt the strength of the flesh is weakened.

The sweetness of contemplation is worthy of love exceedingly, for it carries away the soul above itself, it opens out things heavenly, and shows that things earthly are to be despised; it reveals things spiritual to the eyes of the mind, and hides things bodily.

But we must know that so long as we live in this mortal flesh no one so advances in power of contemplation as to fix the mind's eyes as yet on the unencompassed ray itself of Light. For the Almighty God is not yet seen in this brightness, but the soul beholds something beneath it, by which refreshed it may progress, and hereafter attain to the glory of the sight of Him. When the mind has made progress in contemplation it does not yet

contemplate that which God, but that which is under Him. But in that contemplation already the taste of interior quiet is experienced.

**09.04.19**

**On Contemplating God by William of St. Thierry** [1](#)

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us his ways.”

Yearnings, strivings, thoughts and affections, and all that is within me, come and let us go up to the mountain or place where the Lord both sees and is seen! But worries and anxieties, concerns and toils, and all the sufferings involved in my enslaved condition, all of you must stay here with the ass – I mean my body – while I and the lad – my intellectual faculties – hasten up the mountain; so that when we have worshipped, we may come back to you.

For we shall come back, and that unfortunately, all too soon. Love of the truth does indeed lead us far from you; but for the brethren's sake, the truth of the love forbids us to abandon or reject you. But, though you need thus call us back, that sweet experience must not be wholly forgotten on your account.

“Lord God of hosts, restore us; show us your face, and we shall be saved.” But alas, O Lord, alas! To want to see God when one is unclean in heart is surely quite outrageous, rash and presumptuous, and altogether out of order and against the rule of the word of truth and of your wisdom! Yet you are he who is supremely good, goodness itself, the life of the hearts of men and the light of their inward eyes. For your goodness' sake, then, have mercy on me, Lord; for the beholding of your goodness is of itself my cleansing, my confidence, my holiness. You have your own way, my Lord God, of saying to my soul: “I am your salvation.” Wherefore, Rabboni, Master supreme, you who alone can teach me how to see the things that I desire to see, say to your blind beggar: “What shall I do for you?”

And you know. Since it happens only by your gift, you know how from the inmost depths of my being and after I have put away from me all striving after worldly honors and delights and pleasures, and everything else that can – and often does – arouse in me the lust of the flesh, or of the eyes, or that stirs me in a wrong ambition = you know how my heart then says to you: “My face has sought you; your face will I seek. Do not turn your face from me; do not turn away in anger from your servant.” So look, O my helper of old and my unwearying defender! I know I am behaving outrageously, but it is the love of your love that make me do so, as you indeed can see for yourself, though I cannot see you. And just as you have given me desire for yourself, if here is anything in me that pleases you, that also comes from you. And even as your blind man runs

towards you, you forgive him, and reach out your hand to help him if he stumbles over any obstacle.

Very well then! Let your voice testify deep down within my soul and spirit, shaking my whole being like a raging storm, while my inward eyes are dazzled by the brightness of your truth, which keeps on telling me: “No man shall see you and live.” For I indeed am as yet wholly in my sins, I have not learned yet how to die to myself in order to live to you. And yet it is by your command and by your gift that I stand upon the rock of faith in you, the rock of the Christian faith, and in the place where truly you are present. On that rock I take my stand meanwhile, with such patience as I can command, and I embrace and kiss your right hand that covers and protects me. And sometimes, when I gaze with longing, I do see the “back” of him who sees me; I see your Son Christ “passing by” in the abasement of his incarnation.

But when in my eagerness I would approach him and, like the woman with an issue, am ready to steal the healing for my poor ailing soul by furtively touching even the hem of his garment, or when like Thomas, that man of desires, I want to see and touch the whole of him and – what is more – to approach the most holy wound in his side – the portal of the ark that is there made, and not only to put my finger or my whole hand into it, but wholly enter into Jesus’ very heart, into the holy of holies, the ark of the covenant, the soul of our humanity that holds within itself the manna of the Godhead – then, alas! I am told: Touch me not!”

Thus, and deservedly, my conscience harries and chastises me, forcing me to pay the penalty for my presumption and my wickedness. Then I return to my rock, that rock that is a refuge for those who bristle all over with sins. And once again I embrace and kiss your right hand that covers and protects me.

<sup>1</sup>The works of William of St. Thierry – vol. 1 – Cistercian Publications – Spencer, MA – 1971 – pg 36

on *Ezekiel*, Bk. ii. Hom. ii. nn. 12-14; trans. Cuthbert Butler, in *Western Mysticism*, pp. 93-94.

## **GN-WILLIAM02**

**09.05.19**

### **On Contemplating God by William of st. Thierry**

Thus far I have perceived and seen, faintly enough indeed; and yet that slight experience has sufficed to kindle my longing afresh, so that I can scarcely now contain myself for hoping that one day you will remove your covering hand and pour out your illuminating grace, so that at last, dead to myself and alive to you, according to the answer of your truth with unveiled face I shall begin to see your face, and by that seeing shall be united to you. O face, face, happy face that merits thus to be united to yourself through seeing you! It builds in its heart a tabernacle for the God of Jacob and does everything according to the pattern shown it on the mount! Here with truth and fittingly it sings: "My heart has said to you, 'My face has sought you; your face, Lord, will I seek.'"

So, as I said: by a gift of your grace looking at all the nooks and limits of my conscience, I desire only and exclusively to see you, so that all the ends of my earth may see the salvation of their God; and that, when I have seen him, I may love him whom to love is to live indeed. For, faint with longing, I say to myself: "Who loves what he does not see? How can anything be lovable which is not in some way visible?"

But he who longs for you, O Lord adorable and lovable, is at once confronted with the qualities that make you lovable; for from heaven and earth alike and by means of all your creatures these present themselves to me and urge me to attend to them. And the more clearly and truly these things declare you and affirm that you are worthy to be loved, the more ardently desirable do they make you appear to me.

And yet, O Lord, when all is said and done, I am quite positive that, by your grace, I do have in me the desire to desire you and the love of loving you with all my heart and soul. Thus far you have brought me to the point of desiring to desire you and of loving to love you. But when I love like that, I don't know what I love. What does it mean, to love love and to desire desire? If we love anything, it is by love that we love; and it is by desire that we desire all that we desire. But maybe when I love love, it is not the love that I love – the love, that is, with which I love that which I want to love and by which I love everything that I do love at all – but it is I myself whom I love in the act of loving when in the Lord I praise and love my soul, the soul which beyond all doubt I should loathe and detest if I found it anywhere else but in the Lord and his love.



But what, then, of desire? If I say: "I desire to be desirous," then I find myself desirous already. But is it that I desire the desire for you as if I had never previously had it? Or do I desire a desire greater than that which I already have?

So when my inward eyes grow blurred like this, and become dim and blind, I pray you with all speed to open them, not as Adam's fleshly eyes were opened, to the beholding of his shame, but that I, Lord, may so see your glory that, forgetting all about my poverty and littleness, my whole self may stand erect and run into your love's embrace, seeing him whom I have loved and loving him whom I have yet to see. In this way, dying to myself, I shall begin to live in you. O may this blessedness of being in you be given to me, for whom the worst thing possible is to be in myself!

## **GN-WILLIAM03A**

**09.06.19**

### **On Contemplating God by William of St. Thierry**

But, Lord, make haste, don't loiter! For the grace of your wisdom – or the wisdom of your grace – has its short-cuts. For there, where there are no rational arguments or lines of thought to lead one on and upwards step by step, up to the torrent of your delights and the full joy of your love – there, I say, he to whom you grant it, he who seeks faithfully and persists in knocking, there of a sudden he may find himself arrived already! But, Lord, when something of this joy falls to my lot – and it is all too seldom that it happens – but when it does, Lord, then I cry aloud and shout: “Lord, it is good for us to be here! Let us make here three tents, one for faith and one for hope and one for love!” Do I ever know what I am saying when I say: “It is good for us to be here!” But then forthwith I fall to the ground as one dead, and when I look around me I see nothing. I find myself just where I was before, back in my sorrow of heart and affliction of soul. Till when, O Lord, till when? How long must I seek counsel in my soul and be vexed in heart every day? How long will your Spirit thus come and go in mortal men, never remaining with them, blowing where he will? But when the Lord leads back the captives of Sion, then shall we be as men comforted, then will our mouths be filled with joy and our tongue with gladness!

Meanwhile, I have been a foreigner too long. I have dwelt with the inhabitants of Kedar, very much an exile have I been in soul. Yet deep within my heart the truth of your consolation and the consolation of your truth reply: “There are two loves, the love of desire and the love of delight. Desiring love is sometimes rewarded with sight; the reward of sight is delight, and delight earns the perfecting of love.”

I thank you, then, who by your grace have deigned to speak to your servant's heart and give at least a partial answer to my anxious questions. I receive and embrace this token of your Spirit, and with it joyfully look forward to the fulfillment of your promise, of which it is the guarantee. So I desire to love you, and I love to desire you; and in this way I press forward, hoping to make him my own who has made me his own. That is to say, I hope one day to love you perfectly, you who first loved us, you the love-worthy, you the lovable.

But does this perfecting of love for you, this consummation of beatitude in loving you, ever or anywhere exist, O Lord? Is the soul that thirsts for God as for the fount of life ever so satisfied and so fulfilled that it can say: “It is enough!”? No matter who or where the man may be who says: “It is enough,” I feel pretty certain that there is some lack in him! But what perfection can there be where any lack of that sufficiency obtains? Is perfection never and nowhere to be realized? But what about the unrighteous, Lord? Will they possess your

kingdom? Now an unrighteous man is one who has no desire, no awareness of his debt, no understanding of your love for us proportionate to the love for you which it is possible for a rational creature to possess. Again, it is certain, surely, that the blessed seraphim, for whom their nearness to your presence and the clearness of their sight of you has earned the name of "burning ones" - and indeed they are - it is certain, I say, that they loved you more than he who is lesser in the kingdom of heaven. Here in the kingdom of heaven is someone who is I will not say the least in it, but someone, anyhow; and he desires to love you as much as you can and should be loved by anyone; and this maybe is that into which the angels desire to look. So this happy "lesser one", whoever he is, desires to love you as much as all those others do who love you more than he does. And this he does, not in a spirit of rivalry but by way of devout and godly imitation. Moreover if he makes progress in love, the more his inward eyes are enlightened and the more he grows to be at home with the inner realities, so much the more, provided he is not ungrateful and unrighteous, does he perceive and understand with increasing sweetness that you can be loved more, and that he himself, debtor as he is, can love you more, and that even he can love you as much as do the cherubim and seraphim.

**MY-80**

**09.07.19**

**Mary as Star of the Sea – From a Homily by St. Bernard of Clairvaux <sup>2</sup>**

“And the Virgin’s name was Mary”. Let us now say a few words about this name, which means ‘star of the sea’ and is so becoming to the Virgin Mother. Surely she is very fittingly likened to a star. The star sends forth its ray without harm to itself. In the same way the Virgin brought forth her son with no injury to herself. The ray no more diminishes the star’s brightness than does the son his mother’s integrity. She is indeed that noble star risen out of Jacob whose beam enlightens this earthly globe. She it is whose brightness both shines in the highest heaven and pierces the pit of hell, and is shed upon the earth, warming our hearts far more than our bodies, fostering virtue and cauterizing vice.

O you, whoever you are, who feel that in the tidal wave of this world you are nearer to being tossed about among the squalls and gales than treading on dry land, if you do not want to founder in this tempest, do not avert your eyes from the brightness of this star. When the wind of temptation blows up within you, when you strike upon the rock of tribulation, gaze up at this star, call out to Mary. Whether you are being tossed about by the waves of pride or ambition or slander or jealousy, gaze up at this star, call out to Mary. When rage or greed or fleshly desires are battering the skiff of your soul, gaze up at Mary. When the immensity of your sins weighs you down and you are bewildered by the loathsomeness of your conscience, when the terrifying thought of judgment appalls you and you begin to founder in the gulf of sadness and despair, think of Mary. In dangers, in hardships, in every doubt, think of Mary, call out to Mary. Keep her in your mouth, keep her in your heart. Follow the example of her life and you will obtain the favor of her prayer. Following her you will never go astray. Asking her help, you will never despair. Keeping her in your thoughts, you will never wander away. With your hand in hers, you will not be afraid. With her leading you, you will never tire. Her kindness will see you through to the end. Then

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<sup>2</sup> Magnificat – Homilies in Praise of the Virgin Mary – Cistercian Fathers Series #18 – Cistercian Publications – Kalamazoo, MI – 1979 – p 30

you will know by your own experience how true it is that “the Virgin’s name was Mary”.