

LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY
VIGILS READINGS
Twenty-third Week in Ordinary Time
September 8-14, 2019

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2019

A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke by John Cassian ¹

The tradition of the Fathers and the authority of holy scriptures both affirm that there are three renunciations which every one of us must strive to practice. To these let us turn our attention.

First, on the material level, we have to despise all worldly wealth and possessions; secondly, we must reject our former way of life with its vices and attachments, both physical and spiritual; and thirdly, we should withdraw our mind from all that is transitory and visible to contemplate solely what lies in the future and to desire what is unseen

We read that the Lord commended Abraham to make all three renunciations at once when he said to him: *Leave your country and your kindred and your father's house*. First he said *your country*, meaning worldly wealth and possessions; secondly *your kindred*, that is our former way of living, with its habits and vices which have grown up with us and are as familiar to us as kith and kin; thirdly *your father's house*, in other words every secular memory aroused by what you see.

This forgetfulness will be achieved when, dead with Christ to the elemental spirits of this world, we contemplate as the apostle says *not the things that are seen, for what is seen is temporal but what is unseen is eternal*. It will be achieved when in our hearts we leave this temporal and visible house and turn the eyes of our mind toward that in which we shall live for ever; when, though living in the world, we cease to follow the spirit of the world in order to fight for the Lord, proclaiming by our holy way of life that, as the apostle says, *our homeland is in heaven*.

It avails little to undertake the first of these renunciations, even with wholehearted devotion inspired by faith, unless we carry out the second with the same zeal and fervor. Then having accomplished this as well we

¹ Journey with the Fathers 0 Year C 0 New City Press – 1994 0 pg 114

shall be able to go on to the third, whereby we leave the house of our former father, of him who fathered us as members of a fallen race, *children of wrath like everyone else*, and turn our inward gaze solely toward heavenly things.

We shall attain to the perfection of this third renunciation when our mind, no longer dulled by contact with a pampered body, has been cleansed by the most searching refinement from every worldly sentiment and attitude, and raised by constant meditation on divine things and spiritual contemplation to the realm of the invisible. It will then lose all awareness of the frail body enclosing it or the place it occupies, so absorbed will it be by things divine and spiritual.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2019

The patron of all missionary enterprises among Negroes: a reading about St. Peter Claver from Butler's *Lives of the Saints*.

He was born in Catalonia, about 1581, and as he showed fine qualities of mind and spirit was destined for the Church and sent to study at the University of Barcelona. Here he graduated with distinction [and entered] the Society of Jesus. He left Spain forever in April 1610, and was ordained priest at Cartagena, in what is now the republic of Colombia. By the time of his ordination the slave trade had been established in the Americas for nearly a hundred years, and the port of Cartagena was one of its principal centers, being conveniently situated as a clearing house. The trade had recently been given a considerable impetus, for the local Indians were not physically fitted to work in the gold and silver mines, and there was a beg demand for Negroes from Angola and the Congo.

At this time the leader of the work among the Negroes was Father Alfonso de Sandoval, a great Jesuit missionary who spent forty years in the service of the slaves, and after working under him Peter Claver declared himself "the slave of the Negroes forever". Although by nature shy and without self-confidence he threw himself into the work with method and organization. He enlisted bands of assistants, and as soon as a slave-ship entered the port he went to wait on its living freight. The slaves were disembarked and shut up in the yards. Into these yards or sheds St. Peter

Claver plunged, with medicines and food, bread, brandy, lemons, tobacco to distribute among the Negroes, some of whom were too frightened, others too ill, to accept them. "We must speak to them with our hands, before we try to speak to them with our lips", Claver would say. When he came upon any who were dying he baptized them, and then sought out all babies born on the voyage that he might baptize them. He had a band of seven interpreters, one of whom spoke four Negro dialects, and with their help he taught the slaves and prepared them for baptism, not only in groups but individually. He made use of pictures, showing our Lord suffering on the cross for the; above all he tried to instil in them some degree of self-respect, to give them at least some idea that as redeemed human beings they had dignity and worth, even if as slaves they were outcast and despised.

It is estimated that in forty years St. Peter Claver instructed and baptized over 300,000 slaves. When there was time and opportunity he took the same trouble to teach them how properly to use the sacrament of penance, and in one year is said to have heard the confessions of more than five thousand. Many of the stories both of the heroism and of the miraculous powers of St. Peter Claver concern his nursing of sick and diseased Negroes, in circumstances often that no one else, black or white, could face.

In 1650 he went to preach the jubilee among the Negroes along the coast, but sickness attacked his emaciated and weakened body, and he was recalled to the Jesuit residence at Cartagena. But here a virulent epidemic had begun to show itself, and one of the first to be attacked among the Jesuits was the debilitated missionary, so that his death seemed at hand. After receiving the last sacraments he recovered, but he was a broken man. For the rest of his life pain hardly left him, and a trembling in his limbs made it impossible for him to celebrate Mass. He perforce became almost entirely inactive, but would sometimes hear confessions, especially of his dear friend Doña Isabella de Urbina, who had always generously supported his work with her money. Otherwise he remained in his cell, not only inactive but even forgotten and neglected.

On September 6, 1654 he was taken very ill and became comatose. The rumor of his approaching end spread round the city, everyone suddenly remembered the saint again, and numbers came to kiss his hands before it

was too late; his cell was stripped of everything that could be carried off as a relic. St. Peter Claver never fully recovered consciousness, and died two days later on the birthday of our Lady. The civil authorities who had looked askance at his solicitude for mere Negro slaves, and the clergy, who had called his zeal indiscreet and his energy wasted, now vied with one another to honor his memory.

St. Peter Claver was never again forgotten and his fame spread throughout the world: he was canonized in 1888 and was declared by Pope Leo XIII patron of all missionary enterprises among Negroes.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2019

On Contemplating God by William of St. Thierry ¹

O the incalculable blessedness of the soul that merits so to be acted on by God, that through unity of spirit she loves in God, not just some property of his, but God himself, and even loves herself only in God! Like God, she loves and approves in herself what God must approve and love, that is to say, himself. Or, to put it in another way, she loves and approves in herself that which must be loved by both God the Creator and by his creature. In a word, neither the name of love nor love itself belongs by right to anyone, nor is it owed to any, save to yourself alone. O you who are true Love – love-worthy Lord, this also is the will of your Son in us, this is his prayer for us to you his Father: “I will that, as you and I are one, so may they themselves be one in us.” This is the goal, this is the consummation, this is the perfection, this is peace, this is “the joy of the Lord,” this is the joy of the Holy Spirit, this is the “silence in heaven.”

In fact, as long as we are in this life, it is given us to enjoy the ineffable peace of the “silence in heaven” - that is, in the soul of the righteous which is the seat of Wisdom – only on occasion, for the space of half an hour, or “for scarcely half an hour.” But with the thoughts that remain the soul's attention remains fixed on you, as in the observance of a perpetual feast day. In that blessed and eternal life, however, of which it is said, “Enter into the joy of your Lord,” there alone will the enjoyment be perfect and perpetual. And the bliss then will be proportionately greater, in that by that

time all things that now seem to hinder or retard it will have been done away; and the eternity of her love will be secure for ever, her perfection will be inviolable, and her bliss such as cannot be corrupted.

Come to us, Love, and take possession of us! Drive from before your face all those foul infections which the lust of the flesh and of the eyes, and the pride of life, have brought to birth in our affection like a rank overgrowth of weeds – in this affection, I repeat, which is called love in us, but which too often is corrupted in the soul created by you and for you. For you alone is it created and implanted in us; and when it resists the natural law and cries out against it, it earns for itself such names as gluttony, lust, avarice, and the like. But as long as it continues incorrupt and obedient to the law of its being, it is directed on to you, to whom only love is due.

In fact, as one of your servants has said, the love of the rational soul is “a movement, a quiet abiding, or an end, in which the will neither seeks anything beyond that which it has, nor reckons anything to be desirable.” But he who seeks for anything beyond you or above, as though it were a better thing than you, is seeking for something that does not exist, for there is nothing better nor lovelier than you. That is why such a person makes himself a non-entity when he flees from you, whose is the sole authentic claim on love, and indulges in other alien passions with – as I said before – their alien names. For love, as has been said, and I must repeat it, is directed on to you alone, and it is in you alone that anyone who truly is exists at all. There in you, in you alone, is the quiet safe abiding, for “to fear God” with the chaste fear of love, “and to keep his commandments, this is the whole person.”

[1](#)On Contemplating God – William of St Thierry – Cistercian Fathers Series #3 – Cistercian Publications – Spencer, MA – 1971 – pg 48

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2019

**A reading about family solidarity in ancient Israel,
from a book by Fr. Roland de Vaux.¹**

¹ *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961, pp. 20ff.

Prehistoric Israel is to us a closed book; but whatever may be true of that epoch, there is no doubt that from the time of our oldest documents, at any rate, the Israelite family is *patriarchal*. The proper word to describe it is *bêth'ab*, the 'house of one's father'; the genealogies are always given in the father's line, and women are rarely mentioned; and the nearest relation in the collateral line is the paternal uncle....

The family consists of those who are united by common blood and common dwelling-place. The 'family' is a 'house'; to found a family is 'to build a house' (Ne 7.4)... the family included the servants, the resident aliens ... and the 'stateless persons', widows and orphans, who lived under the protection of the head of the family.

Again, the term *bêth* or 'house', like the word 'family' in modern languages, is very flexible and may even include the entire nation (the 'house of Jacob' or the 'house of Israel'), or a considerable section of the people (the 'house of Joseph' or the 'house of Judah'). It may denote kinship in the wide sense ... In this wide sense, the family was the same group as the clan.... The [clan] concentrated in one area, occupying one or more villages according to its size.

The members of the family in this wider sense had an obligation to help and to protect one another. There was in Israel an institution which defined the occasions when this obligation called for action; it is the institution of the *gôel*, from a root which means 'to buy back or to redeem', 'to lay claim to', but fundamentally its meaning is 'to protect'. This institution has analogies among other peoples (for example, the Arabs), but in Israel it took a special form with its own terminology.

The *gôel* was a redeemer, a protector, a defender of the interests of the individual and of the group. If an Israelite had to sell himself into slavery in order to repay a debt, he would be 'redeemed' by one of his near relations (Lev 25.47-49). If an Israelite had to sell his patrimony, the *gôel* had priority over all other purchasers; it was his right and duty to buy it himself, to prevent the family property from being alienated.

The story of Ruth is yet another illustration of this custom, but here the purchase of the land is rendered more complicated by a case of levirate. Naomi had some property which, because of her poverty, she was forced to sell; and her daughter-in-law Ruth was a childless widow. Boaz was a *gól* of Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 2.20), but there was a closer relative who could exercise this right before him (Ruth 3.12; 4.4). This first *gól* would have bought the land, but he would not accept the double obligation of buying the land and marrying Ruth, because the child of this union would bear the name of the deceased husband and inherit the land (Ruth 4.4-6). So Boaz bought the family property and married Ruth (Ruth 4.9-10).

This story shows that the right of the *gól* followed a certain order of kinship: first, the paternal uncle, then his son, then other relations. Further, the *gól* could renounce his right or decline his duty without blame. By taking off one shoe (Ruth 4.7-8) a man proclaimed that he was forgoing his right....

The term *gól* passed into religious usage. Thus Yahweh, avenger of the oppressed, and savior of his people, is called a *gól* [in several different books of the Hebrew Scriptures].

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2019

SAINT PETER, ARCHBISHOP OF TARENTOISE -from Butler's Lives of the Saints²

St Peter of Tarentaise was born near Vienne in the French province of the Dauphine. He early displayed a remarkable memory, coupled with great inclination for religious studies, and at the age of twenty he entered the abbey of Bonnevaux. After a time, his father and the other two sons followed Peter to Bonnevaux, while his mother, with the only daughter, entered a neighboring nunnery.

He was not quite thirty when he was chosen superior of a new house built at Tamie, in the desert mountains of Tarentaise. It overlooked the pass

²BUTLER'S LIVES OF THE SAINTS, Ed. by Michael Walsh (Harper & Row, CA 1985) p. 138.

which was then the chief route from Geneva to Savoy, and the monks were able to be of great use to travellers. There, with the help of Amadeus III, Count of Savoy, who held him in high esteem, he founded a hospice for the sick and for strangers, in which he was wont to wait upon his guests with his own hands.

In 1142 came his election to the archbishopric of Tarentaise, and Peter was compelled by St Bernard and the general chapter of his order, though much against the grain, to accept the office. He found the diocese in a deplorable state, due mainly to the mismanagement of his predecessor, an unworthy man who had eventually to be deposed. In place of the cathedral clergy whom he found lax and careless, St Peter substituted canons regular of St Augustine. He undertook the constant visitation of his diocese; recovered property which had been alienated; appointed good priests to various parishes; made excellent foundations for the education of the young and relief of the poor; and everywhere provided for the due celebration of the services of the Church..

In 1155, after he had administered the diocese for thirteen years, Peter suddenly disappeared. Actually he had made his way to a remote Cistercian abbey in Switzerland, where, he was accepted as a lay-brother. Not until a year later was he discovered. His identity having been revealed to his new superiors, Peter was obliged to leave and return to his see, where he was greeted with great joy. He took up his duties more zealously than ever. He rebuilt the hospice of the Little St Bernard and founded other similar refuges for travellers in the Alps...

It was not granted to the saint to die among his mountain flock. His reputation as a peacemaker led Alexander III to send him in 1174 to try effect a reconciliation between King Louis VII of France and Henry II of England. St Peter, though he was old, set out at once, preaching everywhere on his way. As he approached Chaumont in the Vexin, where the French court was being held, he was met by King Louis and by Prince Henry, the rebellious heir to the English throne. The latter, alighting from his horse to receive the archbishop's blessing, asked for the saint's old cloak, which he reverently kissed. Both at Chaumont and at Gisors where he interviewed the English king, St Peter was treated with utmost honor,

but the reconciliation for which he labored did not take place until after his death. As he was returning to his diocese he was taken ill on the road near Besancon, and died as he was being carried into the abbey of Bellevaux. This St Peter was canonized in 1191.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2019

A reading about St. John Chrysostom, from *Historical Sketches* by John Cardinal Newman.¹

Whence this devotion to St. John Chrysostom, which leads me to dwell upon the thought of him, and makes me kindle at his name, when so many other great Saints...command indeed my veneration, but exert no personal claim upon my heart? Many holy people have died in exile, many holy people have been successful preachers; and what more can we write upon St. Chrysostom's monument than this, that he was eloquent and that he suffered persecution? He is not an Athanasius, expounding a sacred dogma with a luminousness which is almost an inspiration. Nor, except by the contrast, does he remind us of that Ambrose who kept his ground obstinately in an imperial city, and fortified himself against the heresy of a court by the living rampart of a devoted population. Nor is he Gregory or Basil, rich in the literature and philosophy of Greece, and embellishing the Church with the spoils of heathenism. Nor is he a Jerome, so dead to the world that he can imitate the point and wit of its writers without danger to himself or scandal to his brethren. He has not trampled upon heresy, nor smitten emperors, nor beautified the house or the service of God, nor knit together the portions of Christendom, nor founded a religious order, nor built up the framework of doctrine, nor expounded the science of the Saints; yet I love him, as I love David or St. Paul.

How am I to account for it? I consider St. Chrysostom's charm to lie in his intimate sympathy and compassionateness for the whole world, not only in its strength, but in its weakness; in the lively regard with which he views everything that comes before him, taken in the concrete, whether as made after its own kind or as gifted with a nature higher than its own. It is the interest which he takes in all things, not so far as God has made them alike, but as he has made them different from each other. I speak of the

discriminating affectionateness with which he accepts everyone for what is personal and unlike others....

I speak of the kindly spirit and the genial temper with which he looks round at all things which this wonderful world contains; of the graphic fidelity with which he notes them down upon the tablets of his mind, and of the promptitude and propriety with which he calls them up as arguments or illustrations in the course of his teaching as the occasion requires.

Possessed though he be by the fire of ardent charity, he has not lost one fibre, he does not miss one vibration, of the complicated whole of human sentiment and affection; like the miraculous bush in the desert, which for all the flame that wrapt it round, was not thereby consumed.

That loving scrutiny, with which he follows the Apostles as they reveal themselves to us in their writings, he practices in various ways towards all people, living and dead, high and low, those whom he admires and those whom he weeps over. He writes as one who was ever looking out with sharp but kind eyes upon the world of humans and their history; and hence he has always something to produce about them, new or old, to the purpose of his argument, whether from books or from the experience of life. Head and heart were full to overflowing with a stream of mingled "wine and milk", of rich vigorous thought and affectionate feeling. This is why his manner of writing is so rare and special; and why, when once a student enters into it, he will ever recognize him, wherever he meets with extracts from him.

In him I recognize a special pattern of that very gift of discrimination. He may indeed be said in some sense to have a devotion of his own for every one who comes across him, —for persons, ranks, classes, callings, societies, considered as divine works and the subjects of his good offices or good will, and therefore I have a devotion for him.

[1](#) *Historical Sketches*, II, pp. 284-287.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2019

From a Sermon for Palm Sunday by Blessed Gueric of Igny (CF 32:61-62)

Thanks be to your cross and your nails, Lord Jesus. I behold the jaws of that serpent pierced through, so that those who had been swallowed may pass through them. And he who was confident that the Jordan would flow into his mouth is in a frenzy of anger because the river which he had swallowed has to a great extent ruined him. Forth from those jaws have come to us the men who today sing with us the noble and magnificent triumph of the Cross. Truly they have been freed from the lion's mouth, or rather they have come back from the depths of hell. Well may he be angry, roar and waste away, for the prey has been snatched from his teeth. As for Christ, he will rejoice that he was not crucified in vain.

Let hell and death lament, the one bitten, the other dead. The heavens are glad and the Church exults because Christ despoils hell and triumphs over death. In the conversion of these men he has renewed the triumph of his passion and resuscitated the wonders of his cross. In these men the Cross has flowered once again. Now the tree of life has borne again this precious fruit. How should it remain barren when it has been not only watered but also made life-giving by the Savior's blood? He will not regret now that he climbed up into the palm tree, since he has gathered so much fruit, such precious fruit from it. He foresaw this fruit among others when he was hastening of his own free will to the Passion. "I said," we read, "I will climb up into the palm tree and take hold of its fruit" (Song 7.8). He sums up in a few words that he suffered freely, that he was raised on high by the passion, that his suffering was not without fruit for us. When he sets forth his purpose in the words, "I said," he expresses the freedom of his will; the climbing up shows forth the value of redemption.... He climbed the cross by his will, he triumphed on it by his power, he gathered fruit from it by his loving kindness. By one and the same work he ... destroyed the devil and redeemed the Christian.

Let those then say who have been redeemed by the Lord, those whom he has redeemed from the power of the enemy (behold he has assembled them from this land and that) let them say with the voice and the mind of their Master: "God forbid that I should glory in anything, except the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ, in which God's wisdom turned evil counsel into folly, God's justice destroyed him who had power over death, God's mercy set the captive free. Rightly indeed, you who wisely glory, glory in your

Lord's cross; its triumph has set you free, its mystery has brought you life, its example has justified you, its sign fortifies you. For consistency and right reason seem to demand that those who mark their foreheads with the sign of the cross to fortify themselves should mark their behavior with the example of the Crucified to justify themselves, living by the law of the cross as they are armed by faith in it. Otherwise it is mockery for the soldier to wear the badge of a king whose command he does not follow; it is wrong for him to protect himself with the sign of him whose bidding he does not obey.

END OF READINGS