

LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY
VIGILS READINGS WEEK 30
October 27-November 2, 2019

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2019

A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke by Gregory Palamas ¹

The spiritual champion of evil is full of resources for its furtherance. It has often happened that as soon as the foundations of virtue have been laid in a soul, he has begun to undermine them with despair and lack of faith. Often, too, when the walls of the house of virtue were being built, he has assaulted them by means of inertia and indolence. Even when the house has been roofed over with good works, he has used arrogance and presumption to destroy it.

Nevertheless, stand firm and do not be afraid, for anyone zealous in doing good is even more resourceful. In resisting evil, virtue has the greater power, since it receives heavenly assistance from him who can do all things, and who confirms all virtue's lovers in goodness. Consequently, virtue not only remains unmoved by the manifold wicked wiles of the adversary, but even has the power to raise up and restore those sunk in the depths of evil, and easily to lead them back to God through repentance and humility.

The present parable is sufficient proof, for the tax collector, in spite of his profession and of having lived in the depths of sin, joins the ranks of those living upright lives through a single prayer, and that a short one; he is relieved of his burden of sin, he is lifted up, he rises above all evil, and is admitted to the company of the righteous, justified by the impartial Judge himself. The Pharisee, on the other hand, is condemned by his prayer in spite of being a Pharisee, and in his own eyes a person of importance. Because his "righteousness" is false and his insolence extreme, every syllable he utters provokes God's anger.

But why does humility raise us to the heights of holiness, and self-conceit plunge us into the abyss of sin? It is because when we have a high regard of ourselves, and that in the presence of God, he quite reasonably abandons us, since we think we have no need of his assistance. But when

¹ Journey with the Fathers 0 Cycle C – New City Press – 1984 – pg 128

we regard ourselves as nothing and therefore look to heaven for mercy, it is not unreasonable that we should obtain God's compassion, help and grace. For as Scripture says: *The Lord resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*

This man went away justified, and not the other, says the Lord; because all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but those who humble themselves will be exalted. For since the devil is pride itself, and arrogance his own particular vice, this sin conquers and drags down with itself every human virtue tinged with it. Similarly, humility before God is the virtue of the good angels, and it conquers every human vice to which a sinner has fallen prey.

Humility is the chariot in which the ascent to God is made upon the clouds that are to carry up to him those destined to be with God for endless ages, according to the apostle's prophecy: *We shall be caught up on the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall be always with the Lord.* For humility is like a cloud. Produced by repentance, it draws streams of tears from the eyes, makes unworthy people worthy, and raises up and presents to God those freely justified by reason of their right dispositions.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2019

The zeal of the apostles: a reading from a sermon on Sts Simon and Jude by John Henry Newman. 1

The Apostles commemorated on this Festival direct our attention to the subject of Zeal. St. Simon is called **Zelotes**, which means the Zealous; a title given him (as is supposed) from his belonging before his conversion to the Jewish sect of Zealots, which professed extraordinary Zeal for the Law. Anyhow, the appellation marks him as distinguished for this particular Christian grace. St. Jude's Epistle, which forms part of the service of the day, is almost wholly upon the duty of manifesting Zeal for Gospel Truth, and opens with a direct exhortation to *Acontend earnestly for the Faith once delivered to the Saints.*[@]

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"Christian Zeal," in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, pp. 464 ff.

It will be a more simple account of Zeal, to call it the earnest desire for God's honor, leading to strenuous and bold deeds in His behalf; and that in spite of all obstacles. Now Zeal is one of the elementary religious qualifications; that is, one of those which are essential in the very notion of a religious man. A man cannot be said to be in earnest in religion, till he magnifies his God and Savior; till he so far consecrates and exalts the thought of Him in his heart, as an object of praise, and adoration, and rejoicing, as to be pained and grieved at dishonor shown to Him, and eager to avenge Him. In a word, a religious temper is one of loyalty towards God; and we all know what is meant by being loyal from the experience of civil matters. To be loyal is not merely to obey; but to obey with promptitude, energetic dutifulness, disinterested devotion, disregard of consequences. And such is Zeal, except that it is ever attended with that reverential feeling which is due from a creature and a sinner towards his Maker, and towards Him alone. It is the main principle in *all* religious service to love God above all things; now, Zeal is to love Him above all other people, above our dearest and most intimate friends. This was the especial praise of the Levites, which gained for them the reward of the Priesthood, that is, their executing judgment on the people in the sin of the golden calf. Zeal is the very consecration of God's Ministers to their office. Accordingly our Blessed Savior, the One Great High Priest, the Antitype of all Priests who went before Him and the Lord and Strength of all who come after, began His manifestation of Himself by two acts of Zeal. When twelve years old he deigned to put before us in representation the sacredness of this duty, when He remained in the Temple *Awile His father and mother sought Him sorrowing,* and on their finding Him, returned answer, *ADo you not know that I must be about My Father's business?* And again, at the opening of His public Ministry, He went into the Temple, and *Amade a scourge of small cords, and drove out the sheep and oxen, and overthrew the changers= tables* that profaned it: thus fulfilling the prophecy contained in the text, *AZeal for your house has eaten me up.* Being thus consumed by Zeal Himself, no wonder He should choose His followers from among the Zealous.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2019

A Reading on the Book of Tobit by Dom Damasus Winzen.²

The little book of Tobit is filled with that good family spirit which always has been the precious heritage of the chosen people. The history of salvation during the time of the Old Testament is the history of families. When God ordered Moses to "take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel," he added " by their families." The Israelites do not exist as individuals but as sons and daughters, because it is the "Son of Abraham," the Messiah, in whom their destiny is fulfilled. The history of the Old Covenant culminates in the holy family of Nazareth. The family of Tobit is an image of that family where Jesus was the only-begotten son. Right at the beginning of the book we find Tobit's little family gathered together at the good dinner that was prepared in his house when there was a festival of the Lord. The father sends the son to invite the poor to share the joy of the family. It was an old ordinance in Israel: "With your son, your daughter, your male and female servants, the Levite living in your community, the stranger, the orphan and the widow who are in your community, you are to rejoice before the Lord your God." We can see already how young Tobias takes on the similarity of the Son of God sent by his father to invite the poor into the kingdom of God and to pour out his Spirit upon sons and daughters, upon servants and handmaids. What an invitation, at the same time, to a Christian family to celebrate the feasts of the New Testament at their home in the same spirit of all-embracing charity!

Another aspect of the true family spirit is shown in Tobit's beautiful admonitions to his son. There he really fulfills the office of the father, whose function it is not only to take care of the physical needs of the family but to teach, to become a father by laying his words of wisdom as a foundation in the heart of the son. In this the earthly father imitates his heavenly prototype, the eternal Father whose word is his Son; while the son who reverently receives the father's word to hand it down to his own children represents the Son of God made flesh who said "What the Father has taught me I speak."

² Winzen, Pathways in Scripture. Ann Arbor, Word of Life, 1976. p 141-2

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2019

A Commentary on the Book of Tobias by Dom Damasus Winzen [1](#)

The heart of the Book is reached in young Tobias' marriage with Sarah. The Old Testament gives to the relationship between husband and wife a deeply spiritual meaning, lifting it up to be a sign of the union between God and his people. God cannot be shut out from human wedlock, because the love which urges a man to leave father and mother and to cleave to his wife is an image of the love which caused the Son of God to leave his Father's glory to become one flesh with his bride, the Church. The story of young Tobias' wedding with Sarah is really a prophecy of the messianic marriage between Christ and his Church. Who else can the seven former husbands be but those who love mankind in the selfish spirit of the world, and thus deliver themselves up to the deadly power of the prince of this world? The seemingly superstitious manipulation with the entrails of the fish Tobias had caught in the river Tigris receives a completely new and spiritual meaning as soon as we remember that the fish is a symbol of Christ in his life-giving passion and death. The heart, liver and gall are in the Old Testament always the symbols of the innermost life and emotions. The liver and heart of the fish burnt on coal are the symbol of the sacrifice of Christ, who on the cross gave up his spirit into the hands of his Father and thus destroyed the dominion of the devil.

When we read about Raguel and his servants digging a grave for Tobias, and the maid who was sent in the early morning to their chamber, found the young couple safe and sound, and hurried to bring the good news to the parents, we are reminded of the empty tomb on Easter morning and the women who, when the sun was rising, received the glad tidings of the resurrection and brought them to the apostles. Tobias and Sarah's return to Tobias' home reads like a prophecy of the final reunion between the Church of the gentiles and the Jewish people, whose blindness will be healed by the light which radiates from the sacrificial love of Christ, represented symbolically in the gall of the fish. In the light of this faith old Tobit sees the glory of the New Jerusalem and hears the eternal Alleluia sung in its streets.

The depth of spiritual meaning hidden in the book of Tobit should not make us overlook, however, the wealth of practical wisdom which it has to offer to this present day and age, in which we witness such an appalling disintegration of family life. The deeply religious character of matrimony naturally requires spiritual kinship in the unity of faith between husband and wife, with God himself joining them together and fulfilling his blessing in them. At the same time this supernatural bond requires a sound natural foundation through a written agreement about the juridical and financial rights of husband and wife. "And afterward they made merry, blessing God" (7:14). A marriage blessed by God has nothing puritanical about it. It is the lovely flower of true humanity, which makes the husband the savior of his wife, enthrones the wife in his care and protection, gives honor and peace to the parents, and fuller praise to God in children.

[1](#)Pathways in Scripture – Damasus Winzen – Word of Life – Ann Arbor, MI – 1976 -pg 142

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2019

A Commentary on the Book of Tobias by St. Bede [1](#)

Tobias stopped by the waters of the Tigris because the Lord, when he appeared in the world, spent his life among sinners and mortals; but the water of sin did not touch him, nor did the prince of darkness, when he came, find in him anything of his own. Here again the mystery of the Lord's passion is quite obviously signified. For the huge fish, which, since it wanted to devour him, was killed by Tobias on the angel's instructions, represents the ancient devourer of the human race, that is, the devil. When the latter desired the death of humanity in our Redeemer, he was caught by the power of the divinity. The river Tigris, which, because of its swift current, takes its name from the tiger, a very swift animal, intimates the downward course of our death and mortality. In it lurked a huge fish, inasmuch as the invisible seducer of the human race held the power of death.

The Lord seized hold of the devil and by dying caught and conquered the one who wanted to catch him in death. Moreover he seized him by the gill so that, with the right hand of his power, he might separate his most wicked head from his entrapped body, that is, that he might remove the

wickedness of the ancient enemy from the heart of those whom he had wickedly allied with himself and had made, as it were, one body with him, and that, as a merciful redeemer, he might graft them into the body of his church. For a fish has a gill at the joining of its head and body. Now, just as our Lord is head of his church and the church is his body, so the devil is the head of all the wicked and all the wicked are his head and members. The reason why the Lord seized the very savage fish by the gill, dragged it towards him and cast it upon dry land was that, in smashing them to pieces, he openly and boldly exposed the devil's capabilities in public and rescued from the power of darkness those whom he foreknew to be children of light. *-over*

The Lord gutted the fish when he exposed more extensively to his saints the devil's wickedness and tore from their flesh, as it were, the secrets of his snares. He put away his heart for himself because he wanted to point out in the holy books his cunning, of which it is written, "Now the serpent was more cunning than any of the beasts of the earth". He put away the gall, since, in his concern for caution he wanted the extent of the malicious fury with which he raged against the human race to be put on record. The liver too he put away because he deigned to make known to us through the teachers of the truth the mischievous maturity of his intrigues against us.

The amount of the fish they took for themselves signifies those who are changed from members of the devil into members of Christ, that is, are converted from unbelief to the faith; but the amount they left represents those who, on hearing God's Word, prefer to remain behind among the dead and decaying members of their deceiver rather than return to the companionship of the Savior. He broiled the flesh of those whom he found carnal but rendered spiritual and strong again by the fire of his love.

[1](#)Ancient Christian Commentary – Old Testament - vol. XV – InterVarsity Press – Downers Grove, IL – 2010 – p 17

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2019

A Sermon by St. Aelred of Rievaulx [1](#)

My brothers, if we are not qualified to speak of one of God's saints and proclaim her glory, how qualified are we to give a sermon of all of the saints? It is all the more necessary that we bear ourselves in a way enabling us to come to share their glory. What then must we do? How can we attain these heights? Accordingly, brothers, let us listen to some wholesome advice. For whom should we be more ready to believe than someone who has already attained that glory? He certainly knows the way by which he went up. Let us listen then to one of the great friends of Jesus telling us: *Humble yourselves under God's mighty hand that he may raise you up.*

You know how today throughout the entire world everyone is praising God's saints – the angels and archangels, the apostles, the martyrs, confessors, virgins. In their honor today in our holy Church there are canticles, hymns, torches and all the rest that goes with a feast. The canticles connote the everlasting celebration in which the saints live because of the inexpressible joy which is theirs in God. The hymns connote the inexpressible praise by which they are always praising God. So it is the Psalmist says: *Blessed are those who dwell in your house, O Lord; they will praise you through all ages.* The torches connote the everlasting light in which God's saints live. This is why this past night you sang: *Around you, Lord, is a light that will never fail where the souls of the saints find rest.* Now brothers, ponder, if you can, how exalted in heaven are those who can be exalted and honored in this way on earth. Surely, brothers, if we could behold all the glory of the world and all the praise of the world and all the joy of the world at the same time, in comparison with their joy it is nothing but absolute misery.

Therefore, brothers, you ought to know that we celebrate these feasts with torches, canticles and so on for only two reasons. (These things do not profit God's saints. They take no delight from this earthly singing, nor do they glory in this earthly torches and trifles. Their praise is Christ and he is their light, *who enlightens every person coming into this world.*)

The first reason for these things is that by these reminders we may rouse ourselves to greater devotion; then the second, because of the connotations of which we have already spoken. We ought, then, to do as much as is adequate to these two reasons. They do not celebrate these feasts well who by excessive pomp and ceremony pursue these external

glories and splendours – with the result that the outer self becomes so intent on the canticles, the ornaments, the torches and such lovely trappings that the mind is scarcely able to conceive of anything but what it sees with the eyes, hears with the ears, or perceives with the other senses.

As for us, brothers, who do not see these things, let us ponder and delight in the true loveliness in which the saints live free of corruption; in those spiritual ornaments that the saints possess in righteousness and holiness: in the hymns and praises with which they praise God without weariness; and in that light which they see in the face of God. And let us keep our feasts in such a way that our mind is not turned back to those earthly and perishable delights but rather is roused to those that are spiritual and eternal. And so let us reflect on their glory and exaltation. To enable us to reach this exaltation, let us listen to the advice of the Apostle: *Humble yourselves beneath the mighty hand of God*. The Apostle was very aware of the reason why we are cast down, why we have lost that exaltation in which we were created, why we were driven out into this unhappiness. What is this reason, brothers, if not pride? Therefore, to counteract this pride he taught humility. *Humble yourselves*, he says. But because he knew that not all those who humble themselves humble themselves wisely, he therefore added: *under the mighty hand of God*.

Now let us notice who they are who are humbled beneath the glorious hand of God. They are the good angels who, after the blessed Mary Mother of God, are the focus of this feast. They doubtless humble themselves beneath the glorious hand of God for they look for nothing from his hand but his glory in which they are happy without end, each one according to the rank in which they were created.

Therefore, brothers, let us humble ourselves *beneath God's mighty hand that he may lift us up at the time of his visitation*. May he lift us up through good deeds and through holy desires, so that when he comes at that great visitation when he will demand from everyone an account of what they have done in this life, he may lift us up totally and we may hear that endearing voice saying: *Come, you blessed of my Father. Receive the kingdom that has been prepared for you from the beginning of the world*.

[1](#)Aelred of Rievaulx – The Liturgical Sermons – Cistercian Fathers Series -
#58 – Cistercian Publications – Kalamazoo – 2001 – pg 346

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2019

From Purgation and Purgatory by St. Catherine of Genoa [1](#)

The souls in purgatory cannot think, “I am here, and justly so because of my sins,” or “I wish I had never committed such sins for now I would be in paradise,” or “That person there is leaving before me,” or “I will leave before that one.” They cannot remember the good or evil in their past nor that of others.

Such is their joy in God's will, in his pleasure, that they have no concern for themselves but dwell only in their joy in God's ordinance. They see only the goodness of God, his mercy toward all. Should they be aware of other good or evil, theirs would not be perfect charity. Only once do they understand the reason for their purgatory: the moment in which they leave this life. After this moment, that knowledge disappears. Immersed in charity, incapable of deviating from it, they can only will or desire pure love. There is no joy save that in paradise to be compared with the joy of the souls in purgatory.

As the rust of sin is consumed the soul is more and more open to God's love. Just as a covered object left out in the sun cannot be penetrated by the sun's rays, in the same way, once the covering of the soul is removed, the soul opens itself fully to the rays of the sun. Having become one with God's will, these souls, to the extent that he grants it to them, see into God.

Joy in God, oneness with him, is the end of these souls, an instinct implanted in them at their creation. All that I have said is nothing compared to what I feel within, the witnessed correspondence of love between God and the soul; for when God sees the soul pure as it was in its origins, he tugs at it with a glance, draws it and binds it to himself with a fiery love. God so transforms the soul into himself that it knows nothing other than God. He will not cease until he has brought the soul to its perfection.

That is why the soul seeks to cast off any and all impediments, so that it can be lifted up to God; and such impediments are the cause of the suffering of

the souls in purgatory. Not that the souls dwell on their suffering; they dwell rather on the resistance they feel within themselves against the will of God, against his intense and pure love bent on nothing but drawing them up to him. And I see rays of lightning darting from that divine love to the creature, so intense and fiery as to annihilate not the body alone but, were it possible, the soul. The soul becomes like gold that becomes purer as it is fired, all dross being cast out. *-over*

The last stage of love is that which does its work without human doing. If humans were to be aware of the many hidden flaws in them, they would despair. These flaws are burned away in the last stage of love. God shows the soul its weakness, so that the soul may see the workings of God. If we are to become perfect, the change must be brought about in us and without us; that is, the change is to be the work not of human beings but of God.

This, the last stage of love, is the pure and intense love of God alone. The overwhelming love of God gives the soul a joy beyond words. In purgatory great joy and great suffering do not exclude one another.

[1](#)A Word in Season – vol. IV – Sanctoral – Augustinian Press – 1991 – pg 215

END OF READINGS