

NT-LK32

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A Commentary on Luke by Philoxenus of Mabbug <sup>1</sup>

All who were called by the Lord obeyed his summons at once, provided love of earthly things did not weigh them down. For worldly ties are a weight upon the mind and understanding, and for those bound by them it is difficult to hear the sound of God's call.

But the apostles, and the righteous people and patriarchs before them, were not like this. They obeyed like people really alive, and set out lightly, because no worldly possessions held them bound as though by heavy fetters. Nothing can bind or impede the soul that senses God: it is open and ready, so that the light of the divine voice, each time it comes, finds the soul capable of receiving it.

Our Lord also called Zacchaeus from the sycamore he had climbed, and immediately Zacchaeus hastened to come down, and welcomed his disciple even before he was called. And that is a marvelous thing – our Lord had not spoken to him, and Zacchaeus had not seen the Lord with the eyes of the body, and yet he believed in him simply on the word of others. This was because in him faith had been preserved in its natural life and health. He showed his faith by believing in our Lord as soon as he heard he was coming; and the simplicity of his faith was seen when he promised to give half of his goods to the poor, and to restore fourfold what he had taken by fraud. For if Zacchaeus' spirit had not been filled at that moment with the simplicity proper to faith, he would not have made this promise to Jesus, and he would not have given out and distributed, in a brief space of time, what his labors had amassed over many years. Simplicity scattered on all sides what had been accumulated by cunning; purity of soul dispersed what had been obtained by guile; faith made a public renunciation of what had been found and appropriated by unrighteousness.

For faith's only possession is God, and it refuses to own anything else besides him. Faith sets no store by possessions of any kind, apart from God, its one lasting possession. Faith has been implanted in us so that we may find God and possess nothing but him, and so that we may recognize that everything that exists is harmful to us apart from him.

<sup>1</sup>Journey with the Fathers – Year C – New City Press – NY – 1997 – pg 130

**A reading about St. Charles Borromeo, from a homily by Ronald Knox.** <sup>1</sup>

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When our Lord's apostles came to look back upon that terrible night in the Lake of Galilee, when they strained every nerve against the tempest while their Master lay sleeping in the boat, they found in it an allegory of their own situation, as they launched out the frail bark of his Church upon waves so troubled, with prospects so uncertain. And in every age the Church has looked back to that picture and taken comfort from it in times of adversity. [With great confidence], the Church of God, which is Peter's boat, has breasted the waves all through her troubled history. It is not upon the captain's judgment or the pilot's experience, not human wisdom or human prudence, that she depends for her safe voyage: she rests secure in the presence of her inviolable passenger. Yet we should do ill if we grudged recognition and gratitude to those servants of his who at various times have steered our course for us through difficult waters, and especially to the saints of the Counter-Reformation — that remarkable group of saints whom God raised up at the time of Europe's apostasy, by whose influence, humanly speaking, the faith survived that terrible ordeal. And not the least, nor the least prominent, of these is [St. Charles Borromeo], who ruled the Church of Milan in the latter part of the sixteenth century.

Say what you will, Italy breeds the genius for government.... Anybody, in naming the world's great men, will give you almost at once the names of two Italians, Julius Caesar and Napoleon. And, whatever verdict history may pass on our own times, it is in Italy that the anarchical tendencies of the last half-century have provoked the first reaction in favor of efficient government. St. Charles came from a ruling family among that ruling race. Personal humility shone out in him as in the other saints; but there was something Latin all the same about the resolute competence with which he governed his diocese. Men called him a second St. Ambrose; and St. Ambrose, his predecessor in the See of Milan, was a civil magistrate before he was ever a bishop. It was not idle title to call St. Charles a prince of the Church.

Whatever be the rights and wrongs of all the controversies we hear about the medieval Church, this at least is clear, that in the days of the Council of Trent its organization needed reform. And reform needs more than mere legislation to decree it; it needs administration to execute it. That is St. Charles's characteristic legacy to the Church: it was the influence of his example, in great measure, that molded her organization on the new model which Trent had decreed. The bishop has got to be the center of everything in his diocese, and the clergy of the diocese are to be *his* clergy — a family of which he is to be the father, a guild of which he is to be the master. See how fond St. Charles was of synods: the whole of his comparatively short episcopate is a long record of the synods he gathered amongst his clergy. See how enthusiastic he is for the seminary idea; the bishop, henceforth, is not merely to ordain people, he is to know whom he is ordaining. And above all what was characteristic of St. Charles was the institute which he left behind him — a body of secular priests, putting themselves at the disposal of the bishop as absolutely as the religious puts himself at the disposal of his superior. Yes, there is much about St. Charles's life which is more exciting, and much which is more attractive, than all this; his boundless generosity to the poor, the relentless mortification that regulated his busy,

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<sup>1</sup> from *Occasional Sermons of Ronald Knox*, ed. by Philip Caraman, S.J., New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960, pp. 79-82.

competent life. But what makes him stand out among the saints more than either is his intense devotion even to the most uninspiring details of diocesan routine.

Commentary on the Book of Tobit by Fr. John Craghan, C.S.S.R. <sup>1</sup>

The Book of Tobit is a study in Jewish family life. It relates the fortunes of two such families in exile. Tobit, although originally successful, loses his position, is reduced to poverty, and despite his obvious piety is afflicted with blindness. In another area of the Diaspora Sarah too has to cope with tragedy. She has lost seven husbands in a row – all killed on the occasion of the wedding night. The Book weaves the piety of such families into a story which becomes a model for Jewish existence and faith in the midst of adversity.

The Book unfolds the drama of two little people, Tobit and Sarah, pitted against a system of apparent fate and a seemingly disinterested God. Both protagonists are concerned with the meaning of life in the demanding world of the Diaspora. Yet Tobit and Sarah are more than God's afflicted in Assyria and Media. They are Israel. They represent the desired response to God's word. They are models for Jewish behavior, compelling the Jewish audience to adopt their courageous example and so transform their lives. It is an object lesson in the manner of persevering Israelite faith.

The most obvious influence on the Book is the Old Testament itself. The author clearly dialogues with his scriptural heritage and adapts it to the needs of his audience. By far the greatest single influence on Tobit is the Book of Deuteronomy. For example, exile and destruction of "the Good Land" are due to infidelity and apostasy. However, even after judgment there is the possibility of mercy.

The Book of Tobit, precisely as a religious novel, is intended to reinforce fidelity to the Lord. It speaks to a Jewish community in need of hope and consolation. For the author, Israel's past offers lessons for coping in the present. Deuteronomy's doctrine of fidelity brings prosperity while infidelity brings disaster is judged to be a viable theology for the ongoing covenant community. The author's message is clear. He urges them not to conform to pagan practices but to translate the heritage of Israel into day by day covenant living. The Lord of the covenant is especially present through the concern for fellow Jews – hence the emphasis on such practices as almsgiving. Jewish commitment to Yahweh is measured by Jewish commitment to the community of Yahweh.

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<sup>1</sup> Old Testament Message – vol. 16 – Michael Glazier, Inc.,- Wilmington, DE – 1982 – pg/ 129 f

Commentary on the Book of Tobit by Fr. John Craghan, C.S.S.R. <sup>2</sup>

“Tobit” is a shortened form of “Tobiah”. Both names mean “Yahweh is good”. In view of the family’s misfortunes, one can legitimately question: is Yahweh really good? The real protagonists are Tobit and Sarah. Ch. 3 calls attention to their problems by highlighting the language of lamentation. As in Exodus, lamentation directs God’s attention to the implications of covenant. Since God has promised to look after the needs of his people, he is necessarily involved in the plight of Tobit and Sarah. The implication of lamentation is that it should be a growth experience. Coping with frustration and despair should lead one to a new awareness of the God of the covenant and, in turn, his claim on their lives. Tobit and Sarah have similar problems which demand God’s immediate attention. Despite such reverses both Tobit and Sarah continue to demonstrate faith and hope. Tobit believes that his virtue will ultimately triumph, even though he suffers at present.

The author of Tobit cannot accept a theology of fate. He endeavors to point out that happenings, even bizarre ones, are somehow part of God’s intricate plan. The author now introduces Raphael. Raphael means “God heals”. God is first moved to mercy and only then offers concrete help in the mission of Raphael. The last intervention is the healing of both Tobit and Sarah. The angel makes God present and thus reveals a wholly interested God. Raphael’s task is to bind the evil demon Asmodeus - “the demon of wrath”. Raphael functions as an exorcist. “God heals” triumphs over “the Destroyer”. The fumigating powers of the fish’s heart and liver produce the desired effect – the Destroyers flight. However flight is not enough. To ensure containing the demon’s influence, Raphael embarks on a journey of some 2000 miles to Upper Egypt. The area suggests the desert which in the biblical record is a traditional haunt of demons. There Raphael binds Asmodeus – the Destroyer is thereby destroyed.

Tobias’ prayer reflects the author’s attitude toward marriage. He quotes the creation account of marriage in Genesis 2. However he makes an addition to the text. The wife is not only a help but also a support. The language of the Genesis account is clearly covenantal. It is a question of communal dedication, not the individual advantage of the husband. Hence covenantal authenticity prompts him to marry Sarah, not ssexual gratification.

The anxiety has given way to praise and supplication. Since Sarah and Tobias are part of the divine plan, they have a claim on God’s mercy. This demonstration of concern towards Tobias and Sarah merely anticipate greater blessings to come.

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<sup>2</sup> Old Testament Message – vol. 16 – Michael Glazier, Inc.,- Wilmington, DE – 1982 – pg/ 129 f

A Commentary on the Book of Tobit by Venerable Bede <sup>3</sup>

Here the mystery of the Lord's passion is quite obviously signified. For the huge fish which, since it wanted to devour Tobias, was killed by him on the angel's instruction; it 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 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 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 to 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 the 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 toward him and cast it upon dry land was that, in smashing them to pieces, he openly and boldly exposed the devil's capabilities on public and rescued from the power of darkness those whom he foreknew to be children of light.

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"; and of this heart Paul too says: "For we are well aware of his intentions." He also 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 written about and 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. For they say that it is by the heat and power of the liver the hidden properties of the food that is eaten are "cooked out" and reach the system. But when with careful consideration we seek to find in what order the things we propose to do are to be carried out, we as it were, cook out by the heat of the liver the foods received in the stomach.

The amount of the fish they took for themselves signifies those who are changed from members of the devil to 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.

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<sup>3</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary – Old Testament – vol. XV – InterVarsity Press – Downers Grove, IL – pg. 17.

Commentary on the Book of Tobit by Fr. John Craghan, C.S.S.R. <sup>4</sup>

The Book of Tobit expresses the Deuteronomic doctrine of retribution. God has scourged (afflicted) but now he shows mercy. If Israel will cry out to Yahweh, as Tobit did, then Yahweh will hear and change Israel's lot. Raphael announces that God sent him to test Tobit. The recovery of sight is not merely the result of proper medical procedures. It is, rather, the sacrament of God's abiding covenantal care of his people. The truly blind are those who choose not to recognize Yahweh by fidelity and serve him by meeting the needs of others.

Another Deuteronomic element is praise. The Israelite who witnesses God's ongoing goodness must break out in songs of praise and thanksgiving. To praise is to enter into the rhythm of creation and acknowledge the implications of names, namely, that God is good, very good. Thus, to see God's goodness in the very act of seeing is to acknowledge: "Blessed are you, O God, and blessed is your name forever." Not to be able to break out into praise of God is to confine oneself to a hell of individualism and isolation. Covenant demands praise

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<sup>4</sup> Old Testament Message – vol. 16 – Michael Glazier, Inc.,- Wilmington, DE – 1982 – pg/ 129 f

**A reading about the origins of the Basilica of Saint John the Baptist, commonly known as the Lateran. 1**

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The blessed Pope Sylvester I instituted the rites which the Roman Church observes in consecrating churches and altars. For although from the ages of the apostles places had been dedicated to God where assemblies were held every Sabbath, yet those places had not been consecrated by a solemn rite before this. Up to the time of Sylvester an altar was not erected under title, which, anointed with chrism, symbolizes our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Altar, our Victim, our Priest.

But when the Emperor Constantine obtained health and salvation through the sacrament of Baptism, then for the first time, by an edict published by him, the Christians throughout the world were permitted to build churches; he himself encouraged this holy building by his own example, as well as by this edict. For in his own Lateran palace he dedicated a church to the Savior and founded adjacent to it a Basilica, under the title of St. John the Baptist, on the very spot where he had been baptized by St. Sylvester and cleansed from the leprosy of unbelief. This basilica the same Pope consecrated on November 9, and the memory of this consecration is celebrated today, when, for the first time, a church was publicly consecrated at Rome, and there appeared to the Roman people an image of the Savior depicted on the wall.

Although later on St. Sylvester decreed that from that time forward all altars should be built of stone, yet the altar of the Lateran Basilica was built of wood. This is not surprising. For since, from St. Peter down to Sylvester, because of persecutions, the Pontiffs could not dwell in any fixed abode, they offered the Holy Sacrifice [of the Mass] wherever necessity compelled them, whether in crypts or in cemeteries, or in the homes of the faithful, upon a wooden altar which was hollow like a chest.

When this altar had been placed in the first church, the Lateran, St. Sylvester decreed that from that time on, no one except the Roman Pontiff should celebrate Mass upon it, in honor of the Prince of the Apostles and of the rest of the Popes who had been accustomed to use it. This same church, having been destroyed by



fires, pillaging, and earthquakes, and repaired by the laborious effort of the Supreme Pontiffs, was afterwards rebuilt anew. Pope Benedict XIII, a Dominican, consecrated it on April 28, 1726, b