

## NT-LK34

### 11.17.19

A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke by Nilus of Ancyra [1](#)

In time of trial it is of great profit to us patiently to endure for God's sake, for the Lord says: *By patient endurance you will win life for yourselves*. He did not say by your fasting, or your solitude or silence, or your singing of psalms, although all these are helpful in saving your soul. But he said: *By patient endurance* in every trial that overtakes you, and in every affliction, whether this be insolent and contemptuous treatment, or any kind of disgrace, either small or great; whether it be bodily weakness, or the belligerent attacks of Satan, or any trial whatsoever caused either by other people or by evil spirits.

*By patient endurance you will win life for yourselves*, although to this must be added wholehearted thanksgiving and prayer, and humility. For you must be ready to bless and praise your benefactor, God the Savior of the world, who disposes all things, good or otherwise, for your benefit.

The apostle writes: *With patient endurance we run the race of faith set before us*. For what has more power than virtue? What more firmness or strength than patient endurance? Endurance, that is, for God's sake. This is the queen of virtues, the foundation of virtue, a haven of tranquility. It is peace in time of war, calm in rough waters, safety amidst treachery and danger. It makes those who practice it stronger than steel. No weapons or brandished bows, no turbulent troops or advancing siege engines, no flying spears or arrows can shake it. Not even the host of evil spirits, nor the dark array of hostile powers, nor the devil himself standing by with all his armies and devices will have power to injure the man or woman who has acquired this virtue through Christ.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year C – New City Press – NY – 1997 – pg 134

**CSQ04~80.WPD**

**11.18.19**

**The narrow way to God, a reading from a sermon by St. Aelred of Reivaulx  
(CSQ 4:80-81)**

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As Saint Gregory has said, this present life is nothing other than a way. He who lives well and praiseworthy passes to God, and to life eternal. But the man who lives an evil life is journeying towards hell and eternal death. This is the way of sinners. David speaks of it in the first psalm: "Happy the man who never follows the advice of the wicked, or loiters on the way that sinners take". Through this evil way one comes to the sinner's wretched death. As the Prophet said: "The death of sinners is the worst". Very logically, indeed, he says the death of sinners is the worst because their way is evil. And as the Apostle says: "Evil men go from bad to worse; erring themselves, they lead others into error". The death of sinners therefore is said to be the "worst", because as long as they live they become more and more evil, until, having reached the depths, they merit to be cut off and thrown into the fire.

But our blessed Father Benedict did not follow this way. He did not lead an evil life but held fast to the way of which it is said: "The way of the just is straight". Although narrow, it leads to life. The beginning of this way is narrow but afterwards, as Saint Benedict himself teaches us in his Rule, one runs in the way of God's commandments with untold sweetness and delight. For those who are beginning, it is indeed narrow, as it was for David when he said "Because of the words of your mouth I have followed difficult ways". But did this prophet ever say that because he found it difficult in the beginning he left or he thought he should leave it? God forbid! Rather he held fast until he could make this very different statement: "I have run in the way of your commandments because you have enlarged my heart". Saint Benedict also found the way narrow at the beginning of his conversion. But in the end he found it wide open. Was not

the way difficult for him? As we read in his Life, in order not to consent to lust, he threw himself into a thorn bush. But when he found the way difficult, what did he do? He did not depart from it ; rather he held fast and manfully stood his ground. He first did what he later taught, so that he might teach his followers what he himself did. Thus Pope Saint Gregory said of him: "Just as he lived, so he taught. He could not teach other than he lived". That he stood manfully in the way of God we can learn from his own words, since in his Rule he warns one shaken by fear not to depart from the way of salvation.

**CF08~14-.WPD**

**11.19.19**

**A reading about preparing ourselves to meet the Lord, from a sermon by Guerric of Igny (CF 8: 14-15)**

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“BE PREPARED now Israel to meet the Lord, for he is coming”. And you too my dear brethren be prepared as well; for the Son of Man will come when you least expect him. He is coming, nothing is more certain than that; but when he will arrive—nothing is less certain. Right up to the last moment we will not know the actual time the Father in his almighty power has appointed. Even the angels who stand before him have not been given the privilege of knowing that day or hour. Our last day most certainly must come to us; but it is very uncertain when it will come, where we will be or whence it will come. All we can say is that it is knocking at the door for the old, and lies in wait for the young.

O that they would keep careful guard over themselves who see death so ready to enter, nay rather who see it already entering. For has it not already entered, at least to some extent, a body grown senile and decrepit Yet in many who are already half-dead one can see worldly desires still alive. The limbs are growing cold and the fire of avarice still burns within; life is coming to its end and ambition still strains ahead. Because our youth or health perhaps appear to promise some more years ahead of us death is not often before our eyes, but this is just the very reason why, if we are wise, it should be in our thoughts, lest that day come like a thief in the night and find us unprepared and unready. It is lying in wait for us and we should fear it all the more for its being hidden, for we can neither see it nor get warning of it.

There is therefore only one thing that makes us safe: never to think that we are safe. For fear makes a careful man always prepared until at length fear can give way to security and not security to fear. The wise man says: “I shall keep myself from my iniquity, seeing that I am powerless in respect to my death.” He knows that the just man, if he is surprised by death, will be at

rest? In fact that man triumphs over death who was not overcome by iniquity during his life.

11/20/19

**A Reading from a Sermon on the Song of Songs, by Bernard of Clairvaux.<sup>1</sup>**

What does [the bride] mean then by saying: "I am beautiful like the curtains of Solomon"? I feel that here we have a great and wonderful mystery, provided that we apply the words, not to the Solomon of this *Song*, but to him who said of himself: "What is here is greater than Solomon." This Solomon to whom I refer is so great a Solomon that he is called not only Peaceful—which is the meaning of the word Solomon—but Peace itself; for Paul proclaims that "He is our Peace."

The bride's form must be understood in a spiritual sense, her beauty as something that is grasped by the intellect; it is eternal because it is an image of eternity. Her gracefulness consists of love, and you have read that "love never ends." It consists of justice, for "her justice endures forever." It consists of patience, and Scripture tells you "the patience of the poor shall not perish forever." What shall I say of voluntary poverty? Of humility? To the former an eternal kingdom is promised, to the latter an eternal exaltation. To these must be added the holy fear of the Lord that endures forever and ever; prudence too, and temperance and fortitude and all the other virtues; what are they but the pearls in the jewelled raiment of the bride, shining with unceasing radiance?

How lowly! Yet how sublime! At the same time tent of Kedar and sanctuary of God; an earthly tent and a heavenly palace; a mud hut and a royal apartment; a body doomed to death and a temple bright with light; an object of contempt to the proud, yet the bride of Christ. She is black but beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem: for though the hardship and sorrow of prolonged exile darkens her complexion, a heavenly loveliness shines through it, the curtains of Solomon enhance it...Indeed you must note the prudence, the great wisdom, the amount of discretion and sense of fittingness generated in the bride by that controlled interplay of lowliness and exaltation according as occasion demands, so that amid the ups and downs of this world her sublime gifts sustain her lowliness lest she succumb to adversity; while her lowliness curbs her exaltation or good fortune will bring it toppling down. These poles of her life act so harmoniously. Though

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<sup>1</sup>Sermon 27 in On the Song of Songs II, The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux vol. 3, Cistercian Fathers Series no. 7. Kalamazoo MI 1976. pp.75-76.86.

of their nature opposites, they will work with equal effectiveness for the good of the bride. They subserve her spiritual welfare.

**11SN2103**  
**11.21.19**

### **The Virgin Mary and the Temple, by Fr. Yves Congar<sup>2</sup>**

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The only occasion on which the Gospels expressly mention the Virgin Mary in connection with the Temple are in the account of her Purification and of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (LK 2:23-38) and the finding of the child Jesus in the Temple after four days' absence on his part and three anxious searching by his parents (LK 2:42-50). To these very brief indications, the piety of Christians very soon added the idea of the presentation of Mary in the Temple at the age of three to be consecrated to the service of God. We are dealing here with a symbolical representation of a profound spiritual reality about which the tradition and the doctrine of the Church provide us with valid information. Mary, predestined to be the Mother of Jesus, true God and true man, and to be worthy of her vocation, was prepared by the gift of exceptional graces and lived with unflinching fidelity a most pure life of inner consecration to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As the type of all faithful souls and of the Church herself, Mary expressed spiritually and supremely in her life the "presentation" which, for each one of us, is to begin by the service of faith and to be consummated in heaven.

It is obvious that the tradition and doctrine of the Church may, without falling prey to the imaginary productions of the apocrypha, propound statements concerning the status of the Mother of God in relation either to the Jewish messianic temple going far beyond what we are explicitly told in the three short passages from the Gospel which narrate the incidents mentioned above. If Mary is the Mother of God, she has a special relation to the body of Christ which is the true temple--to his physical body and doubtless also, in a certain sense, to his body the Church. She is herself a temple of God in a quite specific and sublime

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<sup>2</sup>The Mystery of the Temple, Westminster (Maryland) 1962, p.254-255.



way, both because Christ was within her from the moment of his conception until that of his birth, and because of the exceptional spiritual gifts she received in preparation for her divine motherhood and as a reward for her free acceptance of this vocation (LK 1:38), not only after the Annunciation but during the whole of her life. Hence the liturgy--the Oriental liturgy in particular--shows a profound understanding of the mystery of Mary when it constantly uses the texts concerning the Temple and the tabernacle in order to express it.

**11SN2203**

**11.22.19**

**A reading on St. Cecilia, from a homily by Ronald Knox. 1**

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The legends of the early Roman saints, among whom St. Cecilia is numbered, do not always command great attention from the critically minded historian. But whether the story of St. Cecilia as it is told in her acts is all true or only partly true, there is a simplicity about the whole story and a simplicity about St. Cecilia's character in the story which demands a retelling. Let me remind you in the most general way of her story: how she was married to a young pagan called Valerian, but persuaded him to respect her vow of virginity, because her guardian angel would make him sorry for it if he did otherwise; how Valerian wanted to see this guardian angel, but Cecilia, with her innocent craft, said he could not do that unless he was baptized first; how he was baptized, and saw the angel at her side as she prayed; how he made a convert of his brother Tiburtius, and how first the two brothers, and then Cecilia herself were punished with death for professing the Christian religion. It is an old story, and a familiar one: and while we do all homage to other great saints for their public witness to Christ, we shall always need St. Cecilia as well, quietly working at home for the conversion of her own husband and his family.

Not that St. Cecilia herself was in the position of a modern wife. Like so many Christian ladies of her time, she had taken, in imitation of our blessed Lady, a vow of perpetual virginity. These virgin martyrs were martyrs because they were virgins: it was because they insisted on keeping their vow when their parents wished them to marry that the secret of their attachment to the Christian faith was discovered; and it was their persistency in maintaining it that led to their martyrdom. It would be hard to estimate, I think, how much the unpopularity in Roman society of the

Christian faith owed to its tradition of virginity. Virginity is an ideal which the pagan had no right to misunderstand. For, in theory, they, too, honored it; and it should have commended itself to their heathen instinct for sacrifice. For the point of a sacrifice is that the victim should be spotless, the best of its kind. You must offer not what you can well afford to spare, but what will cost you something. That is the pagan idea of sacrifice; and the Christian idea of sacrifice is based on the same principle. In order to give up something to God, we forgo, not the sinful pleasures which we have no right to in any case, but the lawful pleasures which he has given us to enjoy if we will. So, let St. Cecilia's feast remind us to take our Christian vocation seriously, to follow out in our lives the words we profess with our lips. And may this Roman maiden pray for us who worship here and for those who minister to us, that when Christ, the Master she served, comes again in judgment, we may be found blameless before almighty God.

11SAN2302

11.23.19

**On Discretion. From the Rule of St. Columban for Monks.<sup>3</sup>**

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How necessary discretion is for monks is shown by the mistake of many, and indicated by the downfall of some, who beginning without discretion and passing their time without a sobering knowledge, have been unable to complete a praiseworthy life; since, just as error overtakes those who proceed without a path, so for those who live without discretion intemperance is at hand, and this is always the opposite of virtues which are placed in the mean between each extreme. Therefore we must pray God continually that He would bestow the light of true discretion to illumine this way, surrounded on every side by the world's thickest darkness, so that His true worshippers may be able to cross this darkness without error to Himself. So discretion has got its name from discerning, for the reason that it discerns in us between good and evil, and also between the moderate and the complete. For from the beginning either class has been divided like light and darkness, that is, good and evil, after evil began through the devil's agency to exist by the corruption of good, but through God's agency Who first illumines and then divides.

What things then are good? Doubtless those which are untouched, and have remained in the undefiled state of their creation; which God alone created and prepared, according to the Apostle, that we should walk in them; which are the good works in which in Christ Jesus we were created, namely goodness, innocence, righteousness, justice, truth, pity, love, saving peace, spiritual joy, together with the fruit of the Spirit - all these with their fruits are good. Since this is so, the good must be firmly held by those that have God's help, which is ever to be prayed for in prosperity and in adversity, lest either in prosperity we be lifted up to pride, or in adversity be cast down to despair. Thus we must always restrain ourselves from

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<sup>3</sup> Sancti Columbani Opera, edited by G.S.M. Walker. The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. 1957. p.135.

either danger, that is, from all excess by a splendid temperance and true discretion, which cleaves to Christian lowliness and opens the way of perfection to Christ's true soldiers, namely by ever discerning rightly in doubtful cases.

Thus between the little and the excessive there is a reasonable measure in the midst, which ever recalls us from every superfluity on either side, and in every case provides what is universally fixed by human need, and spurns the unreasonable demand of superfluous desire. And this measure of true discretion, weighing all our actions in the scales of justice, in no way allows us to err from what is just, or to suffer a mistake, if we ever follow straight behind it as our leader. For while we must always restrain ourselves from either side, according to that saying: "Keep yourselves from the right and from the left," we must ever proceed straight forward by discretion, that is, by the light of God, while very often we say and sing the victorious psalmist's verse: "My God, enlighten my darkness, since in You I am rescued from temptation. For temptation is the life of humans on earth."