

SUN

12.08.19

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by St. Augustine ¹

The gospel tells us that some people were rebuked by the Lord because, clever as they were at reading the face of the sky, they could not recognize the time for faith when the kingdom of heaven was at hand. It was the Jews who received this reprimand, but it has also come down to us. The Lord Jesus began his preaching of the gospel with the admonition: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. His forerunner, John the Baptist, began in the same way: *Repent*, he said, *for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. Today, for those who will not repent at the approach of the kingdom of heaven, the reproof of the Lord is the same. As he points out himself, *You cannot expect to see the kingdom of heaven coming*. *The kingdom of heaven*, he says elsewhere, is within you.

Each of us would be wise therefore to take to heart the advice of his teacher, and not waste this present time. It is now that the Savior offers us his mercy; now, while he still spares the human race. Understand that it is in hope of our conversion that he spares us, for he desires no one's damnation. As for when the end of the world will be, that is God's concern. Now is the time for faith. Whether any of us here present will see the end of the world I know not; very likely none of us will. Even so, the time is very near for each of us, for we are mortal. There are hazards all around us. We should be in less danger from them were we made of glass. What is more fragile than a vessel of glass? And yet it can be kept safe and last indefinitely. Of course it is exposed to accident, but it is not liable to old age and the suffering it brings. We therefore are the more frail and infirm. In our weakness we are haunted by fears of all the calamities that regularly befall the human race, and if no such calamity overtakes us, still, time marches on. We may evade the blows of fortune, but shall we evade death? We may escape perils from without, but shall we escape what comes from within us? Now, suddenly, we may be attacked by any malady. And if we are spared? Even so, old age comes at last, and nothing will delay it.

¹Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY – 1992 n- pg 18

MON

12.09.19

A Homily for the Immaculate Conception of Mary by Sophronius of Jerusalem ¹

Hail full of grace, the Lord is with you. Truly blessed are you among women, for you have changed the curse of Eve into a blessing and caused Adam, once accursed, to be blessed through you. Truly blessed are you among women, for it was through you that the Father's blessing dawned on humankind and freed it from the ancient curse. Truly blessed are you among women, for through you your ancestors will be saved, since you are going to bear the Savior who will gain them God's salvation. Truly blessed are you among women, for without seed you produced the fruit that brings blessing to all the earth, releasing it from the curse that made it bear thorns. Truly blessed are you among women, for though by nature you are a woman, you will in very truth become the mother of God: if he who is to be born of you is truly God incarnate, then, since you will be giving birth to God, you will with perfect justice be called the mother of God.

Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God that can never be lost. You have won from God a most glorious favor, a grace long desired, a grace of great splendor, a saving grace, an unfailing grace, a grace that will last for ever. Many before you have been holy, but no one has been as favored as you, no one as blessed as you, no one as perfectly sanctified as you, no one as highly praised as you. No one else has like you been possessed from the first by purifying grace, no one else has been enlightened like you, or exalted like you, for no one has approached so close to God as you, or been enriched with such divine gifts, or endowed with such heavenly grace.

You surpass all human desire; you surpass all the gifts given by God to the whole human race, for God's dwelling within you has made you richer than all others. No one else has been able to contain God as you do; no one else has been capable of receiving God as you have; no one else has deserved to be so enlightened by God. And therefore you have not only received God, the Creator and Lord of the universe, but He has in an unheard-of way taken flesh from you; you bear him in your womb, and will later give birth to him who will redeem humankind from the Father's sentence, and confer on it eternal salvation.

¹Journey with the Fathers – Year C – New City Press – NY – pg 156

TUE 12.10.19

A Reading from a Sermon by Blessed Gueric of Igny¹

We are waiting for the Savior. Such waiting is truly a joy to the righteous, who are waiting for the hope of blessedness, the glorious coming of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. What am I waiting for, a righteous person may ask, but the Lord? I know, he says, turning towards him, that you will not disappoint me after such a wait as mine. Already my being is with you; for our nature, taken from amongst us and offered on our behalf, is glorified with you. This gives us hope; for all flesh will come to you, the members following their Head, so that the holocaust may be complete.

But a person can wait for the Lord the more trustfully if their conscience is so at rest as to let one say: Every smallest possession of mine, Lord, is entirely yours, for I have treasured up in heaven all my powers, either by giving them to you or by renouncing them for you. At your feet I have laid down all that is mine, knowing that you will be able not just to keep it safe, but to restore it to me multiplied a hundredfold and to add to it eternal life. How blessed are you, poor in spirit, who in accordance with the advice of the Wonderful Counsellor, lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, lest your hearts become corrupt by remaining on earth with your treasure. For, he says, where your treasure is, there your heart is also. Let your hearts go then, let them go after their treasures; let your attention be fixed on high and your expectancy hang upon the Lord, so that you can justly say with the apostle: Our abiding place is in heaven, from where we are expecting the Savior to come.

O hope of all peoples, everyone who waits for you shall not be disappointed. Our ancestors waited for you - all the righteous from the beginning of the world hoped in you - and they have not been disappointed. For they have now received your mercy in the midst of your temple and make joyful choir to praise you, singing: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; trustfully have I waited for the Lord and he has turned towards me. They recognize the divine majesty humbled in the flesh and say: Look, this is our God; we have been waiting for his coming and he will save us. This is the Lord; we have been relying on him and we shall be joyful and happy in the salvation he will grant us.

¹Liturgical Sermons - Gueric of Igny - Cistercian Fathers - vol 8 - pg.1

For just as the Church awaited in the holy ones of old the first coming, so in us she is expecting the second. Just as she steadfastly hoped in the first for the price of her redemption, so she hopes in the second for the reward of her earnings. This looking forward in hope raises her above earthly concerns; her eyes are fixed with joyous longing upon those of heaven. There are some, impatient to find happiness in the affairs of this present life, who neglect the Lord's advice and make every efforts to snatch the prizes this world offers. But blessed is the one whose whole hope rests in the Lord's name and who takes no notice of spurious and empty foolishness. Such a one will shrink from the contamination of their ways, knowing that it is better to become humble with the meek than to share out ill-gotten gains with the proud. He will find comfort in saying to himself: The Lord is my share, so I will wait for him. The Lord is good to everyone who trusts in him, to a soul that seeks him. It is good to stand by quietly, ready to greet the Lord. Though, true enough, my soul has longed for your salvation, Lord, still I trust in your word. As it says in Scripture: Hope long delayed grieves the soul and desire unfulfilled brings it weariness, still your promise is there to strengthen it. In this the soul does not have just a bare hope; it overflows with hope, hope mounting upon hope as trial comes upon trial, delay upon delay. I am absolutely sure that in the end he will appear and will prove not to have deceived me; so in spite of the delay he imposes I shall go on waiting for him confidently, because he certainly will come and will not be later than the most timely day.

When will this day be? When the full number of all these brethren of ours has been reached and the time of mercy set aside for penance is completed. Listen to Isaiah, who often gained entry to the heavenly council chamber; he tells us with what design the Lord puts off the judgment for a time: The Lord delays so that he can be merciful towards you , and thus he will be honored for having spared you. The Lord is a God of judgment; blessed is everyone who waits for him.

WED

12.11.19

A Reading from the Second Sermon of Blessed Gueric of Igny for Advent¹

Behold the King is coming, let us hasten to meet our Savior. Solomon put it very well when he said: As cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country. He certainly brings good news who announces the coming of the Savior, the reconciliation of the world and the good things of the world to come. How welcome the feet of them that preach peace and bring good tidings. There are many of them, not one. Many, I say, but with one mind. In a long succession from the beginning of time messengers have come to us with one message, one word: He comes, yes, he is coming. Where have these messengers come from? you ask. Scripture tells us: from a far country. Because they come from the land of the living and there is a great distance between that and this land of the dying; between ourselves and them, there is still a great chasm. From there then the prophets were sent to us and angels too. For if they went about here in the body they were caught up there by the Spirit when they were to be sent so that they might hear and see what they were to announce here. Such messengers are waters of refreshment and a drought of saving wisdom to a soul athirst for God. For such a soul the herald of the coming and of the other mysteries of the Savior draws and proffers water with joy from the springs of the Savior. And the soul is heard to reply to the messenger, be it Isaiah or any of the other prophets, in the words of Elizabeth. It has drunk of the same spirit as she has and says: Whence is this that my Lord should come to me? Behold as soon as your salutation sounded in my ears the Spirit in my heart leapt for joy, earnestly desiring to hurry off to meet God its Savior.

And really, brethren, we should go to meet the coming Christ with joy in our heart. Even at this very moment he should be saluted from afar, or at least we should return his greeting who orders deliverance for Jacob. You shall not be ashamed to salute a friend, says Wisdom. How much more ought you to return a greeting? O salvation of my face and my God, what an honor that you should have saluted your servants. How much the greater that you should have saved them. Our salvation would not have been whole and entire had you only ordered deliverance and had not really given it. But you have given it not only by greeting with the kiss of peace in your Incarnation those you had previously saluted with words of peace, but, more, by effecting their salvation through your death on the Cross.

¹ *Liturgical Sermons - Gueric of Igny - Cistercian Fathers vol. 8 - pg. 7 - Cistercian Publications*

Let us therefore rise up with joyful eagerness and hasten to welcome our Savior. Let us adore him and salute him at a distance, crying out to him: Deliverance, Lord, deliverance; Lord, grant us days of prosperity. Blessed are you who will be coming in the name of the Lord. Welcome to you who come to deliver us: blessed be you who come to better our lot. Grant us days of prosperity then, Lord, you who come so favorable and beneficent to the human race; set out, proceed prosperously and reign. May the Father, God of our salvation, make your journey a prosperous one. He shall prosper in the things for which I sent him, says the Father, but not in accord with the prayers of the carnally-minded, nor with the desire of Peter who did not want him to suffer. And whatsoever he shall do shall prosper, not to satisfy the rash wishes of mortals but for their true salvation. Vain is the deliverance of mortals, but salvation is of God who has effected our salvation in his own blood, pouring it out in payment, offering it

Come then, Lord, save me and I shall be saved. Come and smile upon us and we shall find deliverance. We have waited for you, be our stronghold, our deliverer in time of trouble. In this fashion did the prophets and holy men, with great desire and longing, run to greet the Christ who was to come, hoping if possible to see with their eyes what they foresaw in their hearts. Hence the words of the Lord to his disciples: Blessed are the eyes that see what you see; I tell you there have been many prophets and holy men who longed to see what you see and never saw it, to hear what you hear and never heard it. Abraham, our father, was full of joy to see the day of Christ. He saw it - but in the lower regions - and rejoiced. In that day the coldness and hardness of our hearts will be greatly punished. I mean if we do not look forward with joy of spirit to the anniversary of Christ's birth which, we are promised, we shall, God willing, see very soon. In fact the Holy Scripture seems to insist we have such joy so that our spirit, lifted out of itself, may run to meet the arrival of Christ in transports of joy, and straining forward impatient of delay, may strive to pierce the future even now.

THUR 12/12/19

From the Aztec account of the Apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe.²

It was the year one thousand, five hundred and thirty one, a few days into the month of December. One of pitiable poverty, whose name was Juan Diego. According to hearsay, he was a dweller in Kwautitlan, but in things divine he belonged entirely in Tlatilolco. It was a Saturday, and still quite dark, when he was journeying in pursuit of things divine and of the commandments. As he reaches the neighborhood of the hillock in the area named Pepeyac, already dawn is brightening.

Distinctly he hears from the top of the hillock a singing, like that of varied rare birds of song. Time and again subside those voices, as if for the hill itself to answer. How utterly soothing to the heart, how cheering to the soul, is their song, surpassing that of the shrillbird, that of the bellbird, that of every other kind of lovely songbird!

Juan Diego stands still, gazes motionless. He says to himself: "Could it be that I be worthy? Could it be that I deserve what I am hearing? Is it that I am dreaming? Is it that I am sleep-walking? Where am I? Where indeed do I seem to be? Could it be even yonder, in the place they used to tell us of, those ancient men, those Great-Great Grandfathers of ours --- there in the land of the Flowers' bloom, there in the land of our flesh's corn? Could it be even yonder, there in the land of the Heavenly Ones?"

Gazing he is to the top of that hillock, towards the region of the sallying sun, when sallies forth also that heavenly, lovely song. Then suddenly ceases the song, and hearkens he to the stillness: then hears he a call, coming to him from the top of the hillock, and saying: "Juanito, Juan Dieguito!"

²Guadalupe: From the Aztec Language, tr. Fr. Martinus Cawley o.c.s.o. CARA Studies on Popular Devotion, Vol.II Guadalupan Studies, Monograph No.6. 1983. p.1-6

Thereupon ventures he to make his way up to where he is being called. Nothing of disturbance is in his heart, nor any stunning shock; rather is he full content with it all. Full glorying in it all, as he clammers up the hillock, whither he has been gazing and whence has been coming his call.

Upon his reaching the top of the hillock, he catches sight of a woman, one who has been taking her stand there. She beckons him to come on, closer up to herself. Upon reaching her presence, he greatly marvels at her extreme, her surpassing, her perfect wonderfulness. Her garments are as the sun, gleaming, glittering. Even the boulder, the crag, on which she takes her stand sparkles in resplendence, like fine emerald jade on a bangle when it shines, like the swarming glow of a rainbow in the bloom. Even the soil, the brambles and prickles and the rest of the varied weeds that struggle to survive there are shining like emerald, like divine turquoise, to the tip of every leaf; are glittering like the golden scourings of the gods up every stalk and twig and thorn.

In her presence he prostrates; he listens to her utterance, her declaration. These are as of one who sets others at ease, one who is herself of the gentry born, one whose manner is to attract, one whose attitude is esteem. She addresses him: "Do listen to me, my littlest one, Juanito! Whither are you betaking yourself?"

He in turn makes reply: "My sovereign, O Woman, my Maiden, it is yonder that I am bound, to your dwelling in Mexico-Tlatiloloko, in pursuit of things divine which they minister to us, which they teach to us, those representatives of the Person of our Sovereign, who are our priests."

Forthwith she informs him, she presents to him her sacred wish. She addresses him: "Do know this, do be assured of it in your heart, my littlest one, that I myself, I am the entirely and ever virgin Saint Mary, Mother of the True Divinity, God himself: because of Him, life goes on, creation goes on; his are all things afar, his are all things near at hand, things above in the heavens, things here below on the earth. How truly I wish it, how greatly I desire it, that here

they should erect me my temple! Here would I show forth, here would I lift up to view, here would I make a gift of all my fondness for my dear ones, all my regard for my needy ones, my willingness to aid the, my readiness to protect them".

"For truly I myself, I am your compassionate Mother, yours, for you yourself, for everybody here in the land, for each and all together, for all others too, for all folk of every kind, who do but cherish me, who do but raise their voices to me, who do but seek me, who do but raise their trust to me."

FRI

12.13.19

REGAINING THE VIRGIN-MIND IN OUR LIVES, from a book by Caryl Houselander³

The whole process of contemplation through imitation of Our Lady can be gone through, in the first place, with just that simple purpose of regaining the virgin-mind, and as we go on in the attempt we shall find that over and over again there is a new emptying process; it is a thing which has to be done in contemplation as often as the earth has to be sifted and the field ploughed for see.

At the beginning it will be necessary for each individual to discard deliberately all the trifling unnecessary things in his life, all the hard blocks and congestions; not necessarily to discard all his interests for ever, but at least once to stop still, and having prayed for courage, to visualize himself without all the extras, escapes, and interests other than Love in his life: to see ourselves as if we had just come from God's hand and had gathered nothing to ourselves yet, to discover just what shape *is* the virginal emptiness of our own being, and of what material we are made. We need to be reminded that every second of our survival does really mean that we are new from God's fingers, so that it requires no more than the miracle which we never notice to restore to us our virgin-heart at any moment we like to choose.

Our own effort will consist in sifting and sorting out everything that is not essential and that fills up space and silence in us and in discovering what sort of shape this emptiness in us, is. From this we shall learn what sort of purpose God has for us. In what way are we to fulfill the work of giving Christ life in us. Are we reed pipes? Is He waiting to live lyrically through us? Are we chalices? Does He ask to be sacrificed in us? Are we nests? Does He desire of us a warm, sweet abiding in domestic life at home? These are only some of the possible forms of virginity; each person may find some quite different form, his own secret... It is the purpose for which something is made that decides the material which is used...

The purpose for which human beings are made is told to us briefly in the catechism. It is to know, love and serve God in this world and to be happy with Him for ever in the next. This knowing, loving, and serving is far more intimate than that rather cold little sentence reveals to us. The material which God has found apt for it is human nature; blood, flesh, bone, salt, water, will, intellect. It is impossible to say too often or too strongly that human nature, body and soul together, is the material for God's will in us. There are many people in the world

³THE REED OF GOD, Caryl Houselander (Arena Lettres, NJ 1978) pp. 3-4.

who cultivate a curious state which they call "the spiritual life." They often complain that they have very little time to devote to the "spiritual life." The only time that they do not regard as wasted is the time they can devote to pious exercises: praying, reading, meditations, and visiting the church.

All the time spent in earning a living, cleaning the home, caring for the children, making and mending clothes, cooking, and all the other manifold duties and responsibilities, is regard as wasted. Yet it is really through ordinary human life and the things of every hour of every day that union with God comes about.

SAT

12.14.2019

HOW A LOVING SOLICITUDE GOADS THE HUMBLE PERSON, by St John of the Cross⁴

[Persons who are advancing in the spiritual life] receive great benefit from their humility by which they not only place little importance on their deeds, but also take very little self satisfaction from them. They think everyone else is far better than themselves, and usually possess a holy envy of them and would like to emulate their service of God. Since they are truly humble, their growing fervor and the increased number of their good deeds and the gratification they receive from them only cause them to become more aware of their debt to God and the inadequacy of their service to him, and thus the more they do, the less satisfaction they derive from it. Their charity and love makes them want to do so much for God that what they actually do accomplish seems as nothing. This loving solicitude goads them, preoccupies them, and absorbs them to such an extent that they never notice what others do or do not accomplish, but if they should, they then think, as I say, that everyone is better than they. They think they themselves are insignificant, and want others to think this too and to belittle and slight their deeds. Moreover, even though others do praise and value their works, they are unable to believe them; such praises seem strange to them.

These souls humbly and tranquilly long to be taught by anyone who might be a help to them. This desire is the exact opposite of that other desire we mentioned above, of those who want to be themselves the teachers in everything. When these others notice that someone is trying to give them some instruction, they themselves take the words from their very mouths as though they already know everything.

Yet these humble souls, far from desiring to be anyone's teacher, are ready to take a road different from the one they are following, if told to do so. For they do not believe they could ever be right themselves. They rejoice when others receive praise, and their only sorrow is that they do not serve God as these others do. Because they consider their deeds insignificant, they do not want to

⁴THE COLLECTED WORKS, John of the Cross, trans. by Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD (Nelson, London 1963) pp 300-301.

make them known. They are even ashamed to speak of them to their spiritual directors because they think these deeds are not worth mentioning.

They are more eager to speak of their faults and sins, and reveal these to others, than their virtues. They have an inclination to seek direction from one who will have less esteem for their spirit and deeds. Such is the characteristic of a pure and simple and true spirit, one that is very pleasing to God. Since the wise Spirit of God dwells within these humble souls, he moves them to keep these treasures hidden, and to manifest only their faults. God gives this grace to the humble, together with the other virtues, just as he denies it to the proud.