

SUN

12.22.19

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

Matthew the evangelist gives us an account of the way in which the eternal Son of God, begotten before the world began, appeared in time as the Son of Man. His description is brief but absolutely true. By tracing the ancestry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ through the male line he brings it down from Abraham to Joseph, the husband of Mary. It is indeed fitting in every respect that when God decided to become incarnate for the sake of the whole human race, none but a virgin should be his mother, and that, since a virgin was privileged to bring him into the world, she should bear no other son but the son who is God.

Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and he shall be called Emmanuel, a name which means God with us. The name God-with-us, given to our Savior by the prophet, signifies that two natures are united in his one person. Before time began he was God, born of the Father, but in the fullness of time he became Emmanuel, God with us, in the womb of his mother, because when the Word was made flesh and lived among us he deigned to unite our frail human nature to his own person. Without ceasing to be what he had always been, he began in a wonderful fashion to be what we are, assuming our nature in such a way that he did not lose his own.

And so Mary gave birth to her firstborn son, the child of her own flesh and blood. She brought forth the God who had been born of God before creation began, and who, in his created humanity, rightfully surpassed the whole of creation. And Scripture says she named him Jesus.

Jesus, then, is the name of the Virgin's son. According to the angel's explanation, it means one who is to save his people from their sins. In doing so he will also deliver them from any defilement of mind and body they have incurred on account of their sins.

But the title "Christ" implies a priestly or royal dignity. In the Old Testament it was given to both priests and kings on account of the anointing with chrism or holy oil which they received. They prefigured the true king and high priest who, on coming into this world, was anointed with the oil of gladness above all his peers. From this anointing or chrismation he received the name of Christ, and those who share in the anointing which he himself bestows, that is the grace of the Spirit, are called Christians.

May Jesus Christ fulfill his saving task by saving us from our sins; may he discharge his priestly office by reconciling us to God the Father, and may he exercise his royal power by admitting us to his Father's kingdom, for he is our Lord and God, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

¹ Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – 1992 = pg 22

MON

12.23.2019

“ O King of all Nations” - a reading from a treatise by St. Hilary of Poitiers

[A verse from the second Psalm says:] *Ask of me, and I will give you the nations to be your inheritance and the ends of the earth to be your possession.* Christ has indeed received the nations as the inheritance he asked for. When was this? It was when he prayed: *Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your Son that he may give glory to you, since you have given him authority over the whole human race, to give eternal life to all those you have given him.*

This, then, is Christ's inheritance: the whole human race, to whom he desires to give eternal life. All nations are to be baptized, instructed, and born again to new life. No longer will they be subject to the government of angels referred to in the inspired Song of Moses, nor will they be divided up among the angels in proportion to their numbers; they will be received into the Lord's family and reckoned as servants of God. From the dominion of unjust rulers they will be taken into God's eternal kingdom. In the past Israel alone was the Lord's portion and Jacob his allotted heritage; but now the whole company of nations has become a single people, the people of the one and only God. All who are to rise from the dead form the everlasting inheritance of God's eternal Son, the firstborn from the dead.

[Psalm 2 continues with the verse:] *You will rule them with a rod of iron; you will shatter them like the potter's vessel.* To many people these words seem to conflict with the goodness of God. Are the nations which the Son of God asked for and received as his inheritance to be terrorized by an iron rule and smashed like vessels of clay? No good person, they say, gives or receives anything for the purpose of destroying it. Does not the Lord prefer the repentance of sinners to their death? How then will he be acting in accordance with the nature he claims to have if he shatters with an iron rod those whom he has asked for as his inheritance?

These people misunderstand the divine decrees or else fail to recognize their justice and propriety. *You will rule them* means that Christ will lead them like a shepherd, guiding them with a shepherd's loving care, for he is the Good Shepherd and we the sheep for whom he laid down his life.

TUE 12/24/18

Holy Night, by Karl Rahner¹

Why do we call the feast we are keeping tonight a "sacred night"? Night because a beginning, holy night because a blessed and unconquerable beginning; of such a beginning we would have to say: holy night, sacred night. And so the church sings "Silent night, holy night." Everywhere in the world these words are sung for this feast. With a sacred right. For this hour is the holy and sacred night. Faith tells the Christians: that was the beginning. There God himself came gently forth from the terrifying radiance in which he dwells as God and Lord, and came to us; he quietly entered the poor dwelling of our earthly existence and was found as a man; he began where we begin, quite poor, vulnerable, quite childlike and gentle, quite helpless. He who is infinite, distant future which of ourselves we never reach because it seems to retreat farther and farther away as we hurry towards it on the hard roads of life, he himself has approached us, arrived among us, because otherwise we should never have found our way to him. He has accompanied us on our way to him so that this may find a blessed end, because the very end itself has become our beginning. God is near; his eternal word of mercy is where we are; it is a pilgrim on our paths, experiences our joy and our distress, lives our life and dies our death. He has brought his eternal life quietly and gently into this world and its death. He has redeemed us, for he shared our lot. He made our beginning his own, followed the path of our destiny and so opened it up into the infinite expanses of God. And because he accepted us irrevocably, because God's Word will never cease to be human, this beginning which is ours and his is a beginning of indestructible promises, and his silent beginning by night is a holy and sacred night. It is a holy night. The eternal future has entered our time. Its radiance still dazzles us, so that we think it is night. But at all events it is a blessed night, a night in which there is already warmth and light, which is beautiful, welcoming and secure by reason of the eternal day which it bears hidden within it. It is a silent, holy night for us, however, only if we admit the holy silence of this night into our inner selves, only if our heart too keeps watch in solitude. It can do so easily. For such solitude and quiet is not hard. For of course we are solitary. There exists in our heart an interior land where we are alone, to which no one finds his way but God. This innermost, unfrequented chamber of our heart is really there-the only question is whether we ourselves avoid it foolishly out of guilty fear, because no one and no familiar things of this earth can accompany us if we enter it. The silent and solitary soul sings here to the God of the heart its quietest and most ardent song. And it can have confidence that he hears it. For this song no longer has to seek a beloved God beyond the stars in that inaccessible light in which he dwells and which makes him invisible to all. Because of Christmas, because the Word was made flesh, God is near and the quietest word in the stillest room of the heart, the word of love, comes to his ear and his heart. And those who have

entered into themselves even when it is night, hear in this nocturnal quiet in the depth of the heart God's gentle word of love. One must be calm, not afraid of the night, hold one's peace. Otherwise we hear nothing. Let us enter quietly and shut the door behind us. Let us listen to the unutterable melody which sounds in the silence of that night. For the ultimate is only spoken in the silence of the night, now that in our night of life, through the gracious coming of the Word, there has come to be Christmas, holy night, silent night.

[1](#) Every Day Faith, Karl Rahner. Herder and Herder, 1968, pp. 32 ff.

WEDS CHRISTMAS DAY 12.25.2019

The Great Joy by Karl Rahner²

Let us keep Christmas, a festival of faith and of love for the Word who became flesh, a festival also of love for one another because people can love people since God became one like us. Let us worship God because he loved us and our poor flesh so much that God placed it imperishably for all eternity in the very midst of the blazing flame of his Godhead. Incomprehensible God, adventurer of love! We had thought that human beings, pitiable as they are, could only be primitive, unsuccessful trial-model for the superman who is still to come; it is hard for us to bear with ourselves - and especially with others - just as we are. Not unreasonably, for we are difficult to endure, for we are a continual failure and fall from one extreme to the another.

And yet, as the Church sings in its noblest hymn, God did not disdain the Virgin's womb. God came into creation, into humanity. If it were not for this fact of facts, would we have the courage to believe that God was successful with the work of creation? God has entered into all the narrow limits of a human being which it would seem could only exist at an infinite distance: his mother's body, a small defeated native country under foreign occupation, a desperate state of the age, a narrow minded milieu, unsuccessful politics, a body marked out for death, the prison of incomprehension, the monotony of the working day, of complete failure, the dark night of abandonment by God and of death. He spared himself nothing. The narrow confines, however, into which God has entered, must have an issue. It must be worthwhile being a human being, if God was not satisfied to be in himself but also willed in addition to be one of these human beings, and if that was not too dangerous or too trivial for God. Humankind is not a herd, but a sacred family, since God is a member of that family. The tragedy of its history must after all have a blessed outcome, if God does not just observe this hardly divine comedy unmoved from the throne of infinity, but takes part in it, as seriously as all the rest of us, who have to do so whether we want to or not.

The so called genuine reality both of the embittered and disillusioned and of the superficial "happy-go-lucky" is reduced to a mere semblance which only unbelieving fools take in deadly earnest or with greedy seriousness, now that God has become the true reality behind and in the midst of this appearance. Eternity is already in the heart of time, life is as the center of death, truth is stronger than lies, love more powerful than hatred, our wickedness already irrevocably conquered by God's grace. Christianity is indeed an optimism about us humans such as only God could conceive.

²Everyday Faith, "The Great Joy". Karl Rahner, Herder & Herder, 1968, pp. 28-29.

THUR

12.26.19

A Reading from the Third Sermon of St Fulgentius, Bishop of Ruspe.³

Yesterday we celebrated the birth in time of our eternal king; today we celebrate the triumphant suffering of a soldier. For yesterday our king, nobly arrayed in flesh, proceeding from the chaste womb of the Virgin Mary, deigned to visit this world; today a soldier, leaving the confines of the body, made his way in triumph to heaven.

Our king, though he is the Most High, for our sake came in humility; yet he could not come empty-handed. It was indeed a generous gift that he brought for us, one by which he not only abundantly enriched us but gave us the strength to do battle and never be vanquished. What he brought was the gift of love, which was to lead us to become sharers in the godhead. He brought it only to expend it, without in any way diminishing his own store; while turning the poverty of his followers into riches he remained himself, as by a miracle, fully possessed of his own inexhaustible treasury.

Love then, the same love that brought Christ down from heaven to earth, raised Stephen from earth to heaven; the same love shown first in the king was reproduced in its splendor in the warrior.

And so Stephen, in order to earn his right to the crown his name signifies, armed himself with love, and by that same love won every battle. It was love of God that made him yield not an inch, love of his neighbor that led him to intercede for those who stoned him. It was through love that he was able to expose those in error so that they might change their ways; through love that he prayed for those who stoned him so that they should not be punished. Trusting only in love, he overcame Saul's cruel rage, and the very man who had been his persecutor on earth he won as his companion in heaven. That same holy and untiring love longed to win over by prayer those whom it could not convert by persuasion....

Love is therefore the source and origin of every good, an unrivalled protection, the road that leads to heaven. Those who walk in love can be neither lost nor afraid; love is the guide and protector, and brings them to the end of their journey. For this reason, beloved, since Christ has set up a stairway of love by which every Christian can mount up to heaven, keep a firm hold on love alone; love one another, and by growing in love climb together up to heaven.

³Sermon 3,1-3,5-6: CCL 91A, 905-909. cf. *A Word in Season*, I (1st series) p132f.

FRI

12/27/19

From a Sermon by Blessed John Henry Newman [1](#)

Saint John the apostle and evangelist is chiefly and most familiarly known to us as *the disciple whom Jesus loved*. He was one of the three or four who always attended our blessed Lord, and had the privilege of the most intimate intercourse with him; and, more favored than Peter, James and Andrew, he was his bosom friend.

Much might be said of this remarkable circumstance. I say *remarkable*, because it might be supposed that the Son of God Most High, could not have loved one man more than another; or again, if so, that he would not have had only one friend, but, as being all-holy, he would have loved all more or less, in proportion to their holiness. Yet we find our Savior had a private friend; and this shows us, first, how entirely he was a man, as much as any of us, in his wants and feelings; and next, that there is nothing contrary to the spirit of the gospel, nothing inconsistent with the fullness of Christian love, in having our affections directed in a special way towards certain objects. Towards those whom the circumstances of our past life, or some peculiarities of character, have endeared to us.

There have been those before now, who have supposed Christian love was so diffusive as not to admit of concentration upon individuals; so that we ought to love everyone equally. Now I shall here maintain, in opposition to such notions of Christian love, and with our Savior's pattern before me, that the best preparation for loving the world at large, and loving it duly and wisely, is to cultivate an intimate friendship and affection towards those who are immediately about us. The real love of humans *must* depend on practice, and therefore must begin by exercising itself on our friends around us; otherwise it will have no existence. By trying to love our relations and friends, by submitting to their wishes, though contrary to our own, by bearing with their infirmities, by overcoming their occasional waywardness by kindness, by dwelling on their excellences, and trying to copy them, thus it is that we form in our hearts that root of charity, which, though small at first, may, like the mustard seed, at last even overshadow the earth.

We know that Saint John is celebrated for his declarations about Christian love. *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God. If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us. God is love, and he who dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him.* Now, did he begin with some vast effort at loving on a large scale? No, he had the unspeakable privilege of being the friend

of Christ. Thus he was taught to love others; first his affection was concentrated, then it was expanded. Next he had the solemn and comfortable charge of tending our Lord's mother, the Blessed Virgin, after his departure. Do we not discern here the secret sources of his special love of the brethren? Could he who first was favored with his Savior's affection, then trusted with a son's office towards his mother, could he be other than a memorial and pattern (as far as mortals can be). Of love, deep. Contemplative, fervent, unruffled, unbounded?

And now I have suggested to you a subject of thought for today's festival – and surely a very practical subject, when we consider how large a portion of our duties lies at home. Should God call upon us to preach to the world, surely we must obey his call; but at present, let us do what lies before us, *Little children, let us love one another.*

[1](#)A Word in Season – vol. IV – Augustinian Press – 1991 – p 263

A Reading from the Letters of St Cyprian ⁴

The martyrdom of children marked the very beginning of Christ's life: for his name's sake, all those of two years old and under were put to death. Too young to fight, they were yet able to win a martyr's crown, and by their innocence bear witness to the innocence of all who shed their blood for Christ. When even such as these make martyrs, clearly no one is immune from the peril of persecution.

What a shameful thing it would be for Christ's servants to recoil from suffering when their Master suffered first; for us to be unwilling to endure something for our sins, when he, though sinless, endured so much for us! The Son of God suffered in order to make us children of God; will the children of this world refuse to persevere in that sonship through suffering? If we have to bear with the world's hatred, we must remember that Christ bore it before we did. We may have to endure insults, exile, torture in this world, but the Creator and Lord of the world knew them first in harsher form, and warned us of them, saying, "If the world hates you, remember that it hated me before you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own. But you are not of the world; I chose you out of it, and therefore it hates you. Remember the saying I gave you, 'The servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecute me, they will persecute you also." Our Lord and God practiced all he taught, so there can be no excuse for a disciple who hears his teaching but does not act on it.

My beloved, let none of you be so intimidated by the fear of future persecution or the imminent coming of Antichrist as not to be armed against all contingencies with the exhortations and precepts of the gospel and the warning you have received from heaven. Antichrist may come, but Christ will come in his

⁴Epist. 58, 6-7; CSEL t. 3, pp. 661-662.

wake. The enemy may rage and storm, but our Lord will follow hard upon him to avenge our wounds and suffering. The adversary may rage and threaten, but there is one who can deliver us from his hands. He it is whom we must fear, for none can escape his anger, as he himself has warned us in the words: "Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul."