

**THE GIVING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE BAPTISM OF JESUS, from a homily by Bede the Venerable<sup>1</sup>**

*And John gave testimony, saying, 'I saw the Spirit descending like a dove from heaven, and it rested on him'.* It is good that the Spirit descended upon the Lord in the form of a dove, so that the faithful may learn that they cannot be filled with his Spirit unless they are simple, unless they possess true peace with their brothers and sisters, which is signified by the kiss of doves. Ravens also have kisses, but they tear flesh (which a dove does not do at all), signifying those *who speak peace with their neighbor, but wicked things are in their hearts*. A dove, which by nature is innocent of the tearing of flesh, most suitably fits those innocents who pursue peace and sanctity with everyone, *solicitous to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*. And so the Spirit, by descending as a dove, does not represent merely its own innocence and simplicity, or that of him on whom it descended, but likewise that of those who *think of him in goodness and seek him in simplicity of heart*. The Lord himself says in praise of the piety that they share with one accord, and of the gentleness granted by a spiritual grace, *One is my dove; she is the only one of her mother, the elect of her progenetrix*. Indeed, he calls the grace of the Spirit 'the mother and progenetrix of the Church'. By that inspiring grace she too receives the capacity of being rightly called a dove. Accordingly, in Hebrew, the language in which holy scripture was set forth, 'spirit' is a name that is feminine in gender. On this account, the Church is appropriately given the name 'the one dove of Christ,' and 'the elect of her mother and progenetrix,' for undoubtedly it is not because of her own merits, but because of gift of spiritual grace she has received, that she is gathered into the unity of the Christian faith from many nations, that she is gladdened by a mutual dove-like peace, and that she is blessed by her share in election.

*'And I,' John says, 'was not aware of him'.* You understand what is implied: 'I did not recognize him as sublimely as I recognized him when the Spirit descended upon him'. *'But he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "The one upon whom you will see the Spirit descending and resting upon him, he it is who baptizes with the Holy Spirit."*' The Lord baptizes with the Holy Spirit, pardoning sins through the gift of the Holy Spirit. For either he would first baptize some of his disciples with water, through whom the river of baptism would flow to the rest of the faithful; he would baptize them too with the Spirit by unloosing them from their sins and administering the gifts of the Spirit--or else his faithful, calling upon his name, would baptize the elect with water and

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<sup>1</sup>HOMILIES ON THE GOSPEL, Bede the Venerable, Trans. by L. Martin & D. Hurst (Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo MI 1991) pp. 150-152.

anoint them with sacred chrism. Nevertheless, he himself baptizes them in the Holy Spirit, for no one except him is capable of releasing the bonds of sins or of bestowing the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

MON 01.13.20

A Commentary on Gospel of St Matthew by St Hilary of Poitiers [1](#)

Christ commanded the apostles to leave everything in the world that they held most dear, adding: *Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.* For those who belong to Christ have crucified their lower nature with its sinful passions and desires. No one is worthy of him who refuses to take up his cross, that is to say, to share the Lord's passion, death and resurrection, and to follow him by living out the mystery of faith of the newly received grace of the Spirit.

*Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.* This means that thanks to the power of the word and the renunciation of past sins, temporal gains are death to the soul, and temporal losses salvation. Apostles must therefore take death into their new life and nail their sins to the Lord's cross. They must confront their persecutors with contempt for things present, holding fast to their freedom by a glorious confession of faith, and shunning any gain that would harm their souls. They should know that no power over their souls has been given to anyone, and that by suffering loss of this short life they achieve immortality.

*Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.* Christ gives us all a love for his teaching and a disposition to treat our teachers with courtesy. Either he had shown the danger facing those who refused to receive the apostles by requiring these to shake the dust off their feet as a testimony against them; now he commends those who do receive the apostles, assuring them of a greater recompense than they might have expected for their hospitality, and then he teaches that since he still acts as mediator, when we receive him God enters us through him because he comes from God. Thus whoever receives the apostles receives Christ, and whoever receives Christ receives God the Father, since what is received in the apostles is nothing else than what is received in Christ; nor is there anything in Christ but what is in God. Through this disposition of graces to receive the apostles is to receive God. Through this disposition of graces to receive the apostles is to receive God, because Christ is in them and God is in Christ.

[1](#) Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – 1992 – pg 102

**A Reading About *Key Concepts of the Old Testament*, by Albert Gelin.<sup>2</sup>**

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The Old Testament, Claudel has said, is "not so much a continuous as a continuing history, upon which are super-imposed outbursts of lyricism, moral precepts, rules for ritual, and expressions of ever more precise and urgent longings with regard to the future and the unknown." The Old Testament is the history of the true religion. Clearly, God could have used a different means of acquainting the human race with the way of salvation, by projecting a revelation into human history at one fell swoop. God's method was more wonderful than that, making use of the continuity and even the density of history. God made the time factor serve his purpose.

A people whose true genius was far more religious than metaphysical, gradually, it would seem, in the course of its living, discovered the way of salvation and gave it its own particular form. The Old Testament is the history of the people that lived the great realities: Election, Promise, Covenant, Kingdom, Exile, Community. Its experiences, its gropings, its setbacks, its dreams, its conclusions, make up the material of this history. It is a people moved by a religious impulse impelling it always one stage further, rethinking on a more spiritual level what in the first place it had lived and thought in a way less worthy of God. The Old Testament is the history of continual forward movements; a novitiate, a growing spiritualization.

But for the Christian believer there is more than this. The Christian believer knows that God's plan for humankind is a coherent whole, that all tends towards Christ and his Church, that the great realities in the Bible -people, situations, institutions- have an objective reference to Christ and his Church. It was to Christ that God's secret but powerful influence led Israel. What we have to do is to learn to perceive within all the human movement and endeavor the presence of the Eternal that lies below, directing them.

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<sup>2</sup>The Key Concepts of the Old Testament, Sheed & Ward, NY 1955. p.ix-x.

**A reading about Saints Maur and Placid from the *Dialogues* of St. Gregory the Great.**<sup>3</sup>

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The holy man, St Benedict, having returned to Subiaco, long continued to shine by his virtue and miracles, and assembled a great number of solitaries who consecrated themselves to the service of God, so that, with the aid of our Lord Jesus Christ, he built twelve monasteries, placing in each twelve Religious with an Abbot to govern them. He retained with himself only a few of his disciples who, he thought, still needed his presence to be better formed to perfection. It was at this time that many persons in Rome, conspicuous for their nobility and virtue, began to visit him and offer their children that he might mold them to piety, and teach them to live for God alone. Aequitius and Tertullus, who had the honor of being Roman Patricians, came to see the saint and confided to his care their two children; the former was distinguished for spotless innocence of life, and merited, though young, to be chosen by his master to assist him in his functions. As to Placid, being only a boy, he was subject to the weaknesses inseparable from tender age...

The venerable Benedict being one day in his cell, the boy Placid, one of his religious, went out to fetch water from the lake, but, when dipping his pitcher into the water, not taking sufficient heed, his body followed the vessel and he fell into the lake. The waves immediately bore him out from the land as far as the usual flight of an arrow. The saint, who was in his cell, knew of the sad accident at that very instant, and at once calling Maurus, his disciple, said to him: A Brother Maurus, run with all speed; the boy who went to fetch water fell into the lake and has been already carried off a long distance. @

The thing wonderful and unheard of since that instance of the Apostle Peter! Maurus having asked and received the blessing, ran to the lake to execute the order of his Abbot. Thinking he was treading upon dry land, he advanced to the very place whither the waves had carried off the child, and laying hold of him by the hair, brought him back with great hast to the shore. Having reached the land, he began to reflect on what he did, and casting a look behind, saw that he had been running over the waves. He was astonished thereat and very much afraid, seeing that he had performed what he would not have dared to undertake if he had been aware of what he was doing. Having returned to the monastery, he narrated the whole occurrence to the Abbot. The venerable Benedict did not attribute this miracle to his own merit, but to the obedience of the disciple. Maurus, on the other hand, said he was only fulfilling a command, and could have no share in a miracle which he unconsciously performed.

During this pious dispute arising from the humility of the holy Abbot and his disciple, the boy rescued from peril presented himself as arbitrator, and put an end to the contest thus: A When I was being drawn out of the waves, I saw the Abbot=s robe above my head, and it seemed to me that it was he who delivered me from the water. @ This is narrated by Pope St Gregory. An ancient tradition says that the monk Maurus was sent into Gaul by the same holy Father. There, according to the same tradition, he founded a monastery at Glannofol; after having governed it for a long time, he died in the Lord in a good old age, renowned for his sanctity and miracles.

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<sup>3</sup> from the *LITURGICAL READINGS* compiled and adapted at St Meinrad=s Abbey (St Meinrad , IN, 1941) pp. 311-313.

THUR

01.16.20

The Meaning of Vocation – by St John Paul II <sup>1</sup>

Faith and love are not just words or vague feelings. Believing and loving God means a consistent life, lived wholly in the light of the Gospel. This is not easy. It often calls for great courage in going against the trends of fashion and the opinions of our world. But this is the one requirement for a truly successful and happy life.

If, in spite of your personal effort to follow Christ you are sometimes weak and do not live in conformity to the law of love, to the commandments, do not be discouraged. Christ continues to wait for you. He, Jesus, is the Good Shepherd who searches for the lost sheep and who tenderly bears it on his shoulder. Christ is the friend who never lets you down.

In the gospel story we see that the young man, having affirmed that he has kept the commandments, adds: “What do I still lack?” The young heart, moved by God's grace, felt a desire for greater generosity, more commitment, greater love. This desire for more is characteristic of youth; a heart that is in love does not calculate, does not begrudge, it wants to give of itself without measure. “Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, come, follow me.”

To those who entered the path of life by observing the commandments, the Lord proposes new horizons; the Lord proposes to the means that are loftier and calls them to commit themselves to his love without reserve. To discover this call, this vocation, is to realize that Christ is looking on you and inviting you by his glance to give yourself totally in love. Before this glance, before his love, the heart opens its doors gradually and is capable of saying *yes*.

If some of you hear the call to follow Christ more closely, to dedicate your entire heart to him, like the apostles John and Paul, be generous, do not be afraid, because you have nothing to fear when the prize that you await is God Himself, for whom, sometimes without ever knowing it, all young people are searching.

Young people who are hastening to me, young people who more than anything else want to know what you must do to gain eternal life, always say yes to God and he will fill you with his happiness.

“There is one thing you lack, come, follow me”. Is Jesus perhaps repeating to some of you today: “There is one thing you lack?” Is he perhaps asking for even more love, more generosity, more sacrifice? Yes, the love of Christ involves generosity and sacrifice. To follow Christ and to serve the world in his name requires courage and strength. There is no place for selfishness – and no place for fear! Do not be afraid, then, when love makes demands. Do not be afraid when love requires sacrifice.

To each one of you I say, therefore: Heed the call of Christ when you hear him saying to you: “Follow me!” Walk in my path! Stand by my side! Remain in my love! There is a choice to be made: a choice for Christ and the way of life, and his commandment of love.

<sup>1</sup>The Meaning of Vocation – St John Paul II – Scepter Publishers – Princeton, NJ – 1997  
– pg 18

**A Reading from the Letters of St Anthony the Great.<sup>4</sup>**

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The Creator saw that the wound in human nature was grown great, and needed the care of a physician--and Jesus Himself is their Creator, and Himself heals them,--and He sent forerunners before His face. And we are not afraid to say of Moses the Lawgiver that he is one of His forerunners, and that the same Spirit which was with Moses worked also in the choir of the saints; and they all prayed for the Only-begotten Son of God. John again is one of his forerunners: and for this cause the Law and the Prophets were until John, and >the Kingdom of God suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.= (Mt 11:12-13) And being clothed with the Spirit, they saw that none among the creatures was able to heal that great wound, but only the bounty of God, that is to say His Only-begotten, whom He sent to be the Saviour of all the world; for He is the great physician, who is able to heal the great wound. And they asked God, and of His bounty the Father of creatures spared not His Only-begotten for our salvation, but delivered Him up for us all and for our iniquities. (Rom 8:32) And he humbled Himself, and by his stripes we all were healed. (Phil 2:8; Is 53:5) And by the word of His power He gathered us out of all lands, from one end of the world to the other end of the world, and raised up our hearts from the earth, and taught us that we are members one of another.

I beseech you, dearly beloved in the Lord: understand that this Scripture is the command of God. For it is a great thing for us to understand the form that Jesus accepted for us: for He became in all things like unto us, apart from sin. (Heb 4:15) Now therefore it is right that we also should set ourselves free by His advent, that by His foolishness He may make us wise, and by His poverty may enrich us, and by His weakness strengthen us, and confer resurrection upon us all, destroying him that had the power of death. (Heb 2:14) Then we shall also cease to call upon Jesus for bodily needs. The advent of Jesus helps us to do what is good, until we have destroyed all our vices. Then Jesus will say to us, >Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends.= (Jn 15:15) When therefore the Apostles attained to receiving the Spirit of Adoption, then the Holy Spirit taught them to worship the Father as they ought.

And to me, this poor prisoner of Jesus, this time to which we have come has brought joy and lamentation and weeping. For many of our generation have put on the robe of religion but denied its power. As for those who have prepared themselves to be set free through the advent of Jesus, over them I rejoice. But those who do business in the name of Jesus, and do the will of their heart and their flesh--over such I lament. Those who have looked at the length of the time, and their heart has failed them, and they have put off the robe of religion, and are become beasts--for them I weep. Know therefore that for such as these the advent of Jesus becomes a great judgement. But do you, my beloved in the Lord, know yourselves, that you may also know this time, and prepare to offer yourselves as a sacrifice acceptable to God.

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<sup>4</sup>Trans. Derwas J Chitty; SLG Press, Oxford 1975; Letter 3, pp 9-10.

**In her hiddenness we find Mary's greatness; from a book by Thomas Merton.**<sup>5</sup>

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In all the great mystery of Mary, then, one thing remains most clear: that of herself she is nothing, and that God has for our sakes delighted to manifest his glory and his love in her.

It is because she is, of all the saints, the most perfectly poor and the most perfectly hidden, the one who has absolutely nothing whatever that she attempts to possess as her own, that she can most fully communicate to the rest of us the grace of the infinitely selfless God. And we will most truly possess him when we have emptied ourselves and become poor and hidden as she is, resembling him by resembling her.

And all our sanctity depends on her maternal love. The ones she desires to share the joy of her own poverty and simplicity, the ones whom she wills to be hidden as she is hidden, are the ones who share her closeness to God.

It is a tremendous grace, then, and a great privilege when a person living in the world we have to live in, suddenly loses his interest in the things that absorb that world and discovers in his own soul an appetite for poverty and solitude. And the most precious of all the gifts of nature or grace is the desire to be hidden and to vanish from human sight and be accounted as nothing by the world and to disappear from one's own self-conscious consideration and vanish into nothingness in the immense poverty that is the adoration of God.

This absolute emptiness, this poverty, this obscurity holds within it the secret of all joy because it is full of God. To seek this emptiness is true devotion to the Mother of God. To find it is to find her. And to be hidden in its depths is to be full of God as she is full of him, and to share her mission of bringing him to all peoples.

Yet all generations must call her blessed, because they all receive through her obedience whatever supernatural life and joy is granted to them. And it is necessary that the world should acknowledge her and that the praise of God's great work in her should be sung in poetry and that cathedrals should be built in her name. For unless Our Lady is recognized as the Mother of God and as the Queen of all the saints and angels and as the hope of the world, faith in God will remain incomplete. How can we ask him for all the things he would have us hope for if we do not know, by contemplating the sanctity of the Immaculate Virgin, what great things he has power to accomplish in us.

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<sup>5</sup> *New Seeds of Contemplation*, New Directions, 1961, pp. 173-75.