

SUN

05.24.20

The Various Ways of Ascending - A Sermon by St Bernard of Clairvaux ¹

Today the Lord of heaven passed into the heights of heaven with heavenly power; dissipating the weaknesses of the flesh as if they were clouds, he put on the robe of glory. High is the sun in its rising; it has grown hot and gathered strength; its rays are far reaching and multitudinous over the earth; and there is >no one who can hide from its heat=. The Wisdom of God has returned to the land of wisdom where everyone both understands and seeks the good: their understanding is exceedingly acute, and their inclination is exceedingly intent >on heeding the voice of his word=.

We, however, are in this land where there is great wickedness and little wisdom, for >the perishable body presses down the soul and the earthly dwelling burdens the mind that ponders many things=. I think that mind here means understanding, which is in fact pressed down when it ponders many things, when it does not gather itself together in the single exclusive meditation that takes its beginning from that city which is banded together in unity=. This type of understanding must necessarily be pressed down and distracted by many things in many and diverse ways. I think that our inclinations are called soul here, for in a perishable body they are influenced by the different passions, which can never be mitigated, much less quieted, until the will seeks one thing and is directed toward one thing.

There are two parts of ourselves then, understanding and inclination, that must be purified: the understanding, that it may know; and the inclination, that it may will. Fortunate, truly fortunate, were those two men, Elijah and Enoch, from whom every cause and occasion which might shackle either their understanding or inclination was removed. Living for God alone, they know nothing but God and desire nothing but God. We even read of Enoch that >he was carried off, lest wickedness impair his understanding or deceit beguile his soul=.

Our understanding was disordered, not to say blinded; our inclination was tainted, and very tainted. But Christ enlightens our understanding, and the Holy Spirit purifies our inclination. For the Son of God came. He worked so many great and wondrous deeds in the world, that with good cause he called our understanding away from all worldly matters. Thus we could ponder, and never have enough of pondering, that he has done wondrous deeds. Truly he left very extensive fields for our discerning to roam, and the river of these ponderings is so very deep, that, in the words of the prophet, it cannot be crossed. Who can sufficiently ponder how the Lord has come before us, come to us, come to our assistance; and how this unparalleled Majesty willed to die that we might live, to serve that we might reign, to live in exile that we might be brought home again, and even to stoop to the most menial actions so as to set us over

¹ Sermons for the Summer Season - Bernard of Clairvaux - CF53 - Cistercian Publications - Kalamazoo, MI - 1991

all his works.

The Lord of the Apostles presented himself to the apostles in such a way that they would no longer perceive the invisible things of God as understood by the things that are made, but that the very Maker of all things would himself be seen face to face. Because the disciples were beings of flesh and God is spirit, and spirit and flesh are not easily brought together, he adapted himself to them with the shadow of his body, that by the intervention of his life-giving flesh they might behold the Word in flesh, the sun in a cloud, light in an earthen jug, the candle in the lantern.

For this purpose the Lord set his flesh before them, to turn their every thought away from human matters and attach it to his flesh, which was saying wondrous things and performing wondrous deeds. Thus he would turn their attention from flesh to spirit, because >God is spirit, and those who worship God must worship in spirit and in truth=. Does it not seem to you that he enlightened their understanding when he opened their minds to understanding of the Scriptures, making known that the Christ had to suffer these things and rise from the dead, and so enter into his glory.

Still, having grown accustomed to that most holy flesh of his, they could not listen to a word about his departure: that the one for whom they had left everything would leave them. What is the reason for this? Their understanding was enlightened, but their inclination was not yet purified. Whence their kind Teacher gently and tenderly addressed them, saying: It is for your good that I go. For if I do not go away, the Paraclete will not come to you. But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. What does it mean, that while Christ abides on earth, the Holy Spirit cannot come to them? Was the Spirit shrinking from any involvement with Christ=s flesh? From the Spirit and by the Spirit was Christ conceived in the Virgin, and born of a virgin mother. It was nothing of the sort! Christ was showing us the path which we were to walk, and putting before us the form with which we were to be impressed.

And as they wept, Christ was lifted up to heaven. He sent the Holy spirit, who purified their inclination, that is, their will; or rather he transformed it, so that those who at first wanted to detain the Lord, now preferred that he ascend. What he had foretold to them was fulfilled: You shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. In this, then, was their discerning enlightened by Christ, and their will purified by the Spirit, so that just as they knew the good, they would also will it. This only is perfect religion and religious perfection.

From a Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, by St. Bede the Venerable.²

"But you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence." The apostles had not yet been baptized. This refers not to baptism with water, but to baptism with the Holy Spirit. We understand that they had already been baptized, either by the baptism of John, as some people think, or, as is more believable, by the baptism of Christ. For since he did not shun a ministry of memorable humility when he washed their feet, he would not have shunned the ministry of baptizing them, so as to have servants who had been baptized, through whom he could baptize others. Therefore, when the Lord said, John indeed baptized with water, he did not continue with, 'yet you shall baptize.' but with "yet you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit," because neither the apostles nor their followers, who still baptize in the church to this day, had the power to baptize except as John did, that is, with water. However, when the name of Christ is invoked, the interior power of the Holy Spirit is present, which, with the human administration of water, simultaneously purifies the souls and the bodies of those being baptized. This did not happen in the baptism of John - for the Spirit had not yet been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

There follows: "Those therefore who had come together kept asking him, saying, 'Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel at this time?' For when he appeared to them he spoke about the kingdom of God, and promised that after not many days the Holy Spirit would come. Consequently, they pointedly questioned him about this kingdom, namely, whether they should believe that it was soon to be restored at the imminent coming of the Spirit, or that it was to be reserved for the saints in the future. For the disciples, who were still materially-minded, believed that, since the resurrection of Christ had been accomplished, the kingdom of Israel would come immediately. Hence the Lord himself, making known the spiritual Israel and the heavenly kingdom which had been promised by the prophets, said: "It is not for you to know the times or dates which the Father in his power has appointed." He was telling them that the time of that kingdom is so secret that it is accessible only to the Father's knowledge. And, when he said, 'It is not for you to know,' he showed them that he himself also knew (since all things are his which are the Father's), but that it would not be expedient for them, as mortals, to know. Thus, being always uncertain about the coming of the Judge, they should live every day as if the next day they were to be judged.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be witnesses for me in Jerusalem," and so forth. He says "When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, it will certainly will not be to bring the kingdom of Israel, or the kingdom of God to

²The Venerable Bede, Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles. Cistercian Publications, 1989. Cp. I p.10-13.

Israel, as you think, but rather it will be to furnish you the power to bear witness concerning me. Also, it will be so long until the coming of that kingdom that first the fame of the Gospel must spread not only through this city of Jerusalem, but also to the bounds of Judea, and from there on to the neighboring people of Samaria, and finally throughout the farthest borders of the world.

TUE 5/26/20

THE ASCENSION AND CHRISTIAN PRAYER,

from an Article, The Humanity of Christ in Monastic Prayer by Fr Thomas Merton³

At the Ascension, in the sight of the disciples, "the nature of humankind soared above the dignity of all the creatures of heaven" and "there was to be no limit to the advancement of Christ's humanity until, seated together with the eternal Father, it might share enthroned the glory of Him whose nature it shared in the son." And of course, the Fathers never ceased to remind their hearers that this same humanity of Christ which was enthroned with the Father in the divine glory, was to return and judge the world. "He set a limit to His bodily presence, and would remain at the right hand of the Father until He should return in the same flesh in which He had ascended." Monastic prayer is eschatological and is centered on the expectation of the Parousia, the advent of the "immortal and invisible King of ages" who is both "God alone" and the Christ, our Redeemer and Liberator.

In the meantime it is our nature which is enthroned in heaven with Christ. It is our nature which shares the divinity of Christ and of the Father. Hence St Leo puts these words into the mouth of the glorious Redeemer: "I have united you to myself and I became the son of man that you might become children of God." St Gregory adds that Christ has made us children of God by taking us to heaven with Him: "He has led captivity because he has swallowed up our corruption in the power of His incorruption." St Leo says that with Christ's ascension into heaven we have recovered possession of paradise, and not only that, "we have even penetrated, in Christ, into the height of heaven," we have been enthroned with Him because we are "one Body" with Him. This is the reason why we should rejoice at His going to the Father: "above all the heavens, your lowliness is raised, in Me, to be placed at the right hand of the Father." He is not separated from us unless we choose to remain bound to the earth by our passions. In contemplation we experience, at least obscurely, something of this mystery of our union with Him now in heaven.

³"The Humanity of Christ in Monastic Prayer", Monastic Studies 2, 1964, 11-13.

This has important implications for the life of prayer. The life of the monk, being that of a Christian, is a way of living in heaven. While living bodily in exile and in his earthly pilgrimage, the monk is already spiritually in paradise and in heaven where he has ascended with Christ. That is to say, although he is not physically present in heaven, he is free to come and go there as he pleases, in spirit, in prayer, in faith, in thanksgiving, praise and love, because he already "is" there mystically in Christ. "Let us therefore, exult with a worthy and spiritual joy, happy before God in thanksgiving, and let us lift up the free eyes of our heart to that height where Christ is."

The Lord has already "made known to us all that He has heard from His Father"(Jn 15,15). St Gregory, commenting on this line, says that Christ has made us His friends by making known to us "the joys of interior charity and the festival of the heavenly country which He daily makes present in our minds by the desire of love." And St Gregory explains that this loving knowledge of heavenly things is very real indeed, no mere fancy: "for when, hearing of heavenly things, we love them, we already know the things we love, for our love itself is a way of knowing." It is by the charity of Christ in our hearts that we "are in heaven" and know the things of heaven.

The source of our freedom and the power that raises our prayer to the height of heaven is the Holy Spirit, sent by Christ and the Father after the God become flesh ascended into heaven. And faith in Christ's presence in heaven as one of us merits for us the grace of the Holy Spirit. The angels, says St Gregory, already rejoice to have us as their companions, while they adore the humanity of the God become flesh.

WED 05.27.2020

A Reading by Gilbert of Hoyland on the Eternal Dwelling.⁴

As the Lord says: 'In my Father's house are many dwellings': dwellings obviously of lesser lights, because God himself 'dwells in light inaccessible'. John understands this as a multitude of dwellings, not because there is one dwelling for each spiritual creature, since for some one or other there are many dwellings, as the Lord says in Luke, 'and you shall have authority over ten towns'. 'For star differs from star in splendor.' Yes, as the

⁴Treatise 1, The works of Gilbert of Hoyland IV, Cistercian Publications, Inc. 1981, CF34. p.11-13.

number of virtues increases, so the gift of splendors is multiplied, as the prophecy in Isaiah indicates: 'and the Lord shall fill your soul with splendors'. Blissful surely is the soul, which will be filled not only with one but with many splendors, those indeed of which it is said: 'Yours is princely power in the day of your birth, in the splendors of the saints.' The most blissful splendors are those which the Lord pours upon his saints; the beginning of eternity, the day of truth, and the virtue of charity.

Who will grant me that my spirit may be enlightened with a ray of this triple splendor? that this most blessed number of days may complete, yes complete and contain my days? Who I ask, will grant me that my days may stretch out to that line of eternity, may shine in the splendor of truth and be inflamed with the spirit of charity? Unlike the dispensation which prevailed at the first creation of the world, when an alternating return of dawn and dusk set limits between the many days, then indeed there will be one unending day, one unbroken high noon. There at the first creation, only between morning and evening, so to speak, inauspicious night was banned, but in this new day high noon will replace dawn and dusk: the two limits of the day will no longer grow dim. As Zechariah says, 'in the evening there will be light, for then there will be no temporal 'variations, no shadow of change'. Yet when, oh when, will this occur? When, O good Jesus, will you manifest yourself as you are in your high noon? For in you we shall see the Father, and it will be enough for us. How sluggish are our ears, how slow our hearts! slow to see, quick however to believe!

Scripturally, in each and every appearance after your blessed Resurrection, I do not recall ever having read of your appearance at midday. You appeared either when the day had hardly begun or was already ending, that one might understand that here below all light of truth is obscured by some shadow of ignorance. At the same time, a pleasant distinction should be noted in the fact that in the dawn's early light he showed himself at the tomb to the women seeking him anxiously, but that late on the same day, the first of the week, he showed himself to the disciples huddled at home.

Oh that you would appear to us also, O Lord, here in our dawn or in our dusk, for you are above dawn and dusk, the brightest high noon. In that high noon we shall recline at table in your fatherland. Meanwhile as we are journeying on, let us pray, O Lord, that you may warm us with the last ray of evening light. Now we are concluding our discourse with the onset of a day but we do not exclude you: rather we close with you as we opened with you. In the morning let us give thanks, breaking into that song of the Canticle: 'I rested in the shade of the one I longed for.'

THUR 05.28.20

A Sermon of St Bernard of Clairvaux on the Ascension ⁵

The apostles, who were still clinging to the Lord's flesh - uniquely holy because it belonged to the Saint of saints - could not be filled with the Holy spirit until it was taken away from them. Do you think that you, bound and inseparably glued to your flesh, which is very squalid and full of the images of every kind of impurity, can receive the perfectly pure and unadulterated consolations? In fact, when you have begun sorrow will fill your heart; but if you persevere, your sorrow will be turned into joy. For then your inclinations will be purified, and your will renewed, or rather created anew. Then through everything that at first seemed difficult, or even impossible, you will hasten with much pleasure and eagerness.

Send forth your Spirit, Scripture says, and they will be created, and you will renew the face of the earth. Just as the outer person is recognized by the face, so the inner is represented by the will. When the Spirit has been sent, the face of the earth is created and renewed: this means that our earthly will becomes heavenly, ready at a nod to obey more quickly than a nod. Blessed are people like this, for not only do they perceive no evil, but they abide in a certain marvelous expansion of heart.

Dearly beloved, today is the day when the Bridegroom is taken away from us, and our minds are not without some disquiet. But it is for this purpose, that he may send us the spirit of truth. Let us weep and pray that the spirit may find us or rather make us worthy, and may fill this house where we are sitting in order that not a violent shaking but his anointing may teach us everything. Then when our understanding has been illumined and our inclination purified, may he come to us and make his dwelling place in us. Just as Moses' serpent swallowed up all the magicians' serpents, so the Spirit, when he comes, will devour all fleshly consolations. Then will we have rest from labor, gladness from tribulation, and glory after abuse, just as those whom the Spirit filled went out from the council's presence rejoicing that they were considered worthy to suffer abuse for the sake of Jesus' name. The Spirit of Jesus, a good spirit, a holy spirit, an upright spirit, a ruling spirit, makes light and broad whatever seems difficult and confining in this wicked world. Disgrace he judges a joy, and contempt he persuades us is exaltation. Let us, therefore, as the Prophet says, examine our ways and our enthusiasms; let us lift up our hearts and our hands so that we may rejoice, and lavishly rejoice on this solemn feast of the Holy spirit, who leads us into all truth, just as the Son of God promised.

⁵ Sermons for the Summer Season - Bernard of Clairvaux - CF53 - Cistercian Publications - pg. 42 - Kalamazoo, MI - 1991

FRI 05.29.20

St Paul VI -Taken from The New Catholic Encyclopedia

Giovanni Battista Montini was born near Brescia September 26, 1897. As a youth, he was plagued with health problems. Even when he began studying for the priesthood, he attended lectures at Brescia's diocesan seminary, but studied and lived at home. Following his ordination at age 22, he was sent to Rome for graduate studies. He was selected to attend the Pontifical Academy of Noble Ecclesiastics, the school for training Vatican diplomats. He served for thirty years in the Vatican Secretariat of State under Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli. He continued in the same post when Pacelli became Pope Pius XII. Due to some curial tensions, he was made Archbishop of Milan in 1954.

He rebuilt churches which had been bombed during the war. Calling himself "the Archbishop of workers", he visited workers throughout the diocese and preached the social mission of the Gospel.

After the election of Pope John XXIII, Montini was appointed a cardinal. When Pope John announced the calling of Vatican Council II, he also appointed Montini to the Central Preparatory Commission. He enthusiastically welcomed the Council, which he perceived to be an exceptional opportunity for the Church to respond to the grace of God.

At the death of Pope John, Montini was elected as his successor and took the name of Paul VI. In his first message as pope he set forth his agenda: to continue Vatican II, to revise Canon Law, to work for peace and justice at all levels and to seek Christian unity. After his installation as pontiff, he sold his tiara to Cardinal Spellman of New York and gave the money to the poor. Subsequently he used a miter as all Bishops.

When he convened the second session of the Vatican Council, he spoke of its purposes: to seek a fuller definition of the Church and to have a deeper understanding of the episcopate; to renew the Catholic Church; to restore the unity of all Christians and to ask forgiveness for the faults of the Catholic Church and to initiate a positive dialogue with contemporary society that conveys the truth of the gospel. He took an active part in the Council, suggesting amendments to several of the documents. Following on the Council, Pope Paul issued several encyclicals. The one he is most remembered for is the one on contraception "Humanae vitae". He was gravely upset at the negative reaction by many, both within the church and outside. He also tried to renew the Curia, determining that all should resign their positions at the age of 75. This was extended to all Bishops of the Church. He also stated that Cardinals over 80 could not take part in a conclave for electing the Pope.

He met with Patriarch Athenagoras in the Holy Land and later with the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury Bishop Ramsey. His willingness to negotiate with countries behind the iron curtain was his most controversial diplomatic initiative.

The last ten years of his pontificate were difficult for him. He suffered greatly

from the negative reaction of some to various parts of the Council documents. He admitted that the belligerent reaction of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre to the liturgical changes and encouragement of ecumenism was his greatest cross. Debilitating arthritis and other ailments weakened him in the summer of 1978. He died of a heart attack on August 6 at Castel Gandolfo. He was canonized by Pope Francis.

SAT 05/30/20

From A Sermon by Ogier, Cistercian Abbot of the Monastery of Locedio 6

Let us note the Lord's two dwelling-places: the one along the way, the other in his heavenly home; the one temporal, when he dwelt with us in the flesh, the other eternal, where we shall dwell with him glorified in soul and in body. Of the first he says, *'I have said these things to you while still with you* – present in the body. But a time is coming when I shall withdraw from you in my bodily presence and will thereafter speak to you through the spirit. *The Paraclete, the Holy spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you.* He will teach you,' says the Lord Jesus 'what I have told you.' Not that the Son says one thing and the Spirit teaches another, for whatever Christ says and teaches the Trinity says and teaches. Because God is triune, each person of the godhead must establish himself in our hearts. We should hear each distinctly and understand them inseparably. Thus when we say 'the Father, Son and Holy spirit', we do not say these words simultaneously, yet those whom we name are simultaneous and could not be otherwise. When the Lord speaks of the Comforter whom the Father will send, we are to understand: 'I am leaving you in my bodily presence but not in the presence of the Spirit. The body I received on earth I now raise up to heaven, but through my Spirit I will remain with you until the end of time. The Father sent me so that I might appear visible in the flesh, but the hour has come for me to pay death's due, and, rising from the dead, ascend to the Father, and there be seated at his right hand. Henceforth the world will no longer see me in the mortal guise of the flesh. But *the Paraclete, the spirit whom the Father will send in my name*, will comfort you in my bodily absence by the abundance of his sweetness. He will be your teacher, not noising his words abroad but teaching the heart within. *He will prompt you and teach you everything I have told you* through him, all that I will have inspired in you. You will not be able to lament my bodily absence so long as the spirit remains in your hearts.'

O Lord Jesus, may your Spirit come, my God and Master! May He enter my heart

and so flood me with your love that I should seek no other love than yours, that I may love no other beauty than yours, that I may taste no other sweetness! For you are honey and honeycomb: the honey of God the Father, in the honeycomb of the Virgin Mary; honey in the bosom of the Father, honeycomb broken on the cross; honey reigning with the Father and the Holy Spirit in heaven and throughout the universe, blessed through endless ages. Amen