

LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY
VIGILS READINGS
Eleventh Week in Ordinary Time
June 14-20, 2020

SUNDAY, JUNE 14, 2020

From a work by St. Thomas Aquinas¹

Since it was the will of God's only-begotten Son that we should share in his divinity, he assumed our nature in order that by becoming man he might make us divine. Moreover, when he took our flesh he dedicated the whole of its substance to our salvation. He offered his body to God the Father on the altar of the cross as a sacrifice for our reconciliation. He shed his blood for our ransom and purification, so that we might be redeemed from our wretched state of bondage and cleansed from all sin. But to ensure that the memory of so great a gift would abide with us forever, he left his body as food and his blood as drink for the faithful to consume in the form of bread and wine.

O precious and wonderful banquet that brings us salvation and contains all sweetness! Could anything be of more intrinsic value? Under the old law it was the flesh of calves and goats that was offered, but here Christ himself, the true God, is set before us as our food. What could be more wonderful than this? No other sacrament has greater healing power; through it sins are purged away, virtues are increased, and the soul is enriched with an abundance of every spiritual gift. It is offered in the Church for the living and the dead, so that what was instituted for the salvation of all may be of benefit to all. Yet in the end no one can fully express the sweetness of this sacrament, in which spiritual delight is tasted at its very source, and in which we renew the memory of that surpassing love for us which Christ revealed in his passion.

It was to impress the vastness of this love more firmly upon the hearts of the faithful that our Lord instituted this sacrament at the Last

¹ Opusculum 57 – Feast of Corpus Christi
A Word in Season – vol. III – Exordium Books – Riverdale, MD – pg 228

Supper. As he was on the point of leaving the world to go to the Father, after celebrating the Passover with his disciples, he left it as a perpetual memorial of his passion. It was the fulfillment of ancient figures and the greatest of all his miracles, while for those who were to experience the sorrow of his departure, it was destined to be a unique and abiding consolation.

MONDAY, JUNE 15, 2020

A Commentary on the Book of Genesis from the writings of Quodvultdeus of Carthage ²

Joseph and Christ

After two days which seem like two years, Joseph is let out of prison on the third. Likewise our Joseph, who is Christ our Lord, rose from the dead on the third day. He is presented to Pharaoh. The resurrection is manifested to the world. Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams to him and gives him sound advice about what ought to be done, the store for seven years of plenty to be laid up under the supervision of a prudent man, for them to withstand the famine threatening thereafter. Likewise our Joseph, Christ our Lord, gave this counsel to a world running toward its end, in fulfillment of a sevenfold symbolism. For he said that *unless a grain of wheat falling into the earth should die, it remains but what it is; but if it dies, it yields much fruit. For again, they who sow in tears shall reap in joy.*

Joseph was given authority by Pharaoh over the whole of Egypt. So also our Joseph, Christ the Lord, said after his resurrection: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* Joseph sent his men all over Egypt and *collected corn in abundance like the sand of the seashore.* So also our Joseph, Christ our Lord, sent his men out into the world, saying: *Go forth and baptize the nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.* And the tally of the believers was beyond counting, like the sand of the seashore. Joseph set up barns all over Egypt. And Christ our Lord has consecrated churches throughout the world. About that, St. John said: *"He will store the corn in his barn, Joseph opened up the barns in time of famine and served out to the people. Of our Joseph, this is said: The Lord's eyes are on the just. And then: May he in his power and might draw out their souls*

² A Word in Season – vol. VII – Augustinian Press – 1999 – pg 89

from death and feed them in their hunger. Amos the prophet mentions the hunger of the soul: I will give them, says the Lord, a hunger not for bread and water, but to hear the word of God. And in the gospel the Lord himself says: Because iniquity has been there in abundance the charity of many has grown cold. To those affected by this famine, our Joseph, the one who is Christ our Lord, supplies from his granaries the daily abundance of the bread of his body, and on tasting it we see that the Lord is sweet. It was said that Joseph gained from Pharaoh the whole of Egypt. Of our Joseph it is said that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.

TUESDAY, JUNE 16, 2020

From the Life of St. Lutgarde by Thomas Merton ³

Born in 1182, Lutgarde reached maturity at the turn of the 13th century. She belongs to the age of St. Francis and St. Dominic, St Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure. It was a great age. With the growth of the new social order came the development of a new spirit in Christian devotion and Christian living. Collective, liturgical prayer ceased to have the influence it had exercised in the ages of St. Augustine and St. Benedict. Spirituality became more imaginative, affective, individual. The sacred humanity of Jesus became a reality to which the saints of the 13th century were passionately devoted. It was fitting that the Cistercians should play an important part in this new growth, for Bernard of Clairvaux had done more than any other individual to set the movement going.

Lutgarde was born of a bourgeois father who, like the father of St. Francis of Assisi, cherished worldly ambitions for his children. However her mother favored a convent life. Even so, a young man fell in love with her while she was residing at the Benedictine convent of St. Catherine. Pleased and a little flattered by these attentions, she was content to have them continue. But Christ Himself intervened, and made one of these meetings the occasion of His first mystical grace to His daughter.

One day, while the simple girl was sitting behind the grille in the parlor listening to her admirer, Christ in His humanity suddenly appeared.

³ What are these Wounds? By Thomas Merton – Bruce Publishing Co – Milwaukee - 1950

He revealed the spear-wound in His side, and said to her: “Seek no more the pleasure of this affection; behold here, what you should love, and how you should love. Here in this wound I promise you the most pure of delights.”

Another time Jesus asked her: “What do you want?” “Lord,” she told him, “I want your Heart.” Jesus responded: “What do you mean: you want My Heart? I want *your* heart.” To which Lutgarde replied: “Take it, dear Lord. But take it in such a way that your Heart’s love may be so mingled with my own heart that I may possess my heart in you, and may ever it remain there secure in Your protection.”

St Lutgarde is perhaps the first saint in whom this mystical “exchange of hearts” was effected. Since her time, the exchange has become more common in the lives of mystics devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. We read of it in the lives of St. Gertrude, St. Mechtilde (both Cistercians) and St. Margaret Mary.

After some years Lutgarde was elected Prioress of St Catherine convent. However due to the distraction of that position, she decided to enter the Cistercian Abbey near Liege. The period was marked by the Catharist heresy which laid claim to a higher and purer spirituality than that of the Church. They believed that the flesh, the body and all material creation were absolutely evil. The souls of humans were really fallen angels, imprisoned as punishment in human bodies and immersed in the filth of material creation. Rescue from this state had been effected by the son of God. But Christ had never really taken flesh, since the flesh was filthy. Therefore He had not died or risen from the dead.

The Blessed Virgin appeared to Lutgarde with a face very sorrowful. She told Lutgarde that this was because “my Son is once again being crucified by heretics and bad Christians.” She then enjoined on Lutgarde a fast of seven years in reparation. Lutgarde then began the first of three seven year fasts on bread and the ordinary drink of the convent, which happened to be weak beer.

Her third seven-year fast brought her to the end of her life. In 1239 or 1240, Christ again appeared to her and warned her that His Church was exposed to attack by a powerful enemy. This attack would result in terrible harm to souls, unless someone undertook to suffer and win grace from God. Thus Lutgarde began her third and last fast. She was to die in its seventh year. But her death would be serene with the confidence of victory.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17, 2020

St. Joseph Cassant – From an article by Fr Bernardo Bonowitz, OCSO ⁴

Joseph Cassant was born on March 6, 1878 in the southern French town of Casseneuil, the younger son of Pierre and Marie Cassant. The family was relatively prosperous because of successful cultivation of orchards and vineyards. They were solidly devout.

Whereas Joseph's elder brother, Emile, was clearly marked out to continue his father's agricultural work, Joseph's interests were oriented in a different direction. From early childhood, his single ambition was to be a priest.

Joseph's devotion to the Eucharist drew the attention of the pastor, who took him in and began to direct his studies toward seminary. However it soon became apparent that Joseph's talent did not lay in academic studies. The pastor then directed his interests toward the Trappist life, thinking that the academic would not be of such importance there. The pastor took Joseph into the rectory and established a Trappist way of life there for the two of them. Priest and teenager arose every night at two a.m. They celebrated the whole Trappist horarium including the whole Divine Office, manual labor, a rigorous silence and kept to a vegetarian diet.

Joseph entered the Trappist Abbey of Sainte Marie du Desert, near Toulouse at the age of sixteen. The novice was captivated by the Novice Master, Fr. Andre Malet. He was well equipped to help the novice overcome his natural tendencies to scrupulosity and discouragement. Instead of putting the emphasis on Trappist asceticism and penance, In this way he led Joseph to an emphasis on love rather than fear, thus bringing

⁴ Cist. Studies Quarterly = vol. 39.1 2004 – pg 67 f

him to a spirit of peace rather than turbulence. He fought to give himself in complete confidence in Jesus, rather than succumbing to paralyzing anxiety.

Joseph successfully passed through the time of temporary profession. With the help of his director, Fr Andre, he sought to live as much as possible within the Sacred Heart of Jesus, seeking to make Christ's inner attitudes his own. His greatest challenge was the studies, as his pastor had originally expected. His professor was a monk who had studied in the seminary and ordained a deacon before he entered the monastery. Hence he had strict expectations in studies. As a result he would ridicule Joseph in class for his slowness and make remarks that ordaining Joseph would be an insult to the priesthood at large. Unfortunately, the other students laughed at these remarks.

It was during his time of studies that Joseph first showed ill health. He suffered from migraine headaches and other difficulties. But as he prepared for the priesthood, he started to show the classic symptoms of tuberculosis. But his firm conviction was that God's will was that he not complain. He was ordained a priest on October 12, 1902. By this time. Everyone was aware that Joseph's ordination was a participation in the death of Jesus. Because of the state of medical science at that time, the treatment he received was purely palliative and he passed through the agonies of the consumptive. But suffering was an art that Cassant knew well because of his love of Jesus, made known in the Sacred Heart, given to us in the Eucharist and the priesthood shouldered by suffering. In the early morning of June 17, 1903, as Fr. Andre was celebrating Mass for his friend's intentions, Joseph went to the Lord.

We might ask: what does Joseph Cassant have to offer us today? First of all, he instructs us. A man of little intellectual capacity and a very ordinary experience of prayer, Cassant is nonetheless a theologian of the monastic life. He saw, and makes us see, that the personal relation with Jesus is the heart of Christian monasticism. He understood that the central monastic practices - obedience, silence and humility – are Christological realities, expressions of Christ's Sonship and means of our conformity to Christ. He perceived that Christian monastic existence means being offered to the

Father, offering oneself to the Father – in his case, as a priest. He insisted on the apostolic nature of the monastic vocation, that its obligations, struggles and sacrifices are to be lived as intercession to bring men and women to the knowledge and love of Christ. There is nothing unusual or original about all this, particularly in the context of late 19th and early 20th century French spirituality. What is unusual is the complete dominion these contemplative perceptions exercised over Cassant's heart and action. And for today, perhaps there is something new about the single-mindedness of his convictions. Beyond this, there is also the mysterious spiritual core of Joseph Cassant. Fr. Malet intuited in Joseph a deeper level than the young man's psychological limitations – an authentic desire to give himself to Christ. Trappist vocation is a lifelong process of healing. Joseph Cassant is a monk who was healed, and Fr Malet by betting on and developing the essentially healthy aspect of Joseph was the instrument of the cure.

Finally, Cassant challenges us. The tools that he brought to the monastery were few but indispensable: a good and upright will, with a consistent practice of fidelity and generosity, an interior and exterior obedience to the formation offered by his superiors. He staked his spiritual destiny on the sanctifying power of the *conversatio* and was sanctified by it. A monastery is inevitably a *conversatio*, an organized. Detailed, all-embracing way of life meant to lead its members to holiness. As long as the monastic practices remain in place, the only variables are conviction and dedication, faith and zeal.

THURSDAY, JUNE 18, 2020

A Commentary on Genesis from Quodvultdeus of Carthage ⁵

Impelled by the famine, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy grain from their brother, whom they had sold. Those who had crucified our Joseph, that is to say Christ our Lord, came to him to be revived by his bread and do take away the hunger which was distressing their souls. The former Joseph's brethren do him reverence; the latter, Christ's brethren, likewise do him reverence. On seeing his brothers, Joseph recognized them; but they did not know who he was. This applies to us also: for his brethren

⁵ A Word in Season - vol VII – Augustinian Press – 1999 – pg 92

knew him not. *For if they had known who he was, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory.* Joseph was estranged from his brethren and said to them, through an interpreter: *you are spies, you have come to spy out the roads and tracks and the pathways of this country.* So also our Joseph, Christ our Lord, said to his persecutors through his interpreter Peter: *You have denied what is holy and just and you have killed the prince of eternal life.* Joseph's brethren are sorry for what they did. To those others also, Christ's persecutors, the word is: *Repent.* They, of the olden times, say: *We are at fault over our brother.* So also the Jews who had told Pilate: *His blood be upon us and upon our children,* now say to the apostles: *What are we to do, brethren?* Show us. So as not to be thought spies, Joseph's brethren state that they are the sons, twelve in all, of one father; and they say that one of them is no more (since it was he to whom they were telling this), while the youngest is at home with their father.

On hearing mention of his younger brother, Joseph, ardently longing to see him, says: *I will test your claim not to be spies by seeing whether your younger brother will come with you.* And he took Simeon apart from them, had him fettered in their presence, and put him under guard. Surely our latter day Benjamin and youngest brother, sought after by the Joseph who is Christ our Lord, is none other than Paul, formerly Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, as he himself says, calling himself the least of the apostles. Simeon, bound by the three bonds of his denial, he whom fear had bound and love released, this Simeon we may take as Peter. That said, we had better acknowledge that it is by him that sins are bound and loosed: him indeed to whom it is said that *What you hold bound on earth will be bound in heaven; and what you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*

FRIDAY, JUNE 19, 2020

On the mysteries of our redemption hidden and revealed in the heart of Jesus; a prayer from the *Meditations* of William of St. Thierry. 1

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Meditation 6.9 ff.; translated by Sr. Penelope, CMV (Cistercian Fathers series, 3), Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1971, pp. 129-132.

O Truth supreme, you are the heaven of heavens, you who are what you are, who have your being from yourself, who belong to yourself and are sufficient to yourself. You lack nothing, yet you have no excess; ...you have within yourself supremest concord, utmost clarity, most perfect fullness and completest life.

...O Lord, the height, the depth, the wisdom and the might, are these the heaven of which you are the door? It is so, truly; that is why the ark of the covenant was seen in heaven when the door was opened, as [St.] John says. For what does the ark of the covenant that was seen in heaven mean, if not, as the Apostle [Paul] says: *the dispensation of the mystery, which from the beginning has been hidden in God, who created all things?* You are yourself that ark. In you from all eternity was hidden, and in you in these latter days has been fulfilled, all that from the beginning of the world has been revealed to all the saints and prophets by the Law and by the prophecies, by wonders and by signs....

These blessings, that were hidden in your secret heaven through the ages, you at the ages' end unveiled to the world's longing eyes, when you opened in heaven the door that is yourself. You opened that door when your grace appeared to all [people], teaching us.... The heavens being thus opened, all the good and glory and delight of heaven poured itself out on earth. And then, O God, who spared not your own Son, but delivered him up for us all, the greatness of your kindness... to us was published openly to all. You made known your salvation to the world, and in the sight of all the nations you revealed your righteousness....

Those unsearchable riches of your glory, Lord, were hidden in your secret place in heaven until the soldier's spear opened the side of your Son our Lord and Savior on the cross, and from it flowed the mysteries of our redemption. Now we may not only thrust our finger or our hand into his side, like Thomas, but through that open door may enter whole, O Jesus, even into your heart, the sure seat of your mercy, even into your holy soul that is filled with the fullness of God, full of grace and truth, full of our salvation and our consolation....

Open, O Lord, the ark-door of your side, that all your own who shall be saved may enter in, before this flood that overwhelms the earth. Open to

us your body's side, that those who long to see the secrets of your Son may enter in, and may receive the sacraments that flow [from there], even the price of their redemption. Open the door of your heaven, that your redeemed may see the good things of God in the land of the living, though they still labor in the land of the dying....

O good Father, loving Brother, and sweet Lord, you are all that is good and sweet and loving; the sum of goodness overflows in you. Open yourself to us, that your sweetness may flow forth from you to us, and fill us. Open yourself to me, O you who are the door, so that through you I may by longing love attain sometimes to the place of your wondrous dwelling, even to the house of God, although I am not worthy yet to enter there in full reality....

Open to me, O Lord, so that, although I am a stranger unworthy of enrollment as a citizen, yet nonetheless, I may by your gift be suffered on occasion for a little while to journey there, that I may truly see your glory, and not come out again unless I am thrown out!....

O, if only I may see, if only I may persevere, if only I may hear some day: *Enter into the joy of your Lord*, and may thus enter in, never to come out again! Lord, you are mighty and your truth is all about you. Finish your work and give what you have promised.

SATURDAY, JUNE 20, 2020

**A reading about Mary and the birth of her Son,
from the writings of Pierre de Bérulle.⁶**

The Virgin was so careful, as the gospel teaches us on two occasions, to gather up the actions and words of other people regarding her Son and to preserve them in her heart, not allowing a single word about such a great reality to fall to earth: *Mary kept every word (every, it says), reflecting on them in her heart* (Lk 2:19). How much more then should she be attentive to the interior and divine actions of her Son, which, although the world

⁶ AThe Life of Jesus@ in *ABérulle and the French School@*, New York, 1989, pp. 169-171.

cannot see them, her insight made known to her? They are so much more excellent because their source is of greater worth. They can be imprinted only in the sacred heart and the divinized Spirit of Jesus. Therefore the Virgin is enraptured by Jesus and doubly delighted by him; delighted, I say, by his state within her and by the interior exercises of his Spirit, while he lives in her. For this is the most worthy object that exists after the Godhead itself.

Nevertheless, it is necessary that I discover some humiliation in the midst of these grandeurs, bitterness among the sweetness. I would wrong the author of these mysteries and the truth of this story if I did not present it as it is; if I did not describe truthfully what is happening, either in the state of the Son or in the state of the Blessed Mother. I must not omit, therefore, that in the midst of these grandeurs to which the Virgin is exalted, that in these raptures where she is established, I discover there the cross and humiliation. For our mysteries are for God himself both cross and humiliation.

She should have begot him as immortal. She begot him as mortal. He should have been born from her as he was born from the tomb, full of glory and splendor. She begot him vulnerable to our lowliness and misery. She should have begot him in paradise, in heaven, in the bosom of the Father. For he is his Son and will be one day elevated to the throne at the right hand, in the bosom of the Godhead. She begot him in Nazareth and gave birth to him in Bethlehem, in a stable on hay and straw. She recognizes the greatness of her Son and her own as well in relationship to her Son. She knows the Father's plan to humble his Son and the Son's plan to humble himself. She embraces these plans and agrees to be the humiliated Mother of the humiliated Son. Now this is the place and the time where she becomes aware of these truths and begins to accept the humiliation destined for her Son and for herself. For her Son's human filiation and for her divine Motherhood.

For it is in Nazareth, in this birth of Jesus in her, in this moment that these things are accomplished. These are known to her, born in her and experienced by her according to the splendor of her knowledge, the strength of her love and vitality of her sensitivity toward divine reality and the things of her Son and her God.

END OF READINGS