

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.

¹Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – 1992 – pg 102

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**A Reading about the Pillars of the Earth,
from a Sermon by St. Aelred of Rievaulx²**

*Though the earth and all who dwell in it may rock,
it is I who uphold its pillars [Ps. 75(74):4]*

The pillars of the earth, my brothers, are the holy apostles, especially these two whose feast we celebrate today. They are the pillars who support holy Church through their doctrine, their prayers, and through the example of their patience. These are the pillars our Lord upholds. Previously, they were very weak and unable to support themselves or others. Yet this was a great dispensation of the Lord. For if they had always been strong, someone could think that they had always had this strength from themselves. For that reason our Lord wished to show first what they were of themselves, and then afterwards to uphold them, so that all might know that all their strength was from God. Again, because they were to be Fathers of the Church and physicians to cure the weak, they would not know how to have compassion for others' weaknesses unless they first had felt their own weakness. The Lord therefore upholds the pillars of the earth, that is, of holy Church.

For these pillars were very weak: obviously saint Peter was weak, for example, when the voice of one maidservant cast him down. Afterward, the Lord upheld that pillar: first, when He asked him three times, *Peter, do you love Me?* and three times Peter answered, *I do love you [Jn 21]*. For as Peter diminished that love of our Lord in himself when he denied Him three times, and therefore this pillar failed and was broken; so through Peter's confessing his love three times, this pillar was upheld. That other pillar, Paul, was undoubtedly weak, too. For sins are a weakness of the soul, and hear how weak he was: *I who before was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and insulted Him [1 Tim 1]*. Again when he was prostrate and blind and led into the city; when Ananias came to him and instructed him, then he was weak. But hear how strong he was afterwards: *I am certain, he says, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor any other creature can separate me from the Love of God [Rom 8]*.

And note that when Peter answered, *I do love you*, the Lord immediately said to him *Feed My sheep [ibid.]*; as if to say: Show me the love you have for Me in this way: by feeding My sheep. Therefore, my brothers, he who does not wish to feed Christ's sheep, falsely says that he loves God.

But someone may say: What is all this to us? This pertains to bishops, to abbots, to priests who have the care of souls. That is true, my brothers, it does pertain to them; but it also pertains to you. For Christ's sheep are fed in two ways: by word and by example. Certainly there are many prelates or superiors in the Church who can sufficiently feed Christ's sheep by their words; but because they live badly, they would feed them better if they were silent or physically went away. They would thus give the sheep an example of humility, of poverty, abstinence, chastity and the other virtues. Yet that prelate or superior who does both does better, i.e., he feeds the sheep both by his word and by his example. If a prelate or superior cannot do both, it is better to feed Christ's sheep by his example than by his words. Therefore, my brothers, if you love our Lord, live so that the sheep of Christ may be fed by your example, as the Lord says: *So let your works shine before men, that they may glorify your Father Who is in Heaven [Matt 5]*.

But in each soul our Lord also has some sheep, that is, some virtues which he who loves Christ must feed. These sheep are: charity, humility, spiritual joy, and the like. We feed these sheep

²Sermo XVI in Die SS. Petri et Pauli, Migne PL 299-300, 301 & 302.

when we do works that make these virtues grow in us. And each one of us must also feed these sheep, these virtues, in the others. We do this if we so conduct ourselves before our brothers that their charity, their joy, their humility and patience grow by our example. For how do I feed humility in my brother, if I am proud before him, if I speak proudly, answer him proudly, walk proudly? How do I feed obedience in my brother, if he sees me contrary and disobedient? How do I feed his patience if I grumble, am irascible, or speak or make signs harshly before him? He who does these things before his brother does not feed Christ's sheep in him; but so far as he can, he destroys and kills them, because he scandalizes his brother. But he who scandalizes his brother, sins against his brother. And who sins against his brother, as the Apostle says, sins against Christ [*1 Cor 8*]. Therefore if you love Christ, my brothers, feed Christ's sheep, and you will belong to these pillars which are upheld by Christ's love. And let us place before our eyes the life and death of these saints and their reward, my brothers; let us think that if we imitate their sufferings as we can, without doubt we will be joined to their lot. May the Lord grant us this through their merits. Amen.

A Commentary on the Book of Numbers from Homilies of Origen ³

What do these numberings seem to indicate? Can these things be void of mysteries? Are we to believe that the Holy Spirit who dictated these things to be written, composed these things for the sole purpose of informing us who was numbered among the people at that time, and what remained outside the number? Just what profit is there in learning these things? Or what is conferred to the soul's salvation?

But if we follow the thought of Paul and believe that the law is spiritual, and if we listen spiritually to what it contains, then enormous progress to the soul will appear in these things that are written. If I rise above the foolishness of youth, having become a man, then I shall be counted worthy of divine numbering. But as long as any of us are characterized by a childish and unstable understanding, then we shall not deserve to be reckoned to God in the holy and consecrated number. For in the writings of Solomon those who perish are said to be unnumbered, but all who are saved are numbered.

Now do you want me to show you that the number of saints is computed by God? Listen to how David speaks about the stars of the heaven: "He who numbers the multitude of stars and calls them all by name. In fact the Savior not only appointed his chosen apostles in accordance with a number, but he even says that the "hairs of your head are numbered". By these words he was assuredly not saying that those hairs are numbered which are ordinarily cut with scissors and fall to the ground, or which are lost or vanish. Rather, he means that those hairs of the head are numbered by God which were on the Nazarenes, in whom there was present the power of the Holy Spirit for overthrowing the foreign nations. Therefore by the hairs of the head that come as it were from the head of the apostles, he means the virtues of the soul and the abundance of meanings which were produced from the principal part of the mind.

But we have digressed somewhat in these things. Let us now return to the subject. It says: And the Lord spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai, namely, all the things that we have summarized in the brief narration above where he is commanded to number all who go forth in the power of Israel from twenty years old and upwards. So, if someone goes forth in power, and not in just any kind of power, that is, in the power of the Egyptians or in that of the Assyrians or Greeks, but if he goes forth in the power of Israel. Then he is numbered by God. With God only the Israelite power is numbered. This is that power that is taught by God, which is learned through the divine Scriptures, which is handed down through the apostles and gospel faith. And this is why he says that they alone shall be numbered who go forth in the power of Israel.

Moreover let us consider why it is that the people were not numbered after they came out of Egypt, for they were still being pursued by Pharaoh. But they are not said to be numbered when they cross the Red Sea and come to the desert, for they had not yet been tested, they had not yet been attacked by the enemy. They clash with Amalek and conquer, but not even then are they numbered, for a single victory is not enough for one who is striving for perfection. They receive manna as food and they drain the cup of water from the rock that followed them, but not then are they numbered for they had not yet matured to the point of being considered suitable for numbering. The tabernacle of testimony is constructed, but not even with this has the time arrived for numbering the people. The law is given through Moses, the practice of sacrifices is handed down, the rites of purification are shown. The laws and mysteries of sanctification are established and then the people are summoned to be numbered by the command of God.

³ Ancient Christian Texts – Homilies on Numbers – by Origen – Intervarsity Press – Downers Grove, IL – pg 3f

Inscribe these thing, O hearer, on your heart. Consider what great things you must pass through, what great b\things you must endure, by means of how many tests and battles you must fight and win in order to be able to attain to the divine numbering, that you may somehow be taken into account by God, that you may be considered worthy to be numbered among the holy tribes of God. In the first place you must receive God's Law, the law of the Holy Spirit, sacrifices must be offered, purifications must be fulfilled, all that the law of the Spirit teaches must be done so that you can at some time attain to the Israelite numbering

A Commentary on the Book of Numbers by Origen ⁴

For us, the expectation of a resurrection from the dead is a certainty, since at the advent of Christ some will go to paradise, or some are to be transferred to some other locations out of the many stages that are with the Father. Now the distinction in destination and glory will doubtless be bestowed based on the merits and deeds of each one. Each will be in that ranking that the merits of his deeds have merited for him, as Paul attests when he says of those who rise: “But each in his own ranking.”

We had to point these things out in a general way, because we wanted to summarize briefly the mystical content of this entire sacred volume, so that each reader may receive an opportunity for a spiritual interpretation of these things and pursue a similar investigation in the remaining details, or even a superior and more lofty investigation, should God reveal more to him. For I judge myself to be totally unequal to the task of explaining the mysteries this Book of Numbers contains.

For that reason we need to hasten to reach Jesus, not the son of Nun, but Jesus Christ, but only by taking advantage of Moses as our pedagogue. Let us strive for the perfection of Christ. For Moses did not suppress many wars; but Jesus held all wars in check; in fact he gave peace to everyone. The Promised Land, the land that flowed with milk and honey, is divided up by Jesus, “For blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land” through Jesus. In this way the inheritance of the land is divided in order, where each may rest under his own fig tree and under his own vine, and there is no one more to cause terror. All these things that have been prefigured in splendid mysteries, the Lord Jesus himself will fulfill for each one on truth, on the day of his coming, in accordance with the fact that he knows everyone’s merits. He is the “knower of the heart” to whom be the glory and power in the ages of ages. Amen.

⁴ Ancient Christian Texts – Homilies on Numbers by Origen – Intervarsity Press – Downers Grove, IL - p

A Commentary on the Book of Numbers from a Homily of Origen ⁵

Now the initial part of this reading teaches us how the ordering of the camps is arranged by those who have been transferred over to God and do not entangle themselves in secular affairs. Noses said: “Let a man advance into the camp according to his rank and according to his signs and according to the houses of his family. Now does it not seem right to you that it is the same Spirit of God who speaks both in Moses and in Paul? Moses commands them to advance into the camps “in order”. Paul commands all things to be done in the church “in order”. Now does it not seem right to you that it is the same Spirit of God who speaks both in Moses and in Paul? This would seem to indicate that there is a certain order in the soul as well, concerning which it is said that “each one ought to advance according to his own order”.

This order is revealed principally by the fruit of works, but no less by the greatness of one’s thoughts. For sometimes one who is spiritual and so is free from an earthly manner of life that he can examine all things and is himself judged by no one. Moreover if any of us is anxiously concerned about food and drink and devotes all his concern to secular affairs, but who assigns to God one hour or two out of the whole day, and comes to the church for prayer or who listens to the word of God in passing, but who devotes his chief interest to anxious concern for the world and for his own belly – such a man does not fulfill the command that says that a man should advance according to his own order. For the order appointed by Christ is to seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and to believe that God adds those things to us in the second place. As a consequence, let a man advance according to his order. Therefore let each one know his order and understand what is worthy of that order he has received. And let him weigh his actions and speech very carefully. Otherwise he may hear God say to him, “Because of you my name is blasphemed among the Gentiles.”

⁵ Ancient Christian Texts – Homilies on Numbers by Origen – Intervarsity Press Downers Grove, IL – Pg6

From a Sermon by St. Peter Chrysologus ¹

When Thomas heard from his fellow disciples that they had seen the Lord, he answered: Unless I see the wounds made by the nails and put my hand into his side, I will not believe. Why did Thomas thus demand proof before believing? Why was he so devout toward the suffering Christ, but so resistant to the risen Christ? Why did a pious hand open again the wounds made by a wicked hand? Why did the hand of a follower strive to plunge anew into the side opened by the spear of a wicked soldier? Why did the pitiless curiosity of a servant renew the suffering caused by raging persecutors? Why did a disciple inflict these sufferings on the Lord, these pains on God, and test the heavenly physician by his wounds? When the Lord died, the devil's power collapsed, the prison of hell was thrown open, the fetters of the dead were broken, tombs were destroyed; when the Lord rose again death's nature was completely changed. The stone before the Lord's most holy sepulcher was rolled away, and the linen cloths were loosened; at his rising in glory death took to flight and life returned; his body arose never to die again. Why then, Thomas, were you the only one to make such a shrewd inquiry, demanding that the Lord's wounds be shown as the only way to convince you? Suppose those wounds had vanished with all the other marks of suffering – what danger to your faith would not your curiosity engendered?

My brothers and sisters, piety made this search and devotion these demands to ensure that impiety should not thereafter raise doubts about the Lord's resurrection. It was not only the doubts in his own heart that Thomas was healing, but everyone else's as well; and as he was to proclaim these things to the nations, this energetic advocate was diligently trying to discover how he could support the profession of so great a faith. Beyond question his spirit of prophecy was greater than his doubt. For why should he have made such a request unless he had learned from the Lord by prophetic inspiration that these wounds alone were to be retained as proof of the resurrection? Furthermore, the Lord of his own accord had shown the others what this man subsequently demanded. The text says: *Jesus came and stood in their midst and showed them his hands and his side.* For he who had entered through closed doors and was with good reason thought by the disciples to be a ghost could not prove himself to their doubting minds except by the wounds that told of his passion. Then he came and said to Thomas: *Put your finger here, and see my hands, and put out your hand and put it into my side, and be not faithless but believing.* Do this so that when you reopen these wounds which have already poured forth water and blood to cleanse and ransom all humankind, faith may pour out over the whole world. Thomas answered: *My Lord and my God!* - over -

See how scripture shows not only a human body but also, through the suffering this body endured, that Christ is, as Thomas acclaims him, God and Lord. Truly he is God who lives again after being dead, who rose after suffering a mortal wound; for although he endured so much suffering and received such great wounds, he lives and reigns as God for countless ages. Amen

¹A Word in Season – vol. IV – Augustinian Press – 1991 – pg 106

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The Social Teaching of the Catholic Church - from a Pastoral Letter of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops – 1990 ¹

In the Catholic social vision, the human person is central, the clearest reflection of God among us. Each person possesses a basic dignity that comes from God, not from any human quality or accomplishment, not from race or gender, age or economic status. The test of every institution or policy is whether it enhances or threatens human life and human dignity. We believe that people are more important than things.

Flowing from our God-given dignity, each person has basic rights and responsibilities. These include the rights to freedom of conscience and religious liberty, to raise a family, to immigrate, to live free from unfair discrimination, and to have a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family. People have a fundamental right to life and to those things which make life truly human: food, clothing, housing, health care, education, security, social services, and employment. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities – to one another, to our families, and to the larger society, to respect the rights of others and to work for the common good.

The human person is not only sacred but social. We realize our dignity and rights in relationship with others, in community. No community is more central than the family; it needs to be supported, not undermined. It is the basic cell of society, and the state has an obligation to support the family. The family has major contributions to make in addressing questions of social justice. It is where we learn and act on our values. What happens in the family is at the basis of a truly human social life. We also have the right and responsibility to participate in and contribute to the broader communities in society. The state and other institutions of political and economic life, with both their limitations and obligations, are instruments to protect the life, dignity, and rights of the person; promote the well-being of our families and communities; and pursue the common good. Catholic social teaching does offer clear guidance on the role of government. When basic human needs are not being met by private initiative, then people must work through their government, at appropriate levels, to meet those needs. A central test of political, legal and economic institutions is what they do *to* people, what they do *for* people, and how people *participate* in them.

Poor and vulnerable people have a special place in Catholic social teaching. A basic moral test of a society is how its most vulnerable members are faring. This is not a new insight; it is the lesson of the parable of the Last Judgment (see Matthew 25). Our tradition calls us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. As Christians, we are called to respond to the needs of all our sisters and brothers, but those with the greatest needs require the greatest response. We must seek creative ways to expand the emphasis of our nation's founders on individual rights and freedom by extending democratic ideals to economic life and thus ensure that the basic requirements for life with dignity are accessible to all.

¹ Pastoral Letters & Statements of the U.S. Catholic Bishops – vol. VI – National Conference of Catholic Bishops – United States Catholic Conference – Washington DC – pg 217f