

LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY  
Vigils Readings  
Fifteenth Week in Ordinary Time  
July 12-18, 2020

**SUNDAY, JULY 12, 2020**

**A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by St. Gregory the Great [<sup>1</sup>](#)**

Dearly beloved, the reading from the holy gospel about the sower requires no explanation, but only a word of warning. In fact the explanation has been given by Truth himself, and it cannot be disputed by a frail human being. However there is one point in our Lord's exposition which you ought to weigh well. It is this. If I told you that the seed represented the word, the field the world, the birds the demons, and the thorns riches, you would perhaps be in two minds as to whether to believe me. Therefore the Lord himself deigned to explain what he had said, so that you would know that a hidden meaning is to be sought also in those passages which he did not wish to interpret himself.

Would anyone have believed me if I had said that thorns stood for riches? After all, thorns are piercing and riches pleasurable. And yet riches are thorns because thoughts of them pierce the mind and torture it. When finally they lure a person into sin, it is as though they were drawing blood from the wound they have inflicted.

According to another evangelist, the Lord spoke in this parable not simply of riches but of deceptive riches, and with good reason. Riches are deceptive because they cannot stay with us for long; they are deceptive because they are incapable of relieving our spiritual poverty. The only true riches are those that make us rich in virtue. Therefore, if you want to be rich, beloved, love true riches. If you aspire to the heights of real honor, strive to reach the kingdom of heaven. If you value rank and renown, hasten to be enrolled in the heavenly court of the angels.

Store up in your minds the Lord's words which you receive through your ears, for the word of the Lord is the nourishment of the mind. When his word is heard but not stored away in the memory, it is like food which has been eaten and then rejected by an upset stomach. A person's life is despaired of if he cannot retain his food; so if you receive the food of holy

exhortations, but fail to store in your memory those words of life which nurture righteousness, you have good reason to fear the danger of everlasting death.

Be careful, then, that the word you have received through your ears remains in your heart. Be careful that the seed does not fall along the path, for fear that the evil spirit may come and take it from your memory. Be careful that the seed is not received in stony ground, so that it produces a harvest of good works without the roots of perseverance. Many people are pleased with what they hear and resolve to undertake some good work, but as soon as difficulties begin to arise and hinder them they leave the work unfinished. The stony ground lacked the necessary moisture for the sprouting seed to yield the fruit of perseverance.

Good earth, on the other hand. Brings forth fruit by patience. The reason for this is that nothing we do is good unless we also bear with equanimity the injuries done to us by our neighbors. In fact, the more we progress, the more hardships we shall have to endure in this world; for when our love for this present world dies, its sufferings increase. This is why we see many people doing good works and at the same time struggling under a heavy burden of afflictions. They now shun earthly desires, and yet they are tormented by greater sufferings. But, as the Lord said, they bring forth fruit by patience, because since they humbly endure misfortunes, they are welcomed when these are over into a place of rest in heaven.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY -1999 – pg 106

**MONDAY, JULY 13, 2020**

### **A Commentary on the Book of Numbers by Origen <sup>1</sup>**

Every ruler of a tribe and people has a rod, for it is impossible for anyone to rule a people unless he has a rod. This is why the apostle Paul, since he was a ruler of a people, said: “What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod or with love and a spirit of gentleness? So it is necessary that all rulers have their rods, but there is one alone, as the Scripture related, the high priest Aaron, whose rod sprouted. But since as we have shown,

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<sup>1</sup> Ancient Christian Texts – Homilies on Numbers – by Origen – University Press – Downers Grove, IL – 2009 – pg 42f

Christ is the high priest he alone is the one the rod of whose cross not only sprouted but blossomed and bore all this fruit in the form of the believing peoples.

But what is that fruit that it bore? Almonds, it says, which is in the first place a fruit that is bitter in its outer covering. It is protected and covered by its next layer, but with its third layer it feeds and nourishes the one who eats it. In the school, of Christ, then, the teaching of the law and the prophets is like this: at first glance the letter is very bitter; it prescribes the circumcision of the flesh, it commands sacrifices and the other things that are designated as the letter that kills. Throw all this away as you would the bitter rind of a nut. In the second place you will reach the protective covering of the shell in which moral teaching or the definition of self control is described. These are of course necessary to protect what is contained inside but doubtless they also are to be cracked and removed. For instance, we would say that abstinence from food and chastisement of the body is undoubtedly necessary as long as we are in this body, corruptible as it is and susceptible to passions. But when it is broken and dissolved and at the time of its resurrection, has been rendered from corruption into incorruption and from animal into spiritual, then it will no longer be dominated by the labor of affliction or the punishment of abstinence, but rather by its own proper nature and not be any physical corruption. So this is why there now seems to be a necessary rationale for abstinence, but afterwards it will not have to be sought. But in the third place you will find hidden and concealed in the law and the prophets the meaning of the mysteries of the wisdom and knowledge of God by which the souls of the saints are nourished and fed not only in the present life but also in the future. For this is that priestly fruit about which the promise is given to those who hunger and thirst for justice, that they shall be satisfied.

1. Ancient Christian Texts – Homilies on Numbers by Origen OUniversity Press – Downers Grove, IL -2009 – pg 42

**TUESDAY, JULY 14, 2020**

**St. Kateri Tekawitha - “The Lily of the Mohawks” - [1](#)**

St. Kateri was born in 1656 near present-day Auriesville, New York. Her mother, a captured Algonquin, was a Christian, while her father, a Mohawk

chief, viewed the new religion with deep suspicion. Both parents died from smallpox when Kateri was four. Her own scarred face showed the marks of the disease, which also darkened her vision, causing her to stumble in the light. As a result her people called her Tekakwitha - “the one who walks groping her way”. When a Jesuit missionary arrived in her village in 1674 she requested Baptism. She was given the name Kateri – a Mohawk version of Katherine.

Kateri's conversion caused distress in her community, so much so that her confessor feared for her safety and urged her to flee. Under the cover of darkness she set off from her village by foot and traveled two hundred miles to a Christian mission near Montreal, where on Christmas Day, 1677, she made her First Communion.

Though free to practice her faith, she was still forced to grope her way in a world that supplied no clear models. She resisted the idea of marriage. She proposed founding a convent, an idea that was quickly dismissed. Nevertheless, in 1679 she made a public vow of chastity. She said: “I am not my own; I have given myself to Jesus. He must be my only love.” Soon after she fell ill and died on April 17, 1680 at the age of twenty-three. She was beatified in 1980 and canonized in 2012.

[1](#)Give Us Today – July – 2015 – p. 150

**WEDNESDAY, JULY 15, 2020**

### **THE LIFE OF ST. BONAVENTURE, from Butler's Lives of the Saints<sup>2</sup>**

Of the youth of this greatest successor of St Francis of Assisi nothing is known beyond the facts that he was born at Bagnorea, near Viterbo, in the year 1221, the son of John Fidanza and Mary Ritella. He was clothed in the order of Friars Minor and studies at the University of Paris under an Englishman, Alexander of Hales, 'the Unanswerable Doctor'; Bonaventure, who was to become known as the Seraphic Doctor, himself taught theology and Holy Scripture there from 1248 to 1257.

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<sup>2</sup>BUTLER'S LIVES OF THE SAINTS, Concise Edition edited by M. Walsh (Harper San Francisco, 1991) pp. 216-217.

Bonaventure was called by his priestly obligation to labor for the salvation of his neighbor, and to this he devoted himself with enthusiasm. He preached to the people with an energy which kindled a flame in the hearts of those that heard him. While at the University of Paris he produced one of the best-known of his written works, the Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard, which covers the whole field of scholastic theology. The years of his public lecturing at Paris were greatly disturbed, however, by the attack made on the mendicant friars by the other professors at the university. Jealousy of their pastoral and academic success and the standing reproof to worldliness and ease of the friars' lives were in part behind this attempt to get them excluded from the schools. The leader of the secular party was William of Saint-Amour, who made a bitter onslaught on the mendicants in a book called The Perils of the Last Times, and other writings. Bonaventure, who had to suspend lecturing for a time, replied in a treatise on evangelical poverty, named Concerning the Poverty of Christ. The pope, Alexander IV, appointed a commission of cardinals to go into the matter at Anagni, and on their findings ordered Saint-Amour's book to be burnt, vindicated and reinstated the friars, and ordered the offenders to withdraw their attack. A year later, in 1257, St Bonaventure and St Thomas Aquinas received the degree of doctor of theology together.

In 1257 Bonaventure was chosen minister general of the Friars Minor. He was not yet thirty-six years old, and the order was torn by dissensions, some of the friars being for an inflexible severity, others demanding certain mitigation of the rule; between the two extremes were a number of other interpretations. Some of the extreme rigorists, called Spirituals, had even fallen into error and disobedience, and thus given a handle to the friars' opponents in the Paris dispute. The new minister general wrote a letter to his provincials in which he made it clear that he required a disciplined observance of the rule, involving a reformation of the relaxed, but giving no countenance to the excesses of the Spirituals. At Narbonne in 1260, the first of the five general chapters which he held, he produced a set of constitutions on the rule, which were adopted and had a permanent effect on Franciscan life, but they failed to pacify the excessive rigorists. At the request of the friars assembled in this chapter, he undertook to write the life of St Francis, which he compiled with a spirit which shows him to have been filled with the virtues of the founder whose

life he wrote. He governed his order for seventeen years and has been justly called its second founder.

**THURSDAY, JULY 16, 2020**

**A reading about the silence and prayer of Mary, from a book by Adrienne von Speyr.<sup>3</sup>**

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A life of faith is a life of silence. Mary's existence as Mother is hidden in a great silence. All around and about her is silence. People knew nothing of her real life, of the mysteries of her virginity. Not even Joseph understood her. An angel had to enlighten him about her mystery. The silence that surrounds her is simply a reflection of her own silence. She did not become a subject of conversation, because she did not talk about herself. And in that way she safeguarded her secret. Later, too, when the Son appeared in public, she remained silent because it was not her task or mission to speak. But in her silence she participates in the dialogue between Father and Son which is the very substance of prayer. She remained silent out of respect, and in order not to drown the word of God with her own words.

Her silence also manifests her activity and her passivity, her strength and her weakness. Her activity and strength consist in her self-control, her weakness and passivity in allowing herself to be led. She is simply and solely the instrument of God. Strength and weakness, doing and suffering, all the tensions and stresses of life meet and join in her without occasioning the predominance of any one in particular. The priority is always decreed by the need of her mission. She did not cultivate, tend or encourage her good qualities for their goodness' sake (in the way that people do when they are conscious of their own gentleness and are disposed to go further in the same direction). She did not practice her virtues with a definite end in view; on the contrary, she quite simply allowed God to decide everything, to decree everything in accordance with her mission--and this is where her silence is so profound--without losing or giving up any of her complementary qualities. In her, silence is both complete self-renunciation and complete indifference.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Handmaid of the Lord*, New York, 1955, pp. 19-21.

All this co-exists in her with a perseverance that knows no limits, because her mission flows on accompanied by a parallel discretion that disturbs nothing. All her qualities participate to some extent in the glory of her conversation with the Angel: each decision is taken in the solitude and isolation imposed by the relation of her soul to God. Discretion, in this instance, is but another name for humility that asks no questions and never raises the dust. She asked the Angel of God one simple factual question, and with that she became the answer to all that God expected. Her life is therefore community in the Lord, solitude in God, and this communal solitude is called prayer.

**FRIDAY, JULY 17, 2020**

### **A Commentary on the Book of Numbers – from Old Testament Message <sup>4</sup>**

The final section of the Book of Numbers consists of an almost unwieldy collection of disparate materials. The literary character of this section of Numbers is as varied as its content. There are songs and blessings, laws and itineraries, stories and genealogies. The origin of the material range from being very ancient to very late. Relatively short literary pieces of varied sources and purpose are only loosely drawn together, primarily by virtue of a connection with Israel's preparation for coming into the land of Canaan. Although some wilderness traditions are included, the attention of these chapters is clearly turned toward the last of the great themes of the Pentateuch, the inheritance of the Land of Promise. By the end of the Book of Numbers, Israel has come into the region east of the Jordan River. This is the land where some of the tribes ultimately settle and the region from which all Israel will undertake its definitive passage into Canaan.

We conclude our commentary on the text of the Book of Numbers with an exposition of chapters 22-24, the collection of power-filled words of blessing pronounced over Israel by the professional diviner Balaam. These chapters in the Book of Numbers comprise a relatively long unit. The starting point for the unit is probably to be found in the four poetic oracles which both describe and set in motion Israel's destiny of well-being

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<sup>4</sup> Old Testament Message – vol. 3 – Michael Glazier, Inc – Wilmington, DE =1983 = pg

interpreted theologically as a result of divine blessing. Some scholars regard the oracles attributed to Balaam as some of the Bible's most ancient poetry. The biblical writers constructed a profound and humorous story to serve as a narrative context within which the four oracles were set. Accordingly the sequence of events surrounding the blessings pronounced over Israel is said to have begun with the desire of the Moabite king Balak, to have Israel cursed. For this purpose Balak sought the service of a professional speaker of power-filled words, Balaam. At the same time there is little doubt in the mind of the reader that Balaam serves Yahweh who is directing Israel's destiny toward blessing. Balaam thus stands between the authority and designs of God and of Balak. The story presupposes a common ancient Near Eastern view of the effective power of words of blessing and cursing, i.e. the belief that the word once spoken cannot but come to be. It creates what it speaks. What Balaam speaks, whether blessing or curse, will become reality for Israel.

**SATURDAY, JULY 18, 2020**

### **A Commentary on the Book of Numbers by Origen <sup>5</sup>**

We have in hand now the third prophecy from those things which the word of God brought forth through Balaam. let us discuss some things concerning it as well as the Lord grants.

Now indeed this wretched Balak was thinking that the divine Balaam lacked the circumstances of location, rather than the will, to speak curses. So he reckoned that it would be advantageous to change location/ He said: "Come, and I will lead you to another location, if it pleases God, and you will curse them from there. And Balak took Balaam to the top of Mount Fogor, which extends to the desert.

Now God puts those whom he calls on the top of Mount Sinai; but this Balak. Who is opposed to God, puts Balaam on the top of Mount Fogor. "Fogor" translates as "delight" thus Balak puts people on the top of delight and libidinous desire. For he is a lover of pleasure more than of God and on that account he puts them on the summit and top of pleasure, in order to exclude them from God. For Balak translates as "excluding" and

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<sup>5</sup> Ancient Christian Texts – Homilies on Numbers – by Origen – University Press – Downers Grove, IL 2009 – og 101



“devouring”. After all, this is why Foger extends even to the desert, that is, to affairs that are void of and deserted by God.

And Balaam said to Balak Construct for me here seven altars and prepare for me seven calves and seven rams. And Balak did as Balaam told him, and he offered a calf and a ram on every altar. The Apostle’s judgment is clear when he says: “For the things the pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God.” Moreover the prophet speaks similarly: “They have sacrificed to demons and not to God.” Yet since even the law of God gives commands concerning sacrifices and hands down to the sons of Israel sacrificial rites, perhaps we should ask why these things are commanded to be offered even to God, which apparently have been consecrated to demons. Well, there will indeed be a simple and quick response. We have shown elsewhere that a certificate of divorce was to be given, not by the will of God, who was unwilling that what He had joined together should be separated, but Moses wrote these things on his own “in view of the hardness of heart” of the Jews. Likewise in this connection, it seems possible that God, as he says through another prophet “does not eat the flesh of bulls nor drink the blood of goats” and again it is written elsewhere “I did not command you about sacrifices and victims on the day when I led you from the land of Egypt – but Moses commanded these things to them in view of the hardness of their hearts, as a bad custom to which they had been introduced in Egypt. He did this so that those who were unable to keep themselves from sacrificing at least might sacrifice to God and not to demons.

So then the poison of the sacrifices of demons is driven out by sacrifices offered to God, just as also the death of Jesus does not allow the death of sin to exercise dominion over believers. For when the perfect sacrifice came, even the spotless lamb who took away the sin of the whole world, those sacrifices that were already being offered one by one to God already seemed superfluous, since the whole cult of demons had been driven out by this one sacrifice.

**END OF READINGS**