

LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY
Vigils Readings
Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time
July 19-25, 2020

SUNDAY, JULY 19, 2020

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by Gregory Palamas ¹

The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but when all were asleep his enemy came and sowed darnel among the wheat.

Now as the Lord himself explains, the darnel is the offering of the evil one. They bear his mark because they behave the way he does; they are seeds of his sowing, and his children by adoption. Harvest time will be the end of the world, for although it began long since and continues now through death, only then will all things come to an end.

The reapers are the angels, for they are, and will be especially at that time, the servants of the King of heaven. As Scripture says: *Just as the darnel is collected and burnt in the fire, so it will be at the end of the world. The Son of Man, who is the son of the Father Most High, will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all evil doers and every cause of sin.*

And so the Lord's servants, the angels of God, seeing the darnel in the field, that is, the wicked and impious folk living among the good people, and that even within the Church, said to the Lord: *Do you wish us to go and gather it up?* In other words: "Shall we kill them, to remove them from the earth?" But the Lord's reply was: *No, for fear that in collecting the darnel you may also uproot the wheat.*

How then would the wheat, the good people, be uprooted as well if the angels gathered up the darnel, cutting off the wicked by death to separate them from the just? The fact is that many godless sinners who live among people who are upright and devout repent in time and are converted, and learning new habits of piety and virtue they cease to be darnel and become wheat. And so some wheat would be uprooted in the gathering of the darnel if the angels snatched the wicked away before they repented. Moreover, many while living evil lives produce children of good disposition, or they may have other rightly disposed

¹ Journey with the Fathers – Year A 0 New City Press – 1984 – pg 108

descendants. This is why he who sees everything before it comes into being would not permit the darnel to be uprooted until the appointed time. But he says: *At harvest time I will say to the reapers: "First collect the darnel and bind it into bundles to be burnt, but gather the wheat into my barn."*

Those therefore who wish to be saved from eternal punishment and to inherit the everlasting kingdom of God must be not darnel but wheat. They must avoid saying or doing anything evil or useless, and practice the opposite virtues, thus bringing forth the fruits of repentance. In this way they will become worthy of the heavenly granary; they will be called children of the Father Most High, and as heirs will enter his kingdom rejoicing, resplendent with divine glory. To this may we all attain through the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ. To whom with his eternal Father and the most holy, good and life giving Spirit belongs glory now and always and for endless ages. Amen.

MONDAY, JULY 20, 2020

Silence, poverty, and death: a reading from a book by Thomas Merton.

If, at the moment of our death, death comes to us as an unwelcome stranger, it will be because Christ also has always been to us an unwelcome stranger. For when death comes, Christ comes also, bringing us the everlasting life which he has bought for us by his own death. Those who love true life, therefore, frequently think about their death. Their life is full of a silence that is an anticipated victory over death. Silence, indeed, makes death our servant and even our friend. Thoughts and prayers that grow up out of the silent thought of death are like trees growing where there is water. They are strong thoughts, that overcome the fear of misfortune because they have overcome passion and desire. They turn the face of our soul, in constant desire, toward the face of Christ.

A whole lifetime of silence is ordered to a final utterance; by this I do not mean that we must all contrive to die with pious speeches on our lips. It is not necessary that our last words should have some special or dramatic significance worthy of being written down. Every good death, every death that hands us over from the uncertainties of this world to the unfailing peace and silence of the love of Christ, is itself an utterance and a conclusion. It says, either in words or without them, that it is good for life to come to its appointed end, for the body to return to dust

and for the spirit to ascend to the Father, through the mercy of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

A silent death may speak with more eloquent peace than a death punctuated by vivid expressions. A lonely death, a tragic death, may yet have more to say of the peace and mercy of Christ than many another comfortable death.

For the eloquence of death is the eloquence of human poverty coming face to face with the riches of divine mercy. The more we are aware that our poverty is supremely great, the greater will be the meaning of our death: and the greater its poverty. For the saints are those who wanted to be poorest in life, and who, above all else, exulted in the supreme poverty of death.

TUESDAY, JULY 21, 2020

A Reading about the Religion of the Old Testament, from an article by Dennis McCarthy SJ.²

We must consider Old Testament religion as it is laid before us in the bible as an evolving thing, but not in terms of the simplistic evolutionary ideas of the past. Many and complex factors went into its development. This puts us face to face with a concept which is difficult, even repugnant, for us, but all-important in Israel's growing knowledge of God: the holy war. This was, incidentally, a cultic exercise; one is never far from worship and its values in the Old Testament. In the holy war, proper, Yahweh crushed Israel's opponents himself and so proved himself superior to the 'godlets' of the nations. There was much to be learned from things like this. The Lord was God indeed and no other could compare with him. Then, one must trust in this God alone, not in one's own power or wisdom or anything else. We may begin to glimpse here the Totally Other whose ways are not our ways, and what this means for us. God is absolute and deals with us as he will. If this can appear as indifference to human life on one side, on the other it drives home the lesson that salvation depends on this God alone. It is given, not earned. Here is a step towards a doctrine of grace.

²The Way, July 1969, pp 172-182.

Well and good; but the holy war concept raises problems. There is war itself, accepted without question even when it was pure invasion. Worse, the holy war involved the ban, meaning that man, woman, and child, the very animals of the enemy, must all be slaughtered. To be sure, the creator is lord of all life, but this is still a terrible demand, and, if within the rights of the supreme lord, not something that can be safely put into the hands of mere mortals, who can usually be trusted to go astray, be they a chosen people.

This seems harsh and alien. What does a holy war which condemned innocents to death, overwhelming punishments of whole populations some of whom were certainly guiltless, all reflecting somehow a concept of a God so holy that holiness hardly allowed for degrees of guilt, or even concerned itself with guilt as such: What do all these have to do with us: What can they teach us: the ideas drawn from them have, in fact, been much abused among Christians-- witness the wars of religion of the 16th and 17th centuries. But they still preserve a constant, an element which is important and which may need special emphasis today. They reflect an experience of the holy. They speak to us of an absolute to be approached only in fear and trembling, yet One who is to be approached; for, if he is awesome, he is also the ultimate good and the source and guarantee of all goodness. The Old Testament struggles to express both elements of the mystery, that which inspires fear, and that which inspires devoted love. It cannot succeed perfectly, but its emphasis on a God who is beyond us, whose actions and whose demands will not and cannot submit to human judgment, are not to be dismissed. There is a mystery at the heart of things beyond our ordinary understanding, let alone our desires and ambitions, or personalities. The Old Testament means exactly what it says: God is no respecter of created persons. The Old Testament teaches that living up to his demands can be terribly difficult, almost as difficult as rewarding. And it surely implies that the human race alone, or even with its instruments of cult and law and punishments, cannot so live.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 22, 2020

A reading about the vigilant watch of Mary Magdalen at the tomb of Jesus, from a sermon by Blessed Gueric of Igny. 1

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A Sermon 35: the Third Sermon for Easter@, *Liturgical Sermons*, vol. 2 (CF 32), Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1971, pp. 93f.

Brethren, this is the day which the Lord has made, let us exult and rejoice in it. Let us exult in the hope it brings, that we may see and rejoice in its light. Abraham exulted that he might see the day of Christ and by this token he saw and rejoiced.

You too, if you keep watch daily at the doors of wisdom, steadfast at its threshold, if you stay awake through the night with Magdalen at the entrance of his tomb, if I am not mistaken you will experience with Mary how true are the words we read of the Wisdom which is Christ: *She is easily seen by those who love her and she is found by those who seek her. She anticipates those who desire her and shows herself to them first. He who, as soon as it is light, keeps watch for her will not have to toil, for he will find her seated at his doors.* (Wis 6.13ff.) So did Christ, Wisdom himself, promise in the words: *I love those who love me, and they who from early morning keep watch for me will find me.* (Prov 8.17) Mary found Jesus in the flesh. For this she was keeping watch. Over his tomb she had come to mount guard while it was still dark. You, who no longer ought to know Jesus according to the flesh but according to the spirit, will be able to find him spiritually if you seek him with a [similar] desire, if he finds you likewise vigilant in prayer. Say then to the Lord Jesus with the desire and the affection of Mary: *My soul has longed for you during the night, my spirit too, deep within me; from early morning I will keep watch for you* (Isa 26.9). Say with the voice and the mind of the Psalmist: *God, my God, for you as soon as it is light I keep watch, my soul is athirst for you* (Ps 62.2). And see if it is not your lot to sing with him: *We have been filled early in the morning with your mercy, we have exulted and been delighted* (Ps 89.14).

Keep watch then, brethren, intent in prayer; keep watch and carefully guard your actions; especially since the morning of that day which has no sunset has already shone upon us. For already eternal light has come back to us from the nether regions, more serene and more pleasing, and the morning has given its welcome to the newly restored Sun. Indeed it is time now for us to arise from sleep; the night has passed away, while the day has drawn near. Keep watch, I say, that the morning light may rise for you, that is Christ, whose coming forth has been made ready like the dawn, ready to renew often the mystery of the morning of his resurrection in those who keep watch for him. Then you will sing with jubilant heart: *God the Lord has shone upon us. This is the day which the Lord has made; let us exult and rejoice in it* (Ps 117.27, 24). For then he will give you a glimpse of

the light which he has hidden in his hands, telling his friend that it is his possession and he can attain to it.

THURSDAY, JULY 23, 2020

JOSHUA AS A PROPHET AND FIGURE OF JESUS, from a Book by Damasus Winzen

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The Book of Joshua is not only an end, the fulfillment of God's promise to give his people a home, but also a beginning: it is the first of the books of the Old Testament that describe the political development of the Israelitic nation, and show how the people lived up to their part of the covenant with God by keeping the law. Joshua is a "beginning" in the sense this word always has in sacred history, whose author is the "I am who I am." It is comprehensive and universal, containing the entire future development and foreshadowing the end. We do not find in Joshua a mechanical registering of events exactly as they took place during the first period of infiltration of the Israelitic tribes into Canaan. It selects and sees the events which it relates in the light of the purpose, the "end" of the history of the chosen people. This history is essentially "prophetic."

It is different from the history of the gentile nations, because it has as its objective the establishment of God's kingdom among peoples. The history of the gentile nations is one continuous effort to obtain prosperity and glory for themselves. Consequently they are not being guided by the light of divine wisdom. Their history is, in their own eyes, a matter of chance and luck and fate. They trust in soothsayers and diviners to guide them, blindly led by the blind. Divine wisdom, on the contrary, chooses the prophets to make God's will known to his people. "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren--him you should heed." (Deut 18:15) Our Lord's contemporaries see this famous prophecy of Moses' fulfilled in Christ, calling him "the Prophet" (Jn 6:14). Jewish scholars refer it to the prophets who in every period of Jewish history are the successors of Moses, beginning with Joshua, and continuing with Samuel, David, Elijah, etc...

³PATHWAYS IN SCRIPTURE by Damasus Winzen OSB (Word of Life, Ann Arbor MI 1976) pp.88-89.

Joshua is, therefore, the first of the prophets, and as such he immediately points to the last: Jesus. They have, in fact, the same name, because Jesus is the Hebrew form of Joshua. It is the first name in the Old Testament formed with the name of God--Yahweh--and it means "God will liberate" or "God will give room." The name is, therefore, in itself a prophecy. It indicates that the conquest of the promised land under Joshua is more than a political event, that it foreshadows a spiritual liberation, the true nature of which is revealed when the same name is given to our Lord. The angel announced to Joseph: "She [Mary] shall bring forth a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sin" (Mt 1:21). Jesus fulfills what Joshua has prefigured. In the beginning of his public life as saviour he goes to the banks of the Jordan, and at the spot where the ark of the covenant stood when Joshua together with his people passed through the river, he receives from St John the baptism of penance. Instead of standing on dry ground, as Joshua had done, he is immersed in the water to typify his death. Jesus opens the passage into the land of liberty from sin by dying for the sins of the people. He is the Lamb which takes away the sins of the world. Joshua's courage is fulfilled in Christ's charity.

FRIDAY, JULY 24, 2020

St. Sharbel Makhoul – From Butler’s Lives of the Saints ⁴

Joseph Makhoul was born in the remote village of Beqaa-Kafra, in the highest part of Lebanon, near the great cedars in 1828. His family was poor, and his father died in his early childhood, so he and his younger brothers were brought up by his mother and an uncle. It was a devout, almost monastic atmosphere. Joseph became a shepherd but was taught to read and write, served Mass and sang in the choir of the village church. As a boy, while tending his sheep, he found a cave where he could spend hours in prayer and meditation. He often visited the hermitage of Kozhaya, where two of his other uncles were monks, and learned about their way of life. In 1851, when he was twenty-three, he made a long and difficult journey over the mountains to the monastery of Our Lady of Maifouk and entered the novitiate there, taking the name Sharbel from a Syrian martyr of the second century. He was sent to the great monastery of St. Maro at Annaya, where he took solemn vows in 1853, then to the neighboring monastery of St. Cyprian of Knfan, where he studied theology and philosophy. He was ordained priest in 1859 and returned to Annaya, where he lived for fifteen years in all. The regime was a very austere one, combining long hours of prayer, silence, fasting and mortification with hard physical work, but Sharbel was content, delighting in singing the Office, working in the fields, and meditating on the mystery of the Mass.

While many Maronite monks engaged in pastoral and parochial work, the Order also made provision for those called to solitude; and in 1866 Sharbel, who had been drawn to what he had read of the lives of the early Desert Fathers, resolved to follow their way of life. He moved to a small hermitage called St. Peter and St. Paul’s, which was owned by the monastery and consisted of four tiny stone cells and a chapel. Food was brought to him once a day from the monastery. Here he lived for over twenty-three years, devoting himself entirely to preparing for, celebrating, and giving thanks for his daily Mass. He would rise while it was still dark and spend hours in preparation, praying in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke.

⁴ Butler’s Lives of the Saints – Full New Edition – The Liturgical Press – Collegeville, MN - 2000 – December – pg 190

He would celebrate the Mass at about eleven o'clock in the morning with great reverence and recollection, and then spend most of the afternoon and evening kneeling before the holy tabernacle in adoration and contemplation.

He slept on a mattress stuffed with leaves on the floor, with a block of wood wrapped in an old habit for a pillow. He had no means of heating, even in the bitter winter. In this life of prayer and penance he experienced the temptations of the hermits of the early Christian period, and many people came to him for spiritual advice and healing.

In 1898 he celebrated a stroke while celebrating Mass in the Maronite rite, just before the prayer of consecration. Fr. Makarios, who was serving for him, took the chalice from his hand and set it down, then led him back to his cell. The prayer Sharbel was unable to finish runs: "Father of truth, behold your son who makes atoning sacrifice to you. Accept the offering: he died for me that I might have life. Behold the offering! Accept it..." He repeated this prayer before he died eight days later, on the night of Christmas eve.

He was buried in the nearby cemetery, and many pilgrims have visited his shrine: in 1950, they were said to average fifteen thousand a day. There have been many reports of miracles and conversions. He was beatified at the Second Vatican Council on December 5, 1965, and was canonized by Pope Paul VI in 1977.

SATURDAY, JULY 25, 2020

From a Homily on Matthew by St. John Chrysostom ⁵

The sons of Zebedee press Christ: "Promise that one may sit at your right side and the other at your left". What does he do? He wants to show them that it is not a spiritual gift for which they are asking, and that if they knew what their request involved, they would never dare make it. So he says: "You do not know what you are asking", that is, what a great and splendid thing it is and how much beyond the reach even of heavenly

⁵ The Liturgy of the Hours – vol. III – Catholic Publishing Co. – New York – 1975 – pg 1551

powers. Then he continues: "Can you drink the cup which I must drink and be baptized with the baptism which I must undergo?" He is saying: "You talk of sharing honors and rewards with me, but I must talk of struggle and toil. Now is not the time for rewards or the time for my glory to be revealed. Earthly life is the time for bloodshed, war and danger."

Consider how by his manner of questioning he exhorts and draws them. He does not say: "Can you face being slaughtered? Can you shed your blood?" How does he put his question? "Can you drink the cup?" Then he makes it attractive by adding: "which I must drink", so that the prospect of sharing it with him may make them more eager. He also calls his suffering a baptism, to show that it will effect a great cleansing of the entire world. The disciples answer him: "We can!" Fervor makes them answer promptly, though they do not know what they are saying but still think they will receive what they ask for.

How does Christ reply? "You will indeed drink my cup and be baptized with my baptism". He is really prophesying a great blessing for them, since he is telling them : "You will be found worthy of martyrdom; you will suffer what I suffer and end your life with a violent death, thus sharing all with me. 'But seats at my right and left side are not mine to give; they belong to those for whom the Father has prepared them.' " Thus after lifting their minds to higher goals and preparing them to meet and overcome all that will make them desolate, he sets them straight on their request.

"Then the other ten became angry at the two brothers". See how imperfect they all are: the two who tried to get ahead of the other ten, and the ten who were jealous of the two! But, as I said before, show them to me at a later date in their lives, and you will see that all these impulses and feelings have disappeared. Read how John, the very man who here asks for the first place, will always yield to Peter when it comes to preaching and performing miracles in the Acts of the Apostles. James, for his part, was not to live very much longer; for from the beginning he was inspired by great fervor and, setting aside all purely human goals, rose to such splendid heights that he straightway suffered martyrdom.

END OF READINGS