

SUN 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time 07.05.20

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by St. John Chrysostom <sup>1</sup>

Our Master is always the same, gentle and benevolent. In his constant concern for our salvation, he says explicitly in the gospel: *Come, learn of me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.*

What great condescension on the part of the Creator! And yet the creature feels no shame! *Come, learn from me.* The Master came to console his fallen servants. This is how Christ treats us. He shows pity when a sinner deserves punishment. When the race that angers him deserves to be annihilated, he addresses the guilty ones in the kindly words: *Come, learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.*

God is humble, and we are proud! The judge is gentle; the criminal arrogant! The potter speaks in lowered voice; the clay discourses in tones of a king! *Come, learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.* Our master carries a whip not to wound, but to heal us. Reflect upon his indescribable kindness. Who could fail to love a master who never strikes his servants? Who would not marvel at a judge who beseeches a condemned criminal? Surely the self-abasement of these words must astound you.

I am the Creator and I love my work. I am the sculptor and I care for what I have made. If I thought of my dignity, I should not rescue fallen humankind. If I failed to treat its incurable sickness with fitting remedies, it would never recover its strength. If I did not console it, it would die. If I did nothing but threaten it, it would perish. This is why I apply the salve of kindness to it where it lies. Compassionately I bend down very low in order to raise it up. No one standing erect can lift a fallen man without putting a hand down to him.

*Come learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.* I do not make a show of words; I have left you the proof of my deeds. You can see that I am gentle and humble of heart from what I have become. Consider my nature, reflect upon my dignity, and marvel at the condescension I have shown you. Think of where I came from, and of where I am as I speak to you. Heaven is my throne, yet I talk to you standing on the earth! I am glorified on high, but because I am long-suffering I am not angry with you, *for I am gentle and humble in heart.*

<sup>1</sup>Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY – 1999 – pg 104

MON

07,06.20

### Commentary on the Book of Numbers From a Homily of Origen

As the Apostle says: "All these things happened to them in a figure, But they were written as a warning to us. My question is: What warning do we receive from what has been read to us: that " Aaron and Miriam spoke disparagingly of Moses," and on that account were chastised? Miriam even becomes "leprous". Now the concern about this chastisement was so great that while Miriam was spending a week's time with leprosy, the people of God were not making their journey to the Promised Land, nor was the tabernacle of testimony moved.

In the meantime I am warned, first of all, from this action, and I am warned in a useful and necessary way, not to "speak disparagingly of a brother." I should not speak evil of my neighbor; I should not open my mouth to speak disparagingly of a brother. I should not speak evil of my neighbor; I should not open my mouth to speak disparagingly, not only of holy people, but of any of my neighbors, when I see the extent of God's indignation that arose from this, the extent of the vengeance that proceeded from this. After all, even in the Psalms we see that God was roused into action against this sin by a similar indignation where he says: "you sit and speak disparagingly of your brother, and you put a stumbling block against your mother's son. Likewise in another Psalm under the persona of a just man who knows how particularly displeasing this is to God, it is said: "I pursued the one who secretly disparaged his neighbor." So then, based on all these words of the divine Scripture, which are as it were "sharp double-edged swords," let us cut off the vice of denigrating holy people and of disparaging brothers. For leprosy comes on those who denigrate and speak evil.

But after this let us pass from moral subject matter to the mystical understanding. Although a few things have already been said in the previous discussion, nevertheless let us add what seems to have been lacking. Let us see, then, who it is that speaks disparagingly of Moses. Who speaks evil of him.

Not merely the Jew, but also the heretics, who do not receive the law and the prophets, they, too, speak disparagingly of Moses. After all, they are accustomed to fasten even a criminal charge against him when they say that Moses was a murderer, for he killed an Egyptian. And with their blasphemous speech they concoct many other things either against him or the prophets. Therefore, since they speak disparagingly against Moses, they have leprosy in their soul and they are leprous in the inner man, and therefore are considered to be "outside the camp" of the church of God. So whether it is the heretics who speak disparagingly of Moses or those of the church who speak disparagingly of their brothers and who speak evil of their neighbors, there is no doubt that everyone who practices this vice is leprous in his soul.

TUE

07.07.20

A Commentary on the Book of Numbers from a Homily of Origen <sup>1</sup>

Twelve spies were sent from the sons of Israel to survey the land which had been promised to them. When they return after forty days, they report back diverse things. For ten of them cast the people into despair, to the point where they wanted to reject Moses and select another leader and return to Egypt. But two others report good things and encourage the people to persevere in faith. They say: "If the Lord loves us, let him bring us into this land. But the people are plunged headfirst into desperation of infidelity. But the Lord's majesty covers them in clouds and threatens to strike the people with death.

Such a great threat comes from the Lord not to expose the divine nature as capable of suffering and subject to the vice of anger, but in order through this to make known to Moses the love he had for the people, and to make known the goodness of God, which surpasses all thought. For it is written that God becomes angry and threatens the destruction of the people in order that man may be taught that he has so much opportunity with God, and there is so much ground for confidence that even if there is some anger in God it may be mitigated by human prayers, and that man is able to procure so much from him that he may even change God's own decrees. For the goodness that follows wrath shows both the confidence of Moses before God and that the divine nature is estranged from the vice of anger.

At the same time the words here contain a mystery which will be fulfilled in the future ages whereby God promises to raise up another people after this one, but not through Moses but through Jesus Christ and it was to be called not a mosaic but a Christian people. On that account Moses pleads many times for that people. For the moment we say that our fathers were the first people but we are their sons who have arisen in their place. So let us listen to the warning of Paul who says: "But see the severity and goodness of God. For those who have fallen, severity, but for you the goodness of God, but only if you persevere in goodness ; otherwise you too will be cut off. And they, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in.

But as we have said, these things are in the hand of God. Our task is to hasten to correction quickly, to be converted to repentance without pretense, to bewail our past, to be on guard for the future, to invoke God's help; for immediately when you convert and groan, you will be saved. For you will find an advocate who intercedes for you to the Father, the Lord Jesus, who is much greater than Moses who nevertheless prayed for the people and procured pardon.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ancient Christian Texts – Homilies on Numbers by Origen – University Press – Downers Grove, IL – 2009 – pg. 33

WED

07.08.20

From the Treatise “On Consideration” written by St Bernard of Clairvaux for Pope Eugenius III <sup>2</sup>

It has occurred to me to write something which might edify, delight or console you, Blessed Father Eugene. But I do not know the rules for writing a formal yet intimate treatise. Two opposites, your majesty and my love, vie to dictate my style. Love draws me on; majesty holds me back. But you graciously intervene and request rather than command this treatise, although it would be more fitting for you to command it. Since your majesty so admirably condescends, why does my hesitancy persist? What if you have ascended the throne? Even if you were to walk on the wings of the wind, you would not escape my affection. Love knows no master. It recognizes a son even though he wear the tiara. It is the nature of a lover to be suitably humble, willingly submissive, freely compliant, respectful without duress. This is not the way with others however; they are driven either by fear or by greed. Such men bless openly, but harbor evil in their hearts. They flatter you when you are present, yet fail you in time of need. But charity never fails. It is true that I have been freed of maternal obligation toward you, but I am not stripped of affection for you. You were once in my womb; you will not be drawn from my heart so easily. Ascend to the heavens, descend to the depths, you will not escape me. I will follow you wherever you go. I loved you when you were poor in spirit; I shall love you still as father of the poor and the rich. If I know you, you did not cease being poor in spirit when you became the father of the poor. I am confident that this change has been thrust on you and was not of your doing, that this promotion has not replaced your former state, but rather has enhanced it. Therefore I will instruct you not as a teacher, but as a mother, indeed as a lover. I may seem more the fool, but only to one who does not love, to one who does not feel the force of love.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Five Books On Consideration – St Bernard of Clairvaux – CF Series #37 – Cistercain Publications – Kalamazoo, MI – 1976 – pg 23

THUR 07.09.20

**A READING FROM SERMON 1 ON THE MARTYRS**, by St. John Chrysostom.<sup>3</sup>

As is well known to all, the glory of the martyrs is celebrated by the people of God (such being the divine will) to this end, that to them due honor may be paid, and to us may be shown, by the favour of Christ, examples of courage; while then we behold these celebrations, let us understand how great is their glory in heaven, whose festivals are thus honoured on earth; may we ourselves be stirred up to show forth the like example, an equal courage, the same devotion and faith: that so, Christ helping us, we may fight and conquer the foe, and thus having shared the victory of these saints, we may triumph together with them in the kingdom of heaven.

What person, desiring to partake of their reward, would not first set out to acquire their constancy, to imitate their faith, and the courage with which they suffered; would not find, or seek to find, such glory by likening his life to theirs? For, though we were not able to resemble them in martyrdom, at least we might show ourselves worthy by our good deeds to be honoured with so great a gift. For a most loving God is with us, and will grant to such of God's children as desire it either martyrdom itself or, without a martyr's death, the heavenly reward of the saints.

Though a sinner is but weakened by adversity, it is in trials that the just one finds strength. Thus did the saints wage war against sin; thus, in striving they grew more strong, and in dying they won the victory. No athlete earns a reputation for great strength without a struggle, none is crowned unless he win.

FRI 07.10.20

**A commentary on the Book of Numbers from a Homily of Origen** <sup>4</sup>

It is reported and said: "And the sons of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying: "You have killed the people of the Lord. And it came to pass when the congregation rushed on Moses and Aaron, in a rush they fled to the tabernacle of testimony. But the cloud covered it, and the majesty of the Lord appeared. And Moses and Aaron went in to the presence of the tabernacle of testimony.

We have not previously read that a cloud covered the tabernacle and the majesty of the Lord appeared and received Moses and Aaron into the cloud, but only now,, when the people rose up against them and wanted to stone them. Let us learn from this how great is the benefit that comes during the persecutions of Christians, how much grace is

---

<sup>3</sup>Sermon 1 on the Martyrs, vol.3, -trans. from the Roman Breviary, Benzinger Bros. ed., New York 1964, 56.

<sup>4</sup> Ancient Christian Texts – Homilies on Numbers by Origen – University Press – Downers Grove, IL – 2009- pg 37

bestowed, how God becomes their champion, how the Spirit is abundantly poured out. For it is especially at that time that the Lord's grace is present, when human cruelty is aroused. At that time we have peace with God, when we endure wars from men for the sake of justice. For where sin abounded, grace superabounded.

So then, the cloud of the tabernacle covered them and the congregation ushered on Moses and Aaron and the glory of the Lord appeared. However great in meritorious living were Moses and Aaron, however strong they were in the virtue of the soul, nevertheless the glory of God could not appear to them except when they were placed in the midst of persecutions, tribulations, dangers, and were brought practically to the point of death. Therefore neither should you think that the glory of the Lord can appear to you when you are asleep or at leisure. Or did not even Paul the apostle merit to attain God's glory by this means? Does he not list himself beyond all the others to have been in tribulations, in difficulties, in prisons? Does he not say that he was three times beaten with rods, was once stoned, that he suffered shipwreck three times, that he had dangers of the sea, dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from false brothers? To the extent that such circumstances abound, so much the more do they enter the glory of God on those who bear them patiently.

And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron saying: Depart out of the midst of this congregation, and I will consume them at once. And they fell on their faces. Once in Sodom, a minimum of ten were sought by means of whom those who lived in the five cities of the Sodomites were scarcely able to be saved, but now two are able to suffice to save the whole nation of the Israelites but only if they are found to be men of the quality that Moses and Aaron were. So what more shall we say is in these two men? What virtue is so great, what merit, whereby more than six hundred thousand were delivered from the destruction of the devastator? I think that in Moses the Law is signified which teaches people the knowledge and love of God. In Aaron there is an example of supplicating God and of praying to him. So if it comes to pass at some time that God is indignant with us or with the whole people of God, and if a verdict of revenge is already proceeding from the Lord, but the Law of God returns to our heart, admonishing us and teaching us to repent, to make satisfaction for our transgressions, to make supplication for our faults, the anger will at once cease, the indignation will grow quiet, the Lord will be propitiated, as if Moses and Aaron were interceding for us and were making supplication for the whole people.

Now if at some time God's indignation is aroused and a severe chastisement comes for our sins, but our hearts are hardened, so that we are not converted to the Lord or humbled in his sight, it is certain that there is no Moses and Aaron among us, that is knowledge of the Law and the fruit of repentance, through which we should be able to escape the destruction of imminent death. I think that this happened to that people who preceded us, when they all turned aside. For if these things had been present, surely God would never have abandoned them. But let us too fear lest something similar be found in us, for I fear that sentence in which our Lord and Savior who foreknows all things, says as if he is in doubt, "Do you think that the Son of Man, when he comes, will find faith on the earth?"

**The Meekness of St. Benedict as our holy Father. From a Sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny<sup>5</sup>**

**"He sanctified him through his faith and meekness".** (Sir. 45:4) Moses is the real subject of this verse, but today I think it can be applied very well to Saint Benedict. Filled as he was with the spirit of all the saints, he must be considered much more to have not a little of the spirit of Moses. For if the Lord drew from the spirit of Moses and inspired with it every one of those who shared his ministry, how much more must it rest on him who more truly fulfilled on a more spiritual level the fullness of his whole ministry? Moses was the leader of those making their way out of Egypt; Benedict of those turning their backs on the world. They have both given a law. But the one was the minister of the letter that kills, the other, of the spirit that gives life. Moses, owing to the hardness of the hearts of the Jews, apart from a few guides to behavior, left no prescriptions adequate to the task of justification; Benedict however has handed on the unique purity of the Gospel teaching and the simplicity of its way of life. So many of the things about which Moses writes are difficult to understand, impossible or useless to perform. Benedict on the other hand wrote a most excellent Rule of life remarkable both for the lucidity of its style and for its discretion. Finally although Moses was the leader of the children of Israel when they left the land of Egypt he did not lead them into their promised resting-place; whereas our leader, like the standard bearer of the army of monks, has today gone before us along the straight path, the path leading eastward, into the kingdom of heaven. Therefore it is not absurd to consider his merits equal to those of Moses, whose ministry he is found even to have surpassed.

It will not be unfitting therefore to apply to him what we read was written about the other: **"He sanctified him through his faith and meekness,"** especially since it is of these two virtues, faith and meekness, that he is our teacher; he could never have lived otherwise than as he taught.

What could be more notable than his faith? While still a mere youth he scorned the world that smiled upon him. He trampled on the flowers of the world and of his own body as if they were already withered. He desired to suffer the hardships of the world for the sake of God rather than to make merry in it for the moment. What could be more like the faith of Moses, which the apostle praises in the words: **"By faith Moses, when**

---

<sup>5</sup> Liturgical Sermons of Gueric of Igny. vol. 2, Cistercian Fathers Series. Cistercian Publications. Spencer, MA. 1971. p. 24f.

**he was grown up, denied himself to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter, rather choosing to be afflicted with the people of God than to have the pleasure of sin for a time."**

And what could be holier than the meekness of our Father? He even refused to be provoked by the spite of those who were plotting to kill him, offering poison instead of wine. Moses indeed, so the Scripture tells us, was a man exceedingly meek, above all that dwelt upon the earth. But does it deny that his spirit was ever provoked? Does it not tell us that he was not only annoyed but terribly enraged against all who stood in his path? As for the gentleness of our teacher, I remember reading that it was remarkable not only toward those who spoke against him, but also toward those who tried to do him harm. Of his wrath I have no recollection. It must not however be considered prejudicial to the praise of holy meekness in either him or Moses if the just one burns with zeal against sinners, since this is the zeal without which meekness would sink to the level of tepidity or timidity. "Brethren, have peace among you," commands the Master, so meek and peace-loving. But before this he gives an admonition: "Have salt in you." For he realized without a doubt that the meekness of peace is the nurse of vice unless a demanding zeal first sprinkles it with searing salt, just as warm weather causes meat to decay unless it is salted. Therefore have peace among you, but a peace that is seasoned with the salt of wisdom. Seek after meekness, but a meekness that burns with faith.