

LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY  
Vigils Readings  
Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time  
August 2-8, 2020

**SUNDAY, AUGUST 2, 2020**

**A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by St Ephrem <sup>1</sup>**

Our Lord in a desert place changed a few loaves into many, and at Cana turned water into wine. Thus before the time came to give men and women his own body and blood to feed on, he accustomed their palates to his bread and wine, giving them a taste of transitory bread and wine to teach them to delight in his life-giving body and blood. He gave them things of little value for nothing to make them understand that his supreme gift would be given yet more freely. He gave them for nothing what they would have bought from him, what in fact they wanted to buy to teach them that he asked them for no payment. When it was not permitted them to give him the price of bread and wine, which they could have done, they certainly could not pay him for his body and blood.

Moreover, as well as giving freely he lovingly cajoled us, offering us these small things without charge to attract us and cause us to go and receive something greater and beyond all price. He awakened our desire by things pleasing to the palate in order to draw us to that which gives life to the soul. He gave a sweet taste to the wine he created to show how great is the treasure hidden in his life-giving blood.

Consider how his creative power penetrates everything. Our Lord took a little bread, and in the twinkling of an eye multiplied it. Work that would take us ten months to accomplish he did with his ten fingers in a moment. His hands were as earth beneath the bread and his voice was as thunder above it. The movement of his lips acted as dew, the breath of his mouth as sunlight, and in a brief moment he accomplished what normally

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<sup>1</sup> Journey with the Fathers – Year A = New City Press – NY – 1984 = pg 112

takes much time. Thus the shortage was forgotten, many loaves came from few as in the first blessing: *Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.*

The Lord also showed to those to whom he gave his precepts the power of his holy word, and how swiftly he would reward those who accepted it. Nevertheless, he did not increase the number of loaves as much as he could have done, but only enough to satisfy those who were to eat them. His power was not the measure of his miracle, but the people's hunger. Had his miracle been measured by his power it would have been a victory beyond all measure. Measured by the hunger of thousands, there was a surplus of twelve baskets full. Humans who practice any craft always fall short of their customer's desires – they are unable to meet their requirements; but what God does goes beyond anyone's desire. The Lord said: *Gather up what remains so that nothing is wasted* because he wanted to be sure they would not think they had seen a vision. When the fragments had been kept for a day or two they would believe that the Lord had really done this, and they had not just imagined it.

**MONDAY, AUGUST 3, 2020**

**OUR LIVES ARE TO BE AN OFFERING TO THE WILL OF GOD IN THE SPIRIT OF UNSELFISH LOVE, from the writing of Dom Damasus Winzen on the Book of Joshua<sup>2</sup>**

The crossing of the Jordan shows in every detail that this is not simply an "invasion" of a foreign country for the sake of political conquest. The ark of the covenant preceding the people into the waters of the river, carried by the priests and Levites who embody the teaching office of God's Church, confirms the basic principle of spiritual conquest through the word of God. The ark is not a magic object. It contains the law--God's holy will--which is "our sanctification"(1Thess 4:3). That it is called here "the ark of the Lord of all the earth"(3:11), is a reminder of the fact that it is the Lord of

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<sup>2</sup>PATHWAYS IN SCRIPTURE, Dom Damasus Winzen (Word of Life, Ann Arbor MI 1976) pp. 93-94.

all the earth who gives this land to his people, and that the taking possession of Palestine is only the figure of a more universal conquest: that of the entire world through the risen Saviour who reigns at the right hand of the Father.

Wherever the word of God is announced to us, a division takes place, a "crisis" begins, symbolized here in the division of the waters of the Jordan. Those at the right hand stop and form a mountain, those at the left ebb away into the salty waters of the Dead Sea, just as those who hear the Word of God are divided between those who keep it and form the mountain of the Church, and those who, forgetting, drop away and get lost in the Dead Sea of this world. This process will come to an end when "the Lord of all the earth," coming on the clouds of heaven, shall divide the sheep from the goats and say to the sheep on his right hand: "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," and to them on his left: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire!"(Mt 25:31f).

It is on the tenth day of the first month that the people come up from the Jordan and camp in Gilgal. This is the day when the paschal lamb is chosen and brought into the house, before it is killed on the fourteenth (Ex 12:3). Israel is the lamb which now is being brought into the "home" not so much to conquer but to be an offering to the will of God in the spirit of unselfish love. First the Israelites set up a memorial of twelve stones to remember forever that they crossed the Jordan on dry ground through God's power and not their own. Their life in the new country should, therefore, be a continuous thanksgiving: "Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name give the glory, for your mercy and for truth's sake"(Ps 115:1). Then they undergo, at the command of Joshua, the circumcision which is the solemn pledge to overcome the selfishness of nature in order to serve God. Freedom from self enables them to celebrate their first passover feast in

the promised land, the feast of their independence and their salvation through the blood of the lamb. Through both these rites the Israelites profess that the possession of the holy land does not so much depend on shedding the blood of their enemies as on shedding their own blood in a sacrifice of redemption. The majority of them never understood this fundamental principle, through it was fulfilled by Jesus and applied to the new Israel of the Church through the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. When they are thus sanctified, the "captain of the army of the Lord" appears to Joshua to make it clear that behind Joshua there is another one, greater than he, who is the real leader in this campaign. He shows the true nature of his power in the capture of Jericho, the first city to be taken, and a picture of the Church's conquest of the world at the end of time.

**TUESDAY, AUGUST 4, 2020**

**Prayer in the life of the Curé d'Ars:  
a reading from an encyclical by ST. John XXIII.**

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To the priests of this century, apt to be sensitive to the effect of action and easily tempted by a dangerous activism, how beneficial is that model of assiduous prayer in a life given up entirely to the care of souls, which was the Curé d'Ars! O What prevents us priests from being saints, he said. It is lack of reflection. We don't search our hearts; we don't know what we do. Reflection, prayer, union with God, are the things we need. He himself remained, according to contemporary evidence, in a state of continual prayer from which he was not distracted by the wearisome burden of confessions nor by his other pastoral cares. He preserved a constant union with God in the midst of an exceedingly busy life.

Let us listen to him again: he is unflinching on the subject of the joy and blessing of prayer. Man is a beggar who needs to be asking everything from God. How many souls we can convert by our prayers! And he would repeat: prayer is all man's happiness on earth. This happiness he long enjoyed himself with his eyes, lit by faith, contemplating the divine mysteries and, in adoration of the Word incarnate, his pure and simple soul lifted towards

the Holy Trinity, the supreme object of his love. And the pilgrims who thronged the Church of Ars realized that the humble priest was confiding to them something of the secret of his own inner life with the frequent exclamation dear to him: A Being loved by God, united to God, living in the presence of God: oh, what happiness in life and in death!

We could wish that all priests might be convinced, by the witness of the holy Curé d'Ars, of the need to be men of prayer and of the possibility of being so, whatever the heavy and sometimes severe load of the labors of their ministry. But we need an intense faith, such as moved Jean-Marie Vianney and made him able to work miracles. What faith! exclaimed one of his colleagues. Enough to spread over a whole diocese!

With St. Pius X, let us consider it certain and well-founded that a priest, in order to occupy his station properly and fulfill his duty, must devote himself before all else to prayer. Above all he should obey Christ's precept: *We ought always to pray*, a precept earnestly recommended by St Paul: *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. Pray constantly.*

The prayer of the Curé d'Ars, who, so to speak, spent the last thirty years of his life in his church where he was kept by his numerous penitents, was above all a prayer of thanksgiving. His devotion to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar was indeed wonderful. He is there, he would say, he who loves us so much; how could we not love him? And most certainly he loved him and felt irresistibly drawn towards the tabernacle: We do not need many words to pray well, he explained to his parishioners. We know that God is there, in the holy tabernacle; we open our hearts to him; we rejoice in his holy presence. This is the best prayer of all.

**WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 5, 2020**

### **A Commentary on the Book of Joshua by Origen <sup>3</sup>**

They are ordered to trample on the necks of their enemies and to suspend from wood the kings of that land that they violently invade. And

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<sup>3</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture = vol. IV – InterVarsity Press – Downers Grove, IL – 2009--  
Pg.62

yet if only our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God would grant that to me to crush the spirit of fornication with my feet and trample and trample upon the necks of the spirit of wrath and rage , to trample on the spirit of avarice, to trample on the demon of avarice, to trample down boasting, to crush the spirit of arrogance with my feet, and when I have done all these things, not to hang the most exalted of these exploits upon myself but upon his cross. Thereby I imitate Paul who says: “the world is crucified to me”, and that which we have already related above “Not I, but the grace of God that is in me:.

But if I deserve to act thus, I shall be blessed, and what Jesus (Joshua) said to the ancients will also be said to me: “Go courageously and be strengthened; do not be afraid nor be awed by their appearance, because the Lord God has delivered all your enemies into your hands”. If we understand these things spiritually and manage wars of this type spiritually, and if we drive out all the spiritual iniquities from heaven, then we shall be able at last to receive from Jesus a share of the inheritance even those places and kingdoms that are the kingdoms of heaven, bestowed by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

But if we examine the very meaning of the names more eagerly and more diligently, it will be discovered that the significance of the names can have an interpretation at one time of a wicked kingdom, and at another time of a good kingdom. For example I think Libna means “whiteness”. But whiteness is understood in different ways, for there is a whiteness of leprosy and a whiteness of light. Therefore it is possible to indicate diversities even in the meaning of the name itself and of either condition. Thus Libna had a certain whiteness of leprosy under the wicked kings and, after these are destroyed and overthrown, when Libna comes into the Israelite kingdom, it receives the whiteness of light because whiteness is mentioned in Scripture as being both praiseworthy and blame worthy.

Likewise, it is especially the work of the Word of God to pull down the diabolical structures that the devil has built in the human soul, for in every one of us, that one raised up towers of pride and walls of self-exaltation. The Word of God overthrows and undermines these, so that justly, according to the apostle, we are made “the cultivation of God and the building of God” upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself the chief cornerstone, from whom the uniting of the edifice grows into a temple of God in the Spirit”. And thus at last we may be

entitled to be included in the inheritance of the holy land, in the Israelite portion. Then our enemies will be abolished and destroyed so “that none of them remains who may breathe in us, through works and words and spiritual understanding, according to the teaching of Christ Jesus our Lord, “to whom is the strength and the power forever and ever. Amen.

**THURSDAY, AUGUST 6, 2020**

**Sermon of Pope St. Leo on the Transfiguration of Our Lord.** <sup>4</sup>

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The Lord reveals His glory before His chosen witnesses, and glorifies that bodily form which He has in common with others, so that His face was like the brilliance of the sun and His garments equal to the whiteness of snow. In this transfiguration it was intended principally to take away from the disciples' hearts the scandal of the cross, lest the voluntary abjectness of His Passion should shake the faith of those to whom had been revealed the excellence of His hidden Majesty.

But neither by a lesser providence was the hope of Holy Church established, in that the whole Body of Christ would recognize by what kind of recompense it was to be blessed, so that its members might promise to themselves a participation in that honor which had shone in their Head. Yet, while the apostles were being strengthened and raised up to the summit of learning, another lesson also was given in that wonderful act. For Moses and Elias, that is, the Law and the Prophets, appeared talking with the Lord, so that most assuredly in the presence of these five men was effected what had been declared: "In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall stand."

What is more lasting, more firm than the Word, in the proclamation of which the trumpet of both the old and the new Testaments blares forth, since the forecasts of the ancient testimonies agree also with the teaching of the Gospel? For the pages of both Covenants corroborate one another, and Him whom the signs that went before had promised under the veil of mysteries, the splendor of His present glory reveals manifest and within sight.

So, being aroused by the revelations of these mysteries, the Apostle Peter, spurning the things of the world and loathing all earthly things, in a

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<sup>4</sup> *Liturgical Readings*, St. Meinrad's Abbey Press, 1943, pp. 432-433.

kind of ecstasy of mind was ravished with a desire for things eternal, and overflowing with joy at the whole vision, he was desirous of dwelling there with Jesus, where he was gladdened by His manifested glory. And therefore he said: "Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us set up three tents here, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." But to this suggestion the Lord gave no answer, showing that what he desired was not indeed unrighteous, but out of order, since the world could not be saved except through Christ's death; indeed, by our Lord's example the faith of believers should be made to note that, while it is proper that the promises of final happiness should not be questioned, we should, nevertheless, realize that, in the midst of the trials of this life, we should ask for patience rather than glory.

## **FRIDAY, AUGUST 7, 2020**

### **St. Cajetan - Taken from Butler=s Lives of the Saints<sup>5</sup>**

St Cajetan (Gaetano) was son of Caspar, Count of Thiene, of the nobility of Vicenza, where he was born in 1480. Two years later his father was killed, fighting for the Venetians against King Ferdinand of Naples. Cajetan went for four years to Padua University, where he distinguished himself in theology, and took the degree of doctor in civil and canon law in 1504. He then returned to his native town, of which he was made senator. In pursuance of his resolve to serve God as a priest he received the tonsure. In 1506 he went to Rome. Soon after his arrival Pope Julius II conferred on him the office of protonotary, with a benefice attached. On the death of Julius Cajetan refused his successor's request to continue in that office, and devoted three years to preparing himself for the priesthood. He was ordained in 1516, being thirty-three years old, and returned to Vicenza in 1518.

Cajetan had re-founded a confraternity in Rome called "of the Divine Love", which was an association of zealous and devout clerics who devoted themselves to labor with all their power to promote God's honor and the

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<sup>5</sup> Butler=s Lives of the Saints, revised edition by Michael Walsh, Harper, San Francisco, 1991, pg. 240



welfare of souls. At Vicenza he now entered himself in the Oratory of St. Jerome, which was instituted on the plan of that of the Divine Love but consisted only of men in the lowest station of life. This circumstance gave great offence to his friends, who thought it a reflection on the honor of his family. He persisted, however, and sought out the sick and the poor throughout the whole town, served them and cared for those who suffered from the most loathsome diseases in the hospital of the incurables. He founded a similar oratory at Verona and then went in 1520 to Venice where he took up his lodgings in the new hospital of that city. He remained in Venice for three years. He introduced exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in that city, as well as continuing the promotion of frequent communion.

The state of Christendom at this time shocked and distressed Cajetan, and in 1523 he went back to Rome to confer with his friends of the Oratory of Divine Love. They agreed that little could be done other than by reviving in the clergy the spirit and zeal of those holy pastors who first planted the faith, and a plan was formed for instituting an order of regular clergy upon the model of the lives of the Apostles. The first associates of Cajetan were John Peter Caraffa, who later became pope under the name of Paul IV. The institute was approved by Clement VII, and Caraffa was chosen as the first provost general. From the name of his episcopal see of Theatensis these clerks regular came to be distinguished from others as Theatines.

The success of the new congregation was not immediate, and in 1527, when it still numbered only a dozen members, the army of Emperor Charles V sacked Rome. The Theatines house was demolished and the members had to escape to Venice. Cajetan was sent to Verona, where both the clergy and the laity were opposing the reformation of discipline, which their bishop was endeavoring to introduce among them. A general improvement was the fruit of his example, preaching and labors.

Worn out with trying to appease civil strife in Naples, and disappointed at the suspension of the Council of Trent, from which he hoped so much for the Church's good, Cajetan had to take to his bed in the summer of 1547. The end came on Sunday, August 7. Many miracles wrought by his intercession were approved at Rome after rigorous scrutiny, and he was canonized in 1671.

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 8, 2020**

## **Christian de Cherge – Monk, Martyr and Mystic** **By Dom Bernardo Olivera <sup>6</sup>**

In its early stages, monastic life was interpreted in various ways. Not a few understood monasticism as an authentic martyrdom. The martyr, the monk and the mystic are people who have oriented their lives toward mystery and entered deeply therein. They long for one thing only: to enter into communion with their Lord in death in order to be joined with Him in the Resurrection.

Christian de Cherge was born on January 18, 1917 at Colmar into a distinguished family of eight children. His father was a military man, as would be his older brother later on. During his childhood he spent three years in Algeria during the Second World War. From the time of his childhood he always remained impressed by the Muslim's way of approaching God. On October 6, 1956, at the age of nineteen he entered the seminary of the Carmelites in Paris. His studies were interrupted in 1959 when he had to report for military service. Set on becoming an officer, he took the required courses, and in July of the following year he was made second lieutenant. That same month, at the very time of the war of independence, he arrived in Algeria at the age of twenty-three.

An event occurred during this period that left its mark on him for the rest of his life. He had made friends with an Algerian who worked as a warden under the French authorities, a position that made him susceptible to the violence of the National Liberation Army. Mohamed tried to be faithful at one and the same time to his Christian friend, to his Islamic faith, and to his own people. It so happened one day that they were involved in a scuffle in the street. Mohamed protected his friend and tried to pacify his aggressors. The following day, he was found dead. This painful episode was never to be forgotten. Christian came back to it in later years, writing: "I know at least one beloved brother, a convinced Muslim, who gave his life for love of another, in a concrete way, by spilling his own blood. Indeed, since then, in my hope for communion of all the elect in Christ, I can fix my eyes on this friend who lived, even in his death, the one commandment."

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<sup>6</sup> Monk, Martyr and Mystic – Dom Bernardo Olivera – Cistercian Studies Quarterly – vol. 34 – 1999 – pg 321

For Christian de Cherge all of this was a foundational experience and the seed of a vocation. In the blood of his friend, assassinated for not having wanted to bargain with hatred, Christian said in 1982: “I knew my calling to follow Christ would end up living itself out sooner or later in the same country where I had been given this pledge of the greater love ‘shed for you and for many’” On March 21, 1964, he was ordained a priest and shortly thereafter was sent to Algeria and to the monastic life. On September 14, 1976 he made his perpetual vows . In it he expressed his desire to “live in Prayer in the service of the Church of Algeria, listening to the Muslim soul, God willing, until the final gift of my death”.

Christian was elected titular Prior of Atlas in 1984 He was already deeply involved in the interreligious dialogue. On May 21, 1996, united with his six brothers of the community, he sealed with his blood the witness of his life.

Before this happened, though, he wrote out his “Testament” .

“When we have to face an A-DIEU...  
If it should happen one day – and it could be today –  
That I become a victim of the terrorism which now seems ready to engulf  
All the foreigners living in Algeria,  
I would like my community, my Church, my family,  
To remember that my life was GIVEN to God and to this country.  
I ask them to accept that the Sole Master of all life  
Was not a stranger to this brutal departure.  
I ask them to pray for me –  
For how could I be found worthy of such an offering?  
I ask them to be able to link this death with the many other  
Deaths which were just as violent, but forgotten  
Through indifference or anonymity.  
There is no greater love than to give one’s life in this way  
For those whom we love. It is better to do so ahead of time and for all, as  
Jesus did.  
In such a way that he won’t take it away from you,  
The one who will think he is putting you to death.  
Already, without his knowing it, the gift is granted to him as to the others.  
My life has no more value than any other

Nor any less value.

In any case, it has not the innocence of childhood.

I have lived long enough to know that I am an accomplice in the evil

Which seems, alas, to prevail in the world,

Even in that which would strike me blindly.

I should like, when the time comes, to have the moment of lucidity

Which would allow me to beg forgiveness of God

And of all my fellow human beings

And at the same time to forgive with all my heart

The one who would strike me down.

I could not desire such a death.

It seems to me important to state this.

I do not see, in fact, how I could rejoice

If the people I love were to be accused indiscriminately of my murder.

**END OF READINGS**