

NT-MT55
08.09.20

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by St Augustine ¹

The gospel tells us how Christ the Lord walked upon the waters of the sea, and how the apostle Peter did the same until fear made him falter and lose confidence. Then he began to sink and emerged from the water only after calling on the Lord with renewed faith.

Now we must regard the sea as a symbol of the present world, and the apostle Peter as a symbol of the one and only Church. For Peter, who ranked first among the apostles and was always the most ready to declare his love for Christ, often acted as a spokesman for them all. For instance, when the Lord Jesus asked who people thought he was and the other disciples had cited various opinions, it was Peter who responded to the Lord's further question, *But who do you say that I am?* With the affirmation: *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.* One replied for all because all were united.

When we consider Peter as a representative member of the Church we should distinguish between what was due to God's action in him and what was attributable to himself. Then we ourselves shall not falter, then we shall be founded upon the rock and remain firm and unmoved in the face of the wind, rain, and floods, which are the trials and temptations of this present world. Look at Peter, who in this episode is an image of ourselves; at the moment he is all confidence, at the next all uncertainty and doubt; now he professes faith in the immortal One, now he fears for his life.

Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you upon the water. When the Lord said: *Come* Peter climbed out of the boat and began to walk on the water. This is what he could do through the power of the Lord; what by himself? *Realizing how violently the wind was blowing, he lost his nerve and as he began to sink he called out: "Lord, I am drowning, save me.* When he counted on the Lord's help it enabled him to walk on the water; when human frailty made him falter he turned once more to the Lord, who immediately stretched out his hand to help him, raised him up as he was sinking, and rebuked him for his lack of faith.

¹ Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press, NY – 1984 – p. 114

Think, then, of this world as a sea, whipped up to tempestuous heights by violent winds. A person's own private tempest will be his or her unruly desires. If you love God you will have the power to walk upon the waters, and all the world's swell and turmoil will remain beneath your feet. But if you love the world it will surely engulf you, for it always devours its lovers, never sustains them. If you feel your foot slipping beneath you, if you become a prey to doubt or realize that you are losing control, if, in a word, you begin to sink, say: *Lord, I am drowning, save me!* Only he who for your sake died in your fallen nature can save you from a death inherent in that fallen nature.

08SN1001

08.10.2020

From a sermon by St Augustine on the feast of St Lawrence [1](#)

The Roman Church commends to us today the anniversary of the triumph of St. Lawrence. For on this day he trod the furious pagan world underfoot and flung aside its allurements, and so gained victory over Satan's attack on his faith. As you have often heard, Lawrence was a deacon of the Church at Rome. There he ministered the sacred blood of Christ; there for the sake of Christ's name he poured out his own blood. St John the Apostle was evidently teaching us about the mystery of the Lord's supper when he wrote: *Just as Christ laid down his life for us, so we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* My brethren, Lawrence understood this and, understanding, he acted on it. Just as he had partaken of a gift of self at the table of the Lord, so he prepared to offer such a gift. In his life he loved Christ; in his death he followed in his footsteps.

Brethren, we too must imitate Christ if we truly love him. We shall not be able to render better return on that love than by modeling our lives on his. *Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow in his steps.* In saying this, the Apostle Peter seems to have understood that Christ suffered only for those who follow in his steps, in the sense that Christ's passion is of no avail to those who do not. The holy martyrs followed Christ even to the shedding of their life's blood, even to reproducing the very likeness of his passion. They followed him, but not they alone. It is not true that the bridge was broken after the martyrs crossed; nor is it true that after they had drunk from it, the fountain of eternal life dried up.

I tell you again and again, my brethren, that in the Lord's garden are to be found not only the roses of his martyrs. In it there are also the lilies of the virgins, the ivy of wedded couples, and the violets of widows. On no account may any class of people despair, thinking that Christ has not called them. Christ suffered for all. What the Scriptures say of him is true: *He desires all to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.*

Let us understand, then, how a Christian must follow Christ even though he does not shed his blood for him, and his faith is not called upon to undergo the great test of the martyr's sufferings. The apostle Paul says of Christ our Lord: *Though he was in the form of God he did not consider equality with God a prize to be clung to.* How unrivaled his majesty! *But he emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave, made in human likeness, and presenting himself in human form.* How deep his humility!

Christ humbled himself. Christian, that is what you must make your own. *Christ became obedient.* How is it that you are proud? When this humbling experience was completed and death itself lay conquered, Christ ascended into heaven. Let us follow him there, for we hear Paul saying: *If you have been raised with Christ, you must lift your thoughts on high, where Christ now sits at the right hand of God.*

1The Liturgy of the Hours – vol. IV – pg 1305 – Catholic Book Publishing Co
– New York – 1975

08SN1102

08/11/20

A READING FROM THE TESTAMENT OF ST CLARE²

I admonish all my sisters, present and to come, and I exhort them in Our Lord Jesus Christ always to strive to follow the way of holy simplicity, of humility and of poverty, and to live worthily and holily just as we have been taught from the beginning of our conversion to Jesus Christ by our blessed father Francis. Thus with these virtues, not acquired through our merits, but through the mercy and grace alone of our benefactor, the Father of Mercies, the sisters may spread the fragrance of a good name for all the others, for those sisters who are far and for those who are near.

And in the love of Christ love one another, and show the love that you have within you outwardly by your works, so that such an example may inspire the sisters to grow always in the love of God and in mutual charity. I also beseech the sister who shall be entrusted with the guidance of the sisters to govern them more by her virtues and the holiness of her life, than by the dignity of her office, so that the sisters, inspired by her example, will obey her not only out of duty, but rather out of love.

In addition, let her show the discretion and solicitude of a good mother for her daughters, and above all provide all of them with the alms given by the Lord, giving to each according to her need. Let her also be so kind and so approachable to all, that they may disclose their needs to her with surety and have recourse to her with confidence, as they may deem necessary for themselves or for their sisters. For their part the sisters subject to her should remember that they have renounced their wills for God's sake.

Therefore, I will that they obey their mother, with a spontaneous will, as they have promised the Lord, so that this mother, seeing the charity, humility and the unity that reigns among them, may bear the burden of her duties more lightly, and their holy life may change what is painful and bitter

²THE CALL OF ST CLARE, by H. Daniel-Rops, Trans by S. Attanasio (Hawthorn Books, Inc. NY 1963) pp 138-140.

into sweetness for her. How strait is the way that leads to life! And how narrow is the gate through which one must enter! Thus there are few who walk along this path and who pass through this gate. And if there are some who walk along the path for a moment, O how rare are those who know how to persevere there! But happy are those to whom it is given to walk thereon and to persevere unto the end!

08/12/20

THE MOMENT OF DEATH, from the Desert Sayings of Abba Theophilus³

Abba Theophilus said: "What fear, what trembling, what uneasiness will there be for us when our soul is separated from the body. Then indeed the force and strength of the adverse powers come against us, the rulers of darkness, those who command the world of evil, the principalities, the powers, the spirits of evil. They accuse our souls as in a lawsuit, bringing before it all the sins it has committed, whether deliberately or through ignorance, from its youth until the time when it has been taken away. So they stand accusing it of all it has done. Furthermore, what anxiety do you suppose the soul will have at that hour, until sentence is pronounced and it gains its liberty. That is its hour of affliction, until it sees what will happen to it. On the other hand, the divine powers stand on the opposite side, and they present the good deeds of the soul. Consider the fear and trembling of the soul standing between them until in judgment it receives the sentence of the righteous judge. If it is judged worthy, the demons will receive their punishment, and it will be carried away by the angels. Then thereafter you will be without disquiet, or rather you will live according to that which is written: 'Even as the habitation of those who rejoice is in you.' (Ps 87:7) Then will the Scripture be fulfilled: 'Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.' (Is 35:10)

Then your liberated soul will go on to that joy and ineffable glory in which it will be established. But if it is found to have lived carelessly, it will

³THE SAYINGS OF THE DESERT FATHERS, trans. by Benedicta Ward, SLG (Cistercian Publ. USA, 1984) pp. 81-82.

hear that terrible voice: 'Take away the ungodly, that he may not see the glory of the Lord.'(Is 26:10) Then the day of anger, the day of affliction, the day of darkness and shadow seizes upon it. Abandoned to outer darkness and condemned to everlasting fire it will be punished through the ages without end. Where then is the vanity of the world? Where is vainglory? Where is carnal life? Where are enjoyments? Where is imagination? Where is ease? Where is boasting? Riches? Nobility? Father, mother, brother? Who could take the soul out of its pains when it is burning in the fire, and remove it from bitter torments?

"Since this is so, in what manner ought we not to give ourselves to holy and devout works? What love ought we to acquire? What manner of life? What virtues? What speed? What diligence? What prayer? What prudence? Scripture says: 'In this waiting, let us make every effort to be found blameless and without reproach in peace.'(1Cor 1:7-8) In this way, we shall be worthy to hear it said: 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'(Mt 25:34) Amen."

OT-JOS10
08.13.20

A Commentary on the Book of Joshua by St. Jerome ⁴

It is now time to raise the standard of Joshua's chastity. We read that Moses, that is the Law, had a wife; show me then in the same way that Joshua the son of Nun had either wife or children, and if you can do so, I will confess that I am beaten. He certainly received the largest spot in the division of the land of Judah and died, not in his twenties – for by them are reckoned the years of Jacob's service, the price of Joseph – but in the tens, whose praises we have often sung. And he was buried on Thamnath Sore, which means "most perfect sovereignty". The book which bears the name of Joshua ends with his burial. Again in the Book of Judges we read of him as though he had risen and come to life again. And by way of summary his works are extolled. We read too "So Joshua sent the people away every man to his inheritance, that they might possess the land. And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua" and so on. There immediately follows: "And Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being a hundred and ten years old." Moses, moreover, only saw the land of promise; he could not enter, and he died in the land of Moab, and the Lord buried him in the valley in the land of Moab over against Beth peor; but no man knows of his sepulcher to this day. Let us compare the burial of the two. Moses died in the land of Moab, Joshua in the land of Judea. The former was buried in a valley over against the house of Phogorl the latter was buried in Mount Ephraim on the north of Mount Gaash. And in the simple expressions of the sacred Scriptures there is always a more subtle meaning. The Jews gloried in children and childbearing and the barren woman who had no offspring in Israel was accursed, but blessed was he whose seed was in Zion, and his family in Jerusalem. And part of the highest blessing was "Your wife shall be as a fruitful vine in the innermost parts of your house, your children like olive plants around your table. Therefore his grave is described as placed in a valley against over against the house of an idol which was in a special sense consecrated to lust. But we who fight under Joshua our leader; even to the present day know not where Moses was buried. For we despise

⁴ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture – O.T. – vol IV – InterVarsity Press – Downers Grove, IL = 2009 – pg 97.

Phogor and all his shame, knowing that they who are in the flesh cannot please God. And the Lord before the flood had said: "My spirit shall not abide in man forever, because he is flesh,". For this reason when Moses died the people of Israel mourned for him, but Joshua, like one on his way to victory, was not mourned. For marriage ends at death; virginity thereafter begins to wear the crown.

08SN1402.DOC

08.14.20

The witness to eternity in the martyrdom of St. Maximilian: a reading from an address of Pope John Paul II.⁵

The figure of Maximilian [Kolbe] remains as a testimony of the age and belongs to the "signs of the times." This difficult and tragic epoch, stigmatized by horrible debasement of human dignity, has brought about at Oswiecim [*pronounced* Oss-W²-chim] the birth of its salvific sign. Love has shown itself more powerful than death, more powerful than anti-human systems. Love for the person has achieved its victory there where hatred and scorn for human beings seemed to triumph. In this victory of love at Oswiecim the victory of Golgotha presented itself in a particular way. Many saw the death of their prison companion not as still another defeat for human beings, but a saving sign - the sign of our time, of our age.

The Church is rereading the meaning of such signs. It is in this that its link with the history of humanity, of peoples and of nations, consists. Yesterday she reread to the very end the meaning of the sign of Oswiecim that Maximilian Kolbe established by his martyr's death. The Church has reread this sign with profound veneration and emotion in proclaiming the holiness of the Martyr of Oswiecim. The Saints are in history in order to establish permanent points of reference as a background for the future of humankind and the world. That which shows through in them is lasting and unchanging. It bears witness to eternity. From this testimony we always draw a renewed awareness of our vocation and renewed assurance of all that awaits us. This is the direction in which the Saints guide the Church and humanity. Among these spiritual guides we include today St. Maximilian, our fellow countryman. In him the man of our times discovers a wonderful "synthesis" of the sufferings and the hopes of our age.

But in this synthesis there is also a prophetic warning. It is a cry addressed to all, to society, to humanity, to the systems responsible for our life and

⁵ *Kolbe and the Commandant*. Desmet Foundation, 1983, pp. 330-332.

our societies. This modern-day Saint has come forth from the very center of human beings humiliated by human beings, of the humiliation of one's dignity, of cruelty and of slaughter. This Saint cries out therefore with all the synthesis of his martyrdom for a consistent respect for the rights of all and also of nations since in fact he is the son of a nation whose rights have been terribly violated.

09SN1501.DOC

08/15/20

A Reading from a Meditation on Life in Death, by Gertrude of Helfta. ⁶

O Charity, O Cherishing-love, for sinners you have done such a thing with the Virgin's Son that you have given all desperate people hope in you. Through your own graciousness you compel everyone to act trustfully toward you; and, so that none who are miserable may have a cause to plead against you, you turn the cause of all to salvation. O Charity, prepare for me, a destitute and derelict woman, a place of counsel in you, a nest of refuge, where my afflicted spirit may recline. Endure with me the cause of my sojourning here. Raise my fainthearted spirit. Relieve the anxiety of my heart by saying to me: I will not forget you. Ah, in saying so, let your word be inviolate. O Charity, and deign to call me to your calends because my soul yearns passionately for market days when, at your lovingly-kind markets, you may exchange with me my evil for your good. You hold my gentle salvation, so strongly fastened to the cross, that giving up his spirit under your hand, he dies for love.

O Charity, what are you doing? Whom are you assaulting? You neither spare anything nor rest until at length you bring help to those who are miserable. You do not measure love. You so afflict the fountain of life with thirst that to die once does not suffice for him; but dying now he so exposes himself still further to love that he yearns and thirsts for dying a fresh death for each single soul - redeeming those lost with a more costly pledge. O Love, your assiduousness has touched the nerve of my Jesus' heart so energetically that it withered away broken for love. O Love, may it suffice you now, may you set a measure now that my Jesus hangs dead before your eyes. Dead, plainly dead, that I might have life more abundantly. Dead that the Father might adopt me more dearly as a child; dead that I might love more happily.

⁶ *Spiritual Exercises* (CF 49), Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1989, pp. 132-133