

NT-MT38
08.23.20

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by St. John Chrysostom ¹

Peter was to be entrusted with the keys of the Church, or rather, he was entrusted with the keys of heaven; to him would be committed the whole people of God. The Lord told him: *Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you lose on earth will be loosed in heaven.* Now Peter was inclined to be severe, so if he had been impeccable what forbearance would he have shown toward those he instructed? His falling into sin was thus a providential grace to teach him from experience to deal kindly with others.

Just think who it was whom God permitted to fall into sin – Peter himself, the head of the apostles, the firm foundation, the unbreakable rock, the most important member of the Church, the safe harbor, the strong tower; Peter who had said to Christ, *Even if I have to die with you I will never deny you*; Peter, who by divine revelation had confessed the truth: *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

The gospel relates that on the night that Christ was betrayed Peter went indoors and was standing by the fire warming himself when a girl accosted him: *You too were with that man yesterday*, she said. But Peter answered: *I do not know the man.*

Just now you said: *Even if I have to die with you*, and now you deny him and say: *I do not know the man.* Oh Peter, is this what you promised? You were not tortured or scourged; at the words of a mere slip of a girl you took refuge in denial!

Again the girl said to him: *You too were with that man yesterday.* Again he answered: *I have no idea what man you mean.*

Who was it that spoke to you, causing you to make this denial? Not some important person but a woman, a doorkeeper, an outcast, a slave, someone of no account whatever. She spoke to you and you answered with a denial. What a strange thing – a girl, a prostitute, accosted Peter himself and disturbed his faith! Peter, the pillar, the rampart, could not bear the threat of a girl! She had but to speak and the pillar swayed, the rampart itself was shaken!

A third time she repeated: *You too were with that man yesterday*, but a third time he denied it. Finally Jesus looked at him, reminding him of his previous assertion. Peter understood, repented of his sin, and began to weep. Mercifully, however, Jesus forgave him his sin, because he knew that Peter, being a man, was subject to human frailty. - over -

Now, as I said before, the reason God's plan permitted Peter to sin was because he was to be entrusted with the whole people of God, and sinlessness added to his severity might have made him unforgiving toward his brothers and sisters. He fell into sin so that remembering his own fault and the Lord's forgiveness, he might also forgive others out of love for them. This was God's providential dispensation. He to whom the Church was to be entrusted, he, the pillar of the churches, the harbor of faith, was allowed to sin; Peter, the teacher of the world, was permitted to sin, so that having been forgiven himself he would be merciful to others.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY 1999 – pg 118

8/24/20

**Sermon for St Bartholomew's Day
by St. John Cardinal Newman.¹**

It is not only among the poor and lowly that the blessed character of guilelessness is found to exist. Secular learning and dignity have doubtless in their respective ways a powerful tendency to rob the heart of its brightness and purity; yet even in kings' courts, and the schools of philosophy, Bartholomew may be discovered. Nay, like the Apostles, they have been subjected to the world's buffets, they have been thwarted in their day, lived in anxiety, and seemingly lost by their honesty, yet without being foiled either of its present comfort or its ultimate fruit.

I have in these remarks spoken of guileless persons as members of society, because I wished to show that, even in that respect in which they seem deficient, they possess a hidden strength, and unconscious wisdom, which makes them live above the world, and sooner or later triumph over it. The weapons of their warfare are not carnal; and they are fitted to be Apostles, though they seem to be ordinary people. Such is the blessedness of the innocent, that is, of those who have never given way to evil, or formed themselves to habits of sin; who in consequence literally do not know its power of its misery who have thoughts of truth and peace ever before them, and are able to discern at once the right and wrong in conduct, as by some delicate instrument which tells truly because it has never been ill-treated. Nay, such may be the portion (through God's mercy) even of those who have at one time departed from Him, and then repented; in proportion as they have learned to love God, and have purified themselves, not only from sin, but from the recollections of it.

Lastly, more is requisite for the Christian, even than guilelessness such as Bartholomew's. When Christ sent forth him and his brethren into the world, He said, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves." Innocence must be joined to prudence, discretion, self-command, gravity, patience, perseverance in well-doing, as Bartholomew doubtless learned in due season under his Lord's teaching; but innocence is the beginning. Let us then pray God to fulfill in us "all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power;" that if it should please Him suddenly to bring us forward to great trials, as He did His Apostles, we may not be taken by surprise, but be found to have made a private or domestic life a preparation for the achievements of Confessor and Martyrs.

¹"Parochial and Plain Sermons", Vol 2, n 27; San Francisco, 1987, pp 440-441.

8/25/20

from a Book by Dom Damasus Winzen2

Israel's struggle for freedom reaches its peak in Gideon's fight against the Midianites. One cannot read these pages of the book of Judges without being deeply moved by this splendid document of the spirit of Israel's youth. How the Spirit of God puts on this man like a garment: how Gideon destroys the cult of the baalim; how he blows the trumpet and thirty thousand follow him, but God tells him: "The people that are with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel vaunt themselves saying: 'My own hand has saved me'". How Gideon repeatedly makes sure that God truly will save Israel through his own hand. How of the thirty thousand finally only three hundred are left who do not bend their knees to satisfy their thirst. How these by night with flaming torches and with the war cry: "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" chase the enemy from bed and sleep into panic and flight. How, free from all vain-glory, the savior of Israel disarms the envious Ephraimites with a clever witticism. And finally, greatest of all, how he rejects the temptation to accept hereditary rule over Israel with the great words: "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you". All this so magnificent, of such consummate strength and clarity of faith, that we understand very well why Isaiah sees the day of the messianic liberation from all pressure and darkness in the light of the "day of Midian".

Magnificent as the spirit of Gideon was in the days of his campaign against the Midianites, it was still in the spirit of Israel's youth, that violent, alien force which takes possession of its instrument without really changing the heart. The spirit does not stay with Gideon. He has scarcely rejected the rule over Israel when he establishes a little principality in his home town, with a "house-god" made of the earrings of the Midianites and with a large harem. Out of his apostasy grows the evil shoot Abimelech, Gideon's bastard son from a Canaanite concubine, who establishes a tyranny by shedding the blood of his brothers. One of them, Jotham, who has escaped Abimelech's sword, reveals in a magnificent parable the true nature of tyranny which is like a thornbush shooting forth fire to devour the cedars which have made it a king over them.

The sad end of Gideon's glorious beginnings shows that the spirit of Gideon alone was not sufficient to make the "day of Midian" a prophetic picture of the day of the

messiah Jesus. His story however abounds in signs pointing to the two great mysteries of the day of Christ: the incarnation and the Pascha.

OT-JUG5A

08.26.20

A Commentary on the Book of Judges by Dom Damasus Winzen ¹

The children of Israel did again what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the *baalim*, and the Lord gave them into the hands of the Ammonites. Then Jephthah the Gileadite, who as a youth had to flee from his brothers, was made the head by the elders of Gilead to lead them in the fight against the Ammonites. In the spirit of the Lord, he defeated the Ammonites. On his return he offered his daughter in sacrifice, because he had vowed that if the Lord would deliver the Ammonites into his hands, he would offer whatever came forth from the doors of his house to meet him. There are many features of Jephthah's story which remind us of our Lord. Christ also had to flee from his brother, the Jews, who despised him as the son of a harlot. Like Jephthah he associated with sinners and publicans in the "land of Tob", the land of salvation and grace; and on the cross he was reckoned among the sinners. Like Jephthah did Christ fulfill the "vow of salvation" by offering his "daughter", his own flesh; and at the end of time he shall deliver up his Church, the "virgin chaste", to his heavenly Father. But his enemies he will judge as Jephthah judged the Ephraimites at the ford of the Jordan.

Through his victory over the Ammonites, Jephthah had secured peace in the east. In the west the defeat of the Canaanites in the days of Deborah had freed the Israelites from any threat. But then a new power established itself in the fertile plains along the Mediterranean coast – the Philistines, from whom the whole country received the name Palestine. They came from the west, and brought with them much of the early Greek civilization. Their political life was much better organized than that of the native Canaanites. They excelled in their metalwork, of which Goliath's armor is the outstanding example. Against them God raises up Samson who is in every way the opposite of civilization, good manners, art and politics. No ropes are strong enough to hold him. The abundance of his vitality is the only law of his actions. He does not gather wealth or power. He has no education or training, but he excels all in natural wit and sheer physical strength. It would be wrong, however, to see in the Samson stories only a protest against civilization in favor of a "return to nature". The secret of Samson's greatness is his character as a Nazarite, a man who separated from ordinary men to be

consecrated to God. True, Samson's weakness does not allow him to keep the order of life which the vow imposes upon him, and therefore he ends in failure. But his death is, at the same time, the most glorious manifestation of his true nature as a figure of Jesus, the other great Nazarite. Both fight alone and singlehanded, in complete disregard of human cunning, in the supreme liberty which is present where the Spirit of God is. Samson reached in the grandeur of his death that freedom of the spirit which neither unbridled nature nor civilization can secure, but only the sacrifice of self. Samson's death, through which he killed more of his enemies than he had ever killed during his life, makes him truly a figure of Christ who overcame his enemies through his death, and his victory over Satan.

1Pathways in Scripture – Damasus Winzen – Word of Life – Ann Arbor, MI
– 1976 – p. 104

8/27/20

ON THE PRAYER OF HIS MOTHER MONICA FOR HIS CONVERSION,
from the Confessions of St Augustine³

You, O God, sent down your help from above (ps 143:7) and rescued my soul from the depths of this darkness because my mother, your faithful servant, wept to you for me, shedding more tears for my spiritual death than other mothers shed for the bodily death of a son. For in her faith and in the spirit which she had from you she looked on me as dead. You heard her and did not despise the tears which streamed down and watered the earth in every place where she bowed her head in prayer. You heard her, for how else can I explain the dream with which you consoled her, so that she agreed to live with me and eat at the same table in our home? Lately she had refused to do this, because she loathed and shunned the blasphemy of my false beliefs.

She dreamed that she was standing on a wooden rule, and coming towards her in a halo of splendor she saw a young man who smiled at her in joy, although she herself was sad and quite consumed with grief. He asked her the reason for her sorrow and her daily tears, not because he did not know, but because he had something to tell her, for this is what happens in visions. When she replied that her tears were for the soul I had lost, he told her to take heart for, if she looked carefully, she would see that where she was, there also was I. And when she looked, she saw me standing beside her on the same rule.

Where could this dream have come from, unless it was that you listened to the prayer of her heart? For your goodness is almighty; you take good care of each of us as if you had no others in your care, and you look after all as you look after each. And surely it was for the same reason that, when she told me of the dream and I tried to interpret it as a message that she need not despair of being one day such as I was then, she said at once and without hesitation 'No! He did not say "Where he is, you are", but "Where you are, he is".'

I have often said before and, to the best of my memory, I now declare to you, Lord, that I was much moved by the answer, which you gave me through my mother. She was not disturbed by my interpretation of her dream, plausible though it was, but quickly saw the true meaning, which I had not seen until she spoke. I was more deeply moved by this than by the dream itself, in which the joy for which this devout woman had still so long to wait was foretold so long before to comfort her in the time of her distress. For nearly nine years were yet to come during which I wallowed deep in the mire and the darkness of delusion. Often I tried to lift myself, only to plunge the deeper. Yet all the time this chaste, devout, and prudent woman, a widow such as is close to your heart, never ceased to pray at all hours and to offer you the tears she shed for me. The dream had given new spirit to her hope, but she gave no rest to her sighs and her tears. Her prayers reached your presence (ps 87:3) and yet you still left me to twist and turn in the dark.

³THE CONFESSIONS, by St Augustine trans. by R. S. Pine-Coffin (Penguin Books 1961) pp. 68-69.

8/28/20

OUR BEING MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD, from a Treatise of St Augustine⁴

Now this trinity of the mind is the image of God, not because the mind remembers, understands, and loves itself, but because it also has the power to remember, understand, and love its Maker. And in doing this it attains wisdom. If it does not do this, the memory, understanding and love of itself is no more than an act of folly. Therefore, let the mind remember its God, to whose image it was made, let it understand and love Him.

In brief, let it worship the uncreated God who created it with the capacity for himself, and in whom it can be made partaker. Hence it is written: "Behold, the worship of God is wisdom"(Jb 28:28). By participating in that supreme Light, wisdom will belong to the mind not by its own light, and it will reign in bliss only where the eternal Light is. The wisdom is so called human wisdom as to be also that of God. If wisdom were only human it would be vain, for only God's wisdom is true wisdom. Yet when we call it God's wisdom, we do not mean the wisdom by which God is wise: He is not wise by partaking in himself as the mind is wise by partaking in God. It is more like speaking of the justice of God not only to mean that God is just but to mean the justice he gives to us when he "justifies the ungodly": to which the Apostle alludes when speaking to those who "being ignorant of God's justice, and wanting to establish their own justice, were not subject to the justice of God"(Rom 4:5). In this way we might speak of those who, ignorant of the wisdom of God and wanting to establish their own, were not subject to the wisdom of God.

There is an uncreated Being who has made all other beings great and small, certainly more excellent than everything he made, and thus also more excellent than the rational and intellectual being which we have been discussing, namely, the human mind, made to the image of its Creator. And the Being more excellent than all others is God. Indeed, he is "not far from any one of us," as the Apostle says, adding, "for in him we live and move and have our being"(Acts 17:27ff). Were this said in a material sense we could understand it of our material world: for in it also, in respect to our body, we live and move and are. The text should be taken, however, in a more excellent and also invisible and intelligible way, namely, with respect to the mind that has been made to his image.

In fact, what is there that is not in him of whom Holy Scripture says: "For from him and through him and in him are all things"(Rom 11:36)? If all things are in Him, in whom except in him in whom they are can the living live or the moving

⁴LIGHT FROM LIGHT, edited by Louis Dupre & James Wiseman, OSB--Selections from *On The Trinity*, (Paulist Press, NY, 1988) pp. 68-69.

more? Yet all are not with him in the sense in which he says "I am always with you"(Ps 73:23). Nor is he with all things in the sense in which we say, "The Lord be with you." Our great misery, therefore, is not to be with him without whom we cannot exist. Unquestionably, we are never without him in whom we are; but if one does not remember him, does not understand him or love him, he is not with him.

08SN2903

08.29.20

**John the Baptist – the Precursor of Christ in birth and death -
From a Homily by St Bede the Venerable 5**

As a forerunner of our Lord's birth, preaching and death, John showed in his struggle a goodness worthy of the sight of heaven. In the words of Scripture: "Though in the sight of men he suffered torments, his hope is full of immortality." We justly commemorate the day of his birth with a joyful celebration, a day which he himself made festive for us through his suffering and which he adorned with the crimson splendor of his own blood. We do rightly revere his memory with joyful hearts, for he stamped with the seal of martyrdom the testimony which he delivered on behalf of our Lord.

There is no doubt that blessed John suffered imprisonment and chains as a witness to our Redeemer, whose forerunner he was, and gave his life for him. His persecutor had demanded not that he deny Christ, but only that he should keep silent about the truth. Nevertheless, he died for Christ. Does Christ not say: "I am the truth?" Therefore, because John shed his blood for the truth, he surely died for Christ. Through his birth, preaching and baptizing, he bore witness to the coming birth, preaching and baptism of Christ, and by his own suffering he showed that Christ also would suffer.

Such was the quality and strength of the man who accepted the end of this present life by shedding his blood after the long imprisonment. He preached the freedom of heavenly peace, yet was thrown into irons by ungodly men; he was locked away in the darkness of prison, though he came bearing witness to the Light of life and deserved to be called a bright and shining lamp by that Light itself, which is Christ. John was baptized in his own blood, though he had been privileged to baptize the Redeemer of the world, to hear the voice of the Father above him, and to see the grace of the Holy spirit descending upon him. But to endure temporal agonies for the sake of the truth was not a heavy burden for such men as John; rather it was easily borne and even desirable, for he knew eternal joy would be his reward.

Since death was ever near at hand through the inescapable necessity of nature, such men considered it a blessing to embrace it and thus gain the reward of eternal life by acknowledging Christ's name. Hence the apostle Paul rightly says: "You have been granted the privilege not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for his sake." He tells us why it is Christ's gift that his chosen ones should suffer for him: "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us."