

SUN

08.16.20

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

The Canaanite woman whose daughter was tormented by a devil came to Christ begging his help. Most urgently she cried out: *Lord, have pity on me. My daughter is grievously tormented by a devil.* Notice that the woman was a foreigner, a gentile, a person from outside the Jewish community. What was she then but a dog, unworthy to obtain her request? *It is not fair* said the Lord, *to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs.* Nevertheless, by perseverance she became worthy; for Christ not only admitted her to the same noble rank as the children, dog though she was, but he also sent her away with high praise, saying: *Woman, you have great faith; let it be as you desire.* Now when Christ says: *you have great faith*, you need seek no further proof of the woman's greatness of soul. You see that an unworthy woman became worthy by perseverance.

Now would you like proof that we shall gain more by praying ourselves than by asking others to pray for us? The woman cries out and the disciples went to Christ and said: *Give her what she wants – she is shouting after us.* And he said to them: *I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.* But when the woman herself, still crying out, came to him and said: *That is true, sir, and yet the dogs eat what falls from their master's table*, then he granted her request, saying: *Let it be as you desire.*

Have you understood? When the disciples entreated him the Lord put them off, but when the woman herself cried out begging for this favor, he granted it. And at the beginning, when she first made her request, he did not answer, but after she had come to him once, twice, and a third time. He gave her what she desired. By this he was teaching us that he had withheld the gift not to drive her away, but to make that woman's patience an example for all of us.

Now that we have learned these lessons, let us not despair even if we are guilty of sin and unworthy of any favor. We know that we can make ourselves worthy by perseverance.

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<sup>1</sup> Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press, NY – 1990 – pg 116

MON 08.17.20

The Book of Judges – Commentary by Dom Damasus Winzen [1](#)

The deeds of the judges are “signs” of the work of redemption to be wrought by Christ. As an example let us take the story of Eliud, who killed King Eglon of Moab. Ehud's deed is not very edifying, and it would not be worthy of being regarded in the annals of God's kingdom if it did not have a spiritual meaning reaching beyond the naked fact. Eglon, who was too fat to move, is the typical representative of that pompous spirit of self-confidence with which the great ones of the earth try to imitate the omnipotent Lord of heaven and earth. He stands for the “prince of this world”. Ehud's saving deed points to the way in which the savior Christ frees mankind from the domination of the devil. Under the pretext that he has a “word of God” for Eglon, Ehud thrusts the sword into the king's belly. Now the word of God is very often called in Scripture a “sword”. When the author of the letter to the Hebrews writes: “The word of the Lord is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword; it reaches to the division of the soul and the spirit, of the joint also and the marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart”, we cannot help feeling that he has Ehud and his two-edged sword in mind. Is the law with its two commandments of the love of God and the love of neighbor not indeed a two-edged sword? Is it far-fetched to see in the two natures of Christ, as Son of God and son of man, this twofold essence of the law fulfilled? Once we see Christ Himself represented in Ehud's sword, we understand why the sword went into Eglon's belly blade and shaft. It prefigures the way Christ killed the prince of this world – by taking on the sins of humanity, by dying for them and by descending into hell. Holy Scripture does not tell Ehud's story to recommend murder but to point to the mystery of Christ, who made the sacrifice of his innocent life for the source of spiritual freedom for the new Israel.

Israel's fight for liberty against the kings reaches its climax in Deborah's rising against Jabin of Canaan. Tyranny always was, and always will be the fruit of idolatry. The Baalim of the Canaanites are local deities. They merge therefore with the local political power of the king. Israel's God, the one true God, stands for absolute justice for every person. He frees his servants from the arbitrary rule of local tyrants. “Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you? A people made free by the Lord”. This spirit of freedom under God was in danger of being suppressed under the iron rule of Jabin. His general Sisera resided in the fortress which has the significant name of Harosheth-ha-goiim, “silence of the nations”. Sisera has silenced the voice of the nations with his police force of nine hundred chariots of iron. All weapons had been confiscated. The people went underground. There were among the people no leaders.

The service of the true God is not a matter of violence and force. Those who serve him do so willingly, because he alone moves the hearts of men.

[1](#)Pathways in Scripture – Dom Damasus Winzen – Word of Life – Ann Arbor, MI – 1976 – pg 99

TUE 08.18.20

**A Reading About Martyrdom from a Book on the Resurrection, by Joseph Comblin.<sup>2</sup>**

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The Church has to undergo persecution. It is not a temporary stage, a moment in the Church's history restricted, for example, to the first three centuries, nor does it only occur as a warning of the end of time. We have little reason to believe that persecution is likely to be more intense at the end than it is now and always. Persecution is a permanent mark of the church. It defines the normal relations between the church and the world. We are always tempted to explain its occurrence as due to accident or unavoidable circumstances. We blame it on the particular malice of people or the society of the times. But these only express the fundamental hostility which animates sinful humanity in general. We have no reason to think that others placed in similar circumstances would behave differently. Everyone placed in a situation which allows rebellion against the church, does so. It is due to something more powerful than a strong current, or tidal wave, which carries people along with it despite themselves.

Persecution, however, is not the resort of political or religious powers alone. All are persecutors who refuse to co-operate with God, and reject God's word. Even Christians who are unfaithful to the grace they have received become persecutors of their own Church.

Martyrdom is the ordinary way by which the Church attains salvation. It is the very means of salvation. For the Church too has to achieve its own victory. Not by war, by returning the enemy's fire, but by patience, a firm faith and self-denial. The Apocalypse is an exhortation to conquer in this way. But Christians are too often taken unawares by persecution, and are also apt to misunderstand its real meaning. It is not a thing to be endured passively, it must be accepted as the means to salvation and the way towards the resurrection. This way is not optional, nor is it reserved for an elite of the perfect. There is no other way. "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33). By this Christ means: as I have overcome it, so will you...

We always prefer to interpret the merits of Christ's passion in such a manner as to relieve ourselves from having to pursue the same path. There is in fact a superficial view of the cross of Jesus Christ, which says: Christ has taken upon himself the burden of sin, so that we may be free of it; he followed the way of humiliation, of patience and martyrdom to save us from these things. But Christ does not exempt us, he shows us the way and draws us after him. The cross is not the object of free choice. It is inescapable. We shall only go astray if we pretend otherwise.

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<sup>2</sup>La Résurrection de Jésus-Christ, Éditions Universitaires, Paris 1958, p. 210-212. [Orval N71]

WED

08.19.20

The Life of Bl Gueric of Igny – from the Introduction to his Sermons

By Fr Hilary Costello, OCSO <sup>3</sup>

Gueric of Igny was born around 1075 at Tournai and was educated in the humanities, dialectic and theology at the cathedral school. Gueric was first attracted to the eremitical life. He went to Clairvaux without any idea of staying there. He only wanted to derive spiritual advantage from a meeting with the Abbot Bernard. Bernard saw the makings of a good monk in Gueric and urged him to stay.

Like so many of the Clairvaux community, Gueric was considerably older than his abbot. By human standards he was more mature and experienced. Gueric remained at Clairvaux for thirteen years. Igny was founded as the fourth foundation of Clairvaux in 1127. In 1138 the first abbot of Igny, Humbert, resigned and returned to Clairvaux. Gueric was chosen as its second abbot. There is a passage in the *Vita Hugonis* which suggests that Bernard influenced the choice considerably. “It was Bernard who brought Gueric to the monastic life and Bernard favored his election as abbot. He knew of no man living more holy than Gueric and so declared him the one candidate for the office. But this does not indicate that Gueric was imposed on the community. The monks of twelve years standing would have known him at Clairvaux. Gueric himself says that the community chose him: “I am no physician and in my house there is no bread’. That is what I said from the start: ‘Do not make me your leader.’ It is not right for one to rule who cannot be of service. And how can he be of service who is not a physician and in whose house there is no bread? He has neither the art of healing souls nor learning to feed them with? I told you this, but you would not listen. You made me your superior.” Gueric may indeed have been about sixty years old, but then his long experience both before and after his entrance into Clairvaux must have been thought a valuable asset.

Igny flourished under Gueric. Vocations were plentiful and so were benefactors. Much land and money was given to the monastery during his tenure. It was none of this that was to make the abbot’s name known to posterity, but the spiritual teaching committed to writing in his sermons. He seems to have died on August 19, 1157. More than six hundred years later his remains were taken into a new church.

Along with Bernard, Aelred of Rievaulx and William of St Thierry, Gueric has been called the four evangelists of Citeaux.

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<sup>3</sup> Gueric of Igny – Liturgical Sermons – vol. 1 – Cistercian Fathers Series #8 – Cistercian Publications – Spencer, MA – 1970 – pg xi ff

THUR

08.20,20

**St. Bernard as master of mystical and spousal love in Christ: a reading from a letter of Pope John Paul II to the Cistercian Abbots General.**

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...The age in which St Bernard lived saw the beginnings of a new stage of intellectual life in Europe. In fact, while the study of man himself increased, there began an intellectual movement which later on was called humanism and which even in our own times continues with vigor. The Doctor of Clairvaux who knew the aspirations and anxieties of his age, understood thoroughly this new passion for man and did not simply reject it nor condemn it.

On the contrary, he affirmed that man, created according to the image and likeness of God, is an “exalted creature,” and because of this—a capacity to share in the very divine grandeur itself, but at the same time, this capacity also shows him to be miserable, poor, weak and insignificant. Christ saved the whole person in order to bring into eternal life not only his soul but also his body.

Thus, affirming openly the dignity of the human condition, St Bernard exclaimed: “How admirable is the goodness of God seeking man! How great, also, the dignity of man thus found!” And thus, from the consideration of man’s dignity which is revealed by creation and redemption, he showed that there arose, as from a double spring, a true Christian humanism. In fact, in affirming that the image of God remains in us even after sin, and that God became man in order to save man,; St Bernard in theological doctrine contemplates at the same time the dignity and misery of man and in this way he avoids the danger of false “anthropocentrism.”

The christology of St Bernard offers an adequate foundation to the Christian humanism when he teaches with a certain forcefulness that the whole person was taken up in Christ. Actually, while we are living on this earth, in our human condition, we have access to God only through the law of the Incarnation. This “excellent doctor,” when he affirms that he does not yet see Christ in a form equal to the Father because he does not contemplate “God with God,” nevertheless added: “at least as a man, I present Him as man to men.” These words contain an understanding of the true sense of the word “humanism”: the recognition of the limitations as well as the exalted capacity and dignity of man who was created in Paradise, united in friendship with God and was called through the goodness of God to a much more intimate union which surpasses all human concepts and all expectations.

In the spiritual school of St Bernard, the earthly life of Jesus is never found separated from the Eternal Word Incarnate; it is both present with the Father in glory and present among us by grace as the Spouse of the Church and of the soul. [It is he] who calls and leads his bride to the most intimate union with him in the Father. It is with reason then that the Abbot of Clairvaux was called Master of mystical and spousal love in Christ.

**A Reading on St Pius X by Leonard Von Matt.<sup>4</sup>**

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Pius X, the canonized Pope, holds a special place in the hearts of the faithful. But this devotion of the faithful did not begin only at his canonization, when the Church publicly proclaimed the holiness of his life: it began from the moment when he ascended the papal throne. At once there grew up an understanding between the Shepherd and his flock. The first to understand him were the simple, humble people, who recognized him for what he was.

...The obvious quality which led to his canonization was his outstanding holiness. With Pius X, sanctity seemed to be the most natural thing in the world. It quietly enlivened all that he said or did. Yet it would seem that Giuseppe Sarto's natural temperament inclined to a certain violence, easily inflamed, and no one will ever know how much struggle it cost him to achieve that gentleness and unruffled goodness for which he was so renowned. We can follow him on the narrow path which he set himself as church-student, curate, parish-priest, bishop, cardinal and Pope; but the moment of his vocation to the priesthood and the beginning of his heroic sanctity are secrets known to God alone. A certain holiness seems to have been his from the beginning: his striving after a virtuous life seems never to have been interrupted, his charity never diminished. But it was when he began what he called the Ascent of Mount Calvary, when he became Pope, that his great sanctity became evident. It was his conscientiousness that turned the enormous responsibility of the office into a crucifixion: he gave himself unstintingly to the service of the Church, and spent himself without reserve for the love of God and everyone. His sanctity lay in this total dedication: it was thus an inner and in a great measure a hidden sanctity: there were no spectacular penances, no remarkable practices beyond those of a normal, good Christian. It might almost be said that Pius X became a saint in spite of himself by sanctifying himself and his nature and by not resisting God's grace that drew him on.

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<sup>4</sup>St Pius X, Leonard Von Matt. Henry Regnery Co. 1955, p.85,86

**WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE SPEAK OF THE QUEENSHIP OF MARY? from the writings of Thomas Merton<sup>5</sup>**

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Mary alone, of all the saints, is, in everything, incomparable. She has the sanctity of them all and yet resembles none of them. And still we can talk of being like her. This likeness to her is not only something to desire --it is one human quality most worthy of our desire: but the reason for that is that she, of all creatures, most perfectly recovered the likeness to God that God willed to find, in varying degrees, in us all.

It is necessary, no doubt, to talk about her privileges as if they were something that could be made comprehensible in human language and could be measured by some human standard. It is most fitting to talk about her as a Queen and to act as if you knew what it meant to say she has a throne above all the angels. But this should not make anyone forget that her highest privilege is her poverty and her greatest glory is that she is most hidden, and the source of all her power is that she is as nothing in the presence of Christ, of God.

This is often forgotten by Catholics themselves, and therefore it is not surprising that those who are not Catholic often have a completely wrong conception of Catholic devotion to the Mother of God. They imagine, and sometimes we can understand their reasons for doing so, that Catholics treat the Blessed Virgin as an almost divine being in her own right, as if she had some glory, some power, some majesty of her own that placed her on a level with Christ himself. They regard the Assumption of Mary into heaven as a kind of apotheosis and her Queenship as a strict divinization. Hence her place in the Redemption would seem to be equal to that of her Son. But this is all completely contrary to the true mind of the Catholic Church. It forgets that Mary's chief glory is her nothingness, in the fact of being the "*Handmaid* of the Lord," as one who in becoming the Mother of God acted simply in loving submission to his command, in the pure obedience of faith. She is blessed not because of some mythical pseudo-divine prerogative, but in all her human and womanly limitations as *one who has believed*. It is the faith and the fidelity of this humble handmaid, "full of grace" that enables her to be the perfect instrument of God, and nothing else but his instrument. The work that was done in her was purely the work of God. "He that is mighty has done great things in me." The glory of Mary is purely and simply the glory of God in her, and she, like anyone else, can say that she has nothing that she has not received from him through Christ.

As a matter of fact, this is precisely her greatest glory: that having nothing of her own, retaining nothing of a "self" that could glory in anything for her own sake, she placed no obstacle to the mercy of God and in no way resisted his love and his will. Hence she received *more* from him than any other saint. He was able to accomplish his will perfectly in her, and his liberty was in no way hindered or turned from its purpose by the presence of an egotistical self in Mary. She was and is in the highest sense a person precisely because, being "immaculate," she was free from every taint of selfishness that

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<sup>5</sup>New Seeds of Contemplation, Thomas Merton (New Directions NY 1961) pp. 169-171.

might obscure God's light in her being. She was then a freedom that obeyed him perfectly and in this obedience found the fulfillment of perfect love.