

SUN

09.20.20

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by St Augustine ¹

The gospel story about the vineyard workers is appropriate to this time of year, the season of the earthly grape harvest. But there is also another harvest, the spiritual one, at which God rejoices at the fruits of his vineyard.

The kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out to hire men to work in his vineyard. In the evening he gave orders for all to be paid, beginning with the last comers and ending with the first. Now why did he pay the last comers firsts? Will not everyone be rewarded at the same time? We read in another gospel passage how the king will msay to those on his right hand: *Come, you whom my Father has blessed; take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* If all, then, are to receive their wages together, how should we understand this statement about those who arrived at the eleventh hour being paid first, and those who had been working since daybreak being paid last? If I can say anything to further your understanding, thanks be to God. Give thanks to him who teaches you through me, for my own knowledge is not the source of my teaching.

To take an example, then,, let us ask which of two workers receives his wages sooner, one who is paid after an hour, or one who is paid after twelve hours? Anyone will answer: "One who is paid after an hour." So also in our parable. All the workmen were paid at the same time, but because some were paid after an hour and others after twelve hours, the former, having had a shorter time to wait, may be said to have received their wages first.

The earliest righteous people like Abel and Noah, called as it were at the first hour, will receive the joy of resurrection at the same time as we do. So also will others who came later, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and those contemporary with them, called as we may say at the third hour. Moses and Aaron and those called with them at the sixth hour, and after them the holy prophets, called at the ninth hour. At the end of the world all Christians, called at the eleventh hour, will receive the joy of resurrection together with those who went before them. All will be rewarded at the same time, but the first comers will have had the longest to wait. Therefore, if they receive their reward after a longer period, and we after a shorter one, the fact that our reward is not delayed will make it seem as though we were receiving it first, even though we all received it together.

¹ Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press = NY – 1999 – p 126

² The Saints, ed. John Coulson, Guild Press-NY, 1957, p. 538-541.

³ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture – O.T. IV – InterVarsity Press – Downers Grove, IL – 2005

In that great reward. then. we shall all be equal – the first to the last and the last to the first. For the denarius stands for eternal life, in which all will have the same share. Although through diversity of merit some will shine more brilliantly than others, in the possession of eternal life there will be equality. What is endless for all will not be longer for one and shorter for another. What has no bounds will have none either for you or for me. Those who lived chastely in the married state will have one kind of splendor; virgins will have another. The reward for good works will differ from the crown of martyrdom; but where eternal life is concerned there can be no question of more or less for anyone. Whatever may be the individual's degree of glory, each one will live in it eternally. This is the meaning of the denarius.

MON 09.21.2020

Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist, from The Saints, ed. John Coulson²

Few people love the tax collector. Even in these days when the relation between taxer and taxed is, no doubt, scrupulously correct, his name strikes cold. Much more was this so in the Palestine of the first century, when it was in his interests to bully and harry and falsify. But even the mild and honest tax collector was not acceptable to official Judaism: he did business with the gentile and handled his money; he was legally impure, socially outcast. A Jewish Rabbi would be bold indeed to invite him to join his inner circle of disciples: it would be a gesture of defiance to the established prejudice. And so the formula 'publicans and sinners' slipped even into the phrase book of the evangelist and, quaintly enough, into the Gospel of Matthew the publican. This term 'publican' by the way does not accurately describe Matthew's profession but flatters it. The Pharisees might despise it, but the trade was a profitable one and much sought after: whether it be pursued honestly or dishonestly would depend on the character of the officer.

"And Jesus passed further on, he saw Levi, the son of Alpheus, sitting at work in the customs-house and said to him, "Follow me"; and he rose and followed him. That this was a call to the apostolate there is no doubt - its terms too closely match those of the call of Simon and Andrew to be otherwise. Yet 'Levi' does not appear in any list of the Twelve. Now the vocation of the tax collector is reported in the first Gospel too, but there he is called 'Matthew', thus identifying him with the Matthew who appears in all the apostolic lists. The widely accepted and most natural explanation is that Matthew and Levi are one person with two Semitic names. It may be that our Lord himself gave him the name Matthew (Mattai, 'gift of God', in Aramaic) as he gave Kepha to Simon.

This Matthew then got up from his registers and henceforth - at our Lord's suggestion - took a lesson from the lilies and birds that never did a day's calculation in their lives. His master was no longer Antipas, the shrewd 'fox' but one who, unlike the foxes, had not

²The Saints, ed. John Coulson, Guild Press-NY, 1957, p. 538-541.

even a home. The change destroyed all Matthew's worldly prospects: Simon and Andrew might return to their fish, but Matthew had thrown over a coveted business and could never recover it. He left it gladly, it seems and completely - at least it was not he but Judas who kept the accounts for the apostolic group.

After the incident of his call Matthew disappears from the New Testament except as a name in the apostolic lists. What became of him? We have a sentence from a book by Bishop Papias of Hieropolis. "Matthew wrote an ordered account of the oracles (of our Lord) and each interpreted these oracles according to his ability." Time had had its revenge. When the need for a written gospel record began to be felt, upon which of the Apostles would the choice fall? Upon one who used the pen, no doubt. Poor Matthew was back where he started, but this time with an eager will and high purpose. In Palestine, some time between the years 40 and 50, this ex-civil servant produced not the lively and artless Gospel of St. Mark but the orderly, almost ledger like, treatise, which we know as 'The Gospel according to St. Matthew.'

(over)

And so Matthew's old trade entered a new service; the accountant became an evangelist. It is not surprising that he alone records his Master's words; "Every scholar whose learning is of the kingdom of heaven...knows how to bring both new and old things out of his treasure house. For there is no poor tool of ours that God's service will not perfect and dignify.

It is commonly but not unanimously affirmed he died a martyr's death; but we know for certain that he lived a martyr's life - and that is enough. And for us he will always be the man who knew what money was and what it was not.

TUES 09.22.20

A Commentary on the Final chapter of the Book of Judges by St. Ambrose ³

The end of the war was also the end of their wrath, and anger turned to sorrow. Then, putting off their armor the men of Israel met together and wept much and celebrated a fast, grieving that one tribe of their brothers had perished and a strong band of people had been wiped out. They had warred rightly against the authors of the crime because of the cost of the sin, but the people had turned unhappily against their own flesh and each was afflicted with civil war. The outpouring of tears moved their minds to compassion and stirred their feelings; the plan conceived in anger was gone. Sending legates to the six hundred men of Benjamin, who for four months guarded themselves on the top of sheer rocks and by the desert's barrenness, which was dangerous for a mass of attackers, they lamented their common hardship in losing their fellow tribesmen, relatives and allies. Yet the hope of renewing the tribe was not wholly destroyed and they consulted together how they might agree on a pledge of faith and one tribe not perish, severed from the body.

The sentence was that none of the people of the ancestors should give his daughter in marriage to members of the Benjamin tribe. This was confirmed by a solemn oath. But relenting at having laid so hard a sentence on their brothers, they moderated their severity so as to give them in marriage those maidens who had lost their parents, whose fathers had been slain for their sins, or to give them the means of finding a wife by a raid. Because of the villainy of so foul a deed, they who had violated another's marriage rights were shown to be unworthy to ask for marriage. But for fear that one tribe might perish from the people, they connived at the deceit.

³ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture – O.T. IV – InterVarsity Press – Downers Grove, IL – 2005 – pg 178

WEDS 09.23.20

St. Pio of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio) from Butler's Lives of the Saints ⁴

The most famous stigmatist since St Francis of Assisi was born into a family of agricultural laborers in Pietrelcina, northeast of Naples, on May 25, 1887. In 1903 he received the capuchin habit, taking the name of Fra Pio. Seven years later he was ordained to the priesthood. Not long after this he began to experience pains in his hands and feet, and on September 11, 1911 he confessed to his spiritual director that he had had invisible stigmata for over a year. He also suffered the pains of Christ's crown of thorns and scourging.

On August 5, 1918 he underwent the further mystical experience of "transverberation" (piercing with the lance), which left him with a wound in his side that bled continually. A month later the stigmata in his hands and feet became visible and remained so until the final day of his life. The Capuchins made no attempt to conceal Padre Pio's condition, which soon became known all over Italy and was the main cause of both his celebrity and the controversy that surrounded him. As people started flocking to his convent in their thousands, the Vatican, cautious as ever when faced with "private" favors and revelations, had him examined by a succession of doctors. The physical manifestations were undeniable. But were they from God, the psychosomatic effect of a disturbed personality, or even a fraudulent attempt on his part of that of the convent to achieve notoriety?

Huge crowds attended his Masses, during which he went into ecstatic states that could last for two hours or more. In July 1923 he received an order to say Mass in private, but so real was the threat of a violent popular reaction that it was rescinded the following day. Padre Pio himself made no comment on his condition other than that he was "a mystery to himself" but his gifts should produce benefits for others.

His community was able to ensure that they were so used when money offerings started coming in from his penitents and admirers. In January 1925, he opened a twenty-bed hospital that was named after St. Francis and remained in operation for thirteen years.

Throughout this time apostolic visitations continued, as the church authorities attempted to establish the "genuineness" of his stigmata and of his ever-growing ministry. In 1931 he was suspended from all priestly functions apart from saying Mass, which he was required to do in private. However after two years official doubt again yielded to popular enthusiasm, and the restrictions were lifted.

⁴ Butler's Lives of Saints – New Full Edition – September – Liturgical Press – Collegeville, MN – 2000 – pg 216f

In 1940, with the particular support of Maria Pyle, a wealthy American woman to whose mother he had ministered as she was dying in 1929, Padre Pio was in a position to undertake a more ambitious hospital project. Medical and administrative committees were set up, but the Second World War delayed further implementation of the project until 1946, when a limited company was formed to carry the work forward.

By 1948, when the number of penitents was such that Padre Pio was obliged to establish an advanced booking system, Pope Pius XII and the Vatican were taking a more favorable line. Padre Pio was invited to visit the Pope, who suggested the formation of prayer groups to support the work of the hospital. His vision here was original. The schedule for each day was divided into times for prayer and times for science, and he declared that he wanted the foundation to include an international study center, a hospice for old people, and a cenacle for spiritual exercises, all to be run by a “new militia” in the service of the sick.

In 1959 Padre Pio’s own health deteriorated. Then in August he recovered, apparently miraculously, when a statue of Our Lady of Fatima was brought into the hospital for two days.

He died on September 23, 1968, and doctors who examined his body found his hands and feet unmarked and “fresh as those of a child”. He was beatified and later canonized by Pope John Paul II. In his address the Pope spoke not so much of Padre Pio’s extraordinary experiences but of the long hours the friar would spend in the confessional and of his extraordinary charity, which, he said, “was poured like balm on the sufferings of his brothers and sisters.”

THUR 09.24.20

A Reading from the Golden Epistle by William of St Thierry [1](#)

The cell is holy ground and a holy place in which the Lord and his servant often talk together as a man does with his friend; in which the faithful soul frequently has intercourse with the Word of God, the bride is in company with the Bridegroom, the heavenly is united to the earthly, the divine to the human. Indeed as a church is a place holy to God, so the cell is the sanctuary of God's servant.

For both in a church and in a cell the things of God are practiced, but more continually in the cell. In a church at certain times the sacraments of Christian religion are dispensed visibly and in figure, while in cells as in heaven the reality which underlies all the sacraments of our faith is continually celebrated with as much truth, in the same order, although not yet with the same untarnished magnificence or the same security that marks eternity.

Therefore, as has been said, the cell quickly expels as an abortion the man who does not belong to it, is not its true son; it vomits him forth like useless and harmful food. The workshop of piety cannot long suffer such a one to remain in its bosom. The foot of pride comes and the sinner's hand carries him off to another place; he is cast out and cannot find anywhere to settle, he flees in misery, naked and trembling, like Cain before the face of the Lord. Or if he does continue in the cell for some time it is not through the constancy which virtue breeds but through an obstinacy that makes him wretched, and so his cell is like a prison for him or like a sepulcher that has swallowed up a living man.

However the wise man will be all the wiser for the punishment of the fool, and the just man will wash his hands in the blood of the sinner. Therefore, as the Prophet says: "If you are converted, Israel, be converted," that is to say, attain to the summit of perfect conversion. For no one is allowed to remain long in the same condition. The servant of God must always either make progress or go back; either he struggles upwards or he is driven down into the depths.

But from all of you perfection is demanded, although not the same kind from each. If you are beginning begin perfectly; if you are already making progress be perfect also in your doing of that; if you have already achieved some measure of perfection measure yourselves by yourselves and say with the apostle: "Not that I have already won the prize, already reached fulfillment. I only press on, in the hope of winning the mastery, as Christ Jesus has won the mastery over me. This at least I do: forgetting what I have left behind, intent on what lies before me, I press on with the goal in view, eager for the prize, God's heavenly summons in Christ Jesus." - *over* -

Then he adds: "All of us who are perfect must be of this mind." Clearly the apostle's teaching in this passage is that the perfection of the just man in this life consists in wholly forgetting what lies behind him and pressing on with might and main to what lies before. And the place where the perfection of this perfection will be achieved is where the prize of God's heavenly summons will be grasped with full security.

[1](#)The Golden Epistle – William of St Thierry – Cistercian Fathers Series #12 – Cistercian Publications – Kalamazoo, MI – 1971 – pg 22

FRI 09.11.2019

**A reading about family solidarity in ancient Israel,
from a book by Fr. Roland de Vaux. ¹**

Prehistoric Israel is to us a closed book; but whatever may be true of that epoch, there is no doubt that from the time of our oldest documents, at any rate, the Israelite family is *patriarchal*. The proper word to describe it is *bêth 'ab*, the 'house of one's father'; the genealogies are always given in the father's line, and women are rarely mentioned; and the nearest relation in the collateral line is the paternal uncle....

The family consists of those who are united by common blood and common dwelling-place. The 'family' is a 'house'; to found a family is 'to build a house' (Ne 7.4)... the family included the servants, the resident aliens ... and the 'stateless persons', widows and orphans, who lived under the protection of the head of the family.

Again, the term *bêth* or 'house', like the word 'family' in modern languages, is very flexible and may even include the entire nation (the 'house of Jacob' or the 'house of Israel'), or a considerable section of the people (the 'house of Joseph' or the 'house of Judah'). It may denote kinship in the wide sense ... In this wide sense, the family was the same group as the clan.... The [clan] concentrated in one area, occupying one or more villages according to its size.

The members of the family in this wider sense had an obligation to help and to protect one another. There was in Israel an institution which defined the occasions when this obligation called for action; it is the institution of the *gôel*, from a root which means 'to buy back or to redeem', 'to lay claim to', but fundamentally its meaning is 'to protect'. This institution has analogies among other peoples (for example, the Arabs), but in Israel it took a special form with its own terminology.

The *gôel* was a redeemer, a protector, a defender of the interests of the individual and of the group. If an Israelite had to sell himself into slavery in order to repay a debt, he would be 'redeemed' by one of his near relations (Lev 25.47-49). If an Israelite had to sell his patrimony, the *gôel* had priority over all other purchasers; it was his right and duty to buy it himself, to prevent the family property from being alienated.

The story of Ruth is yet another illustration of this custom, but here the purchase of the land is rendered more complicated by a case of levirate. Naomi had some property which, because of her poverty, she was forced to sell; and her daughter-in-law Ruth was a childless widow. Boaz was a *gôel* of Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 2.20), but there was a closer relative who could exercise this right before him (Ruth 3.12; 4.4). This first *gôel* would

¹ *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961, pp. 20ff.

have bought the land, but he would not accept the double obligation of buying the land and marrying Ruth, because the child of this union would bear the name of the deceased husband and inherit the land (Ruth 4.4-6). So Boaz bought the family property and married Ruth (Ruth 4.9-10).

This story shows that the right of the *gôel* followed a certain order of kinship: first, the paternal uncle, then his son, then other relations. Further, the *gôel* could renounce his right or decline his duty without blame. By taking off one shoe (Ruth 4.7-8) a man proclaimed that he was forgoing his right....

The term *gôel* passed into religious usage. Thus Yahweh, avenger of the oppressed, and savior of his people, is called a *gôel* [in several different books of the Hebrew Scriptures].

SAT 02.04.2006

The silence of Mary: a reading from the works of Pierre de Bérulle. 5

It falls to the Virgin to keep silence. It is her condition, her road, her life. Her life is a life of silence, which adores the eternal Word. Seeing before her eyes, at her breast, in her arms, this same Word, the substantial Word of the Father, to be dumb and reduced to silence by the condition of his childhood, she enters again into a new silence and is transformed by it after the example of the incarnate Word who is her Son, her God and her sole love. And in that way her life goes on, from silence to silence, from a silence of adoration to a silence of transformation.

Mary is in silence, enraptured by the silence of her Son Jesus. One of the sacred and divine effects of the silence of Jesus is to put the most holy Mother of Jesus into a life of silence: a silence that is humble, profound, and that adores the incarnate Wisdom with more holiness and eloquence than the words of either angels or humans. This silence on the part of the Virgin is not a silence of one who hesitates in speech or of one who is helpless: it is a silence more eloquent, in its praise of Jesus, than eloquence itself. And so it is marvelous to see that, in this condition of the silence and the childhood of Jesus, everyone speaks and Mary says nothing at all: the silence of Jesus has more power to hold her in sacred silence than the words of either angels or saints have the power to bring her in and make her speak of things so worthy of praise, things that heaven and earth are at one in celebrating and adoring.

The angels speak of these things among themselves and to the shepherds, and Mary is in silence. The shepherds hurry away and speak, and Mary is in silence. The kings arrive and speak, and make the whole city, the whole state, all the sacred synod of Judea, speak: and Mary has withdrawn and is in silence. The whole state is moved, and everyone is astonished and speaks of the new king sought by the kings, and Mary is in her repose and holy silence. Simeon speaks in the temple, and Anna the prophetess, and

5 *Opuscules de piété*, 39, dans *Oeuvres complètes de Bérulle*, Édit. Migne, Paris, 1856, pp. 988-989; reprinted in *ALectures chrétiennes pour notre temps* 8 1971, Abbaye d'Orval, Belgium (M-77).

all those who await the salvation of Israel: and Mary offers, gives, receives and brings back her Son in silence; so powerful and secretly impressive is the silence of Jesus on the spirit and heart of the Virgin, keeping her powerfully and divinely occupied and enraptured in silence. For, again, during the time of his childhood, we have nothing but these words which have been brought to us about the conduct of the Virgin and about her holiness in regard to her Son and to the things which are reported of him and accomplished in him: But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart (Lk 2.19). There we see the condition and occupation of the Virgin, there are her daily duties and her life in regard to Jesus during his holy childhood.