

SUN

09.27.20

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by Clement of Alexandria ¹

He went out moved by regret. The tax collectors and prostitutes will precede you into the Kingdom of God

The doors are open for all who sincerely and wholeheartedly return to God; indeed the Father is most willing to welcome back a truly repentant son or daughter. The result of true repentance, however, is that you do not fall into the same faults again, but utterly uproot from your souls the sins for which you consider yourself worthy of death. When these have been destroyed God will again dwell within you, since Scripture says that for the Father and his angels in heaven the festal joy and gladness at the return of one repentant sinner is great beyond compare. That is why the Lord cried out: *What I want is mercy, not sacrifice. I desire not the death of the sinner but his conversion. Even if your sins are like crimson wool I will make them as white as snow; even if they are blacker than night. I will wash them as white as wool.*

Although only God has power to forgive sin and to cancel transgressions, the Lord commands us also to forgive our repentant brothers and sisters every day. So if we who are evil know how to give good gifts, how much more generous must be the Father of mercies, the good Father of all consolation, who is full of compassion and mercy, and whose nature it is to be patient and await our conversion! Genuine conversion, however, means ceasing to sin without any backward glance.

God pardons what is past, then, but for the future we are each responsible for ourselves. By repenting we condemn our past misdeeds and beg forgiveness of the Father, the only one who can in his mercy undo what has been done, and wipe away our past sins with the dew of the Spirit. And so, if you are a thief and desire to be forgiven, steal no more. If you are a robber, return your gains with interest. If you have been a false witness, practice speaking the truth. If you are a perjurer, stop taking oaths. You must also curb all the other evil passions: anger, lust, grief and fear. No doubt you will be unable all at once to root out passions habitually given way to, but this can be achieved by God's power, human prayers, the help of your brothers and sisters, sincere repentance, and constant practice.

MON

09.28.20

A Reading about Kingly succession in Israel, from a book by Fr Eugene Maly.²

Leadership in Israel was traditionally determined by charismatic manifestations. This had been maintained in the case of Saul and, to some extent perhaps, in the case of

¹ Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY – 1999 – pg128

²"The World of David and Solomon", Englewood Cliffs 1965, pp 108-110.

David. The greatness of David's rule and its relative length would tend to consolidate both attention and power in his family, and indirectly to force the charismatic principle into the shadows. On the theological level the Nathan oracle would have canonized the principle of dynastic succession. In accord with that principle and with ancient Israelite custom concerning the rights of the firstborn, the tendency would also be to consider the oldest son as the most likely heir.

With this review in mind we can appreciate Adonijah's position. As the oldest son now, he was the heir presumptive, the presumption, of course, being principally his and others' interested in his cause. Aware, as Absalom before him had been, that the presumption was not universally shared and that his father especially had given no indication that he shared it (quite the contrary, in fact, if we can believe the report of Nathan that David had made a previous promise to Bathsheba: cf. 1 Kgs 1:11-14), Adonijah acted. The biblical author tells the story beautifully. After having told of the attempts to keep the aging David warm, he states abruptly, *Now Adonijah.. exalted himself, saying, "I will be king;" and he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him.*

It was not, of course, all that simple, but we must remember that the ancient authors *interpreted* history as they wrote it, and their artistic methodology is a frequent clue to their interpretation. At any rate, our author was just as aware as we are that what he recorded was the climatic act in a palace intrigue that had doubtless been brewing for some time. Adonijah, if he had any political *savoir faire* at all, knew that he would need powerful collaborators for any public claim on the throne. He had too many ambitious brothers and half-brothers, not to mention their jealous mothers, to make such a claim lightly. Our author provides us with the needed facts. Adonijah had succeeded in enlisting Joab, the military commander, and Abiathar, one of the high priests, on his side; both were powerful representatives of two of the principal facets of Israelite life and government. Finally, he gave religious sanction to his edict by offering sacrifice, in the presence of those members of the royal family and royal court sympathetic to his cause, at the sacred spring of En-rogel, just outside Jerusalem.

The fact that Adonijah did act while his father was still alive could argue that another faction was already in existence. This faction would be centered around Solomon, by no means one of the older sons of David. His only claim, apparently, was a reported promise made by David to his mother, Bathsheba, that her son would succeed him. Again, our biblical author provides the names of those who constituted this faction. The list is even more formidable than that of Adonijah's faction. It includes Zadok, the priest, and Benaiah, the leader of the mercenaries. But more than this there is Nathan, the prophet, whose court influence was demonstrated more than once, and, presumably, *David's mighty men*. The favor of these last was extremely important; there is no record of their having lost a campaign! Finally, of course, there was Solomon's mother, Bathsheba. On Nathan's urging and with his counsel, she came before the king and informed him of Adonijah's treasonous acts, at the same time reminding him of his promise regarding Solomon. She was still speaking when Nathan, by prior arrangement, entered, confirmed the report and repeated the request of Bathsheba. The stratagem worked. David called in the principals of Solomon's faction and gave command that Bathsheba's son be anointed king at the sacred place of Gihon.

TUE 09.29.20

From A sermon by St Bernard of Clairvaux ³

“He has given his angels charge over you to guard you in all your ways. Let them thank the Lord for His mercy; his wonderful works are for the children of earth.” Let them give thanks and say among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them. O Lord, what is man that you have made yourself known to him, or why do you incline your heart to him? And you do incline your heart to him; you show him your care and concern. Finally you send your only son and the grace of your spirit, and promise him a vision of your countenance. And so, that nothing in heaven should be wanting in your concern for us, you send those blessed spirits to serve us, assigning them as our guardians and teachers.

“He has given his angels charge over you to guard you in all your ways.” These words should fill you with respect, inspire devotion and instill confidence; respect for the presence of angels, devotion because of their loving service, and confidence because of their protection. And so the angels are here; they are at your side, they are with you, present on your behalf. They are here to protect you and to serve you. But even if it is God who has given them this charge, we must nevertheless be grateful to them for the great love with which they obey and come to help us in our great need.

So let us be devoted and grateful to such great protectors; let us return their love and honor them as much as we can and should. Yet all our love and honor must go to him, for it is from him that they receive all that makes them worthy of our love and respect.

We should then, my brothers, show our affection for the angels, for one day they will be our coheirs just as here below they are our guardians and trustees appointed and set over us by the Father. We are God’s children although it does not seem so, because we are still but small children under guardians and trustees, and for the present little better than slaves.

Even though we are children and have a long, a very long and dangerous way to go, with such protectors what have we to fear? They who keep us in all our ways cannot be overpowered or led astray, much less lead us astray. They are loyal, prudent, powerful. Why then are we afraid? We have only to follow them, stay close to them, and we shall dwell under the protection of God’s heaven.

³ The Liturgy of the Hours – vol. IV – Catholic Book Publishing Co – New York – 1975 – pg 1454

WED

09.30.20

Saint Jerome's advice about Scripture: a reading from his letter to Paulinus.

[1](#)

You see how, carried away by my love of the scriptures, I have exceeded the limits of a letter yet have not fully accomplished my object. We have heard only what it is that we ought to know and to desire, so that we too may be able to say with the psalmist: *“My soul breaks out with the fervent desire it always has had for your judgments”* (Ps 119.20). But the saying of Socrates about himself—“I only know this: that I know nothing”—is fulfilled in our case also.

The New Testament I will briefly deal with. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are the Lord's team of four, the true cherubim or store of knowledge. [Like the description in the prophet Ezekiel,] with them the whole body is full of eyes, they glitter as sparks, they run and return like lightning, their feet are straight feet, and lifted up, their backs also are winged, ready to fly in all directions. They hold together each by each and are interwoven one with another: like wheels within wheels they roll along and go wherever the breath of the Holy Spirit wafts them. The apostle Paul writes to seven churches (for the eighth epistle, that to the Hebrews, is not generally counted in with the others). He instructs Timothy and Titus; he interceded with Philemon for his runaway slave. Of him I think it better to say nothing than to write inadequately. The Acts of the Apostles seem to relate a mere unvarnished narrative, descriptive of the infancy of the newly born church; but when once we realize that their author is Luke the physician whose praise is in the gospel, we shall see that all his works are medicine for the sick soul. The apostles James, Peter, John and Jude have published seven epistles at once spiritual and to the point, short and long, short that is in words but lengthy in substance so that there are few indeed who do not find themselves in the dark when they read them. The apocalypse of John has as many mysteries as words. In saying this I have said less than the book deserves. All praise of it is inadequate; manifold meanings lie hid in its every word.

I beg of you, my dear brother, to live among these books, to meditate upon them, to know nothing else, to seek nothing else. Does not such a life seem to you a foretaste of heaven here on earth? Let not the simplicity of the scripture or the poorness of its vocabulary offend you: for these are due either to the faults of translators or else to deliberate purpose: for in this way it is better fitted for the instruction of an unlettered congregation as the educated person can take one meaning and the uneducated another from one and the same sentence. I am not so dull or so forward as to profess that I myself know it, or that I can pluck upon the earth the fruit which has its root in heaven, but I confess that I should like to do so. I put myself before the man who sits idle and, while I lay no claim to be a master, I readily pledge myself to be a fellow-student. *“Every one that asks, receives; and those that seek, find; and to those that knock, it shall be opened”* (Mt 7.8). Let us learn upon earth that knowledge which will continue with us in heaven.

[1](#)Letter LIII in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series Two, Volume 6; translated by W. H. Fremantle, p. 101-102.

THUR 10.01.20

The mission of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: a reading from a book by Hans Urs von Balthasar. 1

There can be no doubt that Thérèse of Lisieux was directly entrusted by God with a mission to the Church. YThérèse=s mission, at the very first glance, displays the marks of a clearly defined, and quite exceptional character. This is much less due to the personal drama of the little saint than to the sacred Form into which the trickling grains of petty anecdotes are compressed, into a hard, unbreakable block, by a firm invisible hand. It is contrary to all expectation that the simple, modest story of this little girl should eventually culminate, as it irrefutably does, in the enunciation of theological truths. Originally she herself never dreamt that she might be chosen to bear some fundamental message to the Church. She only became aware of it gradually; in fact, it did not occur to her until her task was almost completed, after she had already lived out her teaching and was writing the last chapters of her book. Suddenly, as she saw it all laid out before her, she recognized its strangeness, that in her obedience she had unwillingly conceived something beyond her own personality. And now that she saw it she also understood it, and seized it with a kind of violence.

Ever since her childhood Thérèse had shown a striking inclination to meditating and reflecting upon herself. [This] meant that when she discovered her mission she became intensely conscious of it in a manner rare amongst the saints. At that moment she realized she was to be set on a pedestal, and that every bit of her life, even its smallest details, would be used as a pattern for many of the little ones. She regards the publication of her manuscript as an important work; she knows that all the world will love me, and that her writings will do a great deal of good. During her last months, as if making her last will and testament, she repeats constantly: One must tell souls Exactly the same expressions recur in reference to the mission she is soon to begin in heaven: I feel that my mission will soon begin to teach souls to love God as I love Him, to give them my little way. If my wishes are realized, I shall spend my Heaven on earth until the end of the world. Similarly she recognizes the function within the Church of her mission. She not only foresees the proclamation of her own sanctity but she also, as it were, foresaw the canonization of her doctrine. The two are not separable it is not so much her writings as her life itself which is her doctrine, especially since her writings speak about her life more than anything else. Nor does she hesitate to propose her life as an example for the Church, because it is in her life that she sees the realization of that doctrine which can do so much good.

So her life only contains exemplary value for the Church insofar as the Holy Spirit has possessed her and used her in order to demonstrate something for the sake of the Church, opening up new vistas onto the Gospels. That, and that alone, should be the

motive for the Church's interest in Thérèse. That, and that alone, should engage the attention of those who feel themselves put off by many features of her cultus, or even of her character, or who experience indefinable objections to them. In fact, there are few other cases in which it is so prudent to distinguish between the mission of a saint and its essentials.

In the case of Thérèse of Lisieux the dramatic tension between her mission and her person needs specially to be borne in mind, and to be appreciated primarily in theological terms; the essence of sanctity has to be grasped as truly evangelical, as belonging to the Church, as a mission and not simply as an individual ascetical, mystical manifestation. Moreover it is not just because of contemporary needs but because of the depth of revealed truth that portraits of the saints must in future be remodeled, so that the saints can again live amongst us, and in us, as the best protectors and inspirers of the community of the saints, which is the Church.

FRI 10/02/20

On the Succession of Solomon, by Dom Damasus Winzen.⁴

The books of Samuel and of Kings center around the solemn promise which God made to David: "And when your days shall be fulfilled and you shall sleep with your fathers, I will raise up your seed after you and I will establish his kingdom. I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son; and if he commit any iniquity I will correct him with the rod and with stripes of the children of men; but my mercy shall not depart from him." The latter part of the second book of Samuel shows how God used the crooked ways of people, the jealousies and ambitions of the older sons of David, in order to put upon the throne of his father the youngest among his sons, the one whom God had chosen: Jedidiah - the Lord's darling, who is known to history under the name of Solomon, the peaceable. The forty years of Solomon's reign are described in the first eleven chapters of the first book of Kings. They constitute the most glorious period of Jewish history. The weakness of Egypt and Assyria, the two great powers on which the fate of Israel depended, gave Solomon an opportunity to reorganize the administration of his country, to fortify the towns, to set up industries and promote trade with foreign countries, and to crown his work with the building and the dedication of the temple. "And Judah and Israel dwelt without any fear, everyone under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon."

As "king of peace," reigning in glory, Solomon prefigures the other "Son of David" who, on the cross, became our peace, and established his kingdom in the power

⁴Pathways in Scripture, Dom Damasus Winzen. Word of Life 1976. p129-30

of the resurrection. Isarel's "Sun King," in the splendor of his court, foreshadows the gloriously reigning Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father to judge the living and the dead.

SAT 10.03.2020

On a Church, or on the Consecration of an Altar, from a sermon by St. Caesarius of Arles. 1

As your holy charity knows very well, brethren, today we are celebrating the consecration of an altar. We rejoice rightly and deservedly, when we celebrate the feast on which the stone where the divine sacrifice is consecrated was blessed and anointed with oil. But when we celebrate these feasts, Ywe ought to pay careful attention and strive with all our might, so that what is visibly worshiped in churches or on the altars may be invisibly fulfilled in us. Although the churches which we see made of wood and stone are holy, still the temples of our heart and body are much more precious in the sight of God, because the former were made by carnal creatures, while the latter were fashioned by the creator of the world. Churches are constructed of wood and stone by the talents of [many hands], but the temples of our bodies and souls are formed by the hand of the divine artist Himself. Finally, as it is written: *Your hands have made me and fashioned me* Ps 118.73); and again: *Before I formed you in the womb I knew you* (Jer 1.5). The fact that we are temples of God the Apostle Paul clearly shows when he says: *The temple of God is holy, and you are that temple* (1 Cor 3.17). Our Lord also says through the prophet: *Ever present in your midst, I will walk among them* (cf. Lev 26.12). Now God desires both to dwell in and walk among us, as you see, dearest brethren. Let us then with His help strive always to occupy our heart with good thoughts and continually keep our bodies chaste, cleansed of all the filth of dissipation, in order that it may please God to dwell in us.

We read that two altars were set up in the temple built by Solomon, one outside, and one within. On the one that was outside, the sacrifice of animals took place, while on the one inside, the burning of incense was offered. Let us see, brethren, whether there are two altars set up in ourselves, the one that of the body and the other that of the heart. For this reason good works are offered on the exterior altar, that is, in our body. May holy thought emit a sweet fragrance in our hearts, and let us continually do what is pleasing to God on the altar of our heart. We celebrate the consecration of an altar with joy and in a right order of things at the time when we offer the altars of our heart and body purified in the sight of the divine majesty and with a good conscience. I do not know with what boldness or with what kind of a conscience one desires to rejoice at the

consecration of an altar, if he does not strive to preserve purity on the altar of his heart. For our part, brethren, let us endeavor to live in such a way that we may always merit to celebrate a twofold feast. Just as we rejoice visibly at the consecration of a church or of an altar, so let us invisibly merit to feel spiritual joy as the result of bodily chastity and purity of soul.

For our part, dearest brethren, even if some sins creep up on us, as is wont to happen, with God=s help let us strive as much as we can, through fasting, vigils, prayers and almsgiving, to cleanse what is dirty, to restore what was destroyed, to build up what had fallen, and to rebuild the temple of the living God. Then when the Lord comes He will find nothing in us to offend the eyes of His majesty, because it is written of Him, *Here I stand, knocking at the door; if anyone arises and opens the door. I will enter his home and have supper with him, and he with me* (Rev 3.20); and again: *I and my Father will come and make our dwelling place with him* (Jn 14.23). How happy is that soul, in which the Father and the Son, when they come, deign not only to dwell and abide, but also to have supper!