

LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY

VIGILS READINGS

Thirtieth Week in Ordinary Time

October 25-31, 2020

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2020

Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by St. Augustine ¹

I know, beloved, how well fed you are every day by the exhortations of Holy Scripture, and what nourishment your hearts find in the word of God. Nevertheless the affection we have for one another compels me to say something to you, beloved, about love. To speak about love there is no need to select some special passage from Scripture to serve as a text for the homily; open the Bible at any page and you will find it extolling love. We know this is so from the Lord himself, as the gospel reminds us, for when asked: what were the most important commandments of the law, he answered: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.* And then, just in case you might be tempted to search further through the pages of Holy Scripture for some commandments other than these two, he added: *The entire law and the prophets also depend upon these two commandments.* If the entire law and the prophets depend upon these two commandments, how much more must the gospel do so? People are renewed by love. As sinful desire ages them, so love rejuvenates them. Enmeshed in the toils of his desires the psalmist laments: *I have grown old surrounded by my enemies.* Love, on the other hand, is the sign of our renewal from the Lord's own words: *I give you a new commandment – love one another.*

Even in former times there were people who loved God without thought of reward, and whose hearts were purified by their chaste longing for him. They drew back the veils obscuring the ancient promises, and caught a glimpse through these figures of a new covenant to come. They saw that all the precepts and promises of the old covenant, geared to the capacities of an unregenerate people, prefigured a new covenant which the Lord would bring to fulfillment in the last age. The Apostle says this quite clearly: *The things that happened to them were symbolic, and were recorded for us who*

are living in the last age. When the time for it came the new covenant began to be openly proclaimed, and these ancient figures were expounded and explained so that all might understand that the old covenant promises were pointed to the new covenant.

And so love was present under the old covenant just as it is under the new, though then it was more hidden and fear was more apparent, whereas now love is more clearly seen and fear is diminished. For as love grows stronger we feel more secure, and when our feeling of security is complete fear vanishes, since, as the apostle John declares: *Perfect love casts out fear.*

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers -Year A – New City Press – NY – 199 – pg 136

MONDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2020

The end of Jeroboam, from a sermon by John Cardinal Newman. 1

Jeroboam seemed to have everything his own way, but soon a difficulty arose which he had thought light of, if he thought of it at all. The Jewish nation was not only a kingdom, but a church, a religious as well as a political body; and Jeroboam found, before long, that in setting up a new kingdom in Israel, he must set up a new religion too. He resolved to select places for religious worship in his own kingdom. This was against the Law, of course; but what he did was worse than this. He could not build a Temple like Solomon's, and yet he needed some visible sign of the presence of God. Almighty God had bid the Israelites take to themselves no sign of His presence, no likeness of Him; but Jeroboam thought he could not do better than set up two figures of gold, one at each end of his country, not, indeed, as representations (he would argue), but as emblems and memorials of the true God, and as marking the established place of worship.

The figure he adopted, as a memorial of Almighty God, was in the shape of an ox or calf, the same which the Israelites had set up in the wilderness. It

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AJeroboam@, in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997, pp. 524-528.

was a direct and open transgression of the second Commandment. The tribe of Levi, who were especially consecrated to religious purposes, refused to countenance the idolatrous worship, and Jeroboam, led on by hard necessity, cast them out of the country, got possession of their cities and lands, and put in priests of his own making in their stead. And he changed the solemn feast days, and dared to offer incense, himself intruding first, for example's sake, into the sacred office.

Now, then, we come to the concluding scene of this course of crime, perpetrated by one man the transaction to which the text belongs. It was on the new feast day which he had devised of his own heart and at Bethel where the idol was set up. The people were collected from all parts of the country, and the king offered upon the altar and burnt incense. Such was the formal inauguration of the false religion in God's own hallowed country. One of his prophets was sent from Judah to attend the festival; but, as if he were entering a country infected by the pestilence, he was bid go into no house, nor eat nor drink while he was in it, nay, he was not even to return to his home the same way by which he came, as if his feet must not touch the polluted earth twice.

When the prophet came, he uttered his message before the apostate king. It was a prophecy. The man of God addressed the altar, as not deigning to speak to Jeroboam, and foretold its fate. He announced that, after no long time, the idolatrous power should be destroyed, and that very altar should last long enough to see its fall. To show his Divine commission, the prophet gave the word, and the altar was miraculously rent in twain, and the ashes of the sacrifice scattered on the ground. Nothing could be more public than a judgment like this, denounced from God Himself, after Rehoboam, Solomon's son, had not been allowed to take the matter into his own hands. And to make the occurrence still more impressive, two further signs were added. Jeroboam stretched forth his hand to seize the prophet; it was instantly shriveled up, so that he could not pull it to him again. The second miracle was still more awful: [the prophet's own death because he ate and drank] against the express word of God declared to him. [This last sign suggested], throughout all Israel, the fearful argument *If God so punish his own children, what will be the final, though delayed, punishment of the*

wicked? If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? (1 Pet 4.18)

As for Jeroboam, in spite of all this, *after this thing he returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places; whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places.* Such was his life. At the close of his reign, he lost even his earthly prosperity. *The Lord struck him and he died.* Such was his end. His family was soon cut off from the throne; and after all his wise counsels and bold plans he has left but his name and title to posterity, *Jeroboam the son of Nebat who caused Israel to sin.* Such is his memorial.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2020

**A reading about the impatience of Jeroboam,
from a sermon by John Henry Newman.** ¹

That Jeroboam was an instrument in God's hand to chastise Solomon's sin is plain; and there is no difficulty in conceiving how a wicked man, without its being any excuse to him, still may bring about the divine purposes. but in Jeroboam's particular case there *is* this difficulty at first sight; that Almighty God had seemed to sanction his act by **promising** him, in Solomon's life-time, the kingdom of the ten tribes. The prophet Ahijah had met him, and delivered to him a message from "*the Lord, the God of Israel.*" "*I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes **to thee.***" And it was on account of this prophecy that Jeroboam "*lifted up his hand against the king.*"

On a little consideration, however, we shall find no difficulty here: for though Almighty God promised him the kingdom, He did not tell him to gain it for himself; and if we must not do evil that good may come, surely

¹ "Jeroboam", in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1987, pp. 522-523.

we may not do evil that a promise may be fulfilled; and to “*rebel against his Lord*” (in the words of Scripture) was a plain, indisputable sin.

God who made the promise, could of course fulfill it in His own time. He did not require man’s crime to bring it about. It was, of course, an insult to His holiness and power to suppose He did. Jeroboam ought to have waited patiently God’s time; this would have been the part of true faith. But it had always been, as on this occasion, the sin of the Israelites, to outrun God’s providence; and even when they chose to pursue His ends, to wish to work them out in their own way. They never would “*be still and know that He was God,*” wait on His word and follow His guidance.

Thus, when they first took possession of the promised land, they were told to cast the nations out, and utterly destroy all that did not leave the country. They soon became weary of this, and thought they had found out a better way. They thought it wiser to spare their enemies, and form alliances with them and put them under tribute. This brought them first into idolatry, then into captivity. When Samuel rescued them, and their hopes revived, their first act was to choose a king like the nations, contrary to God’s will. And Jeroboam, in this instance, as a special emblem of the whole people in the rebellion itself, had not patience to wait, nor faith to trust God, that “*What He had promised He was able also to perform.*”

That it was *a trial* to Jeroboam we need not deny; of course it was. He was tried and found wanting. Had he withstood the temptation, and refrained himself till lawfully called to reign, untold blessings might have been showered on him and on his people, who, in the actual history, were all cut off for their sins. He was not the first man who had thus been tried. David had been promised Saul’s kingdom, and anointed thereunto by Samuel, years before he came into possession; yet, though he was persecuted by Saul, and has his life several times in his power, still he would not lift up his hand against his king.... [David] inherited the patient faith of his forefather Abraham, and through it “*obtained the promise,*” and founded a throne in righteousness and truth. Had Jeroboam followed it, he, too, might have been the father of a line of kings; he might have been the instrument and object of God’s promised favor, ... founding a dominion not inferior in glory to that of Judah and Jerusalem.

Jeroboam, then, is not excused, though Ahijah prophesied.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2020

**The zeal of the apostles: a reading from a sermon on Sts Simon and Jude
by John Henry Newman. 1**

The Apostles commemorated on this Festival direct our attention to the subject of Zeal. St. Simon is called ***Zelotes***, which means the Zealous; a title given him (as is supposed) from his belonging before his conversion to the Jewish sect of Zealots, which professed extraordinary Zeal for the Law. Anyhow, the appellation marks him as distinguished for this particular Christian grace. St. Jude's Epistle, which forms part of the service of the day, is almost wholly upon the duty of manifesting Zeal for Gospel Truth, and opens with a direct exhortation to "*contend earnestly for the Faith once delivered to the Saints*."

It will be a more simple account of Zeal, to call it the earnest desire for God's honor, leading to strenuous and bold deeds in His behalf; and that in spite of all obstacles. Now Zeal is one of the elementary religious qualifications; that is, one of those which are essential in the very notion of a religious man. A man cannot be said to be in earnest in religion, till he magnifies his God and Savior; till he so far consecrates and exalts the thought of Him in his heart, as an object of praise, and adoration, and rejoicing, as to be pained and grieved at dishonor shown to Him, and eager to avenge Him. In a word, a religious temper is one of loyalty towards God; and we all know what is meant by being loyal from the experience of civil matters. To be loyal is not merely to obey; but to obey with promptitude, energetic dutifulness, disinterested devotion, disregard of consequences. And such is Zeal, except that it is ever attended with that reverential feeling which is due from a creature and a sinner towards his Maker, and towards Him alone. It is the main principle in ***all*** religious service to love God above all things; now, Zeal is to love Him above all other people, above our

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"Christian Zeal," in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, pp. 464 ff.

dearest and most intimate friends. This was the especial praise of the Levites, which gained for them the reward of the Priesthood, that is , their executing judgment on the people in the sin of the golden calf. Zeal is the very consecration of God's Ministers to their office. Accordingly our Blessed Savior, the One Great High Priest, the Antitype of all Priests who went before Him and the Lord and Strength of all who come after, began His manifestation of Himself by two acts of Zeal. When twelve years old he deigned to put before us in representation the sacredness of this duty, when He remained in the Temple *while His father and mother sought Him sorrowing*, and on their finding Him, returned answer, *Do you not know that I must be about My Father's business?* And again, at the opening of His public Ministry, He went into the Temple, and *made a scourge of small cords, and drove out the sheep and oxen, and overthrew the changers' tables* that profaned it: thus fulfilling the prophecy contained in the text, *Zeal for your house has eaten me up.* Being thus consumed by Zeal Himself, no wonder He should choose His followers from among the Zealous.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2020

The decline of the Hebrew monarchy: a reading from *The Two-Edged Sword* by John L. McKenzie. 1

Viewed from a short perspective, the Hebrew monarchy appears to be a magnificent failure if, indeed, one is willing to grant the word magnificent. It fulfilled the immediate purpose for which it was established, and secured the national identity of the Hebrews against the danger which threatened it. Once the monarchy was created, however, it began to run its own course, and it could not do otherwise; for neither priest nor prophet was qualified either by nature or by office to do the work of the king. Running its own course, it followed the line of kingship, despite the restraints imposed upon it by Hebrew religion, until the nation is finally brought down to ruin with itself. It is a pathetic series of shortsighted little men whom we meet in the rolls of the kings of Israel and Judah. Rarely does a man appear

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The Two-Edged Sword , Milwaukee: Bruce, 1956, pp. 140ff.

who rises above the dreary level of the series to show vision and imagination, courage and execution. And some of the most successful rulers are dismissed by the Hebrew writers with a few words, such as Omri and the second Jeroboam. Was this all that could be expected of the charismatic leader?

What **was** expected of the charismatic leader? In the people of the Lord, in a society governed by the will of the Lord, the charismatic leader had not the same functions as the Mesopotamian and the Canaanite king. In these communities, the state, the integrity of society, was an absolute good, for human life was inconceivable outside the state. Therefore the king, the embodiment of the state, provided those goods which men expected of the state, if he and the state failed to do this, they perished. If they succeeded, they had done all that was required of them. And the king was thus an expression of the popular will, despite his absolute character; he represented what the people wanted. The Hebrew king, on the other hand, was to represent what the Lord wanted, and the popular will was of consequence only as far as it was identical with the will of the Lord. The sin of the Hebrew monarchs was that they represented the will of the people rather than the will of the Lord; and in doing this, they failed to give the popular will even those goods which it desired, those goods which it was the function of the Semitic king to give. Hence the Hebrew monarchy could not live.

But the will of the Lord is higher than the popular will, higher than the goods which the king and the state can confer. We have said that the charisma of the word of the Lord was not given to manage the affairs of state, and we can repeat it, for it is important. Samuel was willing to risk anarchy to depose a disobedient king; he failed, but the principle behind his actions was a principle of Hebrew belief, that anarchy is better than disobedience to the will of the Lord. The prophets of the time of Rehoboam, as well as Elijah and Elisha, stooped to the methods of anarchy. We cannot approve their methods, but again the principle involved is that it is better for Israel to have no king than a king who does not embody the will of the Lord. The compilers of the stories of the kings paid little attention to the conquests of David, which are barely recorded, and to those of Omri and the second Jeroboam, because they knew that the

Hebrew king could not be measured by the standards of the kings of the nations. Not, indeed, that the Hebrew story was indifferent to its external glories, for the Hebrew storytellers were human; but the prevailing tone of the story of the kings is one and the same. It is the story of the failure of the Hebrew kings to realize the will of the Lord, of the secularization of the Hebrew monarchy and of its consequent fall.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2020

Continuation of a Reading from The Golden Epistle by William of St Thierry ¹

In the first place then the newcomer to the desert must be taught to follow the teaching of the Apostle Paul and offer up his body as a living sacrifice, consecrated to God and worthy of his acceptance, the workshop due from him as a rational creature. Therefore the body is to be treated strictly, so that it will not rebel or grow wanton, yet in such a way that it will be able to serve, for it has been given to the spirit to serve it. It is not to be regarded as the purpose of life but as something without which we cannot live. For we cannot break off the fellowship which we have with the body whenever we want, but we must wait patiently for it to be broken up in a lawful way and in the meantime observe the conventions of a valid partnership.

This training would involve heavy labor and minute calculations, with the danger of serious mistakes, were it not for the common observance in all its fullness which the law of obedience and of the cell gives once and for all.

Regulating his food and clothing, his work and his rest, his silence and solitude and everything to do with the formation or the needs of the outward man, it leaves the brother who is obedient, patient and tranquil, free from trouble and anxiety. Its provisions so banish and remove, once and for all, what is superfluous, so confine what is needful within the bounds of a proper sufficiency and an austerity within the reach of all, that there is something left for the strong to desire while the weak need not shrink away.

The new monk is then to be trained to follow the common observance and so bring under control the inordinate desires of his flesh by continual penance for his past life, and, in order to despise all else, to cultivate a contempt for himself.

He must at all times be fortified in advance against the temptations which are more savage in their assault upon the solitary who is a novice. The servant of God, who is serving God gratuitously, is unceasingly beset by vices that try to make him accept the wages they offer him in the form of pleasures. This comes at the devil's suggestion, the flesh making its desires felt and the world providing material for them. The Lord our God also tempts us, to see whether we love him or not. Not that he does not know and wishes to find out. It is in order that we ourselves may realize the truth more fully as a result of the temptation.

But it is easy to overcome and meet with reason temptations which give grounds for suspicion or at first sight are obviously evil. It is those which insinuate themselves under the appearance of good that are more difficult to recognize and more dangerous to entertain. Just as it is very difficult to observe due measure in what is believed to be good and not every desire for something good is safe.

The place, however, where all temptations and evil and useless thoughts collect, is idleness. For the greatest evil which can befall the mind is unemployed leisure. The servant of God should never be idle, although he is at leisure to devote himself to God. A name which gives rise to such suspicion and suggests such waste of time and such an absence of manliness must not be given to a matter of such unquestionable value, of such holiness, of such seriousness. Is leisure to devote one's time to God idleness? Rather it is the activity of all activities. Anyone who in his cell is not faithful and fervent in this activity is indeed idle, whatever else he may do that is not done for the sake of this.

In this regard it is ridiculous to take up idle pursuits in order to avoid idleness. A pursuit is idle which either has no usefulness or does not tend to some useful purpose. The aim of activity should not be merely to pass the day more or less enjoyably or at least without becoming too weary of leisure but also that when the day is over it always leaves something in the

mind that will contribute to the soul's advancement and that some fresh treasure is added each day to the heart's store. A good monk should consider that he has lost a day of his life if during the day he cannot remember having done any of the things for which a man lives in solitude.

[1](#)The Golden Epistle – William of St Thierry – Cistercian Fathers Series # 12 – Cistercian Publications – Kalamazoo, MI – 1971 – pg 35

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2020

Mary as Star of the Sea – From a Homily by St. Bernard of Clairvaux ¹

“And the Virgin’s name was Mary”. Let us now say a few words about this name, which means ‘star of the sea’ and is so becoming to the Virgin Mother. Surely she is very fittingly likened to a star. The star sends forth its ray without harm to itself. In the same way the Virgin brought forth her son with no injury to herself. The ray no more diminishes the star’s brightness than does the son his mother’s integrity. She is indeed that noble star risen out of Jacob whose beam enlightens this earthly globe. She it is whose brightness both shines in the highest heaven and pierces the pit of hell, and is shed upon the earth, warming our hearts far more than our bodies, fostering virtue and cauterizing vice.

O you, whoever you are, who feel that in the tidal wave of this world you are nearer to being tossed about among the squalls and gales than treading on dry land, if you do not want to founder in this tempest, do not avert your eyes from the brightness of this star. When the wind of temptation blows up within you, when you strike upon the rock of tribulation, gaze up at this star, call out to Mary. Whether you are being tossed about by the waves of pride or ambition or slander or jealousy, gaze up at this star, call out to Mary. When rage or greed or fleshly desires are battering the skiff of your soul, gaze up at Mary. When the immensity of your sins weighs you down and you are bewildered by the loathsomeness of your conscience, when the terrifying thought of judgment appalls you and you begin to founder in the gulf of sadness and despair, think of Mary. In dangers, in hardships, in every doubt, think of Mary, call out to Mary.

¹ Magnificat – Homilies in Praise of the Virgin Mary – Cistercian Fathers Series #18 – Cistercian Publications – Kalamazoo, MI – 1979 – p 30

Keep her in your mouth, keep her in your heart. Follow the example of her life and you will obtain the favor of her prayer. Following her you will never go astray. Asking her help, you will never despair. Keeping her in your thoughts, you will never wander away. With your hand in hers, you will not be afraid. With her leading you, you will never tire. Her kindness will see you through to the end. Then you will know by your own experience how true it is that “the Virgin’s name was Mary”.

END OF READINGS