

SUN 10.18.20

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by Lawrence of Brindisi <sup>1</sup>

In today's gospel we find two questions: one put to Christ by the Pharisees, and the other put by him to them. The Pharisees' question concerns this world alone, while Christ's has an entirely heavenly and other-worldly sense. Their question derived from profound ignorance and perversity; his stemmed from perfect wisdom and goodness.

*Whose likeness and inscription is this? Caesar's*, they reply. Then *give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's*. To each, he says, must be given what belongs to him. This, surely, is a judgment full of heavenly wisdom and instruction. For it teaches that authority is twofold, having an earthly and human aspect, and a heavenly and divine aspect. It teaches that we owe a twofold duty of obedience: to the human laws and to the law of God. The coin bearing Caesar's likeness and inscription must be given to Caesar, and the one stamped with the divine image and likeness must be given to God. *We bear the imprint of your glorious face, O Lord.*

We are made *in the image and likeness of God*. So you, O Christian, because you are a human being, are God's tribute money – a little coin bearing the image and likeness of the divine emperor. Therefore with Christ I ask: *Whose likeness and inscription is this?* Your answer is, God's. To which I reply, Then why not give God what belongs to him?

If we really want to be God's image, we must be like Christ, for his is the image of God's goodness and *the perfect copy of his nature*, and God *foreordained that those he has chosen should take on a likeness to his Son*. Christ undoubtedly gave Caesar what was Caesar's and God what was God's. He fulfilled to perfection the precepts of both tablets of the law, becoming *obedient unto death, even death on a cross*, and he was most highly endowed, both inwardly and outwardly, with every virtue.

In today's gospel the reply, most wise and discreet, by which Christ sidestepped his enemies' trap shows his great prudence. His teaching that each must be given what belongs to him, and also the example he gave by being willing to pay the temple tax and giving a shekel for himself and Peter, shows his justice. His declaring it to be a duty to pay taxes to Caesar, openly teaching the truth without fear of the Jews who would be offended, shows his fortitude. For this is God's way, of which Christ is the authentic teacher.

Those therefore who resemble Christ in their lives, conduct and practice of virtues, they are the ones who manifest the divine image; for the way to recover this image is by being absolutely just. *Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's*; that is, give to each what belongs to him.

<sup>1</sup>Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY - pg134

**The North American Martyrs, from Butler's Lives of the Saints.<sup>1</sup>**

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On March 16, 1649, the Iroquois attacked the village at which Brebeuf and Lalemant were stationed. The torture of these two missionaries was as atrocious as anything recorded in history. At the height of the torments Father Lalemant raised his eyes to Heaven and invoked God's aid, whilst Father de Brebeuf set his face like a rock as though insensible to the pain. Then, like one recovering consciousness, he preached to his persecutors and to the Christian captives until the savages gagged his mouth, cut off his nose, tore off his lips, and then, in derision of baptism, deluged him and his companion martyrs with boiling water. Finally, large pieces of flesh were cut out of the bodies of both the priests and roasted by the Indians, who tore out their hearts before their death by means of an opening above the breast, feasting on them and their blood, which they drank while it was still warm.

Before the end of the year 1649 the Iroquois had penetrated as far as the Tobacco nation, where Father Garnier had founded a mission in 1641 and where the Jesuits now had two stations. The inhabitants of the village of Saint-Jean hearing that the enemy was approaching, sent out their men to meet the attackers, who, however, took a roundabout way and arrived at the gates unexpectedly. An orgy of incredible cruelty followed, in the midst of which Garnier, the only priest in the mission, hastened from place to place, giving absolution to the Christians and baptizing the children and catechumens, totally unmindful of his own fate. While thus employed he was shot down by the musket of an Iroquois. He strove to reach a dying man whom he thought he could help, but after three attempts he collapsed, and subsequently received his death-blow from a hatchet which penetrated to the brain.

Father Noel Chabanel, the missionary companion of Garnier, was immediately recalled. He had started on his way back with some Christian Hurons when they heard the cries of the Iroquois returning from Saint-Jean. The father urged his followers to escape, but was too much exhausted to keep up with them. His fate was long uncertain, but a Huron apostate eventually admitted having killed the holy man out of hatred of the Christian faith.

These martyrs of North America, SS John de Brebeuf, Isaac Jogues, Anthony Daniel, Gabriel Lalemant, Charles Garnier, Noel Chabanel, Rene Goupil and John Lalande, were canonized in 1930.

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<sup>1</sup>Butler's Lives of the Saints, ed. Michael Walsh, Harpers San Francisco, 1985, p.136-137.

TUE

10.20.20

**A reading about the Queen of Sheba=s visit to King Solomon, from a commentary by John of Ford. 1**

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When the Queen of Sheba saw *all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the ranks of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cupbearers, and his burnt offerings which he offered in the house of the Lord, her breath failed her!* (1 Kgs 10.5). And notice, we have greater than the queen of Sheba here, yes, and *greater than Solomon here*, [Christ himself, the second Solomon]. Moreover, surpassing all the spices which she gave to her Solomon, is the scent of those spices which our Solomon tells us he has handled and weighed and savored for himself. For he says [in the Song of Songs], *The fragrance of your oils surpasses all spices@* (Sg 4.10). And, indeed a throne was prepared for that queen [of Sheba], a throne of judgment, to condemn the apathy of a lukewarm race of men! From the ends of the earth she made her arduous way to seek and marvel at the wisdom which today=s race of half-hearted men hears crying out in the streets and knocking insistently at their doors. But men today scorn wisdom, and drive it away.

And yet, that first Solomon, with all his wisdom, could not satisfy her hunger to the full. He unraveled all problems and explained all mysteries; he opened out in its entirety all that was in his heart (cf. 1 Kgs 10.3); he loaded her with gifts, and enriched her with spices, and displayed everything that he had in his treasuries. But for the mind passionately desirous of true wisdom, however deep it drinks, even until *living water flows from its heart* (Jn 7.38), it will still never cease to thirst. In fact, the more it drinks, the greater its thirst! (cf. Sir 24.29). Is there any wonder then if this queen of ours, the true queen of Sheba, that land of incense and spice, after leaving her own country, that is to say, the innermost depths of her own heart, to seek Solomon, and finally after the discomforts of a long journey, much weary panting and painful sighs of her weary soul, earning the grace to find, to look on, to gaze at, to hold and embrace to her heart=s desire, one so much loved, is it any wonder, it should be said of her that her breath fails. Still less wonder then, for lack of breath her words should fail her too.

WED 10.21.20

**A reading about how Solomon lost simplicity of heart;  
from Damasus Winzen's *Pathways in Scripture*.**

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The house that Solomon had built on Mount Sion did not stand forever. *If you turn aside from following Me, you or your children, and keep not My commands, but go and serve other gods, then I shall cast away from Me the house which I have sanctified for My Name*" (1 Kgs 9.6-7). Solomon turned aside. God had given him a heart large as the sand on the sea shore. Solomon allowed this largeness of heart to turn into [a boundless] love of the world. He was *"a lover of foreign women"* (11.1). He had a thousand of them—thousand being the number symbolic of the perfection of this material universe. They turned away his heart after their gods, *"and his heart was not whole with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father"* (11.4).

[This kind of] largeness of heart destroyed in him the simplicity of heart which is derived from the faith in One God. David who had suffered so much during his life, found in his old age Abisag, the Sunamitess, a *"damsel exceeding beautiful"* (1.4). She slept with the king and served him, but *"the king did not know her"*—the first mysterious dawn of virginal love in the Old Testament. Solomon, on the contrary, never had to suffer. He ruled in glory without knowing the Cross. Therefore earthly love destroyed in him the love of God, and his throne could not be established forever.

When Solomon grew old and "Eros" failed him, his days became dark and cold, filled with the "groaning" of this creation. The "Peaceable One" changed more and more into a tyrant. The glory of his court became an unbearable burden to his people (12.4). Rebellions broke out (11.23ff). The days approached of which the "Preacher" [in the book of Ecclesiastes] says: *"The silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl broken, and the jar is shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken in the pit; the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God Who gave it. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, all is vanity"* (Eccl 12.6-8).

"Eros", the love of the world, killed Solomon, because he had not known "Agape", the love of sacrifice, which alone is stronger than death. Only "Agape" is able to make a heart "large" without destroying its simplicity. This the *crucified* son of David teaches, and St. Paul applies it to our daily lives: *"This, therefore, I say, brethren, the time is short. It remains that they who have wives, live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they did not mourn, and those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, and those who buy anything as though they did not own it, and those who use this world as though they used it not: for the fashion of this world passes away. I want you to be free from all anxiety"* (1 Cor 7.29.32).

THUR 10.22.20

A Reading from the Encyclical of Bl. Pope John Paul II – *Redemptoris Missio* <sup>1</sup>

The Church's universal mission is born of faith in Jesus Christ, as stated in our Trinitarian profession of faith: "I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father... For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man." The redemption event brings salvation to all. "for each one is included in the mystery of the redemption and with each one Christ has united himself forever through this mystery." It is only in faith that the Church's mission can be understood and only in faith that it finds its basis.

If we go back to the beginnings of the Church, we find a clear affirmation that Christ is the one Savior of all, the only one able to reveal God and lead to God. In reply to the Jewish religious authorities who question the apostles about the healing of the lame man, Peter says: "By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well... And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given men by which we must be saved". This statement, which was made to the Sanhedrin, has a universal value, since for all people – Jews and Gentiles alike – salvation can only come from Jesus Christ.

The universality of this salvation in Christ is asserted throughout the New Testament. St. Paul acknowledges the risen Christ as the Lord. He writes: "Although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth – as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords' – yet for us there is only one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist". One God and one Lord are asserted by way of contrast to the multitude of "gods" and "lords" commonly accepted. Paul reacts against the polytheism of the religious environment of his time and emphasizes what is characteristic of the Christian faith: belief in one God and one Lord sent by God.

In the Gospel of St. John, this salvific universality of Christ embraces all the aspects of his mission of grace, truth and revelation: the Word is "the true light that enlightens every person". And again: "no one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known". God's revelation becomes definitive and complete through his only-begotten Son: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he created the world". In this definitive Word of his revelation, God has made himself known in the fullest possible way. He revealed to mankind *who he is*. This definitive self-revelation of God is the fundamental reason why the Church is missionary by her very nature. She cannot do otherwise than proclaim the Gospel, that is, the fullness of the truth which God has enabled us to know about himself.

Christ I the one mediator between God and mankind: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all". No one, therefore, can enter into communion with God except through

Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit. Christ's one, universal mediation, far from being an obstacle on the journey toward God, is the way established by God himself, a fact of which Christ is fully aware. Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ's one, universal mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his.

It is precisely this uniqueness of Christ which gives him an absolute and universal significance, whereby, while belonging to history, he remains history's center and goal: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

[1](#)Encyclical Letter of John Paul II – Redemptoris Missio – Pauline Books & Media – Boston – 1990 – pg 13

FRI 10.23.20

### **The rending of the kingdom of David; a reading from a sermon by John Henry Newman. <sup>1</sup>**

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When Solomon had sinned, and the kingdom was rent from him, still holy David's seed was not utterly put away...; part of the kingdom was still left to the descendants of the faithful king. *"I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son,"* Solomon's son, *"for David My servant's sake."* This one tribe was the tribe of Judah, David's own tribe; to which part of Benjamin was added, as being in the neighborhood. And this kingdom, over which David's line reigned for four hundred years after him, is called the kingdom of Judah.

These were the circumstances under which the division of the kingdom was made. Solomon seems to have allowed himself in tyrannical conduct towards his subjects, as well as in idolatry. ...His oppression of the people was a *sin*; yet, you will observe, the people had no right to complain. They had brought this evil on themselves; they had obstinately courted and struggled after it. They would have *"a king like the nations,"* a despotic king; and now they had one, they were discontented. Samuel had not only earnestly and solemnly protested against this measure, as an offence against their Almighty Governor, but had actually forewarned them of the evils which despotic power would introduce among them. *"He will take your sons and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; he will set them to [plow] his ground and to reap his harvest and to make his instruments of war. He will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, and give them to his servants."* The warning ends thus: *"And you shall cry out in that day, because of your king which you shall have chosen for yourselves, and the Lord will not hear you in that day."* (1 Sam 8.11-18). These were Samuel's words beforehand. Now all this had come upon them: as they had

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<sup>1</sup>"Jeroboam", in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, pp. 520-521

sown, so had they reaped. And, as matters stood, their best course would have been contentment, resignation; it was their duty to bear the punishment of their national self-will. But one sin was not enough for them. They proceeded, as men commonly do, to mend (as they considered) their first sin, by a fresh one—they rebelled against their king. *“What portion have we in David?”* they said, *“neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel—now see to your own house, David.”* (1 Kgs 11.16). Ten tribes out of twelve revolted from their king in that day. Here they were quite inexcusable. Even putting it out of the question that they had brought the evil on themselves, still, independently of this, their king’s tyranny did not justify their sudden, unhesitating, violent rebellion. He was acting against no engagement or stipulation. Because their king did not do his duty to them, this was no reason they should not do their duty to him. Say that he was cruel and rapacious, still they might have safely trusted the miraculous providence of God, to have restrained the king by His prophets, and to have brought them safely through. This would have been the way of *faith*; but they took the matter into their own hands, and got into further difficulty. And I wish you to observe, that all the evil arose from this original fault, worked out in its consequences through centuries, which was their having a king at all.

SAT 10.24.20

**In her hiddenness we find Mary's greatness; from a book by Thomas Merton.**

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In all the great mystery of Mary, then, one thing remains most clear: that of herself she is nothing, and that God has for our sakes delighted to manifest his glory and his love in her.

It is because she is, of all the saints, the most perfectly poor and the most perfectly hidden, the one who has absolutely nothing whatever that she attempts to possess as her own, that she can most fully communicate to the rest of us the grace of the infinitely selfless God. And we will most truly possess him when we have emptied ourselves and become poor and hidden as she is, resembling him by resembling her.

And all our sanctity depends on her maternal love. The ones she desires to share the joy of her own poverty and simplicity, the ones whom she wills to be hidden as she is hidden, are the ones who share her closeness to God.

It is a tremendous grace, then, and a great privilege when a person living in the world we have to live in, suddenly loses his interest in the things that absorb that world and discovers in his own soul an appetite for poverty and solitude. And the most precious of all the gifts of nature or grace is the desire to be hidden and to vanish from human sight and be accounted as nothing by the world and to disappear from one's own self-

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<sup>2</sup> *New Seeds of Contemplation*, New Directions, 1961, pp. 173-75.

conscious consideration and vanish into nothingness in the immense poverty that is the adoration of God.

This absolute emptiness, this poverty, this obscurity holds within it the secret of all joy because it is full of God. To seek this emptiness is true devotion to the Mother of God. To find it is to find her. And to be hidden in its depths is to be full of God as she is full of him, and to share her mission of bringing him to all peoples.

Yet all generations must call her blessed, because they all receive through her obedience whatever supernatural life and joy is granted to them. And it is necessary that the world should acknowledge her and that the praise of God's great work in her should be sung in poetry and that cathedrals should be built in her name. For unless Our Lady is recognized as the Mother of God and as the Queen of all the saints and angels and as the hope of the world, faith in God will remain incomplete. How can we ask him for all the things he would have us hope for if we do not know, by contemplating the sanctity of the Immaculate Virgin, what great things he has power to accomplish in us.