

LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY

VIGILS READINGS

Thirty-third Week in Ordinary Time

November 15-21, 2020

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2020

A reading from *The Narrative of the Late Abbot Eutropius Of the Foundation of the Trappist Monastery at Gethsemani, Kentucky.*¹

We left Louisville on the twentieth of December, 1848, and were to arrive that evening at Bardstown. Here we were to call on the Jesuit Fathers who conducted the College of St. Joseph, and to whom we had a letter of introduction from Monsignor Flaget. We should arrive by daylight at Bardstown, which was twelve miles from Gethsemani; but the unfavorable weather delayed us very much, and we were yet nine miles from the town, when a dark and dreary night set in. We did not stop to take any nourishment by the wayside, but refreshed ourselves as best we could, in the wagons, with bread, cheese and fruit. The good God supplied the drink. The rain did not cease to fall abundantly the entire day, so that, alighting from the wagons, we resembled water rats that came out of the river. To complete our misfortune, about eight o'clock in the evening one of our wagons broke down. It was useless for any further service. The strongest and most vigorous in the other two wagons alighted and gave place to the most feeble in the broken one. One-third of the colony made the rest of the journey on foot to Bardstown.

We arrived at eleven o'clock. The streets were so full of water and mud that we were knee-deep therein. We went directly to St. Joseph's College. Our guides, weary and hungry, left us at its walls and went to a hotel. Our

¹ Documents Relating to Gethsemani's History in the Scriptorium, Gethsemani Abbey.

difficulty was to find the entrance. We knocked again and again, but no answer. Not knowing what to do, we called aloud together the word *Trappist*. In this we were successful.

The following day, having heard Holy Mass and received Holy Communion, our conductors arrived, with a new wagon, borrowed by them at Bardstown. After thanking our hosts for their kind hospitality, we installed ourselves in the wagons and pursued our way to Gethsemani. About two o'clock in the afternoon, we arrived at the entrance of a large forest, after passing the little village of New Haven on the Nashville Railroad. We were informed that this was the beginning of our property. It is difficult to express the feelings that this announcement produced in our souls. I had the wagons stop. Falling on our knees we recited a *Pater and Ave* to salute the good guardian angels of Gethsemani; and we kissed the earth soon to be watered by our sweat and even by our tears. We passed a small stream. We climbed a hill on which are situated wooden cottages, declining with age. We were told that these were the places destined for our dwellings. I was glad at the thought that we were going to find at last the crib of our Divine Savior at Bethlehem. Such, too, were the thoughts of all our religious. They were in transports of joy in beholding these ten or twelve cottages, thrown here and there on the sloping hillside, facing the sun. These composed the entire monastery of Gethsemani.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2020

FROM THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF ST. GERTRUDE THE GREAT²

O love, the fruition of you is that worthiest coupling of your Word and the soul which is brought about by perfect union with God. To use you is to become intertwined in God. To enjoy you is to be one with God. You are

²SPIRITUAL EXERCISES, by St Gertrude the Great, Trans. by G. J. Lewis & J. Lewis (Cistercian Publications Kalamazoo 1989) pp. 78-79.

that peace which surpasses all understanding and you are the road by which one comes to the inner chamber.

Oh, if only it happened to me, too, miserable as I am, to repose for a moment under your dearest cloak of cherishing-love so that my heart might be emboldened by one consolatory utterance of your living Word, or that my soul might hear this good and pleasant word from your mouth: 'I am your salvation; behold, now the bedchamber of my heart is open to you.'

Why, then, O love so unwavering, have you deeply loved someone so foul, so ugly, if not to make her beautiful in you? Your loving-kind charity attracts and allures me, O tender flower of the virgin Mary.

Let me not be confounded in my expectation but grant me to find rest for my soul in you. I have found nothing more desirable, I have judged nothing more lovable, I have wished for nothing more dear than to be held tight, O love, in your embraces, to rest under the wings of my Jesus, and to dwell in the tabernacle of divine charity.

O love, O radiant noonday, I would die a thousand times to be at rest in you. If only you would bend to me your face of such beautiful cherishing-love, O dearest one.

Oh, if I were granted to come exceedingly close to you so that I might now find myself not only next to you but within you. Then, through you, sun of justice, flowers of all the virtues might arise in me, who am dust and ashes. With you as a husband, my Lord, such fecundity might enter my soul that the renowned offspring of total perfection would be born in me. Then, having been snatched from the valley of this misery, I might be able to glory in you forever in the presence of your desirable face; for you, mirror without spot, have not scorned to be, in truth, coupled with a

sinner like me.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2020

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

As one star differs from another in brightness, so cell differs from cell in its way of life: there are beginners, those who are making progress and the perfect. The state of beginners may be called “animal”, the state of those who are making progress “rational” and the state of the perfect “spiritual”. Those who are still animal may on occasion claim forbearance in some respects in which no indulgence should be shown to those who are considered as already rational. Again certain things are tolerated in the rational which are not tolerated in the spiritual: everything in them must be perfect, calling for imitation and praise rather than blame.

Every religious institute is made up of these three kinds of men. As each is marked by a name proper to it, so each is recognized by distinct pursuits. All of those who are born of the light should consider carefully in the light of the present day what is lacking to them, whence they have come, how far they have come, the progress of the day and of the hour.

There are animal, who of themselves are not governed by reason nor led by affection, yet stimulated by authority or inspired by teaching or animated by good example they acquiesce in the good where they find it and like blind men, led by the hand, they follow, that is, imitate others. Then there are the rational, whom the judgment of their reason and the discernment that comes of natural learning endow with knowledge of the good and the desire for it, but as yet are without love. There are also the perfect, who are led by the spirit and are more abundantly enlightened by the Holy Spirit; because they relish the good

which draws them or they are called wise. They are also called spiritual because the Holy Spirit dwells in them as of old he dwelt in Gideon.

The first state is concerned with the body, the second with the soul, the third finds rest only in God. Each of them makes progress after its own fashion and each of them has a certain measure of perfection proper to itself.

The beginning of good in the animal way of life is perfect obedience; progress for it is to gain control of the body and bring it into subjection, perfection for it is when the habitual exercise of virtue has become a pleasure. The beginning of the rational state is to understand what is set before it by the teaching of faith; progress is a life lived in accordance with that teaching; perfection is when the judgment of the reason passes into a spiritual affection. The perfection of the rational state is the beginning of the spiritual state; progress in it is to look upon God's glory with face uncovered; its perfection is to be transformed into the same likeness, borrowing glory from that glory, enabled by the Spirit of the Lord.

However, turned to God the animal state becomes holy simplicity, that is, the will always the same in its attachment to the same object. For properly speaking simplicity is a will that is wholly turned toward God, seeking one thing from the Lord with all earnestness, without any desire to disperse its energies in the world. Or again, simplicity is true humility in conversion, more concerned with the inner reality of virtue than with a reputation for it. The simple man does not mind seeming to be foolish in the eyes of the world that he may be wise in the sight of God. Or again simplicity is the will alone fixed on God, not yet formed by reason so as to be love (for that is what a formed will is), not yet enlightened so as to be charity, that is the delight of love.

Simplicity then possesses in itself some beginnings of God's creation, that is, a simple and good will, the shapeless material, as it were, of

what will be a good man, and at the outset of its conversion it offers this to its maker to be formed. For since together with good will it already has a beginning of wisdom, that is the fear of the Lord, from it it learns that it cannot be formed by itself and that nothing is so advantageous for a fool as to serve a wise man.

Accordingly it submits to a man for God's sake, entrusting to him its good will to be formed in God, in the feelings and spirit of humility. Already the fear of God is beginning to develop all the plenitude of virtues: justice, because it defers to a superior; prudence, because it does not trust in itself; temperance, because it refrains from deciding for itself; fortitude, because it submits itself wholly to obedience, concerned not to judge but only to do what is bidden.

1The Golden Epistle – William of St Thierry – Cistercian Fathers Series #12 – Cistercian Publications – Kalamazoo, MI – 1971 – pg 25

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2020

A READING ABOUT THE RETURN FROM EXILE AND THE RE-BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE, from a Commentary by St Bede the Venerable³

Those who united their efforts to rebuild the temple, worked with such unanimity, says holy scripture, they "worked as one man". May we be always able to imitate such noble conduct, each in his or her order, while building holy Church. Note, and carefully remember, how much good the exile brought to the people: never before had they shown such eagerness in the accomplishment of their religious duties as they manifested on their return. And today many who live negligently in the peace of the Church suddenly err and commit some shameful deed; but it turns out for their good because after their fall they repent and begin to serve God more

³From the Exposition of Esdras & Nehemias--Trans. from **Lectionary & Martyrology**, ed. Encalcat Abbey, Dourgne-Tarn 1956, 408-409.

vigilantly.

Therefore all the people returning from Babylon to Jerusalem worked diligently at the restoration of the temple, especially the Levites and the tribe of Juda. Thus it was the tribe of the priests and that of the king who played the principal part in the construction of the temple: a beautiful image of the double dignity, royal and sacerdotal, of the Church.

"So at last the masons laid the foundation of the Lord's temple. There stood the priests in full array with their trumpets; there stood the Levites and the whole people raised a great shout thanking the Lord. Among the priests and Levites and chiefs of clans there were many older persons who had seen the earlier temple when it stood built there, and they cried aloud in lament, while these others shouted aloud with joy." (Ezra 9:10-12) What joy indeed to see the temple, which had been destroyed, now being rebuilt! What tears, what sorrow to see how the rising walls differed from the magnificence of the first temple which witnessed to the power of Solomon. It is true that the prophet said: "Bright this new temple shall be, he tells you, as never the first was" (Ag 2:9), but this superiority did not lie in the size or the adorning of the building; it lay deeper, because it was a greater miracle and evidence of the divine power, that a few captives, despite the opposition of their enemies, could carry out such a work, while the opulent king Solomon who had no adversaries and enjoyed the help of the rich and powerful king of Tyre and the services of skilled workers, had only to command and his wishes were carried out.

"Nothing would serve the neighboring folk after that but they must thwart Juda's purpose and interfere, as best they could, with the enterprise". (Ezra 4:4-5) It is easy for anyone to see that this applies allegorically to the Church: disbelievers seize every opportunity of hurting her, both by false accusations and by force of arms; they do not scruple even to secure the support of non-Christian powers against her.

"But the God of Israel had still the prophets, Aggaeus, and Zacharias son of Addo, to give his message to the Jews, now that they had returned to their own country and city. With these prophets to aid them, Zorobabel son of Salathiel and Josua son of Josedec did set about providing the Lord with a sacred temple at Jerusalem".(Ezra 5:1-2) Let us admire the spirit of these prophets, who commanded the temple to be rebuilt against the orders of the king, against the Samaitans, against all the people round about who tried to hinder the building. But also admire Zorobabel and the people with him, who showed no less faith in listening rather to the commands of the prophets, than to the interdict of the king.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2020

**Some of St. Mechtild's Practical Counsels
taken from her "Book of Special Grace"⁴**

If any obstacle arises in our service of God, whether from the attitude of others, from external circumstances, from our own desires, memories, or from any other cause - whatever the impediment, we should take it as a messenger from God, sending it back to Him, so to speak, with praise and thanksgiving.

Three things very pleasing to God are: first, never to abandon one's neighbors in their needs, and to excuse their shortcomings and sins as much as possible; second, in tribulation to seek refuge only in God, abandoning to Him alone all that disquiets the heart; third, to walk with Him in truth.

When it is time to eat or to sleep, say in your heart: "Lord, in union with

⁴Scholars and Mystics. Sr. Mary Jeremy OP. Henry Regnery Co., Chicago 1962, pp. 38-39

the love with which you created this useful thing for me, and yourself made us of it when you were on earth, I take it for your eternal praise and for my bodily need." The Blessed Virgin tells us: "if you wish to be truly holy, stay close to my Son; he is holiness itself, making all things holy."

We should be lovingly grateful not only for the spiritual blessings God gives us, but for all bodily necessities, such as food and clothing, receiving them with a sincerely thankful heart and considering ourselves unworthy of them. We should also thank God for everything that he has given to his Mother and to the angels.

Works which give no human satisfaction may nevertheless be very pleasing to God. What best pleases God in members of religious orders is purity of heart, holy desires, gentle kindness in conversation, and works of charity. When you are alone, raise your heart constantly to God, speak with him and direct all your desire to him with great intensity. You can never be in so large a crowd that you are not alone with him.

When those who receive from lord the gift of a fine orchard, they cannot taste the fruit until it is ripe. Likewise, when one receives a special grace, any interior joy is not experienced until by the practice of mortification one has broken the hard rind of earthly pleasure.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2020

A Commentary on the Book of Ezra by St Bede 5

The mystery of the unfinished stones is undoubtedly plain, since we have seen that God's church is built not only by those who by repenting regain their senses and return to the life of holiness that they

5 Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture - Old Testament - V
= InterVarsity Press - Downers Grove, IL - 2008 = pg 317

had previously squandered by sinning, but also from those who have recently been called to the faith, arranged by the instruction of teachers as though with the measuring rod of builders and so inserted into the edifice of the Lord's house in a place appropriate to themselves. Yet the fact that the temple was built from both old and new stones, that is, both from stones that had been finished long previously and from those that had remained unfinished for longer, can also be rightly interpreted as corresponding to the fact that the church of Christ is assembled from both peoples, namely Jews and Gentiles – the Jews who long since had been as though finished through knowledge and mindfulness of God's law, the Gentiles who, being enslaved to idolatry had not by any industry of spiritual architects or any cultivation of piety divested themselves of the ugliness of a rustic and earthly mind.

Since the rebuilding of the house after their captivity, as has often been said, designates the correction of those who through sin have wandered from the path of truth that they had only just set out on, it is fitting that when the temple has been restored in this way it is dedicated by the priests and Levites and the rest of the descendants of the exiles with joy. For when those who have sinned are set straight, there is great joy in heaven in the presence of the angels of God; there is joy also for the teachers who have labored for the salvation of those who go astray, and there is joy for all those who have migrated in their thoughts and deeds from Babylon – i.e. from the confusion of sinners to the citadel of the virtues, which is truly the promised land. So both the priests and the Levites and all the people rejoice in the dedication of the Lord's restored house because all the orders of holy Church must share in the rejoicing when those who have sinned are reconciled by repenting. They offer victims for this dedication when they bring vows of thanks to God for the efforts of sinners to lead a holy life and when many observing their life devoted to God, are themselves spurred on to works of greater virtue.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2020

The Virgin Mary and the Temple, by Fr. Yves Congar⁶

The only occasion on which the Gospels expressly mention the Virgin Mary in connection with the Temple are in the account of her Purification and of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (LK 2:23-38) and the finding of the child Jesus in the Temple after four days' absence on his part and three anxious searching by his parents (LK 2:42-50). To these very brief indications, the piety of Christians very soon added the idea of the presentation of Mary in the Temple at the age of three to be consecrated to the service of God. We are dealing here with a symbolical representation of a profound spiritual reality about which the tradition and the doctrine of the Church provide us with valid information. Mary, predestined to be the Mother of Jesus, true God and true man, and to be worthy of her vocation, was prepared by the gift of exceptional graces and lived with unflinching fidelity a most pure life of inner consecration to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As the type of all faithful souls and of the Church herself, Mary expressed spiritually and supremely in her life the "presentation" which, for each one of us, is to begin by the service of faith and to be consummated in heaven.

It is obvious that the tradition and doctrine of the Church may, without falling prey to the imaginary productions of the apocrypha, propound statements concerning the status of the Mother of God in relation either to the Jewish messianic temple going far beyond what we are explicitly told in the three short passages from the Gospel which narrate the incidents mentioned above. If Mary is the Mother of God, she has a

⁶The Mystery of the Temple, Westminster(Maryland) 1962, p.254-255.

special relation to the body of Christ which is the true temple--to his physical body and doubtless also, in a certain sense, to his body the Church. She is herself a temple of God in a quite specific and sublime way, both because Christ was within her from the moment of his conception until that of his birth, and because of the exceptional spiritual gifts she received in preparation for her divine motherhood and as a reward for her free acceptance of this vocation (LK 1:38), not only after the Annunciation but during the whole of her life. Hence the liturgy--the Oriental liturgy in particular--shows a profound understanding of the mystery of Mary when it constantly uses the texts concerning the Temple and the tabernacle in order to express it.

END OF READINGS