

LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY
VIGILS READINGS HOLY WEEK
April 14-20, 2019

SUNDAY, APRIL 14, 2019

A Sermon of St Bernard on Palm Sunday ¹

Today we are going to celebrate a procession, and soon afterwards we will hear the passion. What is the meaning of this strange connection? The procession is rightly presented anew today because it took place today, but why was the passion that took place on the following Friday added? Rightly was the passion added to the procession so that we may learn to trust in none of the happiness of this world, being aware that *the end of joy is grief*? Let us not be foolish then, lest our prosperity be our downfall, and let us not forget adversity on the day of prosperity and vice versa. The present age is a mixture of both, not only for those in the world, but for those of spiritual mind too. We see that what happens to people in the world is sometimes pleasant, sometimes unpleasant, and to spiritually minded people things are not always sad, not always happy, but it is *evening and morning, one day*, and likewise, *you visit him in the morning and suddenly test him*. Truly for as long as this present age lasts, it ebbs and flows.

On the day of prosperity let them not forget adversity; lest they exalt themselves and say in their abundance we will never be moved. As prosperity in worldly matters slays the worldly who lack wisdom, so an abundance of spiritual prosperity can slay the spiritual who lack learning and therefore are totally unspiritual. Then because there is peril on both sides, Wisdom prays saying, *Give me neither riches nor poverty*, lest riches lift me up in pride or poverty cast me down to impatience.

As the Lord took care to demonstrate patience in the passion, so he showed humility in the procession. In the passion, *like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he did not open his mouth; when persecuted he did not threaten*, but he prayed the more, saying, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*.

¹ Bernard of Clairvaux – Sermons for Lent and Easter ---- Cistercian Fathers Series #52 – Liturgical Press – Collegeville, MN – 2013 – pg 103

What happened in the procession? The people were ready to go out to meet him, and he who knew what was in people did not hide himself. For this he too was prepared not with chariots and horses and saddles covered with gold, but he was lowly, seated on the back of an ass, with the apostles' garments upon it.

Knowing that the passion would soon follow, what meaning did he intend the procession to have? Perhaps so that the passion, being preceded by the procession, would be all the more bitter for that reason. It was by the same people, in the same place, at the very time – with a few days in between – that he was first received in such triumph and afterwards crucified. How different is *Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!* from *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest!* How different is *The King of Israel!* From *We have no king but Caesar!* How unlike one another are the green branches and the cross, flowers and thorns! See how the one before whom the garments of others were spread is stripped of his own and lots are cast for them. How bitter to you are our sins which need such bitterness to wash them away!

May he in his great loving kindness grant us so to persevere in his procession while we are alive, that in that great procession in which he is to be received by the Father with all those who belong to him we may be worthy to enter the holy city with him

MONDAY, APRIL 15, 2019

A Reading on the Lord's Passion, from a Sermon by St Leo the Great.²

The glory of the Lord's Passion, dearly beloved, of which we promised to speak today also, is especially to be honored in the mystery of his lowliness, by which he has redeemed and taught us all: so that from where our price was paid charity might also spring up. For the omnipotence of the Son of God, in which through one and the same essence he is equal with the Father, could have, by a simple act of his will, saved us from the power of the devil, were it not more perfectly in accord with the divine plan, that the hostility of our wicked enemy should be undone through that

²"Sermo. 63 On the Passion of the Lord XII", PL 54, 353 [also [The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers](#), vol.2, pp.149-150].

which he had undone; and that we should be restored by means of that same nature through which slavery was imposed.

For the Evangelist, saying that, *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us*, and the Apostle saying, *That God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself* (2 Cor 5:19), shows us that the only-begotten Son of the Most High Father entered into such a union with our human lowliness that, though taking to himself the substance of our soul and body, he yet remained one and the same Son of God; raising up our nature, not his: for it was lowliness that was raised up, not power: in such a manner that when the creature was joined to its Creator, nothing of the divinity was absent from what he assumed, and nothing of humanity in him who assumed it.

This plan of God's justice and mercy, though veiled in times past, was not yet so hidden as to be concealed from the minds of the saints who lived good lives from the beginning to the Lord's coming. For the salvation that Christ was to bring us, was promised both in the words of the Prophets and in the meaning of events; and received not alone by those who foretold it, but by all who believed them. For one is the faith which sanctifies the just of all ages, and the same is the hope of the faithful, whatever we confess was accomplished, or our forefathers prayed might come to pass, through Jesus Christ, the Mediator of God and humankind (1 Tim 2:5).

There is then no doubt, dearly beloved, that human nature was taken into such close union with him by the Son of God, that Christ is not alone in the man who is *the firstborn of every creature* (Col 1:15), but one and the same in all the sanctified. And as the head cannot be separate from its members so neither can the members from their head. And though it is not in this life but in the life eternal that God *shall be all in all* (1 Cor 15:28), yet even now he dwells within his Temple the Church, as he promised, saying: *Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world* (Mt 28:20). And this the Apostle echoes when he says: *He is the head of the body, the Church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead: that in all things he may hold the primacy: because in him it hath well pleased the Father, that all fulness should dwell; and through him to reconcile all things unto himself* (Col 1:18-20).

TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 2019

From a Sermon by St Chromatius of Aquilea ³

The Cross of Christ is our victory, because it has obtained victory for us. Who among us are so fortunate as to deserve to bear in themselves the cross of Christ? They bear the cross of Christ in themselves who die to the world and are nailed with Christ to the Cross. Listen to what the Apostle says: "With Christ I am crucified; I live, yet it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Those therefore who are free from the vices of the flesh and worldly desires are, as the Apostle says, crucified with Christ. Those on the other hand who are given over to vices of the flesh and worldly desires cannot say: "I am crucified with Christ", for they do not live the way that Christ did, but according to the fashion of the world and the will of the devil.

The cross of Christ is the salvation of the world and the triumphal sign of heaven's victory. In times past, when great kings had won a brilliant victory over vanquished nations, they used to set up a trophy of their victory in the form of a cross and hang spoils taken from the enemy upon it as a permanent reminder. The victory won by Christ's cross is far different. The victory of those kings meant the extermination of peoples, the destruction of cities, the sacking of provinces. The victory of the cross means nations ransomed, cities saved, provinces liberated, the entire world made safe. Nothing is destroyed but the power of the devil, no one taken captive but the demons, for the cross of Christ redeemed the world and took the demons prisoner. It is spoils taken from the demons that are hung on the triumphal cross of Christ. Today the demons hang on the cross of Christ which has become their torment and torture; they are held captive by faith in the cross, by the sign of the passion.

Christ suffered evil and repaid it with good; he suffered death and gave life. Not without reason was he crucified on the spot where Adam's body is said to have been buried; Christ was crucified where Adam was buried in order that life might thus rise out of death. Death came through Adam, life through Christ, who deigned to be crucified and to die precisely

³ A Word in Season – vol IV – Sanctoral – Augustinian Press – 1991 – p 167

in order to destroy through the tree of the cross the sin that had been caused by a tree, and by the mystery of his death to put an end to the punishment of death.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17, 2019

A Reading from St. Ephrem ⁴

The evening before our Lord gave himself up to death he shared his own body with his apostles and offered them his blood, with the commandment that they were to do what he had done in order to keep the memory of his passion alive.

Then a strange thing happened. Earlier Jesus had charged his disciples not to fear death. *Do not be afraid of those who have the power to kill your body*, he had said. But now he himself showed fear, and begged to be spared the cup of suffering: *Father*, he prayed, *if it be possible, let this cup pass me by*. How are we to explain this?

The answer is that our Lord's petition was wrung from the human weakness that he had made his own. There was no pretense about his incarnation; it was absolutely real. And since the donning of our poor humanity had made him weak and defenseless, it was only natural that he should experience fear and alarm. Eating to alleviate hunger, showing weariness after exertion, and revealing human weakness by the need for sleep were all effects of taking our flesh and clothing himself with our infirmity. Consequently when the moment of death drew near he necessarily experienced the ultimate frailty of our human condition; he was gripped by a dreadful horror of dying. This in itself was proof of his humanity, since it clearly showed him to be a descendant of Adam, over whom *death held sway*, to quote the words of the apostle Paul.

It was then that Jesus said to his disciples: *Stay awake and apply yourselves to prayer, or you may be assailed by temptation. The spirit is ready and willing, but the flesh is weak*. And in answer to our question he might well say: "When you are afraid, it is not your spirit that trembles but your human weakness. Remember then that I myself tasted the fear of death in my desire to convince you that I truly shared your flesh and blood."

⁴From the Commentary on the Diatessaron – A Word in Season – vol. II – Exordium Books – 1982 – pg 193

Jesus did indeed experience fear, just as he experienced hunger, thirst, fatigue, and the need for sleep. In view of this the world's inhabitants would find it very difficult to claim that the payment of their debts had cost the Lord neither anguish nor pain.

A further answer to our question is that Jesus wished to teach his disciples how to commit themselves to God both in life and in death. His own divine knowledge made him supremely wise, yet he prayed for what his Father judged to be expedient. How much more ought we ignorant folk to surrender our wills to God's omniscience!

Determining to give his disciples an example they could imitate, our Lord identified himself with them by assuming a human soul like theirs. This enabled him to enter into their sentiments and thus to sow the seeds of comfort in their hearts. He acquainted himself with their fear in order that the knowledge of his resemblance to themselves might restrain them from boasting of their readiness to meet death while it was still far off. Fearless though he was, our Lord actually experienced fear and prayed to be delivered from suffering, even though he knew his prayer could not be granted. Surely then before temptation assailed them his disciples should have prayed all the more earnestly to be saved from failing the test!

We may also tell ourselves that we too were in the Lord's mind as he prayed. In time of temptation our minds become confused and our imagination runs riot. By persevering in prayer Jesus was showing how much we ourselves need to pray if we are to escape the wiles and snares of the devil. It is only by sustained prayer that we gain control of our distracted thoughts.

Finally, there is our Lord's desire to strengthen all who are afraid of death. By letting them see that he himself had experienced fear he would show them that fear does not necessarily lead to sin, provided that one continues to resist it. This is the force of our Lord's concluding prayer: *Not my will, Father, but yours be done*. He is saying: Yes, Father, I am ready to die, in order to bring life to many.

THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2019

**The bridge between the Covenant and the Eucharist:
a reading about the Last Supper by St. Edith Stein.** ⁵

We know from the Gospel narratives that Christ prayed as a Jew who believed in and was faithful to the Law. When he was a child with his parents, and later with his disciples, he used to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the appointed times to take part in the festivals that were celebrated in the temple. He sang joyfully with the pilgrims, >I was glad when they said unto me: We will go into the house of the Lord=. He recited the ancient prayers of blessing, which are still said today, for bread, wine, and the fruits of the earth, as the accounts of the Last Supper bear witness, This was wholly consecrated to the fulfillment of one of the holiest religious obligations B the solemn Passover meal which commemorated the deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Perhaps it is here that we are given the deepest insight into the prayer of Christ, as it were the key which gives access to the prayer of the Church.

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, ATake, eat; this is my body.@ And he took a cup, when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ADrink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins@.

The blessing and giving of the bread and wine have become part of the rite of the passover meal. But at the Last Supper this blessing and giving takes on a wholly new meaning. For this is the birth of the Church. Doubtless it was only at Pentecost that the Church was born a spiritual and visible community. But here, at the Supper, took place that grafting of the shoot in the vine branch which made the outpouring of the Spirit possible. The ancient prayers of blessing became creative words of life on Christ=s lips. The fruits of the earth became his flesh and blood, filled with his life.

⁵ @Liturgy & Eucharist@, reprinted in ALectures chrétiennes pour notre temps@: 8 1971, #2, E4.
Abbaye d'Orval, Belgium.

The visible creation into which he was inserted by his incarnation is now bound to him in a new and mysterious way. The foods that are indispensable for the growth of the human organism are transformed in their nature, and those partaking of them with faith are themselves transformed too; incorporated into Christ in a living union, they are filled with his divine life. The quickening power of the Word is fused with the sacrifice. The Word becomes flesh to give us that Life which is his own. He offered himself, and has thus offered the creation which he ransomed by this offering, as a sacrifice of praise to the Creator. The passover of the ancient covenant has become the passover of the new covenant, at the Lord's Last Supper, at the Sacrifice of the Cross, and, between the Resurrection and the Ascension, at the joyful *agape* where the disciples recognized their Lord in the breaking of the bread; and, in the Sacrifice of the Mass, at Holy Communion.

FRIDAY, APRIL 19, 2019

From a Sermon by St. Leo the Great ¹

When our Lord was handed over to the will of his cruel foes, they ordered him, in mockery of his royal dignity, to carry the instrument of his own torture. This was done to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah: *A child is born for us, a son is given to us; sovereignty is laid on his shoulders.* To the wicked, the sight of the Lord carrying his own cross was indeed an object of derision; but to the faithful a great mystery is revealed, for the cross was destined to become the scepter of his power. Here was the majestic spectacle of a glorious conqueror mightily overthrowing the hostile forces of the devil and nobly bearing the trophy of his victory. On the shoulders of his invincible patience he carried the sign of salvation for all the kingdoms of the earth to worship, as if on that day he would strengthen all his future disciples by the symbol of his work, and say to them: *Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.*

As the crowd accompanied Jesus to the place of execution, the soldiers found a man named Simon of Cyrene, onto whose shoulders they transferred the weight of the Lord's cross. This action also prefigured the faith of the Gentiles, to whom the cross of Christ would mean glory rather than shame. By this exchange the atonement of the unblemished lamb and

the fulfillment of all the rites of the old law passed from the people of the circumcision to the Gentiles, from the children born of the flesh to those born of the spirit.

In the words of the Apostle: *Christ our Passover is sacrificed*. As the new and authentic sacrifice of reconciliation, it is not in the temple, whose cult was now at an end, that he offered himself to the Father; nor was it within the walls of the city doomed to destruction for its crimes. It was beyond the city gates, outside the camp, that he was crucified, in order that when the ancient sacrificial dispensation came to an end a new victim might be laid on a new altar not of the temple, but of the world. - *over*

When Christ is lifted up on the Cross, do not let your inward gaze dwell only on the appearance he had in the eyes of the wicked, to whom the word was addressed through Moses: *Your life will hang before your eyes; night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life*.

O the marvelous power of the Cross, the glory in the Passion! No tongue can fully describe it. Here we see the judgment seat of the Lord, here sentence is passed upon the world, and here the sovereignty of the Crucified is revealed. You drew all things to yourself, Lord, when all the elements combined to pronounce judgment in execration of that crime; when the lights of heaven were darkened and the day was turned into night; when the land was shaken by unwonted earthquakes, and all creation refused to serve those wicked people. Yes, Lord, you drew all things to yourself; the veil of the temple was torn in two and the Holy of Holies taken away from those unworthy high priests. Figures gave way to reality, prophecy to manifestation, law to gospel. You drew all things to yourself in order that the worship of the whole human race could be celebrated everywhere in a sacramental form which would openly fulfill what had been enacted by means of veiled symbols in that single Jewish temple. A nobler order of levites has now arisen. Through your Cross the faithful are given strength instead of weakness, glory instead of shame, life instead of death. Now that the multiplicity of animal sacrifices has ceased, the single offering of your body and blood takes the place of that diversity of victims, since you are the true Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and in yourself you fulfill all the rites of the old law, so that as

there is now a single sacrifice in place of all these victims, so there is a single kingdom formed of all the peoples of the earth.

[1](#)A Word in Season – vol. II – Exordium Books – 1982 – pg 201

SATURDAY, APRIL 20, 2019

FROM AN ANCIENT HOMILY ON HOLY SATURDAY⁶

Something strange is happening - there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear.

He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, he who is both God and the son of Eve. The Lord approached them bearing the cross, the weapon that had won him the victory. At the sight of him Adam, the first man he had created, struck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone: "My Lord be with you all." Christ answered him: "And with your spirit." He took him by the hand and raised him up, saying: "Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light."

I am your God, who for your sake have become your son. Out of love for you and for your descendants I now by my own authority command all who are held in bondage to come forth, all who are in darkness to be enlightened, all who are sleeping to arise. I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you; together we form only one person and we cannot be separated.

⁶THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS II, (Catholic Book Pub. Co. NY 1976) pp 496-98. (PG 43, 439, 451, 462-463.)

For your sake I, your God, became your son; I, the Lord, took the form of a slave; I, whose home is above the heavens, descended to the earth and beneath the earth. For your sake, for the sake of humankind, I became like one without help, free among the dead. For the sake of you, who left a garden, I was betrayed in a garden, and I was crucified in a garden.

See on my face the spittle I received in order to restore to you the life I once breathed into you. See there the marks of the blows I received in order to refashion your warped nature in my image. On my back see the marks of the scourging I endured to remove the burden of sin that weighs upon your back. See my hands, nailed firmly to a tree, for you who once wickedly stretched out your hand to a tree.. Rise, let us leave this place. The enemy led you out of the earthly paradise. I will not restore you to that paradise, but I will enthrone you in heaven.

END OF VIGILS READINGS