

LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY
VIGILS READINGS: Second Week of Easter
April 28-May 4, 2019

SUNDAY, APRIL 28, 2019

A Commentary on the Gospel of John by St. Augustine ¹

My dear people, you, like myself, are well aware that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the one physician capable of bringing us eternal healing and salvation. We know, too, that it was in order to accomplish this that he took upon himself the weakness of our human nature, otherwise that weakness would have remained with us forever. He equipped himself with a human body liable to death, so that in and through that body he might conquer death itself. And though, as the apostle tells us, it was his human weakness that made it possible for him to be crucified, it was his divine power that enabled him to return to life.

That same apostle says: *He will never die again, neither will death have any further hold upon him.* All this you already know and believe, and also the consequences flowing from it; we can be sure that the miracles he wrought while he lived among us were meant to encourage us to accept the gifts from him that should never pass away nor have an end. Thus he gave back sight to blind eyes that would shortly be closed again in death; he raised Lazarus from the dead only for him to die again. His bodily cures, indeed, were never meant to last for ever, even though at the end of time he is to give the body itself life everlasting. But because “seeing is believing,” he used these visible wonders to build up people's faith in even greater marvels that could not be seen.

Let no one then be found to say that since Christ Jesus our Lord no longer works such miracles among us, the Church was better off in its early days. On the contrary, in one recorded testament, the same Lord set those who have never seen and yet believe before those who believe only because they see. Indeed, so great was the disciples' weakness at that time, that when they saw the Lord they found it necessary to touch him before they

could believe he had really risen from the dead. They were unable to believe the testimony of their own eyes, until they had handled his body and explored his recent wounds with their fingers. Only after this was done could that most hesitant of all his disciples exclaim: *My Lord and my God!* Thus it was by his wounds that Christ, who had so often healed the manifold wounds of others, came to be recognized himself.

Now we may ask: could not the Lord have risen with a body from which all the marks of wounds had been erased? No doubt he could have; but he knew his disciples bore within their hearts a wound so deep that the only way to cure it was to retain the scars of his own wounds in his body. And when that confession: *My Lord and my God!* Was uttered, what was his answer to it? *You believe, he said, because you have seen me; blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.*

And who, my brothers and sisters, are those if not ourselves and those who are to follow after us? When, later on, the Lord had departed from human sight and faith had time to strike roots into people's hearts, those who believed in him made their act of faith without seeing him in whom they made it. The faith of such believers is highly meritorious, for it springs from a devoted heart rather than an exploring hand.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year C – New City Press – 2000 – pg 50

MONDAY, APRIL 29, 2019

A Reading from The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena.¹

God eternal, to stir up even more the love of Catherine's soul for the salvation of souls, responded to her:

I have told you that a bridge stretches from heaven to earth by reason of my having joined myself with your humanity, which I formed from the earth's clay.

Though this bridge has been raised so high, it still is joined to the earth. Do you know when it was raised up? When my Son was lifted up on

¹The Dialogue, The Bridge. St Catherine of Siena. Paulist Press, CWS, 1980. p.64, 65-66.

the wood of the most holy cross he did not cut off his divinity from the lowly earth of your humanity. So though he was raised so high he was not raised off the earth. In fact, his divinity is kneaded into the clay of your humanity like one bread. Nor could anyone walk on that bridge until my Son was raised up. This is why he said, "If I am lifted up high I will draw everything to myself."

When my goodness saw that you could be drawn in no other way, I sent him to be lifted onto the wood of the cross. I made of that cross an anvil where this child of humankind could be hammered into an instrument to release humankind from death and restore it to the life of grace. In this way he drew everything to himself: for he proved his unspeakable love, and the human heart is always drawn by love. He could not have shown you greater love than by giving his life for you. You can hardly resist being drawn by love, then, unless you foolishly refuse to be drawn.

I said that, having been raised up, he would draw everything to himself. This is true in two ways: First, the human heart is drawn by love, as I said, and with all its powers: memory, understanding, and will. If these three powers are harmoniously united in my name, everything else you do, in fact or in intention, will be drawn to union with me in peace through the movement of love, because all will be lifted up in the pursuit of crucified love. So my Truth indeed spoke truly when he said, "If I am lifted up high, I will draw everything to myself." For everything you do will be drawn to him when he draws your heart and its powers.

What he said is true also in the sense that everything was created for your use, to serve your needs. But you who have the gift of reason were made not for yourselves but for me, to serve me with all your heart and all your love. So when you are drawn to me, everything is drawn with you, because everything was made for you.

TUESDAY, APRIL 30, 2019

On Loving Christ. From an Easter Sermon of St. Augustine²

² Selected Easter Sermons of Saint Augustine. Commentary by Philip T. Weller. B. Herder Book Co. St. Louis, MO. 1959. p. 169.

Appearing to his disciples after the Resurrection, Our Lord put a question to the Apostle Peter, prompting him who had denied him three times out of fear to make a threefold profession of his love. Christ rose bodily from the dead, Peter was raised spiritually. Christ our Lord rose from the dead, and by his love raised Peter. What advantage was it to Christ to be loved by Peter? When Christ loves you, you are the gainer, not Christ. And when you love Christ, again you stand to gain, not Christ. Wishing to teach all peoples how they can prove their love for him, Christ our Lord made it plain that this is best proved by their concern for his sheep. "Do you love me" Lord, you know that I love you. Feed my sheep." This happened not once, but a second and third time. Our Lord asked only, "Do you love me?" He received no other answer than, "You know that I love you." He gave no other charge to Peter than "Feed my sheep". If we love one another then we also love Christ. For Christ, God from all eternity, was born of a human in the course of time. As human born of human He appeared as human to humankind. As God in the form of human He worked many miracles. As human He suffered many wrongs at the hands of humans. As God in the form of human He arose from the dead. As human among humans He tarried on earth forty days. As God in the form of human He ascended into heaven before their eyes, and now is seated at the right hand of the Father. All this we fully believe, although we do not see it. Neither do we see Christ whom we are commanded to love, and yet each one of us cries out out avowal: I love Christ! "If you do not love your brother or sister whom you see, how can you love God whom you do not

see?" In loving the sheep we prove that we love the Shepherd, for the sheep are in truth the very members of the Shepherd. In order that the sheep might be his members, He deigned to become the Lamb of God. In order that the sheep might be his members, "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter." In order that the sheep might be his members, it was said of him, "Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world." But what tremendous strength there is in this Lamb. Would you like to know when strength was made manifest in this Lamb? Well, the Lamb was crucified and the lion was overcome. Consider and reflect with what power the world is ruled by Christ our Lord who vanquished the devil by his death.

Let us, then, give him our love, and let nothing be dearer to us than He. Or do you think that our Lord is not questioning us? Do you imagine that Peter alone deserved to be questioned, and not ourselves? Whenever this lesson is read, the heart of each and every Christian is being scrutinized. Therefore, whenever you hear the Lord saying, "Peter, do you love me?" visualize a mirror and examine your own reflection. For what else was Peter but a symbol of the Church? Hence when the Lord questioned Peter, He was questioning us.

In temptations, in toil, in weariness, in troubles, in miseries, in sorrows, may the love of Christ which we love in you, the love of Christ which you also love in us, lead us to that place where toil will be no more; nor misery, nor sighs, nor moans, nor vexation, where there will be neither birth nor death, where no one need dread the divine wrath, but find all delight in gazing upon the face of the Almighty.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 1, 2019

A reading about St. Joseph as a special patron of our time, by Fr. Karl Rahner.³

Is it possible to think that anyone living today will be able to see himself or herself reflected in Joseph? Are there not people today who, if they are true to their character as willed by God, are a people of small means, of hard work, of only a few words, of loyalty of heart and simple sincerity? Certainly every Christian and every Christian nation is charged with the entire fullness of Christian perfection as a duty that is never completed. But every nation and every person has, so to speak, his own door, his own approach, through which he alone can come nearer to the fullness of Christianity. Not all of us will find access to the boundless vistas of God's world through the great gate of surging rapture and burning ardor. Some must go through the small gate of quiet loyalty and the ordinary, exact performance of duty. And it is this fact, I am inclined to think, that can help us to discover a rapport between earth and heaven, between Christians today and their heavenly intercessor...

[Joseph] received into his family the One who came to redeem his nation from their sin, One to whom he himself gave the name of Jesus, a name which means "Yahweh is Salvation." Silent and loyal, he served the eternal Word of the Father, the Word who had become a child of this world. And they called their Redeemer the son of a carpenter. When the eternal Word was audible in the world in the message of the gospels, Joseph, having quietly done his duty, went away without any notice on the part of this world.

But the life of this insignificant man did have significance; it had one meaning that, in the long run, counts in each one's life: God and his incarnate grace. To him it could be said: "Good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord." Who can doubt that this man is a good patron for us? This man of humble, everyday routine, this man of silent performance

³ *The Eternal Year*, trans. by John Shea, S.S.; Baltimore MD: Helicon, 1964, pp 74-77.

of duty, of honest righteousness and of manly piety, this man who was charged with protecting the grace of God in its embodied life.

Christians of today might find their way back to what is best in them if the individuality of this man, their patron, were again producing more stature in them. Granted, a nation must have greatness of spirit and pioneers who will lead her towards new goals. Just as much, if not more so, however, a nation needs men and women of life-long performance of duty, of clear-headed loyalty, of discipline of heart and body. A nation needs those who know that true greatness is achieved only in selfless service to the greater and holy duty that is imposed upon each life; those of genuine reverence, conquerors of themselves, who hear the word of God and carry out the inflexible decrees of conscience. It needs those who through their lives bear the childlike, defenseless grace of God past all those who, like Herod, attempt to kill this grace. A nation needs those who do not lose confidence in God's grace, even when they have to seek it as lost, as Joseph once sought the divine child. Such as these are urgently needed in every situation and in every class. We have a good patron, who is suitable for everyone. For he is a patron of the poor, a patron of working men and women, a patron of exiles, a model for worshipers, an exemplar of the pure discipline of the heart, a prototype of fathers who protect in their children the Son of the Father.

THURSDAY, MAY 2, 2019

A reading of St. Athanasius on the Letter to the Philippians. ⁴

It is not a dark saying but a divine mystery. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"; but for our sakes afterwards the "Word was made flesh." And the term in question, "highly exalted", does not signify that the substance of the Word was exalted, for He was ever and is "equal to God", but the exaltation is of His humanity. Accordingly, this is not said before the Word became flesh; that it might be plain that "humbled" and "exalted" are spoken of His human nature, for where there is humble estate, there too may be exaltation; and

⁴ *Orations Against the Arians*, Parker & Co., pp. 238-239.

if because of His taking flesh "humbled" is written, it is clear that "highly exalted" is also said because of it. For of this was human nature in want, because of the humble estate of the flesh and of death.

Since then the Word, being the Image of the Father and immortal, took the form of a servant, and as man underwent for us death in His flesh, that thereby He might offer Himself for us through death to the Father; therefore also, as man, He is said because of us and for us to be highly exalted, that as by His death we all died in Christ, so again in the Christ Himself we might be highly exalted, being raised from the dead, and ascending into heaven, "whither the forerunner is for us entered, not into the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."

But if now for us the Christ is entered into heaven itself, though He was even before and always Lord and Maker of the heavens, for us therefore is that present exaltation also written. And as He Himself, who sanctifies all, says also that He sanctifies Himself to the Father for our sakes, not that the Word may become holy, but that He Himself may in Himself sanctify all of us, in like manner we must take the present phrase, "He highly exalted Him", not that He Himself should be exalted, for He is the highest, but that He may become righteousness for us; and we may be exalted in Him, and that we may enter the gates of heaven, which He has also opened for us, the forerunners saying, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in." For here also not on Him were shut the gates, who is Lord and Maker of all, but because of us is this too written, to whom the door of paradise was shut. And therefore in a human relation, because of the flesh which He bore, it is said of Him, "Lift up, O ye gates", and "shall come in", as if humanity were entering; but in a divine relation on the other hand it is said of Him, since the "Word was God", that He is the "Lord" and the "King of Glory". For as Christ died and was exalted as man, so, as man, is He said to take what, as God He ever had, that even this so high a grant of grace might reach to us.

FRIDAY, MAY 3, 2019

The witness of the apostles to the resurrected Christ: a reading from the Guide to the Christian Assembly by Jean Frisque.⁵

They were still talking about all this when he himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you!"

The preeminent witnesses to the resurrection of Christ were the apostles. From the time of Jesus' baptism to his death, they accompanied him in his public ministry. His death on the cross at the first threw them into a panic, but soon afterwards it clarified everything for them, once it had been placed in its Scriptural context, through the aid of the resurrected Christ himself.

But was the testimony of the apostles limited to this single well-founded assertion: *He whom you crucified has risen from the dead through the power of God?* In reality, there was much more: the apostles did not only offer an eyewitness account of an event but the testimony of their faith. Only their faith enabled them to discover why the death on the cross was the key-event of salvation-history and in what way it led to the life of the resurrection. And theirs was not simply any faith, but faith in the paschal experience itself, the faith which had perceived that in Jesus Christ all people were called to share in the divine filiation and to contribute on their own behalf to the construction of the Kingdom.

Nor was this all. The witness which the apostles rendered to the resurrection of Christ was above all an authorized witness. The apostles had received from the resurrected Christ himself their power to testify validly to him. They had received the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the resurrected Christ. Thus the very life of the resurrected Christ was given to the apostolic group, and the Church which they would construct in his name would be animated by this same life. The Church was to be the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the life which circulated in her would testify until the end of time to the resurrection of her Head!

Thus we can see why the apostolic witness rendered to the resurrected Christ was inseparable from the life which animated the first Christian community. This witness was necessarily communal. The preaching in which this witness took shape was absolutely inseparable from the grace of communion given to the primitive community and its efforts to be entirely

⁵London, 1965, vol. 3, pp 77-78.

faithful to the law of universal charity.

Today's Christians are not wrong, therefore, when they insist upon the importance of the testimony of their life. But the life to which they must witness in order to testify to the resurrected Christ is the life of Christ himself. This life is displayed here on earth by the way of total obedience unto death for the love of all people, for such an obedience leads us constantly from death to life. Such a sign can only be displayed by the Church herself.

SATURDAY, MAY 4, 2019

Cross and Resurrection by Hans Urs von Balthasar from his book On Prayer.⁶

Heaven, then, in which we can already participate, informs our life on earth and gives it its meaning; and, in like manner, the resurrection determines our relation to the cross, setting up a second and final "soteriological" tension. We are Christians, because the Lord has risen; if he had not, our faith would be vain. Christ suffered for the sake of glorification and took on himself the cross, the confession of the cross, that he might obtain absolution from the Father. We are not at first entitled to go with Christ on the way he walked; otherwise there would be no qualitative difference between him and us; he would only be *primus inter pares* (first among equals), and we could be literally called co-redeemers. But "God commends his charity towards us because when as yet we were sinners according to the time Christ died for us ... When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son". If we walk with the Son, it is because we are carried along by the grace of the redemption accomplished by him. The sentence that decided our destiny in principle was pronounced on Christ as representing all sinners. In him we were crucified and condemned to death; in him justified and accepted as children of God. In him, without any action on our part, God's wrath against us has changed into solicitous love. so then we have to bring to full

⁶"Cross & Resurrection" from the book *On Prayer*. Hans Urs von Balthasar, Sheed and Ward 1961, pp. 233-234.

reality in our temporal life on earth what is already true in Christ and through him in heaven with the Father.

In the New Testament what we have to do follows from what we are. We are justified, and must act accordingly. We are dead, buried and risen with Christ, and have to live our lives in view of this. We are no longer to live to sin; we are henceforth to look on the "old self", who is dead as dead in fact, daily oppose his resistance to the sentence of death, make him die daily. One might say that in order to exalt the resurrection St. Paul upsets the equilibrium between the old and the new eon, the old and the new Adam, cross and resurrection, fear and hope. From now on the first member of each pair of antitheses is comprised within the second; the cross, in the Christian life, is borne in the strength of the resurrection already accomplished. "In all things we suffer tribulations but are not distressed. We are straitened, but not destitute. We suffer persecution, but are not forsaken. We are cast down, but we perish not. Always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies....For which cause we faint not; but though our outer nature is corrupted, yet the inner nature is renewed day by day.

END OF READINGS FOR THIS WEEK.