

LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY  
VIGILS READINGS: Sixth Week in Easter  
May 26-June 1, 2019

**SUNDAY, MAY 26**

**A Commentary on the Gospel of St John by St Bernard of Clairvaux <sup>1</sup>**

*My Father and I will come to him* – that is to say, to the holy of heart – says the Son of God, *and we will make our home with him*. It seems to me that when the psalmist said to God: *You make your dwelling in the holy place, you who are Israel's praise*, he had no other heaven in mind than the hearts of the saints. The apostle expresses it quite clearly: *Christ lives in our hearts through faith*, he tells us..

Surely it is no wonder that the Lord Jesus Christ makes his home in such a heaven because, unlike the other heavens, he did not bring it into existence by a mere word of command. He descended into the arena to win it; he laid down his life to redeem it. And so after the battle was won he solemnly declared: *This is my resting place for ever and ever: here I have chosen to dwell*. Blessed indeed is the soul to whom the Lord says: *Come, my chosen one, I will set up my throne in you*.

Why, then, are you sorrowful, my soul, and why are you troubled within me? Are you trying to find a place for the Lord within yourself? Who among us can provide a fitting place for the Lord of glory, a place worthy of his majesty! O that I might be counted worthy to worship at his footstool, that I might at least cling to the feet of some saintly soul whom the Lord has chosen to be his dwelling place! However, the Lord has only to anoint my soul with the oil of his mercy for me in turn to be able to say: *I have run the way of your commandments because you have enlarged my heart*. Then perhaps, even if I cannot usher him into a large and richly furnished room in my heart where he may refresh himself with his disciples, I shall at least be able to offer him a place to lay his head.

It is necessary for a soul to grow and be enlarged until it is capable of containing God within itself. But the dimensions of a soul are in proportion to its love, as the apostle confirms when he urges the Corinthians to *widen their hearts in love*. Although the soul, being spiritual, cannot be measured physically, grace confers on it what nature does not bestow. It expands

spiritually as it makes progress toward human perfection, which is measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ, and so it grows into a temple sacred to the Lord.

Love, then, is the measure of the soul. Souls are large that love much, small that love little; while as for a soul that has no love at all, such a soul is itself nothing. *Without love, says Saint Paul, I am nothing*

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year C – New City Press – 2000 – pg 58

## **MONDAY, MAY 27**

### **St. Augustine, Archbishop of Canterbury, by Butler<sup>1</sup>**

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When Pope St. Gregory the Great decided that the time had come for the evangelization of Anglo-Saxon England, he chose as missionaries some thirty or ore monks from his monastery of St. Andrew on the Coelian Hill. As their leader he gave them their own prior, Augustine. The party set out from Rome in the year 596; but no sooner had they arrived in Provence than they were assailed with warnings about the ferocity of the Anglo-Saxons and the dangers of the Channel. Greatly discouraged, they persuaded Augustine to return to Rome and obtain leave to abandon the enterprise. St. Gregory, however, had received definite assurance that the English were well disposed towards the Christian faith; he therefore sent Augustine back to his brethren with words of encouragement which gave them heart to proceed on their way. They landed in the Isle of Thanet in the territory of Ethelbert, king of Kent, who was baptized at Pentecost 597. Almost immediately afterwards St. Augustine paid a visit to France, where he was consecrated bishop of the English by St. Virgilius, metropolitan of Arles. At Christmas of that same year, many of Ethelbert's subjects were baptized, as St. Gregory joyfully related in a letter to Eulogius, the patriarch of Alexandria. Augustine sent two of his monks, Laurence and Peter, to Rome to give a full report of his mission, to ask for more helpers and obtain advice on various points. they came back bringing the pallium for

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<sup>1</sup>Butler's Lives of Saints. Harper, 1991, pp. 158-159.

Augustine and accompanied by a fresh band of missionaries, amongst whom were St. Mellitus, St. Justus and St. Paulinus.

Gregory outlined for Augustine the course he should take to develop a hierarchy for the whole country, and both to him and to Mellitus gave very practical instructions on other points. Pagan temples were not to be destroyed, but were to be purified and consecrated for Christian worship. Local customs were as far as possible to be retained, days of dedication and feasts of martyrs being substituted for heathen festivals.

In Canterbury itself St. Augustine rebuilt an ancient church which, with an old wooden house, formed the nucleus for his metropolitan basilica and for the later monastery of Christ Church. These buildings stood on the site of the present cathedral begun by Lanfranc in 1070. Outside the walls of Canterbury he made a monastic foundation, which he dedicated in honour of St. Peter and St. Paul. After his death this abbey became known as St. Augustine's, and was the burial place of the early archbishops.

Cut off from much communication with the outside world, the British church clung to certain usages at variance with those of the Roman tradition. St. Augustine invited the leading ecclesiastics to meet him at some place just on the confines of Wessex, still known in Bede's day as Augustine's Oak. There he urged them to comply with the practices of the rest of Western Christendom, and more especially to co-operate with him in evangelizing the Anglo-Saxons. Fidelity to their local traditions, however, made them unwilling. A second conference proved a said failure. Because St. Augustine failed to rise when they arrived, the British bishops decided that he was lacking in humility and would neither listen to him nor acknowledge him as their metropolitan.

The saint's last years were spent in spreading and consolidating the faith throughout Ethelbert's realm, and episcopal sees were established at London and Rochester. About seven years after his arrival in England, St. Augustine passed to his reward, on May 26, c. 605.

**TUESDAY, MAY 28**

**A Sermon of St Bernard of Clairvaux on the Resurrection 2**

*The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the book and to loosen its seven seals. Where are those who said, Let Christ, the King of Israel, come down from the cross and we will believe in him? Where are those, I say, who taunted him as they wagged their heads before the cross, demanding that our Head be removed from it? Where are those who, when God our King before the ages worked salvation in the midst of the earth, when he inspired the prophet who said that *the Lord has reigned from the tree* – where, I say, are those who said then, *If he is the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross?* O venomous tongue, O deceitful tongue! Truly *their tongue is a sharp sword*, truly they have sharpened their tongues like swords, and *the poison of asps is under their lips*.*

You urge him, O Jew, to come down from the cross. What am I to do? I implore you, Lord, I implore you not to give way to them. If only those who endure can be saved, how much less can he be Savior if he were not to endure? What am I to say to my brothers, who are your limbs, if you come down from the cross? How will I encourage the fainthearted, how will I admonish the lazy and those who have almost gone back from the truth? How am I to say to people of this kind, *do not desert your post*, if they can reply that Christ deserted his? How many are even now tempted to come down from the cross, and some have even come down! Who will remain, if you come down and give to the fainthearted and to our impatience an opportunity that will find us totally ready? *The human imagination and thought are prone to evil from youth*. How will you now say: *Those who want to follow me, let them take up their cross*, if you first leave your own? *Far be it from you, Lord!* Be gracious to us. Don't let this happen! It is Satan who tries to persuade you thus; he is the enemy of salvation who is trying to hinder the work of salvation. What will this sacrifice profit – this evening sacrifice – what will it profit if the tail is missing. Perseverance alone is the crown of the virtues, and the enemy wishes to snatch it away from me. But how, my brothers, will he endure on the cross when he sees on one side the Jews decrying him and on the other his disciples sighing? Must we not

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2 Bernard of Clairvaux – Sermons for Lent and Easter – Cistercian Fathers series #52 = Liturgical Press – Collegeville, MN – 2013 – pg 149

fear that he will come down to comfort his disciples and confute his enemies? The Jews say: *He saved others, himself he cannot save*. His disciples say, *We were hoping that he would redeem Israel*. The Jews exult and insult; Peter despairs and denies. By his advice you would not have ascended the cross, you know!

If you lay aside the cross before you lay down your life, where is that great love than which no one has greater? Where is what the disciple whom he loved said: *Having loved his own, he loved them to the end*? Where is your full and perfect obedience if you are not obedient to the point of death? Where is your patience, your humility, which you set before us as a model, if you reveal your power by descending from the cross because of the mockery of the Jews? The well-known words, sweeter than honey and the honey comb, will have to be removed from the gospel *No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends*; and this, *as the Father has commanded me, so I do*. The Apostle could not have said, *Christ loved us and gave himself up for us*, or this, *Christ became obedient to the Father to the point of death, even death on the cross*.

This is the mystery, brothers, this is the great sacrament of the Lord's cross, for in it we have those four virtues. Let surpassing charity be at the head, let obedience be at the right side – let patience be on the left side, and let humility be at the foot.

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 29**

### **A Continuation of the Sermon of St Bernard on the Resurrection 3**

So now too, O Jew, if you are asking for a sign, *Look for me on the day of my resurrection*. This wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign, and no sign will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. Do you ask for the sign of his coming down? I will not give you that, but the sign of his resurrection instead. There you were, saying, *Let him come down from the cross and we will believe in him*, and here he is, having done greater things than this, much greater things. Is it not greater to leave a sealed tomb than to come down from the cross?

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3 Bernard of Clairvaux – Sermons for Lent and Easter – Cistercian Fathersd Series #52 –Liturgical Press –  
Collegeville, MN – 2013 – pg 153

But perhaps you ask how I know that he came forth from a closed tomb. Yesterday you heard that as the holy women were coming to the tomb an earthquake occurred, an angel came down from heaven and rolled back the stone about which they were complaining and sat upon it, saying that he whom they sought was not there but had already risen. Obviously then, the great stone that the Jews had put there and sealed had not yet been rolled back when the Savior came forth. Certainly this was a greater miracle than if he had come down from the cross. He did a much more marvelous thing when he rose from the dead.

True, other resurrections had taken place earlier, but they were preambles to this one, and they were surpassed by this one in two respects. First, they rose to die again, but Christ being raised now dies no more. Hence Christ is the first fruits of those who arise, because he was the first to rise after dying. Again, other, dying again, needed to be restored to life again; Christ died once for all and rose once for all.

The Lord's resurrection surpasses all the others in another way. Some had been restored to life by others, but none before Christ had been able to restore themselves to life. Elisha, who had restored the dead to life, has long lain dead and has not risen. Christ alone has been able to restore himself to life, he who alone was first among the dead. What will he be able to do, he who is living eternally and saying to the Father, *I have risen, and I am still with you*, he who alone with respect to all the dead was so powerful?

It was absolutely fitting for him to rise on the third day because of the text *after two days he will revive us, and on the third day he will raise us up*. Thus should it happen to us as to our Head before us. The first day he was on the cross, the second in the tomb, and on the third day he was glorified by the triumph of the resurrection. So we also, if we are his members and if we choose to follow our Head, on the first day – that is, while we are in this mortal flesh – we will persevere on the cross of our penitence, concerning which he himself said, *if any want to come after me, let them take up their cross and follow me*. We will not come down, as Christ did not come down.

Righteous men took him down when he was already dead; may the holy angels take us down! Thus with the day successfully finished, the second, which is after death, we will spend in the tomb, sleeping in peace and

resting from all labor. *Henceforth now, says the Spirit, they may rest from their labors.*

On the third day we will rise again to be forever in glory and eternal life.

## **THURSDAY, MAY 30**

### **A Continuation of the Sermon of St Bernard on the Resurrection 4**

*The Lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed. The Lamb has been slain, but the lion has prevailed. The lion, I say, the mightiest of beasts, who trembles at no one he meets.* He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Let those who are from elsewhere tremble. This lion is mighty, not cruel.

Blessed then are those of the tribe of Judah. They are clothed with praise, so that all of their bones may say *Lord, who is like you?* All their works, because they are works of God, praise him.

This Lion prevailed to open the book and undo its seals. Those who are familiar with the narrative of the Book of Revelation know how John saw the book closed and sealed and wanted to see what was written in it. He began to weep because no one was found worthy to open the Book. One of the elders, however, said to him, *Do not weep. The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the book and to loosen its seals.* A little later he heard them singing, *Worthy is the lamb that was slain to open the book and to loosen its seals.* He is the Lamb, he is the Lion – indeed he is the Book. What wonder if no one was worthy to open the book? John himself, than whom no one greater has arisen among those born of women – confesses himself unworthy. *I am not worthy.* He says, *to untie the thong of his sandals.* Divinity comes to us wearing sandals, the Wisdom of God comes enclosed in a book; what the thong of his sandal binds is also symbolized by the seals of the book.

But what are these seven seals? There are seven things, I think, that chiefly concealed the presence of majesty in the flesh, and in some way prevented the book from being opened and the Wisdom of God from being recognized. Among these are the betrothal of his mother, by which the virgin birth and his holy conception were concealed so that he might be thought to be the carpenter's son; also his physical weakness, his wailing,

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4 Bernard of Clairvaux – Sermons for Lent and Easter – Cistercian Fathers Series #52 – Liturgical Press – Collegeville, MN 2013 – pg155

and suffering hunger, and nursing, and the other kinds of physical distress he bore, greatly obscured the Lord of Mercy. Circumcision, too – the brand mark of robbers, the medicine of the sick, and the remedy for sinners – was no less instrumental in closing and sealing this book. But it was the flight into Egypt away from Herod the king that provided the greatest concealment to the Son of God and King of heaven.

And who would have recognized the Christ of the Lord in his temptation by the devil, when the tempter was bold enough to suggest that he fall down and worship him? Need I speak of the cross, where he hung between two thieves, as though he was one of them? His burial too most certainly closed the great mystery of holiness, because when the Lord was buried, it seemed that only despair remained.

Rightly did John weep because no one was found to loosen the seals and open the book to reveal the Wisdom of God closed within. But worthy is the Lamb that was slain, the Lion who rose from the dead, and the Book worthy to open itself, which we cannot doubt was done at the resurrection – by which, among all the rest, it is clearly shown that all we mentioned before was a matter of choice, not of necessity, a matter of condescension, not of contract.

And now God the Father *has lifted up my head*; we cannot doubt that he will lift up his limbs as well, if they choose to follow their head and go through the same opening, which is the passion; otherwise they must be separated from the head and perish. For the head to go through one opening and the limbs through another is quite impossible. *I will*, he says, *that where I am, there also they may be with me*. If he wills this, who will stand in his way? *If God is for us, who can be against us?* Therefore in affirmation he says, *Where I am, there will my servant also be*

## **FRIDAY, MAY 31**

### **From a Sermon by Saint Sophronius, bishop.<sup>1</sup>**

"Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you." What joy could surpass this, O Virgin Mother? What grace can excel that which God has granted to you alone? What could be imagined more dazzling or more delightful? Before the miracle we witness in you, all else pales; all else is inferior when

compared with the grace you have been given. All else, even what is most desirable, must take second place and enjoy a lesser importance.

"The Lord is with you." Who would dare challenge you? You are God's mother; who would not immediately defer to you and be glad to accord you a greater primacy and honor? For this reason, when I look upon the privilege you have above all creatures, I extol you with the highest praise: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you." On your account joy has not only graced us, but is also granted to the powers of heaven.

Truly, "You are blessed among women. " For you have changed Eve's curse into a blessing; and Adam, who hitherto lay under a curse, has been blessed because of you.

Truly, you are blessed among women. Through you the Father's blessing has shone forth on humankind, setting them free of their ancient curse.

Truly, you are blessed among women, because through you your forebears have found salvation. For you were to give birth to the Savior who was to win them salvation.

Truly, you are blessed among women, for without seed you have borne, as your fruit, him who bestows blessings on the whole world and redeems it from that curse that made it sprout thorns.

Truly, you are blessed among women, because, though a woman by nature, you will become, in reality, God's mother. If he whom you are to bear is truly God made flesh, then rightly do we call you God's mother. For you have truly given birth to God.

Enclosed within your womb is God himself. He makes his abode in you and comes forth from you like a bridegroom, winning joy for all and bestowing God's light on all.

You, O Virgin, are like a clear and shining sky, in which God "has set his tent." From you "he comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber." Like a giant running his course, he will run the course of his life which will bring salvation for all who will ever live, and extending from the highest heavens to the end of them, it will fill all things with divine warmth and life-giving brightness.

1Oratio 2, in sanctissimae Deipararæ Annuntiatione, 21-22.26: PG 87, 3, 3242, 3250

**SATURDAY, JUNE 1**

**A reading about the reasons for martyrdom, from the *First Apology* of St. Justin Martyr. <sup>5</sup>**

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We do not desire to live by lying. We are desirous of an eternal and good life; we strive for the abode of God, the Father and Creator of all; we make haste to profess our faith; we believe with firm conviction that they can attain these things who have shown God by their works that they follow Him and love to make their home with Him where there is no sin to cause disorder. In brief, this is what we look for and what we have learned from Christ and, in turn, teach to others.

We do not worship with many sacrifices and floral offerings the things human hands have made, set in temples, and called gods. We know that they are inanimate and lifeless and have not the form of God (for we do not think that God has that form which some say they reproduce in order to give honor to Him). Why should we tell you, who already know, into what different shapes the artisans fashion their material, by carving, cutting, molding, and hammering? From vessels destined for vile purposes, by merely changing their shape and by skillfully giving them a new form, they often make what they call gods. Thus, His name is applied to corruptible things that need constant care. This, we think, is not only stupid but also disrespectful to God, who is of ineffable glory and form.

But we have learned from tradition that God has no need of our material gifts, since we see that He is the Giver of all things. We have been taught, are convinced, and do believe that he approves of only those who imitate His inherent virtues, namely, temperance, justice, love of neighbor, and any other virtue proper to God who is called by no given name. We have also been instructed that God, in the beginning, created in His goodness everything out of shapeless matter for our sakes. And if we by our actions prove ourselves worthy of His plan, we shall be found worthy to make our abode with Him and to reign with Him, free from all corruption and pain.

When you hear that we look forward to a kingdom, you rashly assume that we speak of a human kingdom, whereas we mean a kingdom which is with

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<sup>5</sup> Saint Justin Martyr, *The First Apology* (Fathers of the Church series), New York: , 1948, chapters 8-10, pp. 42-43.

God. This becomes evident when, being questioned, we openly profess to be Christians, although we know well that for such a profession of faith the punishment is death. If we expected a human kingdom, we would deny that we are Christians that we might not be put to death, and we would try to hide from you, that we might attain what we expect.

That all these things should happen was foretold, I say, by our teacher, Jesus Christ, who is the Son and Apostle of God, the Father and Ruler of all, and from whom we have received our name of Christians. Hence, we are convinced of the truth of all the things He taught us, because whatever He foretold would happen is actually happening; this, indeed, is the practice of God, to speak of something before it takes place and then to show it taking place just as He predicted.

**END OF READINGS**