

SUN 05.19.19

A Commentary on the Gospel of John by Cyril of Alexandria [1](#)

I give you a new commandment, said Jesus: love one another. But how, we might ask, could he call this commandment new? Through Moses, he had said to the people of old: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself. Notice what follows. He was not content simply to say, I give you a new commandment: love one another. He showed the novelty of his command and how far the love he enjoined surpassed the old conception of mutual love by going on immediately to add: Love one another as I have loved you.

To understand the full force of these words, we have to consider how Christ loved us. Then it will be easy to see what is new and different in the commandment we are now given. Paul tells us that *although his nature was divine, he did not cling to his equality with God, but stripped himself of all privilege to assume the condition of a slave. He became as we are, and appearing in human form humbled himself by being obedient even to the extent of dying, dying on a cross.* And elsewhere Paul writes: *Though he was rich, he became poor.*

Do you not see what is new in Christ's love for us? The law commanded people to love their brothers and sisters as they love themselves, but our Lord Jesus Christ loved us more than himself. He who was one in nature with God the Father and his equal would not have descended to our lowly estate, nor endured in his flesh such a bitter death for us, nor submitted to the blows given him by his enemies, to the shame, the derision, and all the other sufferings that could not possibly be enumerated; nor, being rich, would he have become poor, had he not loved us far more than himself. It was indeed something new to go as far as that!

Christ commands us to love as he did, putting neither reputation, nor wealth, nor anything whatever before love of our brothers and sisters. If need be, we must be prepared to face death for our neighbor's salvation as did our Savior's blessed disciples and those who followed in their footsteps. To them the salvation of others mattered more than their own lives and they were ready to do anything or to suffer anything to save souls that were perishing. *-die daily*, said Paul. *Who suffers weakness without my suffering too? Who is made to stumble without my heart blazing with indignation? -over*

The Savior urged us to practice this love that transcends the law as the foundation of true devotion to God. He knew that only in this way could we become pleasing in God's eyes, and that it was by seeking the beauty of the love implanted in us by himself that we should attain to the highest blessings.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year C – New City Press – 2000 – pg 56

MON 05.20.19

An Easter Sermon by St Aelred of Rievaulx ¹

At the time when the sons of Israel were leaving Egypt, it was prescribed in the Law that a lamb was to be slaughtered and eaten. This was called the paschal feast. It was also prescribed that for seven days they should eat unleavened bread – that is, bread without leavening. And this was called the feast of unleavened bread. The Evangelist brings this out when he says: *The festival of unleavened bread, called the pasch, was approaching.* This first feast, when the lamb was killed, was called only the pasch; the latter was called both the pasch and the feast of unleavened bread. It seems to me, then, that the first feast symbolizes the Lord's passion and the latter his resurrection. That the first symbolizes the Lord's passion is sufficiently well known. In it the true Lamb was slain and by his blood we have been saved from the hand of Pharaoh – that is, the devil. The feast is called the pasch – that is, the passing over – because Christ at his passion passed over from this world. As the Evangelist says: *Before the day of paschal feast Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father.*

Yet let us take a look at how the other feast symbolizes the Lord's resurrection. And first of all let us reflect on how profoundly that divine majesty humbled himself and to what depths he descended for us. He who is the creator, made himself a creature. He who was Lord, made himself a servant. He who was rich, made himself poor. He who was great, made himself little. *And the Word was made flesh.* He was bread and he fed the angels. But he did not feed us. And so we were wretched, because a rational creature is always wretched if he is not fed this bread. We were, however, so weak that in no way could we taste that bread in all its purity. We had within us a corrosive leaven that robbed us of our pristine strength. We had become so unlike that pure and untainted bread that we could not taste it at all. This leavening which we had within us was twofold. We had within us the leavening of mortality and we had within us the leavening of iniquity.

You see now how far removed we were from that bread in which there was neither mortality nor iniquity. How were we to ascend to it? How were we to taste it? What things are so contrary to one another as mortality and immortality, iniquity and justice? We are mortals and sinners; he is immortal and just. How were we to come together? He saw this, he who is caring and merciful. Because we could not ascend to him, he came down to us. He took upon himself one part of our leavening and so adapted himself to our weakness. He did not take to himself the whole leaven that was in us, but a certain part of it. If he had taken on the whole of it he would be as we are and he would not be able to help us. If he had taken none of it he would be so distant from us that we would not be able in any way to approach him. And so we would remain forever in our wretchedness. We have said that there was a twofold leavening in us: mortality and iniquity. The one he took on and by it was made like us. The other he avoided so that he could profit us.

The leavening of our mortality therefore he accepted, and abode in the purity of his justice, so that he would be the sort of being who could come down to us and yet remain the sort of being to whom we ought to ascend. You see now, brothers, how that pure bread is leavened for our sakes. To this leavening of mortality belongs hunger, thirst, sorrow, misery. All of this our Lord took on himself. He chose to take on this leavening, but he was not obliged to remain in ferment. First he showed this leavening in himself through a wondrous compassion and then he purged himself of this leaven through a wondrous charity. He purged himself of this leavening in such a way as to show his wonderful charity for us. Therefore he willed to purge himself from the leavening of mortality in the way in which we have to purge ourselves from the leavening of iniquity.

We ought to know that our iniquity is the cause of our mortality. And therefore when we are fully purged of iniquity we will doubtless also be purged of mortality. We ought meanwhile to realize that our iniquity is twofold. It comes from the nature in which we were born and from the evil which we later brought to it. From both of these the Lord purges us. He offered for us a sacrifice – his own blood – and through this sacrifice we are purged. And therefore what we suffer now from the corruption of our nature is no longer iniquity but infirmity. From the corruption of our nature come the impulses of concupiscence which we suffer unwillingly. From this come the impulses of lust, anger, pride, ambition. But if we do not consent to them, God does not impute them to us, because the pure sacrifice was offered to offset the corruption of our nature. Note, then, by the workings of his compassion in us in baptism we are purged of all sins, both those which came from nature and those which we added voluntarily.

[1](#)The Liturgical Sermons of Aelred of Rievaulx – Sermon 12 - Cistercian Fathers Series - #58 – Cistercian Publications – Kalamazoo – 2001 – pg 194

TUES

05.21.19

A Continuation of the Easter Sermon by St Aelred of Rievaulx ¹

Christ's compassion has purged us of all sins through Baptism. But have we kept ourselves in that untainted state? What then shall we do? He has taught us how we are to be cleansed. In the same way as he was purged of the leavening of mortality we ought to be purged from the leavening of iniquity. Doubtless, he could somehow have purged himself of mortality without suffering pain. But since we cannot be purged of our iniquity except by temporal pains, he willed to provide an example for us.

Remember now that we said that our Lord Jesus Christ is bread. Think of him before the passion. Notice that he was, as it were, bread with leavening in it. He was hungry and thirsty, he wept, he slept, he felt tired. All these things belong not to the leavening of iniquity but to the leavening of infirmity and mortality. By all of them he demonstrated the compassion and charity he had towards us. All of them are various kinds of medicine that were characteristic of our infirmity. All of them, because they were characteristic of us in that he did not possess them himself, he took them on from us. But in us they are all mixed with sin. For our hunger and thirst are usually accompanied by evil obsessions, our sadness by complaining and despair or bitterness, our sleep by looseness, and our lethargy and laziness by listlessness. But our Lord untangled them and separated them. He rejected the sin and took on the infirmity. For a short time he hid what was his own and took upon himself what was ours. That is why Isaiah said: *That he may accomplish his work, his alien work.*

What work? Many are the works of the Lord, but here he is speaking of a particular work which belongs especially to him. The angels, the archangels and all the powers of heaven are his work. *Heaven, earth, the sea and all that they contain* are his work. But we know how he accomplished these works; he did not undertake alien works to accomplish these. *He spoke and they were made.* What then is this work of his that is so special, so singular, so wonderful, so unheard of? Let us listen then to what Scripture says: *His mercies are above all his works.* I see three types of work that belong to God. There is the work of his wisdom, the work of his mercy, and the work of his judgment. The work of his wisdom: *heaven and earth and everything that they contain.* The work of his judgment: *to render to each one according to his deeds.* But *his mercies are above all his works.* Therefore the work of his mercy is especially his work. It is his own work, his proper work, in which there appears to the utmost his goodness, his charity, and his kindness.

He accomplished the work of his wisdom when he created the world. But he had not yet accomplished the work of his mercy. For the work of his mercy corresponds to those who are wretched. He accomplished the work of judgment when he hurled the devil out of heaven for his pride. He accomplished the work of judgment when he expelled a human being from paradise for disobedience. Yet in these works he demonstrated his

wisdom and power. He willed to show his mercy as well, *for his mercies are above all his works*. Therefore the work of his mercy is properly said to be his work.

But how would he accomplish this work if not by saving the wretched? Therefore the work of our salvation is the work of his mercy – that is, the work which is properly *his* work. What is the property of the Savior – that is, Jesus – if not to save? As you know, brothers, our Lord Jesus Christ is *wisdom*, he is strength, he is life. What is the opposite of wisdom and as it were foreign to it? Without doubt, folly. And what is the opposite of strength? Without doubt, infirmity. Similarly the only thing opposite death is life. Reflect now on how our Lord took on himself a work which was alien to him so that he might be able to accomplish his own work, that is, the work of his mercy. He who is wisdom willed to be, as it were, foolish. He who was strong willed to be infirm. That is why the apostle says: *The folly of God is wiser than the wisdom of human beings and the infirmity of God stronger than human strength*. That he may accomplish his work, his alien work, bread hungers, the fountain thirsts, strength grows tired and life dies.

But how does he accomplish his own work by means of this alien work? It is his hunger that feeds us, his thirst that inebriates us, his weariness that refreshes us, his death that brings us life. All this is the work of his mercy. By means of this alien work he accomplishes everything. Therefore, as we said, wisdom accomplishes its work by means of folly, strength accomplishes it by means of weakness, might accomplishes it by means of weariness, life accomplishes it by means of death. In order that he might accomplish the work of his mercy, the work of his wisdom and the work of his judgment became foreign to him. At length the time came when he willed to rid himself of this leavening. He applied fire – that is, his passion. In his passion all that leavening was destroyed, all corruption and all mortality were destroyed, and today he rose from earth, unleavened bread.

[1](#)The Liturgical Sermons of Aelred of Rievaulx – Sermon 12 - Cistercian Fathers Series - #58 – Cistercian Publications – Kalamazoo – 2001 – pg 194

WED 05.22.19

A Sermon by Bl Aelred of Rievaulx for the Day of Easter ¹

Today we can say, “Abundance has made us poor, not an abundance of understanding but of subject matter. For who is adequate to speak of the glory, sweetness and joy of this day? Who knows what to talk about? *This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.* This day feeds the hungry and heals the sick; it is life and resurrection for the dead. The one who is tired can rest on this day. The one who is sick can be cured on this day. The one who is dead can arise on this day. *This is the day the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

This is the day of eternity, in which the Creator lives eternally. It is the day of creation, in which God has created all things. It is the day of perdition, in which humanity fell into damnation. It is the day of restoration, in which God has redeemed humanity. *And it is the day that the Lord has made.* The day of eternity has no morning; it has no evening. It has no beginning or end. The day of eternity is God himself, who has no beginning or end, who does not vary or change but is always in the same condition, to which point the prophet says, *You are always the same and the years do not decrease you.*

It is a day of mutability in which God created all things, because he made all things out of nothing, and all things are mutable. That day has a morning and an evening, that is, a beginning and an end. For there is no doubt that time began, and it has been written about the end of the world, *Because time will be no more.* But that day does not have a night, because had all things remained in the same state in which they were created, there would be no terrible night of eternal damnation nor any exterior darkness into which are sent those who, of their own accord, rush into interior darkness. - over -

But this weeping does not remain for long, because immediately *joy breaks out in the morning*, when the day of glorification begins because of the sublime resurrection of the Lord. *This is the day that the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it.* Just as God redeemed humanity on the day of restoration, so he glorified humanity on the day of resurrection. For we await the fullness of glory on the day of our own resurrection, when this mortal flesh shall put on immortality, and corruption incorruption, when the word that was written shall come to pass: *death will be swallowed up in victory.* And what will this victory be like? When our body has perfect health, perfect beauty, perfect strength, and perfect alacrity, when there will be no labor, no fatigue, no temptation, no persecution, no fear that something must be suffered or lost, no greed for something that must be possessed.

But why do we exert ourselves to express in words what is ineffable? *For eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor does it enter into the human heart.* See already, brothers, that the whole of our glory will be in God and from God, in our neighbor and from our neighbor, in us and from us. And both love and vision make up this glory. In a wonderful way, love increases vision and vision love, because as much as we love, that much shall we see, that much shall we love.

¹ Aelred of Rievaulx – The Liturgical Sermons - .Cistercian Fathers Series - #77 = Liturgical Press – Collegeville, MN – 2016 – pg 109

THUR

05.23.19

A Continuation of a Sermon by B. Aelred of Rievaulx on Easter ²

You know already, brothers, and by all means you ought to know, what the apostle said: *They will be two in one flesh; this is a great mystery; it applies to Christ and the Church.* And what does this mystery mean? It means at least that Christ and the church are one. If we do not corrupt faith by a bad life, brothers, *we who believe in Christ* are surely the church. As the apostle says, *insofar as we have believed in Christ, we have put on Christ.* But Christ is our Head, and we are his Body. Consider now what kind of joy you ought to have on this day. Today Christ has risen. This is the beginning of our glory. *This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

This day had a morning when our Lord rose; it will have a noontime when his glory, splendor and brightness, which began today in the Head, are transferred to all the members, *when our lowly body is configured to the body of his brightness.* Then will he make our *justice shine forth* like a light and our *vindication like the noontime.* Then our noontime will be transferred into the noon of that first day, the day of eternity, so that it cannot fail or fade into evening but remains always in its fervor, on its light, in its brightness, in its sublimity. Then we will sing in reality what we just now sang in hope: *This is the day that the Lord has made.*

The Lord made this day not alone as an exception to all others, but alone as the most excellent and luminous of all. For this day is not one of those seven in which God created the heaven and the earth, but it is the eighth day, in which he united heaven and earth. Those days were changeable, variable, rising in the east, setting in the west. This day begins today at some point but never fades; it will increase to the noontime and then shine out always in its brightness. And see, brothers, why in Scripture this day is called the eighth. - over -

As you know, brothers, God created all things in six days; on the seventh *he rested from all the works that he had performed.* We do not experience in this earthly life any more than seven days. These days always repeat; they hasten through seasons, months and years. There are not more days. But how long will these days last? How long this mutability, this temporality, this variability? All of this will continue up to the day of resurrection. Then these seven days will end, and that one day will succeed these seven. Therefore that which follows the seven, what ought it to be called except the eighth? Certainly that day will not be one of the seven, because in them there are mutability and variation, rising and setting; in it there are eternity and stability. Justly then *this is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

This day began today, because the resurrection itself began. Therefore, brothers, not so after the seventh day that the Lord himself rose from the dead. For on the sixth day, as you know, the Lord was crucified; on the seventh day, that is, the Saturday, he rested in the sepulcher. After the seventh day, and therefore as on an eighth day, our Lord rose from the dead, because the one who knows all things before they came to be,

² Aelred of Rievaulx – The Liturgical Sermons – Cistercian Fathers Series - #77 – Liturgical Press – Collegeville, MN – 2016 – pg 112

even before he created the world, saw how the world had to perish. And he saw how it ought to be restored. Therefore he willed to create the world in a way that would signify the manner in which he wished to restore it.

FRI

05.24.19

A Sermon by Bl Aelred of Rievaulx – Day of Easter ³

As our Lord Jesus Christ deigned to be born for us, to be tempted for us, to be beaten for us, and to die for us, so also did he deign to rise for us. Yet his temptation, scourging, death and entombment belong to our redemption; his resurrection strengthens our hope. For by the former he paid for us what we owed, by the latter he showed us what to hope for. Just as by the death of his flesh he freed our soul from death, so by the scourging he took he freed us from the scourging of our soul. For without a doubt, we were in the scourging and we were in the tomb, and whatever he himself suffered in the body is what we have suffered in the soul,

Because we had suffered all these things in the soul, our Lord Jesus Christ wished to suffer all of them on his body and, through the sufferings of his body, to cure the sufferings of our soul. And because Christ suffered all these things for us, so he then rose from the dead; without a doubt where he rose we too have risen. *If therefore you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above.* But we must see to whom the apostle spoke: undoubtedly to those who have risen with Christ. And who are those who rise with Christ except those who share in all that Christ has suffered.

I wonder whether the apostle speaks especially to you – to you who have certainly suffered many temptations, as if you were being beaten with Christ; to you who die with Christ through daily labors and tribulations; to you who are, as it were, buried in this cloister and in this silence for Christ. You who suffer all these things, not in your soul against Christ, but in your body for Christ, you have certainly risen with Christ. For now, you have risen in the soul; afterward you will arise in your body. Therefore *seek the things that are above.* But since not all those who share in this resurrection are the same in perfection, let us briefly see how all ought to seek the things that are above, all according to their own way.

For there are the beginners, the advanced, and the perfect. The beginners are those newly come from the world, who are to a great deal plagued by carnal desires. The advanced, those who have already gained a certain calm in regard to their carnal vices, are vehemently attacked by spiritual vices. Spiritual vices like pride and vainglory immediately begin to assail the one who starts advancing in virtue.

It is necessary therefore that beginners, who have already risen with Christ through confession, seek the things that are above. The virtues are above, the vices below. Therefore those who are beginning ought always to despise those things which are below, namely vice and sin, and always keep before their eyes the virtues, which are above. Those, however, who have made progress in virtues and are tempted by pride, let them see why they take pride in themselves. If it is because of the virtues that they have, let them know that these are already no longer virtues. For proud virtues are not virtues. Let them understand that those who are proud are from below, not from above. For if they grow proud. Whether because they seek some praise from another or because they glory in themselves, each attitude is from below, not above, because both are of human origin. Therefore, if they have already risen with Christ, let them seek the

³ Aelred of Rievaulx – The Liturgical Sermons – Cistercian Fathers Series #77 – Liturgical Press – Collegeville, MN = 2016 – pg 102

things that are above, not by faith alone but also by good works, so that they may fulfill what the apostle said: *He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.*

Therefore let beginners strive toward virtue; those making progress, toward true humility; the perfect toward contemplation. Thus what the apostle said will be fulfilled: *If you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above.*

From a Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, by St. Bede the Venerable. ⁴

"But you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence." The apostles had not yet been baptized. This refers not to baptism with water, but to baptism with the Holy Spirit. We understand that they had already been baptized, either by the baptism of John, as some people think, or, as is more believable, by the baptism of Christ. For since he did not shun a ministry of memorable humility when he washed their feet, he would not have shunned the ministry of baptizing them, so as to have servants who had been baptized, through whom he could baptize others. Therefore, when the Lord said, John indeed baptized with water, he did not continue with, 'yet you shall baptize.' but with "yet you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit," because neither the apostles nor their followers, who still baptize in the church to this day, had the power to baptize except as John did, that is, with water. However, when the name of Christ is invoked, the interior power of the Holy Spirit is present, which, with the human administration of water, simultaneously purifies the souls and the bodies of those being baptized. This did not happen in the baptism of John - for the Spirit had not yet been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

There follows: "Those therefore who had come together kept asking him, saying, 'Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel at this time?' For when he appeared to them he spoke about the kingdom of God, and promised that after not many days the Holy Spirit would come. Consequently, they pointedly questioned him about this kingdom, namely, whether they should believe that it was soon to be restored at the imminent coming of the Spirit, or that it was to be reserved for the saints in the future. For the disciples, who were still materially-minded, believed that, since the resurrection of Christ had been accomplished, the kingdom of Israel would come immediately. Hence the Lord himself, making known the spiritual Israel and the heavenly kingdom which had been promised by the prophets, said: "It is not for you to know the times or dates which the Father in his power has appointed." He was telling them that the time of that kingdom is so secret that it is accessible only to the Father's knowledge. And, when he said, 'It is not for you to know,' he showed them that he himself also knew (since all things are his which are the Father's), but that it would not be expedient for them, as mortals, to know. Thus, being always uncertain about the coming of the Judge, they should live every day as if the next day they were to be judged.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be witnesses for me in Jerusalem," and so forth. He says "When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, it will certainly will not be to bring the kingdom of Israel, or the kingdom of God to Israel, as you think, but rather it will be to furnish you the power to bear witness

⁴The Venerable Bede, Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles. Cistercian Publications, 1989. Cp. I p.10-13.

concerning me. Also, it will be so long until the coming of that kingdom that first the fame of the Gospel must spread not only through this city of Jerusalem, but also to the bounds of Judea, and from there on to the neighboring people of Samaria, and finally throughout the farthest borders of the world.