

LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY  
VIGILS READINGS  
Third Week in Ordinary Time  
January 26-February 1, 2020

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 26, 2020**

**The beginnings of the Cistercian Order: a reading from the *Exordium Parvum*.<sup>1</sup>**

We Cistercians, the first founders of this Church, in this document hereby relate to our successors how this Monastery and its way of life took its beginning according to the Laws of Holy Mother the Church; by what authority it began, and also by what persons and at what times; so that by the telling of the plain and unadulterated truth, they may be moved to a deep love for this Monastery and for the observance of the Holy Rule of St. Benedict which was begun in it by us through the Grace of God; and that they might pray for us who have borne the heat and the burden of the day without losing courage; that they might labor with great fervor in the straight and narrow way which the Rule describes, even unto complete union with God, when, having shed the garments of this flesh, they might happily rest in eternal peace.

In the year 1098, Robert of blessed memory, the first Abbot of the Church of Molesme founded in the Diocese of Langre, together with some of the brethren from the same Monastery, came to the venerable Hugh, who was at that time the Legate of the Holy See and the Archbishop of the Church of Lyons, stating that they desired to live their life under the guidance of the Holy Rule of Father Benedict, and that in order that they might follow out these designs with greater freedom and security, they earnestly entreated him that he would bless and endorse their project with his Apostolic Authority. The Legate was happily pleased with their desire, and he laid the foundation of their beginnings by his Letter.

After these affairs, the Abbot (Robert) and those who sided with him returned to Molesme and chose from that community of brethren those who wished to associate

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<sup>1</sup> translation by a monk of the Abbey of Gethsemani.

with themselves, brothers who had made their vows according to the Rule; so that between those who had spoken to the Legate at Lyons and those who had been chosen from the Monastery, there were twenty-one monks. Accompanied by such a troop, they made their way in all haste to the desert which was called Citeaux. This place was situated in the Diocese of Chalons-sur-Saone. Because of the thickness of the woods and undergrowth, it was very rarely visited by people and it was inhabited by nothing but wild animals. When they arrived there, the men of God immediately conceived a great and holy reverence for the place, for the more contemptible and inaccessible it was to the people of the world, the more they considered it fit for their life. This was the very reason for which they had come there. Far away and hidden by the density of trees and undergrowth, they began to construct a monastery there with the help of the Bishop of Chalons-sur-Saone and the consent of the one who owned the property. For these men, while they were still at Molesme, inspired by the grace of God, had frequently spoken among themselves about the transgressions of the Rule of Blessed Benedict, Father of Monks. They had lamented and grown sad in spirit, seeing that both they and the rest of the monks who had promised by their Solemn Profession that they would observe this Rule, kept that promise to a very small degree. On account of this, by the authority of the Holy See, they came to this solitude in order that they might fulfill their profession by the observance of the Holy Rule. Then Lord Odo, the Duke of Burgandy, having been delighted by their holy fervor, and having been approached by the letters of the Legate (Hugh) of the Holy Roman Church, completed with his own resources the wooden monastery which they had begun, and he daily provided for them in all their needs and assisted them abundantly with grants of land and cattle.

**MONDAY, JANUARY 27, 2020**

**The virtue of St. Timothy as a pattern for Christians: a reading from a sermon by John Henry Newman.** <sup>2</sup>

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*Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and for your other infirmities* (1 Tim. 5:23). This is a remarkable verse, because it accidentally tells us so

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<sup>2</sup> *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, p. 1193.

much. It is addressed to Timothy, St. Paul's companion, the first Bishop of Ephesus. Of Timothy we know very little, except that he did minister to St. Paul, and hence we might have inferred that he was a man of very saintly character; but we know little or nothing of him, except that he had been from a child a careful reader of Scripture. This indeed, by itself, in that Apostolic age, would have led us to infer that he had risen to some great height in spiritual excellence; though it must be confessed that instances are frequent at this day, of persons knowing the Bible well, and yet being little stricter than others in their lives, for all their knowledge.

Timothy, however, had so read the Old Testament, and had so heard from St. Paul the New, that he was a true follower of the Apostle, as the Apostle was of Christ. St. Paul accordingly calls him "my own son", or "my true son in the faith". And elsewhere he says to the Philippians that he has "no man like-minded to Timothy, who would naturally" or truly "care for their state". But still, after all, this is but a general account of him, and we seem to desire something more definite in the way of description, beyond merely knowing that he was a great saint, which conveys no clear impression to the mind. Now, in the text we have accidentally a glimpse given us of his mode of life. St. Paul does not expressly tell us that he was a man of mortified habits; but he reveals the fact indirectly by cautioning him against an excess of mortification. "Drink no longer water," he says, "but use a little wine." It should be observed that wine, in the southern countries, is the ordinary beverage; it is nothing strong or costly. Yet even from such as this, Timothy was in the habit of abstaining, and restricting himself to water; and, as the Apostle thought, imprudently, to the increase of his "frequent infirmities."

There is something very striking in this accidental mention of the private ways of this Apostolic Bishop. We know indeed from history the doctrine and the life of the great saints, who lived some time after the Apostles' age; but we are naturally anxious to know something more of the Apostles themselves and their associates. We say, "Oh that we could speak to St. Paul - that we could see him in his daily walk, and hear his oral and familiar teaching! - that we could ask him what he meant by this expression in his Epistles, or what he thought of this or the other doctrine." This is not given to us. God might give us greater light than He does; but it is His gracious will to give us the less. Yet perhaps much more has been given us in Scripture, as it has come to us, than we think, if our eyes were enlightened to discern it there. Such, for instance, is

this text; it is a sudden revelation, a glimpse of the personal character of Apostolic Christians; it is a hint which we may follow out. For no one will deny that a very great deal of doctrine, and a very great deal of precept, goes with such a fact as this: namely, that this holy man, without impiously disparaging God's creation, and thanklessly rejecting God's gifts, yet, on the whole, lived a life of abstinence.

I cannot understand why such a life is not excellent in a Christian now, if it was the characteristic of Apostles and friends of Apostles then. I really do not see why the trials and persecutions, which surrounded them from Jews and Gentiles, their forlorn despised state, and their necessary discomforts, should not even have exempted them from voluntary sufferings in addition, unless such self-imposed hardships were pleasing to Christ. Such were the holy men of old. How far are we below them! Alas for our easy sensual life, our cowardice, our sloth! is this the way by which the kingdom of God is won?

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 28, 2020**

A reading about the contemplation of wisdom, by **St. Thomas Aquinas**. 1

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[In the book of Ecclesiasticus it says] *Run ahead into your house and gather yourself there and play there and pursue your thoughts.* (Ecclus. 32.15-16)

The advantage which the study of wisdom has is that it is to a greater degree self-sufficient in pursuing its business. When we are engaged in outward activities we need many things to help us, but in the contemplation of wisdom we work all the more effectively, the more we dwell alone with ourselves. So, in the words cited above, the wise Man calls us back to ourselves: *Run ahead into your own house*, that is, be anxious to return from external things to your own mind, before anything else gets hold of it and any other anxiety distracts it. That is why it says in Wisdom 8.16, *I will enter my house and rest with her*, with wisdom, that is.

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From *Albert and Thomas: Selected Writings*; Paulist Press (CWS), 1988; pp. 527f.

The first requirement, then for the contemplation of wisdom is that we should take complete possession of our minds before anything else does, so that we can fill the whole house with the contemplation of wisdom. But it is also necessary that we ourselves should be fully present there, concentrating in such a way that our aim is not diverted to other matters. Accordingly the text goes on, *And gather yourself there*, that is, draw together your whole intention. And when our interior house is entirely emptied like this and we are fully present there in our intention, the text tells us what we should do; *And play there*.

There are two features of play which make it appropriate to compare the contemplation of wisdom to playing. First, we enjoy playing, and there is the greatest enjoyment of all to be had in the contemplation of wisdom. As Wisdom says in Ecclesiasticus 24.27, *My spirit is sweeter than honey*.

Secondly, playing has no purpose beyond itself; what we do in play is done for its own sake. And the same applies to the pleasure of wisdom. If we are enjoying thinking about the things we long for or the things we are proposing to do, this kind of enjoyment looks beyond itself to something else which we are eager to attain.

If we fail to attain it or if there is a delay in attaining it, our pleasure is mingled with a proportionate distress. As it says in Proverbs 14.13, *Laughter will be mixed with grief*. But the contemplation of wisdom contains within itself the cause of its own enjoyment, and so it is not exposed to the kind of anxiety that goes with waiting for something which we lack. This is why it says in Wisdom 8.16, *Her company is without bitterness* (the company of wisdom, that is) *and there is no boredom in living with her*.

It is for this reason that divine Wisdom compares her enjoyment to playing in Proverbs 8.30, *I enjoyed myself every single day, playing before him*, each *single day* meaning the consideration of some different truth. So our text goes on, *Pursue your thoughts*, the thoughts, that is, by means of which we obtain knowledge of the truth.

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2020**

***From a Sermon by Saint Anastasius of Antioch, bishop***<sup>3</sup>

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*To this end Christ died and rose to life that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. But God is not God of the dead, but of the living.*

That is why the dead, now under the dominion of one who has risen to life, are no longer dead but alive. Therefore life has dominion over them and, just as Christ having been raised from the dead, will never die again, so too they will live and never fear death again. When they have been thus raised from the dead and freed from decay, they shall never again see death, for they will share in Christ's resurrection just as he himself shared in their death.

That is why Christ descended into the underworld, with its imperishable prison-bars: to shatter the doors of bronze and break the bars of iron and, from decay, to raise our life to himself by giving us freedom in place of servitude.

But if this plan does not yet appear to be perfectly realized - for people still die and bodies still decay in death - this should not occasion any loss of faith. For, in receiving the first-fruits, we have already received the pledge of all the blessings we have mentioned; with them we have reached the heights of heaven, and we have taken our place beside him who has raised us up with himself, as Paul says: In Christ God has raised us up with him, and has made us sit with him in the heavenly places.

And the fulfillment will be ours on the day predestined by the Father, when we shall put off our childish ways and come to perfect manhood. For this is the decree of the Father of the ages: the gift, once given, is to be secure and no more to be rejected by a return to childish attitudes.

There is no need to recall that the Lord rose from the dead with a spiritual body, since Paul in speaking of our bodies bears witness that they are sown as animal bodies and raised as spiritual bodies: that is, they are transformed in accordance with the glorious transfiguration of Christ who goes before us as our leader.

The Apostle, affirming something he clearly knew, also said that this would happen to all peoples through Christ, who will change our lowly body to make it like

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<sup>3</sup> Oratio 5, de Resurrectione Christi, 6-7,9: PG 89,1358-1359. 1361-1362. From the Liturgy of the Hours vol. III, p. 1886.

his glorious body.

If this transformation is a change into a spiritual body and one, furthermore, like the glorious body of Christ, then Christ rose with a spiritual body, a body that was sown in dishonor, but the very body that was transformed in glory.

Having brought this body to the Father as the first-fruits of our nature, he will also bring the whole body to fulfillment. For he promised this when he said: I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself.

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, 2020**

***A Reading About Key Concepts of the Old Testament, by Albert Gelin.***<sup>4</sup>

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The Old Testament, Claudel has said, is "not so much a continuous as a continuing history, upon which are super-imposed outbursts of lyricism, moral precepts, rules for ritual, and expressions of ever more precise and urgent longings with regard to the future and the unknown." The Old Testament is the history of the true religion. Clearly, God could have used a different means of acquainting the human race with the way of salvation, by projecting a revelation into human history at one fell swoop. God's method was more wonderful than that, making use of the continuity and even the density of history. God made the time factor serve his purpose.

A people whose true genius was far more religious than metaphysical, gradually, it would seem, in the course of its living, discovered the way of salvation and gave it its own particular form. The Old Testament is the history of the people that lived the great realities: Election, Promise, Covenant, Kingdom, Exile, Community. Its experiences, its groupings, its setbacks, its dreams, its conclusions, make up the material of this history. It is a people moved by a religious impulse impelling it always one stage further, rethinking on a more spiritual level what in the first place it had lived and thought in a way less worthy of God. The Old Testament is the history of continual forward movements; a novitiate, a growing spiritualization.

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<sup>4</sup>The Key Concepts of the Old Testament, Sheed & Ward, NY 1955. p.ix-x.

But for the Christian believer there is more than this. The Christian believer knows that God's plan for humankind is a coherent whole, that all tends towards Christ and his Church, that the great realities in the Bible -people, situations, institutions- have an objective reference to Christ and his Church. It was to Christ that God's secret but powerful influence led Israel. What we have to do is to learn to perceive within all the human movement and endeavor the presence of the Eternal that lies below, directing them.

## **FRIDAY, JANUARY 31, 2020**

A reading about **St. John Bosco**, by Archbishop L. Mathias. [1](#)

Don Bosco has struck the imagination of all who have known him and his work. There is no doubt that he was one of the most wonderful of men, and even in that galaxy of great names which is the catalogue of Saints, he occupies a place apart.

[Paul Claudel said that “In the Church there are some who made a profession of sanctity...; who, from the very first, had the Calendar of Saints as a goal. Don Bosco had no time for this, and we can readily believe that if he became a saint it was not his fault.”]

Genius as well as Saint, it is often difficult to see where the one ends and the other begins. Simple as a child and mostly to be found in the dust and clamor of a playground crowded with children, he plays also with miracles and prophecies, which he seems to make for fun. His speech is simple: so simple that children listen fascinated to his new kind of eloquence — an eloquence very different from that of the pulpit orators of the time. And his mind is so wise, that ministers, kings and popes listen to his advice.

A poor man, of poor parents, more millions passed through his hands than through those of many a banker. He spent them with the prodigality of an American playboy, when it was a question of the salvation of souls; but he was as tight with each cent as the peasants he came from, when it was a question of his person, or his comfort. He had the shrewdness of a captain of industry and a trust in God that made him undertake even the impossible when he saw it was for God's glory.

Above all, he was the most lovable of men. To know him was to love him, and often to be so fascinated as to be physically unable to leave him.

His chosen, or better, his God-given mission was education, and he is **the** educator of modern times. A man who could do with children what no man has ever done; he could attach to himself the little ruffians that roam the streets and make of them lovable, ideal young men.

Indeed, Don Bosco as a man, as a Saint, as an Educator occupies a place apart. [He had a tremendous love for God and for souls, and not much for anything else.] His motto was ***“Give me souls, and take all the rest away.”***

[1](#)From the Preface to *Saint John Bosco*, by A. Auffray; Salesian House: Tirpattur, India, 1959.

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2020**

### **The Marian Experience of God, by Hans Urs von Balthasar**<sup>5</sup>

The Incarnation of the Word occurs in the faith of the Virgin. She relies not so much on the appearance of the angel as wholly on his word, which is a Word from God. The future tense 'thou wilt conceive' contains a promise to Israel, and her maidenhood is the faith of Zion. The lightning-flash of the miracle has no counterpart in her human experience; this experience begins afterwards, as a temporal echo of that miracle. It begins with a blind sense of touch, with the bodily sensing of a presence, in the words of Gregory of Nyssa, the sense of touch as the fundamental, unerring sense, and this experience intensifies first within its own particular kind before it extends to embrace also the experience of seeing and hearing which comes with the birth. The gradual separation into two of the one natural consciousness of the body at that stage when the mother's consciousness still embraces both bodies, is like an imitation, within the economy

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<sup>5</sup>The Glory of the Lord. Hans Urs von Balthasar. Ignatius Press, 1982, 338-339.

of salvation, of the mystery of the Trinity, and, no less, like an imitation of the mystery of the two natures in the one Person. The mother is still both herself and her child. and her feeling of the child still wholly encompasses within itself her being felt by the child - just as the believer's vision of God presupposed his being seen by God. Seen in the light of Mary's simple experience of motherhood, which in her has become a function of the archetypal act of faith, all closed consciousness of self and all closed experience of self become problematic: the experience of self must open out, through faith, to an experience that encompasses both oneself and the other - oneself and the burgeoning Word of God, which at first seems to be growing in the self until in this growth it becomes evident that it is rather the other way around and that is the self that is contained in the Word of God. And yet this reversal does not occur by virtue of any sudden break, because even the first phase was already a function of faith, which from the outset is God's almighty Word in humankind; but at that stage faith was still not felt in all its true dimension. This state of non-feeling is not a guilt which is gradually atoned for; it is nature, which is good in its radical otherness to God and which is intended to experience the goodness of God by submitting to the patient process of becoming according to Irenaeus.

The experience of the THOU both among human beings and between God and individuals grows up out of the realm of the body and the senses into the sphere of the spirit; but in such a way that an original relationship of spirit is the prerequisite for this growth. Between the spiritual presuppositions and the beginnings of the physical process comes the lightning-bolt of miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit. This act of overshadowing by the Holy Spirit stands

beyond the dichotomies of "physical" and "personal", of "corporeal" and "spiritual". For this reason, with the overshadowing of the Virgin begin the mysteries of the Mystical Body, which are above all mysteries of the Holy Spirit, generated in the womb of the virginal Church.

**END OF READINGS**