

SUN 01.19.20

A Commentary on the Gospel of John by Cyril of Alexandria ¹

When he saw Jesus coming toward him, John said: Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” No longer does he say: *Prepare*. That would be out of place now that at last he who was prepared for is seen, is before our very eyes. The nature of the case now calls for a different type of homily. An explanation is needed of who is present, and why he has come down to us from heaven. So John says: **Behold the Lamb of God**, of whom the prophet Isaiah told us in the words: *He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb before his shearer he opened not his mouth*. In past ages he was typified by the law of Moses, but because the law was merely a figure and a foreshadowing, its salvation was only partial; its mercy did not reach out to embrace the whole world. But now the true lamb, the victim without blemish obscurely prefigured in the former times, is led to the slaughter for all to banish sin from the world, to overthrow the world’s destroyer, to abolish death by dying for the entire human race, and to release us from the curse: *Dust you are and to dust you shall return*. He will become the second Adam who is not of earth but of heaven, and will be for us the source of every blessing. He will deliver us from the corruptibility foreign to our nature; he will secure eternal life for us, reconcile us with God, teach us to revere God and to live upright lives, and be our way to the kingdom of heaven.

Our Lamb died for all to restore the whole flock on earth to God the Father; one died for all to make all subject to God; one died for all to gain all so that *all might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised to life for them*.

Because our many sins had made us subject to death and corruption, the Father gave his son as our redemption, one for all, since we all were in him and he was greater than all. One died for all so that all of us might live in him. Death swallowed the Lamb who was sacrificed for all, and then disgorging him, disgorged all of us in him and with him; for we were all in Christ who died and rose for us.

Once sin had been destroyed how could death, which was caused by sin, fail to be wholly annihilated? What power will death have over us now that sin has been blotted out? And so, rejoicing in the sacrifice of the Lamb let us cry out: *O death, where is your victory? O grave, where is your sting? All wickedness shall hold its tongue*, as the Psalmist sings somewhere. Henceforth it will be unable to denounce sinners for their weakness, for God is the one who acquits us. *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for our sake*, so that we might escape the curse brought down on us by sin.

¹ Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – 1992 – pg 80.

MON

01.20.20

The road to the Father's house: a reading from the homily of

Pope St. John Paul II at the Mass of Beatification of Blessed Cyprian Tansi.

[1](#)

The life and witness of Father Tansi is an inspiration to everyone in the Nigeria that he loved so much. He was first of all a man of God; his long hours before the Blessed Sacrament filled his heart with generous and courageous love. Those who knew him testify to his great love of God. Everyone who met him was touched by his personal goodness. He was then a man of the people: he always put others before himself, and was especially attentive to the pastoral needs of families. He took great care to prepare couples well for Holy Matrimony and preached the importance of chastity. He tried in every way to promote the dignity of women. In a special way, the education of young people was precious to him. Even when he was sent by Bishop Heerey to the Cistercian Abbey of Mount Saint Bernard in England to pursue his monastic vocation, with the hope of bringing the contemplative life back to Africa, he did not forget his own people. He did not fail to offer prayers and sacrifices for their continuing sanctification.

Father Tansi knew that there is something of the Prodigal Son in every human being. He knew that all men and women are tempted to separate themselves from God in order to lead their own independent and selfish existence. He knew that they are then disappointed by the emptiness of the illusion which had fascinated them, and that they eventually find in the depths of their heart the road leading back to the Father's house. He encouraged people to confess their sins and receive God's forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He implored them to forgive one another as God forgives us, and hand on the gift of the reconciliation, making it a reality at every level of Nigerian life. Father Tansi tried to imitate the father in the parable: he was always available for those searching for reconciliation. He spread the joy of restored communion with God. He inspired people to welcome the peace of Christ, and encouraged them to nourish the life of grace with the word of God and with Holy Communion.

[1](#) *L'Osservatore Romano*, 26 March 1998.

TUES 01.21.20

Virginity as a virtue, from the book *The Four Cardinal Virtues* by Josef Pieper. ²

One might almost say that we lack today the right word for virginity.. For virginity designates in popular parlance the condition of intactness and singleness rather than the virtue, born of grace and resolve, of him who for the sake of God has forever renounced the experience of sexual enjoyment. Again we are constrained to think that this poverty of language must have its deepest cause in the fact that the popular mind is no longer aware of the thing itself. However that may be, if here we briefly expound the nature of the virtue of *virginitas* under the name of virginity, we needs must keep in mind many discrepancies from current usages of speech and interpretation.

...Virginity is not a fact, but an act; not a condition, but a decision. That which constitutes virginity as a virtue is not mere inviolateness as a psychic (and certainly not as a physical) factor, even though this inviolateness may be the trophy of heroic chastity. Virginity as a virtue is established by the decision, or, to speak even more accurately, by the vow to refrain forever from sexual union and its attendant pleasure.

Nor is this all. Such a decision might spring from all sorts of reasons, for instance, from the anti-Christian view that this kind of abstinence is nothing but abstinence from evil. Two things are involved in this decision, or rather enter into it and pervade it utterly.

First: Virginity is honored not because it is virginity, but because it is consecrated. The decision to live in sexual abstinence is not in itself worthy of praise; it is made praiseworthy only by its end and purpose, to the extent that it aims to make him who practices it free for things divine. It would be well if not only the non-Christian but the Christian also always kept in mind these two incontrovertible sentences of the great teachers of the Church, St Augustine and St Thomas; [they should remember] that, consequently, a virginity which does not realize the purpose of being free for God and for divine things becomes correspondingly meaningless and, in any case, loses the dignity for which it is honored by the Church. Of course, various chance necessities or even moral reasons may force or move one to remain unmarried; and evidently the radiance of a sacrifice offered to God can be imparted to such a necessity or choice. But to prize, on purely religious grounds, a celibacy that lacks the support of its most essential foundation, necessarily borders on Manichaeism, which regards the bare fact of celibacy itself as a good **C** and consequently sees something evil in marriage.

² South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966, pp. 176-177.

And here we come to the second fact expressed in the Christian decision to remain virginal: the affirmation of marriage as both a natural and a supernatural good. The Church has expressed this affirmation not only where it belongs, that is, not only in the liturgy of the Nuptial Mass and in dogmatic decisions concerning the seventh sacrament. It is affirmed in the very prayer at the consecration of virgins, where she speaks of the sanctity of matrimony and of the blessing that rests upon it; and in this very place virginity is expressly related to the same mystery that is included in the matrimonial union of man and wife.

WED 01.20.20

A reading from the Encyclical of Pope John Paul II – “Ut Unum Sint” –
“That they may be One”³

At the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church committed herself irrevocably to following the path of the ecumenical venture, thus heeding the spirit of the Lord, who teaches people to interpret carefully the “signs of the times”. The experiences of these years have made the Church even more profoundly aware of her identity and mission in history. The Catholic Church acknowledges and confesses the weaknesses of her members, conscious that their sins are so many betrayals of and obstacles to the accomplishment of the Savior’s plan. Because she feels herself constantly called to be renewed in the spirit of the Gospel, she does not cease to do penance. At the same time, she acknowledges and exalts still more the power of the Lord, who fills her with the gift of holiness, leads her forward, and conforms her to his Passion and Resurrection.

Taught by the events of her history, the Church is committed to freeing herself from every purely human support, in order to live in depth the Gospel law of the Beatitudes. Conscious that the truth does not impose itself except “by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power”, she seeks nothing for herself but the freedom to proclaim the Gospel. Indeed her authority is exercised in the service of truth and charity.

Together with all Christ’s disciples, the Catholic Church bases upon God’s plan her ecumenical commitment to gather all Christians into unity. Indeed, “the Church is not a reality closed in on herself. Rather, she is permanently open to missionary and ecumenical endeavor, for she is sent to the world to announce

³ The Encyclicals of John Paul II – edited by J. Michael Miller – Our Sunday Visitor Publishing –
Huntington, IN 46750 – 1996 – pg 914f

and witness, to make present and spread the mystery of communion which is essential to her, and to gather all people and all things into Christ, so as to be for all an “inseparable sacrament of unity”.

The unity of all divided humanity is the will of God. For this reason He sent His son, so that by dying and rising for us he might bestow on us the Spirit of love. On the eve of his sacrifice on the Cross, Jesus himself prayed to the Father for his disciples and for all those who believe in him, that they might be one, a living communion. This is the basis not only of the duty, but also of the responsibility before God and his plan, which falls to those who through Baptism become members of the Body of Christ, a Body in which the fullness of reconciliation and communion must be made present. How is it possible to remain divided, if we have been “buried” through Baptism in the Lord’s death, in the very act by which God, through the death of His Son, has broken down the walls of division? Division openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the Good News to every creature.

THUR

01.23.20

A Reading from the Encyclical of Pope John Paul II – “Ut Unum Sint” –
“That They may be One”⁴

The Decree on Ecumenism from the Second Vatican Council states: “The Lord of the ages wisely and patiently follows out the plan of his grace on behalf of us sinners. In recent times he has begun to bestow more generously upon divided Christians remorse over their divisions and a longing for unity. Everywhere, large numbers have felt the impulse of this grace, and among our separated brethren also there increases from day to day a movement, fostered by the grace of the Holy spirit, for the restoration of unity among all Christians. Taking part in this movement, which is called ecumenical, are those who invoke the Triune God and confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. They join in not merely as individuals but also as members of the corporate groups in which they have heard the Gospel, and which each regards as his Church and, indeed, God’s. And yet almost everyone, though in different ways, longs that there may be one visible Church of God, a Church truly universal and sent forth to the whole world that the world may be converted to the Gospel and so be saved, to the glory of God.”

The Catholic Church embraces with hope the commitment to ecumenism as a duty of the Christian conscience enlightened by faith and guided by love. Here too we can apply the words of St Paul to the first Christians in Rome: “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy spirit”; thus our “hope does not disappoint us”. This is the hope of Christian unity, which has its divine source in the Trinitarian unity of the Father, the son and the Holy spirit.

Jesus himself, at the hour of his Passion, prayed “that they may all be one”. This unity, which the Lord has bestowed on his Church and in which he wishes to embrace all people, is not something added on, but stands at the very heart of Christ’s mission. Nor is it some secondary attribute of the community of his disciples. Rather, it belongs to the very essence of this community. God wills the Church, because he wills unity, and unity is an expression of the whole depth of his *agape*.

In effect, this unity bestowed by the Holy spirit does not merely consist in the gathering of peoples as a collection of individuals. It is a unity constituted by the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments and hierarchical

⁴ The Encyclicals of John Paul II – edited by J. Michael Miller – Our Sunday Visitor Publishing –
Huntington, IN – 1996 – pg 914f

communion. The faithful are *one* because, in the Spirit, they are in *communion* with the son and, in him, share in his *communion* with the Father: “Our *fellowship* is with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn 1:3). For the Catholic Church, then, the *communion* of Christians is none other than the manifestation in them of the grace by which God makes them sharers in his own *communion*, which is his eternal life. Christ’s words “that they may be one” are thus his prayer to the Father that the Father’s plan may be fully accomplished, in such a way that everyone may clearly see “what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things” (Eph 3:9). To believe in Christ means to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the Church; to desire the Church means to desire the communion of grace which corresponds to the Father’s plan from all eternity. Such is the meaning of Christ’s prayer: “Ut unum sint”.

FRI 01.24.20

How Charity Produces Love of Neighbor by St. Francis de Sales. ⁵

Just as God has created us in his image and likeness, so also has he ordained for us a love in the image and likeness of the love due to his divinity. He says: You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole mind. This the greatest and the first commandment. and the second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Theotimus, why do we love God? The reason for which we love God is God himself. says St. Bernard, as if to say that we love God because he is the most supreme and most infinite goodness. Why do we love ourselves in charity? Surely, it is because we re God=s image and likeness. Since all persons have this same dignity, we also love them as ourselves, that is, in their character is most holy and living images of the divinity. It is in this character, Theotimus, that we are related to God by such close alliance and such loving dependence that nothing prevents him from saying that he is our Father and from calling us his children. It is in this character that we are capable of being united to his divine essence by enjoyment of his supreme goodness and bliss. It is in this character that we receive his grace and our spirits are associated with his most holy Spirit, and as it were are made partakers of his divine nature, as St. Leo says. Hence, the same charity that produces acts of love of God produces at the same time those of love of neighbor. Just as Jacob saw that one and the same ladder touched heaven and earth and equally served the angels both to descend and to ascend, so also we know that one and the same dilection reaches out to cherish both God and neighbor. Thus it raises us up to unite our spirit with God and it brings us back again to loving association with our neighbors. However, this is always on condition that we love our neighbors in as much as they are God=s image and likeness, created to communicate with the divine goodness, to participate in his grace, and to enjoy his glory.

Theotimus, to love our neighbor in charity is to love God in the human being or the human being in God. It is to cherish God alone for love of himself and creatures for love of him. When we see our neighbor created in the likeness and image of God, should we not say to one another, Stop, do you see this created being, do you see how it resembles the Creator? Should we not cast ourselves upon him, caress him, and weep over him with love? Should we not give him a thousand, thousand blessings? Why so? O Theotimus, it is for love of God who made us in his own image and likeness and therefore capable of sharing in his goodness in grace and glory.

⁵ *On the Love of God*, Tan Books & Pub. Inc., 1975, pp. 170-171.

SAT 01.25.20

A Reading about St Paul and the Unity of Christians, from a discourse of Paul VI.⁶

The two feelings that are dominant at this moment are a feeling of sadness, and a feeling of hope. Sadness, because unity among all Christ's followers has not yet been restored. This brings to our mind an obvious and painful memory, the memory of history. Christ founded one Church. St Paul has left us in heritage, as it were, his commitment; *Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together. There is one Body, one Spirit, just as you were all called into one and the same hope when you were called. There is one lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all* (Eph 4:3-6). How have we been able to become divided in such a serious, many-sided and enduring manner? And how can we fail to suffer at such a state of things, which in so many concrete ways still endures? In this, we Catholics certainly have our share of blame which also is many-sided and enduring. How can we fail to feel pain and remorse for this? Secondly: how can the difficulties standing in the way of reconciliation be overcome? Another reason for our reflection. We see the great obstacles, and they seem insuperable.

This is a grave state of affairs that even militates against the very work of Christ. The Second Vatican Council affirms clearly and firmly that division of Christians *inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the good news to every creature (Unitatis Redintegratio, 1)*, and thus damages the work of reconciliation of all peoples.

Yet in these last few years marvelous strides have been made in different ways towards reconciliation. This is known and seen by everyone, and certainly we all rejoice at it. But so far no stride has reached the goal. The heart that loves is always hasty. If our haste is not heeded, love itself makes us suffer. We are conscious of the inadequacy of our efforts. We are aware of the laws of history, which call for a longer period of time than that of our human existence. And it is understandable that the slowness in reaching solutions should seem to make our desires, our attempts, our efforts and our prayer vain. Let us accept this economy of the divine plan, and let us resolve humbly to persevere.

Another sentiment that fills our heart with its lifegiving breath in regard to ecumenism, that ecumenism which really strives for the reestablishment of unity among all Christians. It is hope. Is it not prayer that nourishes hope? And does not St Paul assure us that *hope is not deceptive* (Rom 5:5)?

⁶"The Teachings of Pope Paul VI 1975", Vatican City, 1976, 177ff.

To *bring everything together under Christ, as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth* (Eph 1:10). This theme which has been proposed for the reflection for all Christians during this year's week of prayer concentrates our meditation upon the salvific plan of God for us and for the whole of creation.