

NT-MT25

02.16.20

A Commentary on the Gospel by St. John Chrysostom [1](#)

Christ gave his life for you, and do you hold a grudge against your fellow servant? How then can you approach the table of peace? Your master did not refuse to undergo every kind of suffering for you, and will you not even forgo your anger? Why is this, when love is the root, the wellspring and the mother of every blessing?

He has offered me an outrageous insult, you say. He has wronged me times without number, he has endangered my life. Well, what is that? He has not yet crucified you as the Jewish elders crucified the Lord. If you refuse to forgive your neighbor's offense your heavenly Father will not forgive your sins either. What does your conscience say when you repeat the words: *Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name*, and the rest? Christ went so far as to offer his blood for the salvation of those who shed it. What could you do that would equal that? If you refuse to forgive your enemy you harm not him but yourself. You have indeed harmed him frequently in this present life, but you have earned for yourself eternal punishment on the day of judgment. There is no one God detests and repudiates more than the person who bears a grudge, whose heart is filled with anger, whose soul is seething with rage.

Listen to the Lord's words: *If you are bringing your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and first go and be reconciled. Then come and offer your gift.* What do you mean? Am I really to leave my gift, my offering there? Yes, he says, because this sacrifice is offered in order that you may live in peace with your neighbor. If then the attainment of peace is the object of the sacrifice and you fail to make peace, even if you share in the sacrifice your lack of peace will make this sharing fruitless. Before all else, therefore make peace, for the sake of which the sacrifice is offered. Then you will really benefit from it.

The reason the Son of God came into the world was to reconcile the human race with the Father. As Paul says: *Now he has reconciled all things to himself, destroying enmity in himself by the cross.* Consequently, as well as coming himself to make peace he also calls us blessed if we do the same, and shares his title with us. *Blessed are the peacemakers*, he says, *for they shall be called the children of God.*

So as far as a human being can, you must do what Christ the Son of God did, and become a promoter of peace both for yourself and for your neighbor. Christ

calls the peacemakers a child of God. The only good deed he mentions as essential at the time of sacrifice is reconciliation with one's brother or sister. This shows that of all the virtues the most important is love.

1Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – N.Y. - 1999 – pg 88

The Call of God – from a book by Hans Urs von Balthasar ¹

Every call of God is a proclamation of the eternal election by which he “chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish in his sight in love”; by which he “predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ as his sons” (Eph 1:4-5). It is an act of love, and its goal is the holiness that is always a form of love. Because it has been formed and shaped by the laws of love, it can be comprehended only in terms of love.

It follows that God can issue the commandment of love, which is the essential content of every genuine call, in varying degrees of urgency and clarity. For many, its sound is dissipated; they regard it as something to be taken for granted, as something that does not require their special attention. Of course God demands love; of course there is such a thing as a first and greatest commandment; of course every Christian is called to obey it, whether well or badly, to the best of his ability. And God will help our weakness, and, we hope, forgive our failings. So far as its content is concerned, the commandment of love sounds plainly enough, but it strikes no answering chord in the one who hears it. It compels him to no conclusions that could force him out of the rut he is in.

The call to love God boundlessly is always, at the same time, God’s offering of his own love to the one thus called. Because this is so, the call bears in itself the possibility not only of understanding, but also of responding to the love to which it calls. Indeed every special form of the divine call contains also the special grace of the response. All forms of God’s special call are forms of love and, for that reason, different from the mere command that a master might issue to his servant. Nevertheless, the manner and the very sound of God’s voice can be different depending on whether the call is to the priestly state or to the state of the counsels.

The word “counsel” is not fully adequate to convey the personal love of God that is reflected in the invitation to personal discipleship.

¹ The Christian State of Life – Hans Urs von Balthasar – Ignatius Press – San Francisco – 1983 – pg426

OT-GEN03.DOC
02.18.20

An overview of the book of Genesis, from *Pathways in Holy Scripture* by Damasus Winzen.²

Because Lent and the pre-Lenten season belong to Easter as a time of preparation, (this) is really the time when first we scent the holy spring of Easter in the air. That is the reason why the Church wants us to read the Book of Genesis. She wants us to contemplate the beginnings of the world in the light of Christ who has appeared at the end of the ages (Heb 9:26) to redeem it, because it is the same Son of God through whom all things received their first being, and through whom they were re-established on Easter. The work of Creation, foreshadows the work of Redemption, because Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of history...

The first eleven chapters of Genesis form a whole quite apart from the rest of the book, and in modern commentaries are usually referred to as *Primeval history* because they trace the history of mankind from the beginning of creation to Abraham. We should be aware, however, that these chapters do not give the kind of history that modern scholars present in their writings. No attempt is made in these chapters to give a complete account of *historical developments* which took place in prehistoric times. The author of Genesis does not register historical events in their chronological order. He does not think in terms of centuries but of generations ...

The word *generation* is really the keyword of Genesis. It means the handing down, from father to son, of totality of life, the *seed*. The family receives from the father a common stock in which each member participates, and which unfolds itself in the life of the sons. The father is the *root* out of which the family grows like the branches of a tree. Adam, therefore, is not only the first of a series of individuals, but the root out of which the whole tree of humankind grows. His life affects all his posterity. His fall becomes in them *original sin*. History in the Old Testament is, therefore, the progressive unfolding of an original *soul* which repeats in each generation basically the same pattern of life. As the rabbis say: The lives of the patriarchs foreshadow the story of their descendants. The life of Abraham, for example, anticipates the whole history of the Jewish people, and later on, the life of Christ becomes the pattern imitated in the lives of his generation. The common life which in this way fills each generation is never produced by the father, but has always been received or handed down from an ancestor. The first of these ancestors could come into being only through an act of creation, through which God himself sets the absolute beginning of the chain of generations. Creation is there only to make generation possible. Therefore, the

², by Dom Damasus Winzen (*Word Of Life*, Ann Arbor, MI, 1976) pp. 19-22.

generations of Genesis are preceded by a creation in which they are all rooted.
(over)

For this reason the book of Genesis must be explained, not in the light of geology or paleology, but in the light of the history of the chosen people as it is presented in the other parts of the Old Testament, and as it is fulfilled in Christ. There we find unfolded what is contained, in a primitive form, in the first chapters of Genesis. The beginning in which all things were created is the Word of God, the Son. All things have been created through him and unto him. He existed before all things and he sustains and embraces them all (Col 1:16-17). The creation, therefore, is an expression of the infinite love which later manifested itself in the work of redemption: For it has pleased God the Father that...through his Son he would reconcile all things to himself, whether on the earth or in the heavens, making peace through the blood of his cross (Col 1:20-21).

2/19/20

A Reading from the Book *On Genesis*, by Bruce Vawter.³

Now enters the plodding Esau, fresh with his kill, which, all unsuspecting, he prepares into a tasty dish to set before his father. "*Who are you?*" asks Isaac. Esau must have been thunderstruck. Who am I? Instants ago he had been sent to fetch fresh food; and this he has done, and with dispatch. Haply, however, Isaac is equally as confused as his elder son: he is *seized with a fit of uncontrollable trembling*, as he recognizes, now without the need of puerile testing, that his authentic first-born waits on his next word. "*Who was it, then?*" he stammers in this extremity; who had the access and the knowledge to perpetrate on a dying father the enormity that has now been revealed? The question needs only to be asked to be answered, by father and son alike. "*He has been well named Jacob,*" cries Esau, since "*he has now supplanted me twice*".

In Isaac's response to Esau and the subsequent dialogue between father and son the irrevocable and independent nature of the "special blessing" is well brought out. It is quite obvious that in the mind of the author and his readers a blessing was more than a matter of words and pious wishes; once uttered, even in error, it was effective of the good it pronounced and could neither be recalled nor transferred to another. In part, such ideas are tributary to the almost superstitious awe in which the spoken word was held: "word" and "deed" being virtually interchangeable concepts, for good or for ill the blessing or the curse respectively worked its effect by its very pronouncement. In addition, this blessing is, indeed, "special": Isaac has, so to speak, expended in it all his capability of vital communication, so that there is nothing left for the real Esau. In the face of the piteous despair of his twice betrayed son, now bereft of his heritage for once and all, Isaac must remain mute and helpless.

The sympathy which Esau's plight engendered begins to fade away as we learn of his murderous designs, even though the feelings that prompt them are understandable. Rebekah, adept at discovering Esau's plans as she had those of his father, again counsels her beloved younger son. But her final words are fraught with exquisite irony for the biblical writer: *Must I lose both of you in a single day?* She means, of course, to forestall the slaying of Jacob at Esau's hands and then the almost inevitable death of Esau himself in the ensuing blood vengeance exacted by kin and clan. In reality, she has indeed lost both of her sons in this single day.

³On Genesis: A New Reading, New York, Doubleday 1977, p305f.

2/20/20

**THE UNITY OF THE APOSTOLIC EXPERIENCE OF THE RESURRECTION
AND OUR OWN by Karl Rahner, SJ⁴**

From the New Testament on, Christian doctrinal tradition says correctly that with regard to faith in the resurrection of Jesus all of us are and remain dependent on the testimony of predetermined witnesses who "saw" the risen Lord, and that we could believe in the resurrection of Jesus only because of this apostolic witness and in dependence on it. Consequently, even the theology of mysticism, for example, denies to the mystics to whom Jesus "appears" the character of being resurrection witnesses, and denies to their visions any equality with the appearances of the risen Jesus to the apostles. All of this is correct and of decisive importance: our faith remains tied to the apostolic witness.

But for various reasons, however, this dependence would be interpreted falsely if we wanted to understand it after the secular model of others kinds of "faith" in an event at which one was not present himself, but which one accepts nevertheless because someone who assures him that he has experienced it seems to be "credible." For first of all and on the one hand, the weight of such secular testimony is essentially dependent on the extent to which the recipient of the testimony is in a position to evaluate the credibility of the witness from similar experiences which he had had himself. Hence if the testimony of the apostles about the resurrection were to be judged only according to the secular model of a witness's statement, it would have to be rejected as incredible, even if it could not be explained how it arose given the undeniable honesty and unselfishness of the witnesses. But the presupposition for employing this model in our question is not applicable. We ourselves do not stand simply and absolutely outside of the experience of the apostolic witnesses.

For secondly and on the other hand, and this is decisive here, we hear this witness of the apostles with that transcendental hope in resurrection which we have already discussed. Hence we do not learn something which is totally unexpected and which lies totally outside of the horizon of our experience and our possibilities of verification. Moreover, we hear the message of the resurrection which we believe with God's "grace" and with the interior witness of the experience of the Spirit. This statement is not tainted in the least with the

⁴FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH, by Karl Rahner, (Seabury Press, NY, 1978), pp. 274.

suspicion of mythological theory. It means rather that we experience in faith and in the hope of our own resurrection the courage to stand beyond death, and indeed by gazing upon the risen Jesus who comes before us in the apostolic witness. And in this courage as freely exercised the risen Jesus himself gives witness that he is alive in the successful and inseparable correspondence between transcendental hope in resurrection and the categorical and real presence of such a resurrection. The two reinforce each other mutually in this circle and give witness to us of their truth.

02SN2104

02/21/20

St. Peter Damian - from a Discourse of Pope Benedict XVI ¹

St Peter Damian was one of the most significant figures of the 11th century ... a lover of solitude and at the same time a fearless man of the Church, committed personally to the task of reform."

Born during 1007 in the Italian city of Ravenna, Peter belonged to a large family but lost both his father and mother early in life. An older brother took the boy into his household, yet treated him poorly. But another of Peter's brothers, a priest, took steps to provide for his education; and the priest's own name, Damian, became his younger brother's surname.

Peter excelled in school while also taking up forms of asceticism, such as fasting, wearing a hair shirt, and spending long hours in prayer with an emphasis on reciting the Psalms. He offered hospitality to the poor as a means of serving Christ, and eventually resolved to embrace voluntary poverty himself through the Order of Saint Benedict.

The monks he chose to join, in the hermitage of Fonte Avellana, lived out their devotion to the Cross of Christ through a rigorous rule of life. They lived mainly on bread and water, prayed all 150 Psalms daily, and practiced many physical mortifications. Peter embraced this way of life somewhat excessively at first, which led to a bout with insomnia.

Deeply versed in the Bible and the writings of earlier theologians, Peter developed his own theological acumen and became a skilled preacher. The leaders of other monasteries sought his help to build up their monks in holiness, and in 1043 he took up a position of leadership as the prior of Fonte Avellana. Five other hermitages were established under his direction.

Serious corruption plagued the Church during Peter's lifetime, including the sale of religious offices and immorality among many of the clergy. Through his writings and involvements in controversies of the day, the prior of Fonte Avellana called on members of the hierarchy and religious orders to live out their commitments and strive for holiness.

In 1057, Pope Stephen IX became determined to make Peter Damian a bishop, a goal he accomplished only by demanding the monk's obedience under threat of excommunication. Consecrated as the Bishop of Ostia in November of that year, he also joined the College of Cardinals and wrote a letter encouraging its members to set an example for the whole Church.

¹ From the Internet - Catholic News Service

With Pope Stephen's death in 1058, and the election of his successor Nicholas II, Peter's involvement in Church controversies grew. He supported Pope Nicholas against a rival claimant to the papacy, and went to Milan as the Pope's representative when a crisis broke out over canonical and moral issues. There, he was forced to confront rioters who rejected papal authority.

Peter, meanwhile, wished to withdraw from these controversies and return to the contemplative life. But Nicholas' death in 1061 caused another papal succession crisis, which the cardinal-bishop helped to resolve in favor of Alexander II. That Pope kept the Cardinal Bishop of Ostia occupied with a series of journeys and negotiations for the next six years.

In 1067, Peter Damian was allowed to resign his episcopate and return to the monastery at Fonte Avellana. Two years later, however, Pope Alexander needed his help to prevent the German King Henry IV from divorcing his wife. Peter lived another two years in the monastery before making a pilgrimage to Monte Cassino, the birthplace of the Benedictine order.

In 1072, Peter returned to his own birthplace of Ravenna, to reconcile the local church with the Pope. The monk's last illness came upon him during his return from this final task, and he died after a week at a Benedictine monastery in Faenza during February of that year.

Never formally canonized, St. Peter Damian was celebrated as a saint after his death in many of the places associated with his life. In 1823, Pope Leo XII named him a Doctor of the Church and extended the observance of his feast day throughout the Western Church.

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02.22.14

From a homily by Paul the Deacon ¹

The early Church called today's feast Saint Peter's Chair because Peter, the first of the apostles, was said on this day to have taken his seat as bishop. It is quite right, therefore, that churches all over the world should observe the anniversary of that see which the apostle received for their salvation when the Lord said: *You are Peter, and upon this rock I shall build my Church.* Upon this rock means upon our Lord and Savior, who bestowed on his faithful witness a share in his own title.

And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The gates of hell are the tortures and flatteries of persecutors, which frighten some into losing their faith, and open the way to eternal death. Hell possesses many gates, but none of them prevails over the Church founded on the rock.

It is right, then, for all the churches to honor Peter. As head of the Church, firm as the hardest rock, he confounded the enemies of Christ by the authority of the Holy Spirit, conquering by the strength of tireless endurance. As was prophesied, the gates of hell did not prevail against him who made the eternal gates open to him by confessing the king of glory. The gateway of life could hardly remain closed to one who, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed the inscrutable secret of the single majesty of God which unites the Father and the Son, and who also taught and made known that in one and the same Son of God there exists both the humanity he assumed and the divinity which was his by right. He actually heard the Savior himself saying: *I and the father are one* and *Whoever sees me sees my Father as well.*

Peter's acknowledgement made him worthy of honor on earth and glory in heaven. It is the reason why the Lord called him the foundation of the Church. And so the universal Church gives recognition to this foundation upon which its structure rises to the heights. The Psalmist aptly says: *Let them exalt him in the gathering of the people, and praise him where the elders are installed.* It is fitting, then, for the Church to honor this foundation upon which it rises to heaven.

¹Word in Season – vol. IV – Augustinian Press – 1999 - 31