

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by Walter Hilton [1](#)

When love acts in the soul it does so wisely and gently, for it has great power to kill anger and envy, and all the passions of wrath and melancholy, and it brings into the soul the virtues of patience, gentleness, peaceableness, and friendliness to one's neighbor. People guided only by their own reason find it very hard to be patient, peaceful, sweet-tempered and charitable to their neighbors when they treat them badly and wrong them. But true lovers of Jesus have no great difficulty in enduring this, because love fights for them and kills such movements of wrath and melancholy with amazing ease. Through the spiritual sight of Jesus it makes the souls of such people so much at ease and so peaceful, so ready to endure and so conformed to God, that if they are despised and disregarded by others, or suffer injustice or injury, shame or ill-treatment, they pay no attention. They are not greatly disturbed by these things and will not allow themselves to be, for then they would lose the comfort they feel in their souls, and that they are unwilling to do. They can more easily forget all the wrong that is done them than others can forget it even when asked for forgiveness. They would rather forget than forgive, for that seems easier to them.

And it is love that does all this, for love opens the eye of the soul to the sight of Jesus, and confirms it in the pleasure and contentment of the love that comes from that sight. It comforts the soul so much that it is quite indifferent to what others do against it. The greatest harm that could befall such people would be to lose the spiritual sight of Jesus, and they would therefore suffer all other injuries than that one alone.

When true lovers of Jesus suffer harm from their neighbors, they are so strengthened by the grace of the Holy Spirit and are made so truly humble, so patient and so peaceable, that they retain their humility no matter what harm or injury is inflicted on them. They do not despise their neighbors or judge them, but they pray for them in their hearts, and feel more pity and compassion for them than for others who never harmed them, and in fact love them better, and more fervently desire their salvation, because they see that they will have so much spiritual profit from their neighbor's deeds, though this was never their intention. But this love and this humility, which are beyond human nature, come only from the Holy Spirit to those whom he makes lovers of Jesus.

[1](#) Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY – 1992 – pg 90

**Jacob's virtue in the midst of contention; a reading from a treatise by St. Ambrose.** <sup>1</sup>

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Accordingly, as Scripture says, Jacob became rich by such means and reared a very good flock for Christ. He improved it with the title of faith and a diversity of virtues, the marks of a glorious name. And so he did not consider himself poor, for he was rich with the wealth of faith. He provoked the hostility of Laban's sons on grounds of his very great wealth, since he had increased his own flock by adding the other to it. And God said to him, Return to the land of your father and to your own kin, and I will be with you, showing that nothing is lacking to anyone who has the fullness of things. This alone is more than enough for one who has been perfected, in it all things subsist, and to it all things are referred; nothing is strange to it, nothing further is necessary to it, peace and faith are sufficient for it, so that through them it might reconcile what at first had been in discord. And no wonder if Jacob possessed peace, for he had set up a column and anointed it to God, and that column is the Church. Now the column has been called the mainstay of the truth. For whoever anoints it pours the ointment of faith upon Christ and that of compassion upon the poor.

Now let us consider how the just ought to behave if enmity arises. First, let the just avoid it; it is better to go away without strife than to settle down with contention. Next, let the just possess a property that can be carried off so that the just cannot be held under any obligation by the adversary but may say, Identify whatever of yours I may have. And Laban searched and found nothing of his with Jacob. He was a great man and truly happy who could lose nothing of his and possess nothing of another's, that is, possess nothing too little and nothing to excess. Therefore anyone who has no lack of anything has been perfected; anyone who has nothing to excess is just - this is to observe the proper mean of justice. How powerful virtue is! Alliance with it brought gain but did not inflict loss. This is what perfection is; it gives the greatest advantage to those who hold to it but brings them no disadvantage whatsoever.

Accordingly, Laban who desired to do harm to Jacob was not able to send him away empty. For the wise is never empty but always has the garment of prudence on and is able to say, I was clad with justice and I clothed myself with judgment, as Job said. Surely these are the inner veils of the spirit, and no one can take them away except when someone strips them off by his own guilty action.

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<sup>1</sup> *Seven Exegetical Works*, ed. Bernard M. Peebles, Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1972, pp. 157-158.

## Jacob as Symbol of Virtue. by Saint Ambrose.<sup>2</sup>

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Now let us consider how the just person ought to behave if enmity arises. First, let them avoid it; it is better to go away without strife than to settle down with contention. Next, let them possess a property that can be carried off with them so that they cannot be held under any obligation by the adversary but may say, "Identify whatever of yours I may have." And Laban searched and found nothing of his with Jacob. He was a great man and truly happy who could lose nothing of his and possess nothing of another's, that is, possess nothing too little and nothing to excess. Therefore the one who has no lack of anything has been perfected; the one who has nothing to excess is just -- that is to observe the proper mean of justice. How powerful virtue is! Alliance with it brought gain but did not inflict loss. This is what perfection is; it gives the greatest advantage to those who hold to it but brings them no disadvantage whatsoever.

Accordingly the man who desired to do harm to Jacob was not able to send him away empty. For the wise man is never empty but always has the garment of prudence on himself and is able to say, "I was clad with justice and I clothed myself with judgment," as Job said. Surely these are the inner veils of the spirit, and no one can take them away except when someone strips them off by his own guilty action. In fact Adam was found stripped so, and naked, whereas Joseph was not naked even though he had thrown off his external clothing, as he possessed the safe covering of virtue. Therefore the wise person is never empty. How could he be empty? He has taken from the fullness of Christ and keeps what he has received. How could he be empty? His soul is filled, for it guards the garments of grace it has received. We must be afraid that someone may lose the veil of blamelessness, and that ungodly persons may transgress the bonds of justice with onslaughts of sacrilege and persecution and snatch away the garment of the soul and of the spirit. This does not readily happen unless a person has first been stripped of their clothing by the voice of their iniquity. On this account David also says, "If there is iniquity in my hands, let me deservedly fall empty before my enemies. Let the enemy pursue my soul and take it."

Therefore none of the enemies can take your soul unless it has first been made empty. Do not be afraid of those who can plunder treasures of gold and silver; such people take nothing from you. They take away what you do not have, they take away what you are not able to possess, they take away, not an ornament to your soul, but a burden on it, they take away what does not enrich your heart but weighs it down; "for where your treasure is, there also will your heart be."

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<sup>2</sup> The Fathers of the Church, vol. 65. Saint Ambrose: Seven Exegetical Works. Catholic University of America Press. Washington DC. 1971. p. 157.

But this pertains to the moral sense, whereas the mystical sense is that Laban, whose name means "he that has been purified" -- and even Satan transfigures himself into an angel of light -- came to Jacob and began to demand his possessions from him. Jacob answered him, "Identify whatever of yours I may have," that is, "I have nothing of yours. See if you recognize any of your vices and crimes. I have not carried off with me any of your deceits and I have no share in your guile; all that is yours I have shunned as a contagion." Laban searched and found nothing that was his. How happy is the one in whom the enemy has found nothing that he could call his own, and in whom the devil has come upon nothing that he would recognize as his own. That appeared to be impossible in the case of humans, but Christ supplied the model of it when he said in the Gospel, "The prince of this world will come and in me he will find nothing."

WED

02.26.20

### The Manner of Keeping the Lenten Observance. From a Sermon by St. Bernard<sup>3</sup>

I beseech you, most dearly beloved, to enter with all possible fervor upon this Lenten time, which is commended to us not only by the law of abstinence, but also and much more by the mystery it contains. Oh, with what devotion should we observe what has been transmitted to us as an inheritance from the righteous Moses who, by a special privilege granted to no other prophet, spoke to the Lord face to face. With what eagerness should we embrace a practice commended to us by the example of Elias, who was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot. We are encouraged to undertake this fast by the example of Moses and Elias, who, illustrious though they may be, are still our fellow-servants. But much greater encouragement should be given in the example of our Lord Jesus Christ Who also fasted for forty days. What kind of monk, or even what kind of Christian, would one be who would submit only with reluctance to an observance given to us by Christ? Besides, we ought to imitate His example with all the more fervor knowing that He fasted not for His own sake but for ours.

Let us fast, therefore, dearest brethren, and let us fast with devotion during this holy season of Lent. But let us also remember that the time of our Lent must not be limited to forty days. We are required to continue it all the days of this miserable existence, during which, with the help of divine grace, we are to fulfill the ten commandments of the law. They are clearly in error who suppose that these few days are sufficient for the practice of penance, since it is obvious that the whole period of our earthly life is ordered for no other purpose. "Seek the Lord," says the prophet, and not only during forty days, but "while He may be found". "Call upon Him while He is near". For the time of calling upon Him will then have gone by when God shall be near to no one, but to some intimately present and from others far remote. From the fact that He is declared to be **near**, it is clear that He is not yet present, not yet possessed, but it is equally evident that He can be found and possessed without difficulty. "Who seemed to you to have been neighbor to him that fell among robbers"? Doubtless "the one who showed mercy to him". Therefore since the Lord is near during all this time of mercy, "seek Him," most dearly beloved, "seek Him while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near."

Nevertheless we ought to seek Him with greater ardor during these forty days of Lent, which is not only a part, but the most sacred part of the whole season of

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<sup>3</sup>St. Bernard's Sermons for the Seasons & Principal Festivals of the Year. vol. II. Bernard of Clairvaux. The Carroll Press. Westminster, MD. 1950. p. 84.

mercy. If, then, at other times we have allowed our zeal to grow slack, it is fitting that our hearts should now be warmed with a renewal of spiritual fervor. If the stomach alone has sinned, let the stomach alone fast, and that suffices. But if the other members have sinned also, why should they not be made to fast as well as the stomach? Therefore let the "eye which has wasted the soul" be made to fast. Let the ear, too, be made to fast, and the tongue, and the hand, and even the soul herself. Let the eye fast from curious looks, so that, wholesomely humbled, it may now be kept in penitential restraint. Let the ear fast from news and idle tales and from all that is vain and worthless with regard to salvation. Let the tongue fast from detraction and murmuring, from unprofitable, vain and frivolous words, and - because of the great importance of silence - sometimes even from words that seem necessary. Let the hand fast from every work not sanctioned by obedience. But above all, let the soul fast from vice and the following of her own will. For without this kind of fasting, all the rest will have no value in the eyes of God. For we read in the prophet Isaias that when the people said to the Lord: "Why have we fasted and you have not regarded?", they received this answer: "Behold in the day of your fast your own will is found."

THUR

02.27.20

## On Lenten Prayer and Fasting. From a Sermon by St. Bernard.<sup>4</sup>

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Notice in this Lenten observance how prayer and fasting assist each other like two allies, as it is written: "When a neighbor helps a neighbor, both shall be comforted". Prayer obtains the strength for fasting and fasting merits the grace to pray. Fasting renders prayer more powerful, and prayer responds by sanctifying the fast and presenting it to the Lord. What would our fast profit us if - God forbid - it were allowed to remain on the earth? Let it therefore be lifted up on the wing of prayer. But since this one wing may not be sufficient, it is necessary to add a second. "The prayer of the just one pierces the heavens", says Ecclesiasticus. Consequently, in order that our fast may be easily lifted up to heaven, let it be provided with the two wings of prayer and justice.

Now what is justice but the virtue which inclines us to render everyone their due? Therefore it is not enough to have regard only to God. You are a debtor also to your human superiors, and a debtor to your equals. It is certainly not the will of God that you should despise those whom He is far from despising. You may have said to yourself, "It is enough for me if I have the approval of God alone for my conduct. Why should I be concerned about the judgment of others?" But be assured of this: that the Lord is pleased with no action of yours which either gives scandal to His children or which is done contrary to the will of the one whom you are obliged to obey as God's representative. Joel says: "Sanctify the fast; call a solemn assembly". What is it to "call a solemn assembly" but to preserve unity, to foster peace, to "love the family of believers"? The proud Pharisee fasted; he also returned thanks to God. But he did not call the assembly, since he rather isolated himself by saying, "I am not as others". And therefore his fast, borne up on only one wing, was unable to ascend to heaven. See to it carefully that your fast shall have two wings, "peace, namely, and holiness, without which no one shall see God". "Sanctify the fast," that is to say, let a pure intention and devout prayer offer it to the Divine Majesty; and "call a solemn assembly," that is to say, your fast should not be singular or detrimental to unity.

Since I have spoken about justice and fasting, it is right that I should say something concerning prayer. Now just as this holy exercise is more efficacious when discharged as it ought to be, so the adversary strives to hinder it.

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<sup>4</sup>St. Bernard's Sermons for the Seasons & Principal Festivals of the Year, vol. II. Bernard of Clairvaux. The Carroll Press. Westminster, MD. 1950. p. 91.

Sometimes he obstructs prayer by inspiring "smallness of spirit" and immoderate fear. This happens when a person is so taken up with consideration of their own unworthiness that they lose sight altogether of the goodness of God. The psalmist says: "Abyss calls on abyss": the abyss of light on the abyss of darkness, the abyss of mercy on the abyss of misery. For the human heart is deep and unfathomable. But although my iniquity is great, much greater, O Lord, is Your goodness. And consequently, whenever my soul disquiets me, I shall be "mindful of the multitude of Your mercies" and so shall be comforted.

FRI

02.28.20

### **Lent the Season of Purification by Pope St. Leo the Great**<sup>5</sup>

This sacred season is dedicated to the purification of the soul, let us therefore be careful to fulfill the Apostolic command that we cleanse ourselves from all defilement of the flesh and of the spirit, so that restraining the conflict that exists between the one and the other substance, the soul, which in the Providence of God is meant to be the ruler of the body, may regain the dignity of its rightful authority, so that, giving offence to no one, we may not incur the contumely of evil mongers. With just contempt shall we be tormented by those who have no faith, and from our wickedness evil tongues will draw weapons to wound religion, if the way of life of those who fast be not in accord with what is needed in true self denial. For the sum total of our fasting does not consist in merely abstaining from food. In vain do we deny our body food if we do not withhold our heart from iniquity, and restrain our lips that they speak no evil.

We must then so moderate our rightful use of food that our other desires may be subject to the same rule. For this is also a time for gentleness and patience, a time of peace and serenity, in which having put away all stains of evil doing we strive after steadfastness in what is good. Now is the time when generous Christian souls forgive offences, pay no heed to insults, and wipe out the memory of past injuries. Now let the Christian soul exercise itself in the amour of justice, on the right hand and on the left, so that amid honor and dishonor, evil report and good, the praise of all will not make proud the virtue that is well rooted, the conscience that has peace, nor dishonor cast it down. The moderation of those who worship God is not melancholy, but blameless.

Therefore, you Dearly Beloved, the holy offspring of the Catholic Mother, Whom the Spirit of God has taught in the School of Truth, use your freedom of

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<sup>5</sup>Sermons of the Great Fathers. "Lent the Season of Purification" by Pope Leo the Great. Henry Regenery Co., 1958, pp. 29-31.

action with right reason, knowing that it is good to abstain, even from what is lawful; and when you must practice self denial, so abstain from food as merely putting aside its use, not as condemning its nature. And so you will not allow yourselves in any way to be infected by the error of those who are completely defiled by their own observance of it; serving the creature rather than the Creator; and dedicating their own stupid observance to the lights of heaven. For they have decreed for themselves days of fasting, in honor of the sun and moon, and, they have decreed this fast both in honor of the stars and to show their contempt of the Lord's resurrection.

SAT 02.29.20

**A reading about Lent and the Rule of St. Benedict, from a meditation by Dom Alban Boulwood.** <sup>6</sup>

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In Chapter 49 of the Holy Rule, On the Observance of Lent, St. Benedict begins by saying that the spiritual man ought really to be living at all times in the spirit of Lent, that is, in wholehearted conversion to God. Our frailty causes us to fail often in this, but if we do not try to live in this spirit during the holy season of Lent, when shall we ever do so?

St Benedict sees the spirit of Lent not as one of unhappiness, but rather as a spirit of free and joyful oblation: so that everyone of his own will may offer to God, with joy and the holy spirit, something beyond the measure appointed to him (RB 49). The Church herself has been preparing us for this, first by drawing us and inspiring us by the sublime glimpse of divine love unveiled at Christmas, and then by summoning us to hear the Savior=s call as he manifests his divine mission and power after the Epiphany. And now we are called to follow him, in the work of his oblation and redemptive sacrifice which he now so lovingly takes up. Our Lord calls us to unite ourselves with him in his oblation to his Father=s will, for this is his mission.

Our response to this divine invitation has led us to the oblation by which as [monks] we offer ourselves wholly to God, and it seems specially fitting for us during Lent, to renew, solemnly, sincerely, reflectively, our formal [offering] of ourselves to God through the Rule of St. Benedict. It is true that our [offering] is really made once and for all but the point lies in the renewal of the spirit of our [offering]. It is not enough to set up a religious program in our life, Even in the monastery itself, where the vows and the whole rule of life establish a wonderful religious machinery to guide and speed us towards God, yet these things still remain in themselves just the machinery of our life; and we soon find, here too, precisely that tendency for things to become mechanical in the bad sense. And so we are always having to renew our spirit, deepening, clarifying, purifying, reaffirming, our interior [offering], as the years bring us the daily opportunities of fulfillment.

We must go forward in faith and in hope and in love, one step at a time, trying to be ready to recognize God=s will as it comes to us day by day, and trying to give ourselves to it with all our heart. As occasion arises, the instruments of

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<sup>6</sup> *Alive to God* [Benedictine Studies VII], Baltimore-Dublin, 1964, pp. 72-75.

good works [which St. Benedict mentions] will be offered to us; so many spiritual tools, yet all but a part of the first great one *C to love the Lord with your whole heart.*