

SUN 02.02.20

A Commentary of Origen on the Presentation ¹

Let us reflect on the way everything was prearranged for Simeon to embrace the Son of God. In the first place, he had been given a revelation by the Holy Spirit that *he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Anointed*. Then, he did not enter the temple by chance or routine, but he came there under the prompting of the Spirit of God, *for all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God*. If you too wish to embrace Jesus and enfold him in your arms, strive with all your might to follow the guidance of the Spirit and come to God's temple. Now, at this moment you are standing in the temple of the Lord Jesus, which is his Church, the temple built of living stones. When your life and conduct are really worthy of the name of Church, you are standing in the Lord's temple.

If, led by the Spirit, you come to the temple, you will find the child Jesus, you will lift him up in your arms and say: *Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace as you promised*. Notice at once that peace is joined to death and dismissal, for Simeon does not say only that he wishes to go, but adds that he wished to go in peace. This is the same promise as was made to blessed Abraham: *You shall go to your ancestors in peace when you have reached a ripe old age*. Who dies in peace? Only the person who has *the peace of God which surpasses all understanding*, and which guards the heart of its possessor. Who departs from this world in peace? Only the person who understands that *God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ*, and who, being in no way at enmity with God or opposed to him, has acquired complete peace and concord through good works, and so is allowed like Abraham to go in peace and join the holy patriarchs.

But why speak of the patriarchs? Shall I not rather go on to speak about Jesus, the prince and lord of the patriarchs, about whom Saint Paul says: *It is better to die and be with Christ?* That person possesses Jesus who dares to say: *It is no longer I who live – it is Christ who lives in me*.

And so, as we stand in the temple and hold the Son of God and embrace him, let us pray to almighty God and to the child Jesus that we may be found worthy of discharge and departure to better things, for we long to speak with Jesus and embrace him. To him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen

¹Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – 1992 – pg 146

MON

02.03.20

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A Commentary on Abraham's Intercession for Sodom by St John Chrysostom ¹

Who could worthily praise the God of all for his marvelous long suffering and considerateness or congratulate the good man for enjoying such great confidence? "He continued to speak", the text goes on. Then at that point the good man, while respecting God's ineffable long suffering and being afraid of ever seeming to go too far and surpass the limit in his entreaty, said: "Pardon me, Lord, if I continue to speak; if only thirty can be found there?" Since he saw that God was disposed to kindness, he still did not proceed gradually with his compromise. He sought to rescue not merely five good people but ten in pursuing his request. O, the goodness of the Lord beyond all telling and all imagining! I mean, which of us living in the midst of countless evils could ever choose to exercise such wonderful considerateness and loving kindness in executing a sentence against our peers?

For proof that such persons' good standing is a means of winning long suffering for us, take heed in that very story to what God says to the patriarch: "If I find ten good people there, I will not destroy the city." Why do I say ten good people? No one is found there free from lawlessness, except alone the good man Lot and his two daughters, His wife, you remember, perhaps on his account escaped punishment in the city but paid later the penalty for her own indifference. Now, however, since through God's ineffable love the growth of religion was taking place, there were many people unobtrusively in the heart of the cities capable of appealing to God; others in hills and caves, and the virtue of these few succeeded in cancelling out the wickedness of the majority.

The Lord's goodness is immense, and frequently he finds his way to grant the salvation of the majority because of a few just people. Why do I say on account of a few just people? Frequently when a just person cannot be found in the present life, he takes pity on the living on account of the virtue of the departed and cries aloud in the words, "I will protect this city for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David." Even if they do not deserve to be saved, he is saving. And they have no claim on salvation; yet, since showing love is habitual with me and I am prompt to have pity and rescue them from disaster for my own sake and the sake of my servant David. I will act as a shield. He who passed on from this life many years before will prove the salvation of those who have fallen victim to their own indifference.

¹ Homily on Genesis

TUE

02.04.20

Lot Flees to Zoar - From Origen ²

Hear these words, you who close your houses, you who avoid a guest as an enemy. Lot was living in Sodom. We do not read of other good deeds of his. The hospitality alone occurring at that time is mentioned. He escapes the flames, he escapes the conflagration for this reason alone: because he opened his house to strangers. Angels entered the hospitable house; fire entered the houses closed to strangers.

Let us therefore see what the angels say to their host on account of his services of hospitality. "Save your life in the mountain lest perchance you be included." Lot was indeed hospitable. And, as the Scripture has borne testimony to him, he was hidden from destruction when the angels had been hospitably received. But he was not so perfect that immediately on departing from Sodom, he could ascend the mountain; for it belongs to the perfect to say, "I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, whence shall help come to me". He therefore was neither such that he should perish among the inhabitants of Sodom, nor was he so great that he should dwell with Abraham in the heights. For if he had been such, Abraham would never have said to him: "If you go to the right, I shall go to the left, or if you go to the left, I will go to the right", nor would the dwellings of Sodom have pleased him. He was therefore somewhere in the middle between the perfect and the doomed. And knowing that it is not appropriate with his strength to ascend the mountain, he piously and humbly excuses himself saying, "I cannot be saved on the mountain, but, behold, this city is small. Here I shall be saved." To be sure when he entered the small city of Zoar, he is saved in it. And after this he went up into the mountain with his daughters.

And yet, to digress slightly, what similarity appears to be with the paradise of God and the land of Egypt that Sodom might be compared with these? Now, I think that it is in this way. Before Sodom sinned, when it preserved still the simplicity of the unstained life, it was as the paradise of God, but when it began to be discolored and darkened with the stain of sins, it became as the land of Egypt. But since indeed the prophet says, "Your sister Sodom shall be restored to her ancient state", we inquire also whether her restoration also recovers this, that she be "as the paradise of God. For Scripture did not say: "Sodom will be restored", but it says "Sodom will be restored to its ancient state." And they will assert strongly that its ancient state was not "as the land of Egypt" but "as the paradise of God.

² Origen – Homilies on Genesis

Wed

02.05.20

St. Agatha - From Butler's Lives of the Saints

St Agatha has retained her place in the Universal Calendar following the reforms of 1969, even though nothing that can be called historical fact is known of her life. There is, however, good evidence of an early cult, with many versions of her legend recorded in both Greek and Latin, the Greek being the earlier, with the Latin dating from the sixth century. This means that however fictitious the details of her Acts, she cannot be dismissed as a mere fiction altogether. Her Acts, though, are more of an indication of the type of woman held up for veneration as a saint in the early centuries than anything else.

She is described as a wealthy woman who had dedicated her virginity to Christ. This, then, rather than her life, is the most precious thing she has to offer. Her birthplace is assigned to either Palermo or Catania in Sicily, and she is said to have died at Catania, which has the stronger historical claim to be her birthplace. Among those who try to take the precious gift she has vowed to Christ from her is a consul named Quintianus. He used the imperial edict against Christians to have her brought before him, then placed in a brothel run by a woman with the appropriate name of "Aphrodisia" and her assistants, referred to as her daughters. All tricks, assaults and threats to make her yield her virginity fail, and so she stands as an example of "virginity as a sacred power, a concrete realization within this world of the divine spirit".

Quintianus then handed her over to be tortured, and her Acts dwell on the tortures inflicted on her, culminating in the cutting off of her breasts, which were placed on a platter. Perhaps because further details of her tortures involve her being rolled over live coals, she is invoked against fire in general. This may, though, be an extension of her protection against eruptions from Mount Etna, because she is associated with Sicily, and her legend states that after her death a flow of lava from Mount Etna was miraculously diverted by her silken veil held up on a staff. This is last recorded as happening in the 1840s, and her veil is still carried in solemn procession on her feast day in Catania. By extension she protects against earthquakes everywhere. She is also patron saint of bell-founders. The association is ancient and certain, but the reason has not been determined. It may be that it derives from her protection against volcanic eruptions and fire, as bells were rung to warn of both. Another explanation given is that the molten metal involved in casting bells suggests the flow of molten lava. Her breasts also brought a more appropriate patronage, as she is invoked against diseases of the breast. Her breasts on a dish were often mistaken for loaves in the Middle ages, from which arose the custom of blessing bread on a dish at her altar on her feast day.

Pope Damasus I composed a hymn in her honor. Two churches were dedicated to her in the sixth century. Pope St Gregory the Great had rich shrines made for some of her relics in Rome, then moved them to the monastery of San Stefano on the island of Capri. Other relics remained in Catania until 1840, when they were moved to Constantinople.

Whatever the facts behind her legend, Agatha remains one of the best-loved and most invoked saints in the Christian devotional life.

Thursday 02.06.09

From an Account of the Martyrdom of St Paul Miki and his companions by a contemporary writer [1](#)

The crosses were set in place. Fr Pasio and Fr Rodriguez took turns encouraging the victims. Their steadfast behavior was wonderful to see. The Father Bursar stood motionless, his eyes turned heavenward. Brother Martin gave thanks to God's goodness by singing psalms. Again and again he repeated: "Into your hands, Lord, I entrust my life." Brother Francis Branco also thanked God in a loud voice. Brother Gonsalvo in a very loud voice kept saying the Our Father and Hail Mary.

Our brother, Paul Miki, saw himself now standing in the noblest pulpit he had ever filled. To his "congregation" he began by proclaiming himself a Japanese and a Jesuit. He was dying for the Gospel he preached. He gave thanks to God for this wonderful blessing and he ended his "sermon" with these words: "As I come to this supreme moment of my life, I am sure none of you would suppose I want to deceive you. And so I tell you plainly: there is no way to be saved except the Christian way. My religion teaches me to pardon my enemies and all who have offended me. I do gladly pardon the Emperor and all who have sought my death. I beg them to seek baptism and be Christians themselves."

Then he looked at his comrades and began to encourage them in their final struggle. Joy glowed in all their faces, and in Louis' most of all. When a Christian in the crowd cried out to him that he would soon be in heaven, his hands, his whole body strained upward with such joy that every eye was fixed on him.

Anthony, hanging at Louis' side, looked toward heaven and called upon the holy names - "Jesus, Mary!" He began to sing a psalm: "praise the Lord, you children!" (He learned it in catechism class in Nagasaki. They take care there to teach the children some psalms to help them learn their catechism.)

Others kept repeating "Jesus, Mary!" Their faces were serene. Some of them even took to urging the people standing by to live worthy Christian lives. In these and other ways they showed their readiness to die.

Then, according to Japanese custom, the four executioners began to unsheathe their spears. At this dreadful sight, all the Christians cried out, "Jesus, Mary!" And the storm of anguished weeping then rose to batter the very skies. The executioners killed them one by one. One thrust of the spear, then a second blow. It was over in a very short time.

[1](#)The Liturgy of the Hours - vol. II -Catholic Book Publishing Co. - New York - 1976 - p 1664

FRI 02.-07.20

A reading about Abraham's affection for Ishmael, from a homily by St. John Chrysostom.

When the time of suckling was over, *“Sarah saw the son born to Abraham by Hagar the Egyptian”* the text goes on, *“playing with her son Isaac. She said to Abraham, ‘Send away this maidservant and her son: surely the son of the maidservant will not share the inheritance with my son Isaac.’”*

Now this remark about his son struck Abraham as severe. In this instance, once again Sarah does not tolerate the brashness of Ishmael and is unable to put up equably with the maidservant's son being reared with Isaac. So just as she previously wished to check Hagar's arrogance and in her extreme irritation had her sent packing, so in this case too she wanted to nip Ishmael's forwardness in the bud [because she did not want] to see the son born of grace and of the very gift of God being reared along with that of the Egyptian maidservant. ...She was afraid that, in the event of her and Abraham's sudden passing, [since they were so old,] Ishmael would ... endeavor to thrust himself into his father's inheritance and become a sharer of it with Isaac; hence Sarah said, *“Send away from here the maidservant and her son.”* Let her learn at this stage, she is saying, that the son of the maidservant has nothing in common with my son Isaac. It is, in fact, not fair that the slave's son should be reared with that of the mistress, my son.

For her own part, however, Sarah was not guilty of acting unreasonably; ...even God agreed with the words she spoke. The patriarch, on the other hand, being affectionate and well-disposed towards Ishmael, did not take kindly to her remarks. It was not ... that he took much interest in Hagar; rather, he was well disposed towards his son for the reason that he was then still in his youth. Yet, consider the extraordinary considerateness of the loving God: in fidelity to his characteristic loving kindness and wishing to strengthen the bonds of harmony between them, the Lord said to Abraham, [*“Do not be displeased, but whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you.”*] Accept everything she now says to you about Ishmael and Hagar, and heed her. Don't be ready to distress the woman who ... has given evidence of such great affection for you on more than one occasion so as to save you from death by surrendering herself for your welfare and proving the occasion of your wonderful prosperity. On the first occasion she caused you to leave Egypt with all that wealth, and later she was responsible for your being accorded remarkable esteem by Abimelech. So don't allow yourself to follow a course of action contrary to what is advised by her; nor in fact will

things turn out otherwise. Your descendants will be called after Isaac, the child born of her, and he will be your successor. *“But this son of the maidservant I shall cause to become numerous; I shall make him grow into a might nation since he is your offspring.”*

Now great peace and harmony began to reign over their life together, God's goodness strengthening their relationship. Notice [Abraham's] utterly correct attitude in giving evidence in every way of his godly purpose. I mean, when he heard Sarah's words, they struck him as severe; but when the Lord gave him orders, he immediately carried them out and gave no further thought to his natural affections. In other words he said to himself, When it is he that commands, let all feelings take no further part; after all, the one who commands is the Lord of nature. So Abraham *“arose early next morning, took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder along with the child, and sent her away.”*

... The merciful and loving God, however, surpassing ... a mother's and father's affection in his care for us... had pity on the child; he felt for Hagar's plight, he allowed her to experience her isolation, and at once granted her relief at his hands. ...What loving kindness on the Lord's part! Far from ignoring her as a menial, he deigned to show her such wonderful concern.... In her neediness the Lord granted her means, and, when she found herself so much at a loss and lacking all hope of survival, he showed his characteristic generosity by consoling her and at the same time exercising care for the child, [who himself would become a mighty nation because of the providence of God's hands.]

SAT 02.08.20

A Reading About the Virgin Mary, from a book by Hans Urs von Balthasar.³

Mary is a "prototype of the church," and this for two reasons: she is the place of the real and bodily indwelling of the Word in the most intimate union of Mother and Child sharing the same flesh; and, in the spiritual sphere, she is - and to this the former is due - a servant, in her entire person, body and soul, one who knows no law of her own, but only conformity to the Word of God. Because she was a virgin, which means a pure, exclusive hearer of the word, she became mother, the place of the incarnation of the Word. Her womb was blessed, only because she "heard the word of God and kept it" (Lk 11:28), because she "kept all these words and pondered them in her heart" (Lk 2:19). She is the model which should govern contemplation, if it is to keep clear of two dangers: one, that of seeing the word only as something external, instead of the profoundest mystery within our own being, that in which we live, move and are: the other, that of regarding the word as so interior to us that we confuse it with our own being, with a natural wisdom given us once and for all, and ours to use as we will....

The hearer *par excellence* is the virgin who became pregnant with the Word, and bore him as her own and the Father's son. She herself, even when mother, remained a servant; the Father alone is the Master, together with the Son, who is her life and who moulds her life. She lives wholly for the fruit of her womb. Even after she has given him birth, she continues to carry him within her; she only needs to look into her heart to find him. But she does not omit, on that account, to turn her gaze uninterruptedly upon the child growing up by her side, upon the youth and the man, whose ideas and actions seem to her ever more unpredictable and astonishing. More and more she "understood not" what he meant - when he stayed behind in the Temple without telling her, when he failed to receive her, when, in his public life, he concealed his power and spent himself in vain and, in the end, detached himself from her as she stood at the foot of the cross, substituting for himself a stranger, John, to be her son. With all the

³Prayer, London: Geoffrey Chapman 1963, p.22ff.

force of her body, she obeys the word that resounds ever more strongly and divinely but seems more and more alien and almost tears her asunder, although, in spite of all, she has given herself to it wholly and radically in advance. She lets herself be led whither she "knows not"; so far is the word she follows from being her own wisdom. Yet she is wholly in accord with its leading, so surely is the word she loves "engrafted" in her heart (James 1:21).