

SUN

08.30.20

A Commentary on the Gospel by St. Augustine ¹

If anyone wished to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and come after me.

Our Lord's command seems hard and heavy, that anyone who wishes to follow him must renounce himself. But no command is hard and heavy when it comes from one who helps to carry it out. That other saying of his is true: *My yoke is easy and my burden is light.* Whatever is hard in his commands is made easy by love.

We know what great things love can accomplish, even though it is often base and sensual. We know what hardships people have endured, what intolerable indignities they have borne to attain the object of their love. What we love indicates what sort of people we are, and therefore making a decision about this should be our one concern in choosing a way of life. Why be surprised if people who set their hearts on Christ and want to follow him renounce themselves out of love? If we lose ourselves through self-love we must surely find ourselves through self-renunciation.

Who would not wish to follow Christ to supreme happiness, perfect peace, and lasting security? We shall do well to follow him there, but we need to know the way. The Lord Jesus had not yet risen from the dead when he gave this invitation. His passion was still before him; he had still to endure the cross, to face outrages, reproaches, scourging; to be pierced by thorns, wounded, insulted, taunted and put to death. The road seems rough, you draw back, you do not want to follow Christ. Follow him just the same. The road we made for ourselves is rough, but Christ has leveled it by passing over it himself.

Who does not desire to be exalted? Everyone enjoys a high position. But self-abasement is the step that leads to it. Why take strides that are too big for you – do you want to fall instead of going up? Begin with this step and you will find yourself climbing. The two disciples who said: *Lord, command that one of us shall sit at your right hand in your kingdom and the other at your left* had no wish to think about this step of self-abasement. They wanted to reach the top without noticing the step that led there. The Lord showed them the step, however, by his reply: *Can you drink the cup that I am to drink?* You who aim at the highest exaltation, can you drink the cup of humiliation? He did not simply give the general command: *Let him renounce himself and follow me* but added: *Let him take up his cross and follow me.*

What does it mean to take up one's cross? It means bearing whatever is unpleasant – that is following me. Once you begin to follow me by conforming your life to my commandments, you will find many to contradict you, forbid you, or dissuade you, and some of these will be people who call themselves followers of Christ. Therefore if you meet with threats, flattery, or opposition, let this be your cross; pick it up and carry it – do not collapse under it. These words of our Lord are like an exhortation to endure martyrdom. If you are persecuted you ought, surely, to make light of any suffering for the sake of Christ.

MON 08.31.20

From the Golden Epistle by William of St Thierry [1](#)

To “seek the face of God” is to seek knowledge of him face to face, as Jacob saw him. It is of this knowledge the Apostle says: “Then I shall know as I am known; now we see in a confused reflection in a mirror, but then we shall see face to face, we shall see him as he is.” Always to seek God in this life by keeping the hands unstained and the heart clean is that piety which, as Job says, “is the worship of God.” The man who lacks it “has received his soul in vain,” that is to say, lives to no purpose or does not live at all, since he does not live the life to live which he received his soul.

This piety is the continual remembrance of God, an unceasing effort of the mind to know him, an unwearied concern of the affections to love him, so that, I will not say every day, but every hour finds the servant of God occupied in the labor of asceticism and the effort to make progress, or in the sweetness of experience and the joy of fruition. This is the piety concerning which the Apostle exhorts his beloved disciple in the words: “Train yourself to grow up in piety; for training the body avails but little, while piety is all-availing, since it promises well both for this life and for the next.

The habit you wear promises not only the outward form of piety but its substance, in all things and before all things, and that is what your vocation demands. For, as the apostle says again, there are some who exhibit the outward form of religion although they are strangers to its meaning.

If anyone among you does not possess this in his heart, display it in his life, practice it in his cell, he is to be called not a solitary but a man who is alone, and his cell is not a cell for him but a prison in which he is walled. For truly to be alone is not to have God with one. Truly to be walled in is not to be at liberty in God. Solitude and being walled in are words that denote wretchedness, whereas the cell should never involve being walled in by necessity but rather be the dwelling-place of peace, an inner chamber with closed door, a place not of concealment but of retreat.

The man who has God with him is never less alone than when he is alone. It is then he has undisturbed fruition of his joy. It is then he is his own master and is free to enjoy God in himself and himself in God. It is then that in the light of truth and the serenity of a clean heart a pure soul stands revealed to itself without effort, and the memory enlivened by God freely pours itself out in itself. Then either the mind is enlightened and the will enjoys its good or human frailty freely weeps over its shortcomings.

Accordingly as your vocation demands, dwelling in heaven rather than in cells, you have shut out the world, whole and entire, from yourselves and shut up yourselves, whole and

entire, with God. For the cell (*cella*) and heaven (*coelum*) are akin to one another: the resemblance between the words is borne out by the devotion they both involve. For both appear to be derived from *celare*, to hide, and the same thing is hidden in cells as in heaven, the same occupation characterizes both the one and the other. What is this? Leisure devoted to God, the enjoyment of God.

[1](#)The Golden Epistle – William of St Thierry – Cistercian Fathers Series #12 – Cistercian Publications – Kalamazoo, MI – 1971 – pg

TUE 09/01/20

A Reading on the Book of Judges from Dom Damasus Winzen, O.S.B.¹

It is a long way from the twelve Judges to the twelve Apostles. The latter are sent out to establish the kingdom of the Son of God's love in the power of the Holy Spirit Who flows from the pierced heart of the "King of the Jews", and fills the whole house of the Church on Pentecost. The spirit of the Judges never fills the whole house of Israel, nor does he rest upon them. He resembles the spirit of God which in the beginning of creation moved over the waters of chaos. He is the spirit of adolescence, not of maturity. He acts like an alien force, seizing the champion with violence, lifting him up above his natural strength, without, however, penetrating the person and transforming the heart. We should not expect the Judges to have the inner qualities which we love in Jesus. They are not "saints" in our Christian sense. When we read their stories we should remember the word of St. Augustine: "The spirit of the Lord worked in these prophetic times the prefiguring and the preaching of the things to come through people who knew as well as through people who did not know. There is no reason, therefore, to call their sins no-sins, because God Who knows how to make good use of our evil deeds, has used even their sins to signify what He intended."

The deeds of the Judges are "signs" of the Work of Redemption to be wrought by Christ. As an example let us take the story of Ehud who killed King Eglon of Moab (3:12-30). Ehud's deed is not very edifying, and it would not be worthy of being recorded in the annals of God's kingdom, if it did not have a spiritual meaning reaching beyond the naked fact. Eglon, who is too fat to move, is the typical representative of that pompous spirit of self-confidence with which the great ones of the earth try to imitate the Omnipotent Lord of heaven and earth. He stands for the "Prince of this

¹Pathways in Scripture, Dom Damasus Winzen, O.S.B., Regina Laudis, p.196

world". Ehud's saving deed points to the way in which the Savior Christ frees all people from the dominion of the devil. Under the pretext that he has a "word of God" for Eglon, Ehud thrusts the sword into the king's belly so that it goes in, blade and haft. Now the word of God is very often called in Holy Scripture a "sword". When St. Paul writes in the Epistle to the Hebrews (4:12): "The word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword; and reaching to the division of the soul and spirit, of the joint and marrow, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart", we cannot help feeling that he has Ehud and his two-edged sword in mind.

WED 09/02/20

A PEOPLE MADE FREE BY THE LORD, from Pathways in Scripture by Dom Damasus Winzen²

Israel's fight for liberty against the kings reaches its climax in Deborah's rising against Jabin of Canaan. Tyranny always was, always is, and always will be the fruit of idolatry. The *baalim* of the Canaanites are local deities. They merge, therefore, with the local political power of the king. Israel's God, the one true God, stands for absolute justice for everyone. He frees his servants from the arbitrary rule of local tyrants. "Happy are you, O Israel! who is like you? A people made free by the Lord" (Deut 33:29). This spirit of freedom under God was in danger of being suppressed under the iron rule of Jabin. His general Sisera resided in the fortress which has the significant name of Harosheth-ha-goiim, "silence of the nations." Sisera had silenced the voice of free nations with his police force of nine hundred chariots of iron. All weapons had been confiscated. "There was no shield nor spear seen among forty thousand in Israel" (5:7). At this point a woman arose: "you did arise, Deborah, arise as a mother in Israel", just as in the beginning of the New Testament, when man is put to silence, the voice of a woman opens the gates of freedom for humankind (Luke 1:20-38). The song of Deborah breaks the silence of the nations. In the power of genuine inspiration, it praises the beauty of that freedom which only the spirit of God is able to release in the human soul:

When men let grow their hair in Israel,
When the people offer themselves willingly,
Bless ye the Lord! (5:2)

²PATHWAYS IN SCRIPTURE, Dom Damasus Winzen (Word of Life, Ann Arbor MI 1976) pp. 100-102.

The service of the one true God is not a matter of violence and force. Those who serve him do so willingly, because he alone moves the hearts of men and women. His army is an army of volunteers. Deborah's trumpet-call aroused everything that was noble and generous and magnanimous in Israel. From all sides they responded and banded together on Mount Tabor against the kings. In the plain at the foot of the mountain Sisera's chariots held free sway, and the poorly armed peasants would not have had much of a chance, had not the Lord moved heaven and earth to help them. "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera" (5:20). A sudden cloudburst turned the brook Kishon into a raging sea and the entire plain into a swamp. Thus horse and rider and chariot suffered the fate of the Egyptians in the Red Sea. Alone, without his horse, Sisera found his way into the tent of Heber's wife, Jael, and there, at the hand of a woman, he met an inglorious death. In a masterful climax the song ends with a scene in the harem of Sisera's ancestral palace where we find his mother and his wives waiting for him to come back loaded with spoil. In the whole of human literature we do not find a more poignant picture of degraded womanhood that has lost freedom and dignity than here where it forms the sharpest contrast to the noble, heroic attitude of the woman whom the Spirit of God has made "a mother in Israel." ..The true meaning of Deborah's song, is the praise of that freedom which the Word and the Spirit of God give to the Church. Deborah, the prophetess, whose name means "the talkative one" and also "the bee," who sends to Barack and calls him to rise against Jabin, represents the voice of God which, in the law and through the prophets, calls the Israelitic people to battle against the powers of this world. Victory, however, is completed, not by her but by Jael, who is described as the wife of a non-jew and therefore foreshadows the Church of the gentiles.

THUR 09.03.20

A reading using our gifts for the service of others, from St. Gregory the Great's treatise *Pastoral Care*.

There are those who are gifted with virtues in a high degree and who are exalted by great endowments for the training of others; men who are unspotted in their zeal for chastity, strong in the vigor of their abstinence, replete with feasts of knowledge, humble in their long-suffering patience, erect in the fortitude of authority, gentle in the grace of loving-kindness, strict and unbending in justice. Such, indeed in declining to undertake supreme rule when invited to do so, deprive themselves, for the most part, of

the gifts which they have received not for their own sakes only, but for the sake of others also.

When these regard their own personal advantage, not that of others, they lose such advantages in wishing to retain them for themselves, Hence it was that the Truth said to the disciples: *“A city seated on a mountain cannot be hid, neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house”* (Mt 5.14-15). [For this reason] He said to Peter, *“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”* And when Simon replied at once that he loved Him, he was told: *“If you love me, feed my sheep”* (Jn 21.17). If, then, the care of feeding is a testimony of love, he who, abounding in virtues, refuses to feed the flock of God, is convicted of having no love for the Supreme Shepherd. [It is because of this that] Paul says: *“If Christ died for all, then all were dead. And if He died for all, it remains that they also who live, may not now live only for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again”* (2 Cor 5.14-15). Thus, Moses says that the surviving brother must take the wife of his brother who died without children, and raise up children for his brother’s name; and should he refuse to take her, she shall spit in his face...

Now, the deceased brother is [the Lord] who, appearing after the glory of the Resurrection, said: *“Go, tell my brethren;”* for He died, as it were, without sons, because He had not yet filled up the number of the elect. The surviving brother is ordered to take the wife, because it is fitting that the care of Holy [Mother] Church should be assigned to him who is best fitted to rule it well. If he proves unwilling, the woman spits in his face, because, whosoever does not care to assist others by the favors which he has received, is reprobated by Holy Church also for the good he has, and as it were, she casts spittle in his face....

So, there are those who, endowed, as we have said, with great gifts, in their eagerness for the pursuit of contemplation only, decline to be of service to the neighbor by preaching; they love to withdraw in quietude and desire to be alone for meditation. Now, if they are judged strictly on their conduct, they are certainly guilty in proportion to the public service which they were able to afford. Indeed, what disposition of mind is revealed in him, who could perform conspicuous public benefit on coming to his task, but prefers his own privacy to the benefit of others, seeing that the Only-Begotten of the Supreme Father came forth from the bosom of His Father into our midst, that He might benefit many?

FRI 09/04/20

A Reading from The City of God, by St. Augustine.³

There is a vast difference between the manner in which people use what we call prosperity and adversity. A good person is neither puffed up by fleeting success nor broken by adversity; whereas, a bad person is chastised by failure of this sort because he is corrupted by success. God shows His intervention more clearly by the way He apportions the sweet and the bitter. For, if He visited every sin here below with manifest penalty, it might be thought that no score remained to be settled at the Last Judgment. On the other hand, if God did not plainly enough punish sin on earth, people might conclude that there is no such thing as Divine Providence. So, too, in regard to the good things of life. If God did not bestow them with patient liberality on some who ask Him, we could possibly argue that such things did not depend on His power. On the other hand, if He lavished them on all who asked, we might have the impression that God is to be served only for the gifts He bestows. In that case, the service of God would not make us religious, but rather covetous and greedy. In view of all that, when good and bad suffer alike, they are not, for that reason indistinguishable because what they suffer is similar. The sufferers are different even though the sufferings are the same trials; though what they endure is the same, their virtue and vice are different.

For, in the same fire, gold gleams and straw smokes; under the same flail the stalk is crushed and the grain threshed; the lees are not mistaken for oil because they have issued from the same press. So, too, the tide of trouble will test, purify, and improve the good, but beat, crush, and wash away the wicked. So it is that, under the weight of the same affliction, the wicked deny and blaspheme God, and the good pray to Him and praise Him. The difference is not in what people suffer but in the way they suffer. The same shaking that makes fetid water stink makes perfume issue a more pleasant odor.

³The Fathers of the Church Vol. 8 The City of God. St. Augustine. Fathers of the Church, Inc. 1950.
Book 1, Cp. 8 p. 28-9

SAT 09.05.20

A Reading about Mary and Waiting for Christ, from a book by Fr Jean Daniélou.ⁱ

The Blessed Virgin had a most crucial role in the first coming of Christ. In her culminated all the expectation of the Jewish people, insofar as all the preparations, aspirations, inspirations, graces, prefigurations which had filled the Old Testament, all came together and were summed up in her; it is true to say that at the eve of Christ's coming she was the epitome and incarnation of the long waiting of twenty centuries. The whole of the Old Testament seems to come together in her with a more ardent longing and a more complete spiritual preparation for Our Lord's coming. *Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low.* The work of the Old Testament was one of education: the human race, rugged, coarse, as yet unformed, still utterly carnal-minded, must be made able, bit by bit, to take God's gifts, to receive the Holy Spirit. It was a long, progressive work of training. And the training culminated in the soul of the Blessed Virgin; and if we can say that in some sense her soul is outside time, and that in her eternity is present, then we may also say that she was prepared by the education of the whole of her people: she is the marvelous flower sprung out of Israel, the final point in the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit in the souls of all the prophets and all the holy women of Israel. It is in fact, absolutely true to say that in her *every valley was filled, every mountain and hill brought low.* That is to say, in her our Lord's path was smooth before Him.

All this, which was simply the preparation and foreshadowing of Christ in Our Lady's soul, is a reality still present to us, for the mystery we are now living in the world is the mystery of Christ's gradual coming into all souls, into all nations. Christ had appeared in the flesh, the culmination of Israel's hopes; Mary had seen him for whom she had waited, she had held in her arms the child born in Bethlehem, and with Simeon had been able to salute Him as a Light to enlighten the Gentiles. Christ, then, had certainly come. He has come, but He is always He that is to come. He has come, but not yet wholly come; and though the waiting of Israel had been crowned, Israel is nonetheless still waiting. We live always during Advent, we are always waiting for the Messiah to come. He has come, but is not yet fully manifest. He is not fully manifest in each of our souls; He is not fully manifest in the world as a whole: that is to say, that just as Christ was born according to the flesh in Bethlehem of Juda so must He be born according to the spirit in each of our souls.

ⁱ."Advent", New York 1951, 102-103, 109-110.