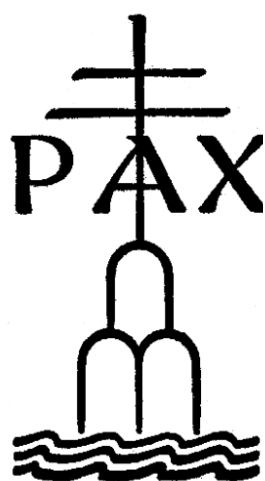


*TWO YEAR LECTIONARY
PATRISTIC VIGILS READINGS*

YEAR 2 - Scripture & Patristic



TWO YEAR LECTIONARY PATRISTIC VIGILS READINGS YEAR 2 - Scripture & Patristic . 1

Advent Week 1.....	6
Advent Week 2.....	21
Advent Week 3.....	36
Advent II: 17 – 24 December	49
Christmas.....	66
Epiphany.....	90
Lent	107
Lent Week 1.....	116
Lent Week 2.....	131
Lent Week 3.....	147
Lent Week 4.....	162
Lent Week 5.....	179
Passiontide.....	195
Easter	210
Easter Week 2.....	225
Easter Week 3.....	240
Easter Week 4.....	256
Easter Week 5.....	273
Easter Week 6.....	289
Easter Week 7.....	305
Pentecost & Feastdays	322
Season of the Year Week 01.....	331
Season of the Year Week 02.....	345
Season of the Year Week 03.....	361
Season of the Year Week 04.....	378
Season of the Year Week 05.....	396
Season of the Year Week 06.....	414
Season of the Year Week 07.....	429
Season of the Year Week 08.....	444
Season of the Year Week 09.....	459
Season of the Year Week 10.....	474
Season of the Year Week 11.....	489

Season of the Year Week 12.....	504
Season of the Year Week 13.....	520
Season of the Year Week 14.....	538
Season of the Year Week 15.....	553
Season of the Year Week 16.....	568
Season of the Year Week 17.....	583
Season of the Year Week 18.....	598
Season of the Year Week 19.....	615
Season of the Year Week 20.....	631
Season of the Year Week 21.....	646
Season of the Year Week 22.....	661
Season of the Year Week 23.....	676
Season of the Year Week 24.....	691
Season of the Year Week 25.....	706
Season of the Year Week 26.....	724
Season of the Year Week 27.....	743
Season of the Year Week 28.....	758
Season of the Year Week 29.....	773
Season of the Year Week 30.....	788
Season of the Year Week 31.....	803
Season of the Year Week 32.....	818
Season of the Year Week 33.....	833
Season of the Year Week 34.....	848

A Two Year Patristic Lectionary for the Divine Office

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The History of the Patristic Lectionary

A 'patristic lectionary' is a series of readings from the fathers (in Latin *patres*) of the Church. Scripture has always been read in the Church in the context of tradition. With the development of the Divine Office (services of prayer celebrated at different times of each day) the daily cycle of Scripture reading came to be accompanied by commentaries from the fathers of the Church, as St Benedict wrote in the middle of the sixth century, 'Let the inspired books of both the Old and the New Testaments be read at Vigils, as also commentaries on them by the most eminent orthodox and catholic fathers' (Rule of Benedict, IX). The main surviving early Latin collections of readings from the fathers, or patristic lectionaries, are those of Alan of Farfa and Paul the Deacon from the eighth century. These formed the basis of the patristic lectionary used in the Roman Breviary and many other Latin Breviaries. Over time the readings from the fathers were cut back in length with no thought to their meaning. Attempts were made to improve the patristic lectionary by Cardinal Quiñonez in the sixteenth century, the monks of Cluny in the seventeenth century and Archbishop Vintimille of Paris in the eighteenth, but the inadequate patristic lectionary of the *Breviarium Romanum* (1568) and *Breviarium Monasticum* (1612) continued in use until the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

The Twentieth Century Reform

After the Second Vatican Council the Holy See produced two Lectionaries of Scripture readings for use with the Liturgy of the Hours, a one-year cycle and a two-year cycle. The one-year cycle of Scripture with an accompanying patristic reading for use each day at the Office of Readings was published in the *editio typica* of the *Liturgia Horarum* and translated into the various vernaculars, including the three volume English 'Divine Office'. This is the version used by most priests, religious and laity today. Some find the one-year cycle of Scripture and the choice of patristic readings unhelpful after many years repetition; it is certainly not suitable for monastic communities.

The two-year cycle of Scripture readings was published in *Notitiae*, the Journal of the Congregation for Divine Worship (CDW), with the intention of publishing it as a supplement to the *Liturgia Horarum*. Work was also done on a two year cycle of patristic texts to accompany this lectionary. Changes at the CDW, however, resulted in the suspension of the work but religious in various language groups produced their own versions of the two-year cycle which have been approved by the competent authorities. Volumes of this two-year cycle of Scripture and patristic readings for the Divine Office (Liturgy of the Hours) have been published in Italian, French and German which are used by the secular clergy and laity as well as by religious communities. A good example is the Italian *L'ora dell'ascolto. Lezionario biblico-patristico* (1989) which uses the two-year patristic lectionary developed by the CDW.

The English Two-Year Patristic Lectionary

In the English-speaking world there was an attempt to produce a two-year patristic lectionary led by Henry Ashworth which became the eight volume series of books 'A Word in Season', most recently published by Augustinian Press. The later volumes in this series, however, departed from the strict concept of a 'patristic' lectionary and took the majority of readings from later periods of Church history. Given the special place of the fathers in the history and theology of the Church and the fact that they are part of the patrimony of all Christians, some felt it would be better to have a two-year lectionary which drew most of its readings from the early Church. On this basis Abbot Hugh Gilbert OSB of Pluscarden Abbey in Scotland asked me to create a two-year cycle of patristic readings for use at the Abbey. We did not wish to use the cycle developed by the CDW and utilised in the Italian volume because many of its patristic readings were insufficiently connected to their Scripture readings and because certain patristic books were read in sequence over a number of days (*lectio continua*), a practice that is impractical because it would be interrupted by the readings for Saint's days.

The aim of the Two Year Patristic Lectionary is thus:

To have each patristic reading either related to the Scripture reading or to the season of the Church's year.

To have a reading for every day of the Temporal cycle (i.e. including days such as Christmas, Ascension, Sacred Heart).

To have the vast majority of the 'patristic' readings from the Fathers of the Church, although following medieval precedent writers such as Origen have been included. This gives it ecumenical value.

To use readings from the one-year cycle in the Divine Office and the two-year cycle of Word in Season whenever possible.

To include the texts of a complete two-year Scripture cycle, as approved by the Holy See, for use with the patristic readings.

The lectionary is composed of 772 units, each consisting of a Scripture reading with accompanying reading from the Fathers, and it is arranged in files for the seasons of the Church's year. There are a total of 1544 readings; as each is roughly 500 words long, the total lectionary consists of about three quarters of a million words. All the files are edited, formatted and ready for use. As a commentary by the Fathers of the Church on almost the whole of Scripture this should be a great resource for homilies and catechetics, as well as a text for the liturgy.

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Feast of St Aelred, Abbot of Rievaulx, 2010.

Scripture texts are taken from *The Revised Standard Version*: Old Testament Section, © 1952; New Testament, Second Edition, © 1971; Deuterocanonical Books, © 1957 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Compiled into ebook formats by Fr Richard Healey (rmhealey.com)

Advent Week 1

Sunday of the First Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(Reproving the people: Isaiah 1:1-18)

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: "Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not understand."

Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged.

Why will you still be smitten, that you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds; they are not pressed out, or bound up, or softened with oil.

Your country lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence aliens devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by aliens. And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city.

If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.

Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of he-goats.

"When you come to appear before me, who requires of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and the calling of assemblies – I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.

"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."

A READING FROM THE CATECHESSES OF ST CYRIL OF JERUSALEM

We preach not one coming only of Christ, but a second also, far more glorious than the first. The first revealed the meaning of his patient endurance; the second brings with it the crown of the divine kingdom.

Generally speaking, everything that concerns our Lord Jesus Christ is twofold. His birth is twofold: one, of God before time began; the other, of the Virgin in the fullness of time. His descent is twofold: one, unperceived, like dew falling on the fleece; the other, before the eyes of all, is yet to happen. In his first coming he was wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger. In his second coming he is clothed with light as with a garment. In his first coming he bore the cross, despising its shame; he will come a second time in glory accompanied by the hosts of angels.

It is not enough for us, then, to be content with his first coming; we must wait in hope of his second coming. What we said at his first coming, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, we shall repeat at his last coming. Running out with the angels to meet the Master we shall cry out in adoration, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. The Saviour will come not to be judged again but to call to judgement those who called him to judgement. He who was silent when he was first judged, will indict the malefactors who dared to perpetrate the outrage of the cross, and say, These things you did and I was silent. He first came in the order of divine providence to teach men by gentle persuasion; but when he comes again they will, whether they wish it or not, be subjected to his kingship.

The prophet Malachi has something to say about each of these comings. The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. That is the first coming. Again, of the second coming he says, And the angel of the covenant whom you seek. Behold, the Lord almighty will come: but who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap; he will sit like a refiner and a purifier. Paul pointed to the two comings when he wrote to Titus, The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. You see how he has spoken of the first coming for which he gives thanks and of the second to which we look forward.

Hence it is that by the faith we profess, which has just been handed on to you, we believe in him 'who ascended into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead; and his kingdom will have no end.' Our Lord Jesus Christ will, then, come from heaven. He will come in glory at the end of this world on the last day. Then there will be an end to this world, and this created world will be made new.

St Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechesis 15. 1-3, from The Divine Office vol. I

Monday of the First Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The judgement and salvation of Zion; a gathering of the nations: Isaiah 1:21-27; 2:1-5)

How the faithful city has become a harlot, she that was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. Your silver has become dross, your wine mixed with water. Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Every one loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the fatherless, and the widow's cause does not come to them.

Therefore the Lord says, the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel: "Ah, I will vent my wrath on my enemies, and avenge myself on my foes. I will turn my hand against you and will smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy. And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counsellors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city."

Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness.

The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AELRED OF RIEVAULX

Let us take a look at ourselves and our city. Our way of life is a strongly fortified city surrounded on all sides by sound observances which, like walls and towers, rise up to prevent our enemy from deceiving us and enticing us away from our Emperor's army. What a wall poverty is! How well it defends us against the pride of the world, against harmful and ruinous vanities and superfluities. What a tower silence is! It repels the assaults of contention, quarrelling, dissension, and detraction. What about obedience, humility, cheap clothing? What about a restricted diet? They are walls, they are towers against vices, against the attacks of our enemies. In this city we declare ourselves, not Romans, but angelic beings. For these observances demonstrate that we belong to the fellowship of the angels and are not among the slaves of the Romans. When we make profession of this way of life the words of Isaiah are fulfilled: *They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into sickles*. Then he goes on: *Nation shall not lift sword against nation nor ever again be trained for war*.

Everyday this is being fulfilled literally, not in the treacherous nation of the reprobate that neither does, nor has, nor shall enjoy peace, but in the race of the just which is blessed. Do you not see men, nobles in the world, experiencing conversion to monastic life, laying down their spears and swords and earning their food by manual labour like peasants? But this is better, more obviously and more fully understood as being fulfilled in a spiritual way among every class, poor as well as rich, clerical as well as lay.

Let us think about the sword of which the Lord said: Everyone who takes up the sword will perish by the sword, and the ploughshares by which the earth of our heart is broken, in accordance with the text: Rend your hearts and not your garments. And we shall see at the present time countless persons changing their swords into ploughshares. The sword is wrongdoing. With this sword a person wounds himself before he does anyone else; as Saint Augustine says: 'Every person who is a wrongdoer harms himself before he harms anyone else because, even before he injures the other person, by making up his mind to injure someone else he injures himself, slaying himself with the sword of wrongdoing. This is the sword of which the Lord says to Peter: Everyone who takes up the sword will perish by the sword.

How many there are, brothers, who at the present time are beating this sword of wrongdoing into the ploughshare of compunction! Many who have previously killed their soul with the sword of sin now rend their heart by the compunction of penance. Many today are also changing their spears - that is, the subtlety of their wits by which they used to drag many others down into sin with them - into sickles with which they are reaping a spiritual harvest so that they may come to meet the Lord bearing in their hands the sheaves of justice and salvation.

St Aelred, The Liturgical Sermons 3.7-13, tr. Berkeley & Pennington (2001), from Cistercian Fathers 58

Tuesday of the First Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The judgement of God: Isaiah 2:6-22; 4:2-6)

For thou hast rejected thy people, the house of Jacob, because they are full of diviners from the east and of soothsayers like the Philistines, and they strike hands with foreigners. Their land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures; their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots. Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made. So man is humbled, and men are brought low – forgive them not! Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust from before the terror of the LORD, and from the glory of his majesty. The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the pride of men shall be humbled; and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.

For the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up and high; against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up; and against all the oaks of Bashan; against all the high mountains, and against all the lofty hills; against every high tower, and against every fortified wall; against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the beautiful craft. And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the pride of men shall be brought low; and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. And the idols shall utterly pass away. And men shall enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground, from before the terror of the LORD, and from the glory of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth.

In that day men will cast forth their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats, to enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs, from before the terror of the LORD, and from the glory of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth. Turn away from man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?

In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel. And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, every one who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning. Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy and a pavilion. It will be for a shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.

A READING FROM THE ORATIONS OF ST GREGORY NAZIANZEN

The Son of God himself, who is before all ages, the invisible, the incomprehensible, the bodiless, the beginning from the beginning, the light from the light, source of life and immortality, image of the archetype, immovable seal, unchangeable image, the Father's definition and Word, he it is who came to his own image and took to himself flesh for the

sake of our flesh. Then he united himself with an intelligent soul for my soul's sake, purifying like by like. He took to himself all that is human, except sin. He was conceived by the Virgin who was first purified in body and soul by the Spirit. It was necessary both that childbearing be honoured and that virginity be honoured still more highly.

He came forth as God with what he had taken to himself. Out of two contraries, flesh and spirit, he made one. The Spirit conferred the godhead on the flesh that received it. He who enriches others becomes poor. He took to himself the poverty of my flesh so that I might obtain the riches of his godhead. He who is full empties himself. He emptied himself of his godhead for a brief time so that I might share in his fullness.

What is this wealth of goodness? What is this mystery that touches me? I received the divine image and I did not keep it. He receives my flesh to save the image and grant immortality to the flesh. This, his second communion with us, is far more marvellous than the first. It was necessary that holiness be conferred on man through the humanity God took to himself. In this way, conquering the tyrant by force, he freed us and led us back to himself through his Son, the mediator. The Son brought this about to the honour of the Father to whom in all things, he is seen to defer.

The good shepherd, who lays down his life for his sheep, set out after the strayed sheep, on the mountains and hills on which you used to sacrifice. When he found the stray sheep he carried it on those same shoulders that bore the wood of the cross, and brought it back with him to the life above. The brightest of all lights follows the lamp that goes before him. The Word follows the voice in the wilderness. The bridegroom follows the friend of the bridegroom who is making ready for God a special people, cleansing them with water in anticipation of the Spirit.

We needed an incarnate God who would die that we might live. We died with him that we might be cleansed. We rose again with him because we died with him. We were glorified with him because we rose again with him.

St Gregory Nazianzen, Oratio 45. 9,22,26,28, from The Divine Office vol. I

Wednesday of the First Week in Advent

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST BERNARD

We have come to know a threefold coming of the Lord. The third coming takes place between the other two. They are clearly manifest but the third is not. In the first coming the Lord was seen on earth and lived among men in the days when, as he himself bears witness, they saw and hated him. In his last coming *all flesh shall see the salvation of our God, and they shall look on him whom they have pierced*. The other coming is hidden. In it, only the chosen see him within themselves and their souls are saved. In brief, his first coming was in the flesh in weakness, this intermediary coming is in the spirit and in power, the last coming will be in glory and majesty.

This intermediary coming is like a road leading from the first to the last coming. In the first coming Christ was our redemption, in the last he will appear as our life, in this intermediary coming he is our rest and consolation.

Do not imagine that what we are saying about the intermediary coming is simply our own fabrication. Listen to Christ himself, If a man loves me he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him. I have read elsewhere, The man who fears the Lord will do good, but it is my opinion that more was said of the one who loves, namely that he will keep the words. Where, then, are they to be kept? Without any doubt they are to be kept in the heart, as the prophet says, I have kept your words in my heart, lest I sin against you. Keep the word of God in that way for, blessed are they who keep it. Let it pierce deep into your inmost soul and penetrate your feelings and actions. Eat well and your soul will delight and grow. Do not forget to eat your bread or your heart will wither, but let your soul feast richly.

If you keep the word of God in this way without a doubt you will be kept by it. The Son with the Father will come to you. The great prophet who will renew Jerusalem will come and he will make everything new. The effect of this coming will be that just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man. Just as the old Adam was poured out throughout the whole man and filled him completely, so now let Christ take possession of the whole man, for he created the whole man, he redeemed the whole man and he will glorify the whole man.

St Bernard, Sermon 5 On Advent 1-3, from The Divine Office vol. I

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(Against the Lord's vineyard: Isaiah 5:1-7)

Let me sing for my beloved a love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briers and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry!

Thursday of the First Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(Zion the refuge of the Moabites; the conversion of Ephraim: Isaiah 16:1-5; 17:4-8)

They have sent lambs to the ruler of the land, from Sela, by way of the desert, to the mount of the daughter of Zion. Like fluttering birds, like scattered nestlings, so are the daughters of Moab at the fords of the Arnon. "Give counsel, grant justice; make your shade like night at the height of noon; hide the outcasts, betray not the fugitive; let the outcasts of Moab sojourn among you; be a refuge to them from the destroyer. When the oppressor is no more, and destruction has ceased, and he who tramples under foot has vanished from the land, then a throne will be established in steadfast love and on it will sit in faithfulness in the tent of David one who judges and seeks justice and is swift to do righteousness."

And in that day the glory of Jacob will be brought low, and the fat of his flesh will grow lean. And it shall be as when the reaper gathers standing grain and his arm harvests the ears, and as when one gleanes the ears of grain in the Valley of Rephaim. Gleanings will be left in it, as when an olive tree is beaten – two or three berries in the top of the highest bough, four or five on the branches of a fruit tree, says the LORD God of Israel.

In that day men will regard their Maker, and their eyes will look to the Holy One of Israel; they will not have regard for the altars, the work of their hands, and they will not look to what their own fingers have made, either the Asherim or the altars of incense.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON THE DIATESSARON BY ST EPHREM

To prevent his disciples from questioning him about the time of his coming Christ said, *Of that hour no one knows, neither the angels nor the Son. It is not for you to know the times or moments.* He hid the time from us so that we would be on the watch and so that each of us might think that the coming will happen in his own lifetime. If he had revealed when he was to come again, his coming would have been made pointless and the peoples and ages in which it will take place would no longer yearn for it. He said that he will come again but he did not say exactly when. Hence, all generations and ages live in eager expectation of him. The Lord pointed out the signs of his coming but we have no knowledge of when they will be completed. In many varied ways they have happened and passed away and are still happening. His last coming is, in fact, like his first.

The just and the prophets longed for him, thinking that he was to appear in their day. So, today, each of the faithful wants to receive him in his own lifetime, just because he did not reveal the day of his coming. His chief reason for this was so that no one might think that he who has power and authority over numbers and times is subject himself to a command and an hour. How could that have been hidden from him which he himself had determined, and for which he had given signs? He gave prominence to those signs so that, from that day onwards, all generations and all ages might think his coming would happen in their own time.

Be on the watch. When the body sleeps, nature gets the better of us. Then, our actions do not come from our will but by force from the impulse of nature. When the soul is overcome by a heavy sleep of timidity or sadness, the enemy takes control of it and works through it what it does not want to do. Force dominates nature and the enemy dominates the soul. The Lord's command about vigilance holds good for both parts of man. The body must avoid overpowering sleep and the soul must guard against sluggishness and timidity. In the words of Scripture, Awake you just, and I rose up and am still with you, and, Do not lose heart. That is why we do not lose heart in the ministry which is entrusted to us.

St Ephrem, Commentary On the Diatessaron 18. 15-17, from The Divine Office vol. I

Friday of the First Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The future conversion of the Egyptians and the Assyrians: Isaiah 19:16-25)

In that day the Egyptians will be like women, and tremble with fear before the hand which the LORD of hosts shakes over them. And the land of Judah will become a terror to the Egyptians; every one to whom it is mentioned will fear because of the purpose which the LORD of hosts has purposed against them.

In that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt which speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the LORD of hosts. One of these will be called the City of the Sun.

In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the LORD at its border. It will be a sign and a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt; when they cry to the LORD because of oppressors he will send them a saviour, and will defend and deliver them. And the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians; and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day and worship with sacrifice and burnt offering, and they will make vows to the LORD and perform them. And the LORD will smite Egypt, smiting and healing, and they will return to the LORD, and he will heed their supplications and heal them.

In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians.

In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage."

A READING FROM THE PROSOLOGION OF ST ANSELM

Come now, insignificant man, fly for a moment from your affairs, escape for a little while from the tumult of your thoughts. Put aside now your weighty cares and leave your wearisome toils. Abandon yourself for a little to God and rest for a little in him. Enter into the inner chamber of your soul, shut out everything save God and what can be of help in your quest for him and having locked the door seek him out. Speak now, my whole heart, speak now to God: I seek your face, O Lord, your face I seek.

Come then, Lord my God, teach my heart where and how to seek you, where and how to find you. Lord, if you are not present here, where, since you are absent, shall I look for you? On the other hand, if you are everywhere why then, since you are present, do I not see you? But surely you dwell in light inaccessible. And where is this inaccessible light, or how can I approach the inaccessible light? Or who shall lead me and take me into it that I may see you in it? Again, by what signs, under what aspect, shall I seek you? Never have I seen you, Lord my God, I do not know your face.

What shall he do, most high Lord, what shall this exile do, far away from you as he is? What shall your servant do, tormented by love of you and yet cast off far from your face? He yearns to see you and your face is too away from him. He desires to come close to you, and your dwelling place is inaccessible; he longs to find you and does not know where you are; he is eager to seek you out and he does not know your face.

Lord, you are my God and my Lord, and never have I seen you. You have created me and re-created me and you have given me all the good things I possess, and still I do not know you. In short, I was made in order to see you, and I have not yet accomplished what I was made for.

And you, O Lord, how long? How long, Lord, will you be unmindful of us? How long will you turn your face from us? When will you look upon us and hear us? When will you enlighten our eyes and show your face to us? When will you give yourself again to us? Look upon us, Lord; hear us, enlighten us, show yourself to us. Give yourself to us that it may be well with us, for without you it goes so ill for us. Have pity upon our efforts and our strivings towards you, for we can avail nothing without you.

Teach me to seek you, and reveal yourself to me as I seek, because I can neither seek you if you do not teach me how, nor find you unless you reveal yourself. Let me seek you in desiring you; let me desire you in seeking you; let me find you in loving you; let me love you in finding you.

St Anselm, The Prosologion 1, from The Divine Office vol. I

Saturday of the First Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The watchman announces the destruction of Babylon: Isaiah 21:6-12)

For thus the Lord said to me: "Go, set a watchman, let him announce what he sees. When he sees riders, horsemen in pairs, riders on asses, riders on camels, let him listen diligently, very diligently." Then he who saw cried: "Upon a watchtower I stand, O Lord, continually by day, and at my post I am stationed whole nights. And, behold, here come riders, horsemen in pairs!" And he answered, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the images of her gods he has shattered to the ground." O my threshed and winnowed one, what I have heard from the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, I announce to you.

The oracle concerning Dumah. One is calling to me from Seir, "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?" The watchman says: "Morning comes, and also the night. If you will inquire, inquire; come back again."

A READING FROM THE TREATISE ON THE ADVANTAGE OF PATIENCE BY ST CYPRIAN

The command of our Lord and Master which will save us is: He who endures to the end will be saved. And, if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

The hope of truth and of freedom is already ours, dearly beloved, but if we are to attain truth and freedom in reality we must endure and persevere. The very fact that we are Christians is the substance of faith and hope. But in order that faith and hope may attain their full fruit, there is need of patience. We are pursuing a future, not a present glory, in accordance with the admonition of Paul the Apostle: It is in hope that we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Waiting and patience are necessary if we are to fulfil what we have begun to be, and to receive, through God's unfailing help, what we hope for and believe.

In another passage from the same Apostle, those who are holy, who work at laying up a treasure for themselves in heaven by increasing the capital that God has given them, are instructed to be patient as well: So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap. He urges us that no one give up his work through impatience, that no one stop halfway on the road to praise and glory, being turned aside or overcome by temptations so that past achievement perishes, while what is begun is not brought to completion.

The Apostle, finally, when he would speak of charity, joined to it endurance and patience. Love, he says, is large-souled, love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it thinks no evil; loves all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. He shows that it can tenaciously persevere, for the very reason that it knows how to endure all things.

And in another passage: Forbearing one another, he says, in love, using every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. He proved that neither unity nor peace could be kept unless the brethren treat one another with mutual forbearance, and preserve the bond of concord through patience.

St Cyprian, On the Advantage of Patience 13, 15, from The Divine Office vol. I

Advent Week 2

Sunday of the Second Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(Against the pride of Jerusalem and of Shebna; Isaiah 22:8b-23)

In that day you looked to the weapons of the House of the Forest, and you saw that the breaches of the city of David were many, and you collected the waters of the lower pool, and you counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall. You made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool. But you did not look to him who did it, or have regard for him who planned it long ago.

In that day the Lord GOD of hosts called to weeping and mourning, to baldness and girding with sackcloth; and behold, joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." The LORD of hosts has revealed himself in my ears: "Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven you till you die," says the Lord GOD of hosts.

Thus says the Lord GOD of hosts, "Come, go to this steward, to Shebna, who is over the household, and say to him: What have you to do here and whom have you here, that you have hewn here a tomb for yourself, you who hew a tomb on the height, and carve a habitation for yourself in the rock? Behold, the LORD will hurl you away violently, O you strong man. He will seize firm hold on you, and whirl you round and round, and throw you like a ball into a wide land; there you shall die, and there shall be your splendid chariots, you shame of your master's house. I will thrust you from your office, and you will be cast down from your station. In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your girdle on him, and will commit your authority to his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him like a peg in a sure place, and he will become a throne of honour to his father's house."

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ISAIAH BY EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA

The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight the paths of our God. This makes clear that the events spoken of in the prophecy are to take place not in Jerusalem, but in the wilderness. By this is meant that the glory of the Lord will appear, and the salvation of God will be made known to all flesh.

This prophecy was fulfilled historically and literally, when John the Baptist preached the saving advent of God, in the wilderness by the Jordan, where the salvation of God was in fact seen. For Christ and his glory became known to all when, after he had been baptized, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit came down under the appearance of a dove, and rested upon him. Then was the Father's voice heard in testimony to the Son: This is my Son, my Beloved; listen to him!

These things were said because God was about to come to the wilderness, which had been impenetrable and inaccessible for a whole age. For all the nations were empty of the knowledge of God: access to them had been prohibited to all the men of God and the prophets. That was why that voice ordered a way to be prepared for the Word of God, and the pathless and rugged lands levelled, so that at his coming, our God might find the road clear for his advance. Prepare the way of the Lord: this is the Gospel preaching, the new consolation, the ardent desire that the salvation of God come to the knowledge of all men.

Get you up to a high mountain, O herald of good tidings to Sion, lift up your voice with strength, O herald of good tidings to Jerusalem.

These words fit in very well with the meaning of our first quotation. They make an appropriate reference to the preachers of the Gospel, and announce the coming of God among men, after we have heard of the voice crying in the wilderness. It is fitting that after the prophecy about John the Baptist, the preachers of good tidings be mentioned.

Who then is this Sion, except she who earlier was called Jerusalem? For she too is a mountain, according to that passage of Scripture, The mountain of Sion, where you made your dwelling, and the Apostle says, You have come to Mount Sion. Does this perhaps refer to the band of Apostles, chosen from among the former people of the circumcision?

This Sion and Jerusalem is she who receives the salvation of God. She herself is placed on high on the mountain of God, that is on his Only-begotten Word. To her he gives the command to get up on a high mountain, and preach the word of salvation. But who preaches the good tidings, if not the band of those who make the Gospel known? And what is meant by making the Gospel known? Preaching to all mankind the coming of Christ on earth, and preaching it first to the cities of Judah.

Eusebius of Caesarea, Commentary on Isaiah 40, from The Divine Office vol. I

Monday of the Second Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The Lord is revealed on his day: Isaiah 24:1-18)

Behold, the LORD will lay waste the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants. And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the slave, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the creditor, so with the debtor. The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled; for the LORD has spoken this word.

The earth mourns and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left. The wine mourns, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh. The mirth of the timbrels is stilled, the noise of the jubilation has ceased, the mirth of the lyre is stilled. No more do they drink wine with singing; strong drink is bitter to those who drink it. The city of chaos is broken down, every house is shut up so that none can enter. There is an outcry in the streets for lack of wine; all joy has reached its eventide; the gladness of the earth is banished. Desolation is left in the city, the gates are battered into ruins. For thus it shall be in the midst of the earth among the nations, as when an olive tree is beaten, as at the gleaning when the vintage is done.

They lift up their voices, they sing for joy; over the majesty of the LORD they shout from the west. Therefore in the east give glory to the LORD; in the coastlands of the sea, to the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One. But I say, "I pine away, I pine away. Woe is me! For the treacherous deal treacherously, the treacherous deal very treacherously."

Terror, and the pit, and the snare are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth! He who flees at the sound of the terror shall fall into the pit; and he who climbs out of the pit shall be caught in the snare. For the windows of heaven are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble.

A READING FROM THE LITURGICAL YEAR BY ABBOT PROSPER GUÉRANGER

The earth was in desolation when the Messiah came to deliver and save it. So diminished, so decayed, were truths among men that the race was bordering on its ruin. The knowledge of the true God was becoming rarer as the world got older; idolatry had made everything in creation an object of its adulterous worship; the practical result of a religion which was but gross materialism was frightful immorality; men were forever at war with one another, and the only safeguards of what social order still existed in the world were the execrable laws of slavery and extermination. Among the countless

inhabitants of the globe a mere handful could be found who were seeking God; they were as rare as the olives that remain on the tree after a careful plucking, or as grape-bunches after the vintage is ended. Of this happy few were, among the people of the Jews, those true Israelites whom our Saviour chose for his disciples; and, among the Gentiles, the Magi who came from the East asking for the newborn King, and later on, Cornelius the Centurion, whom the angel of the Lord directed to Saint Peter. But with what faith and joy did they not acknowledge the incarnate God!

Now all this will again happen when the time draws near for the Second Coming of the Messiah. The earth will once more be filled with desolation, and mankind will be again a slave of its self-degradation. The ways of men will again grow corrupt, and this time the malice of their evil will be greater because they will have received him who is the Light of the World, the Word of Life. A profound sadness will sit heavily on all nations, and every effort for their well-being will seem paralysed; they, and the earth they live on, will be conscious of decrepitude; and yet it will never once strike them that the world is drawing to an end. There will be great scandals; stars will fall from heaven: that is, many of those who had been masters in Israel will apostatise, and their light will be changed into darkness. There will be days of temptation, and faith will grow slack, so that when the Son of Man appears faith will hardly be found on the earth.

Grant, O Lord, that we may be in the number of those chosen olives, of those select bunches of grapes, wherewith you will complete the harvest which you gather forever into your house. Preserve intact within us the deposit of faith which you have entrusted to us; let our eye be fixed on that Orient of which the Church speaks to us, and where you are suddenly to appear in your majesty. When that day of yours comes, and we behold your triumph, we shall shout our glad delight, and then, like eagles that cluster round a body, we shall be taken up to meet you in the air, as your Apostle says, and thus shall we be ever with you.

Abbot Prosper Guéranger, The Liturgical Year, Advent, 198-200, from Word in Season 2

Tuesday of the Second Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The Kingdom of God; thanksgiving: Isaiah 24:19 – 25:5)

The earth is utterly broken, the earth is rent asunder, the earth is violently shaken. The earth staggers like a drunken man, it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and will not rise again.

On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth. They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be confounded, and the sun ashamed; for the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before his elders he will manifest his glory.

O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure. For thou hast made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin; the palace of aliens is a city no more, it will never be rebuilt. Therefore strong peoples will glorify thee; cities of ruthless nations will fear thee. For thou hast been a stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat; for the blast of the ruthless is like a storm against a wall, like heat in a dry place. Thou dost subdue the noise of the aliens; as heat by the shade of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is stilled.

A READING FROM THE CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

The Church, to which we are all called in Christ Jesus, and in which we acquire sanctity through the grace of God, will attain her full perfection only in the glory of heaven. Then will come the time of the restoration of all things. Then the human race as well as the entire world, which is intimately related to man and achieves its purpose through him, will be perfectly re-established in Christ.

Christ, having been lifted up from the earth, is drawing all men to himself. Rising from the dead, he sent his life-giving Spirit upon his disciples and through this Spirit has established his body, the Church, as the universal sacrament of salvation. Sitting at the right hand of the Father, he is continually active in the world, leading men to the Church, and through her joining them more closely to himself and making them partakers of his glorious life by nourishing them with his own body and blood.

Therefore, the promised restoration which we are awaiting has already begun in Christ, is carried forward in the mission of the Holy Spirit, and through him continues in the Church. There we learn through faith the meaning, too, of our temporal life, as we perform, with hope of good things to come, the task committed to us in this world by the Father, and work out our salvation.

The final age of the world has already come upon us. The renovation of the world has already been irrevocably decreed and in this age is already anticipated in some way. For even now on this earth the Church is marked with a genuine though imperfect holiness.

However, until there is a new heaven and a new earth where justice dwells, the pilgrim Church in her sacraments and institutions, which pertain to this present time, takes on the appearance of this passing world. She herself dwells among creatures who groan and travail in pain until now and await the revelation of the sons of God.

Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium 48, from The Divine Office vol. I

Wednesday of the Second Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(God's banquet; the song of the redeemed: Isaiah 25:6 – 26:6)

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken.

It will be said on that day, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain, and Moab shall be trodden down in his place, as straw is trodden down in a dung-pit. And he will spread out his hands in the midst of it as a swimmer spreads his hands out to swim; but the LORD will lay low his pride together with the skill of his hands. And the high fortifications of his walls he will bring down, lay low, and cast to the ground, even to the dust.

In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: "We have a strong city; he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks. Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps faith may enter in. Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in thee. Trust in the LORD for ever, for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock. For he has brought low the inhabitants of the height, the lofty city. He lays it low, lays it low to the ground, casts it to the dust. The foot tramples it, the feet of the poor, the steps of the needy."

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ISAIAH BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

Death prevailed and swallowed us up, but God has wiped away the tears from every face. Death had power over Adam, our first parent, because of his sin, and like some savage and cruel beast, it attacked him and carried him off. After that lamentations, wailings, tears, and mourning for the dead were the lot of all who dwelt upon earth. But in Christ they came to an end. Coming to life again on the third day, he trampled death under foot and became the way by which we were to escape corruption. Christ became the firstborn from the dead and the firstfruits of all who had fallen asleep. Now the firstfruits, the one who comes first, will undoubtedly be followed later by others, that is by us. And so sorrow has been turned into joy; we are no longer clad in mourning but girded with a God-given gladness that inspires the jubilant cry: *Death, where is your victory? Grave, where is your sting?*

And in that day they will say: Behold your God in whom we have trusted and exulted. We shall rejoice in our salvation, for God will give rest upon this mountain. In other words, you will recognise the one who fills the cup of gladness with wine and anoints with

sweet oil the inhabitants of the spiritual Zion. You will recognise him to be truly God and by his very nature the Son of God, even though for the life and salvation of all he appeared in the nature of a slave and became in every respect except sin a man like those who live upon earth.

Behold our God in whom we have trusted. We have exulted in our salvation. I think these words may best be taken as spoken by the Israelites, for since they had been brought up on the teachings of Moses and were familiar with all the prophets had foretold, they expected a saviour and redeemer, who is our Lord Jesus Christ come at the appointed time. Prompted by the Spirit to prophesy Zechariah, the father of John, declared that a mighty saviour been raised up for his people, and Simeon likewise when he received the holy infant in his hands said: My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people.

And so, recognizing as the hope of our race the Saviour and Redeemer foretold long before, they will cry out in the words the Prophet: Behold, our God, and will proclaim that God will give rest upon this mountain. The mountain referred to must surely be the Church, for it is there that rest is given. We have heard the words of Christ: Come to me, all who are weary and overburdened and I will give you rest. By faith in Christ we have laid aside the grievous, the insupportable burden of sin. And we have been given rest in another way too, for we have been delivered from dread of the punishment we should have had to suffer for our sins. Nor are these the only effects of the presence in us of the grace of Christ our Saviour. We have in addition the hope of blessings yet to come, the kingdom of heaven, eternal life, and freedom from every cause of distress.

St Cyril of Alexandria, In Is. Lib. 3, t. 1 (PG 70, 563-566), from Word in Season 1

Thursday of the Second Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The song of the righteous; a promise of resurrection: Isaiah 26:7-21)

The way of the righteous is level; thou dost make smooth the path of the righteous. In the path of thy judgments, O LORD, we wait for thee; thy memorial name is the desire of our soul. My soul yearns for thee in the night, my spirit within me earnestly seeks thee. For when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. If favour is shown to the wicked, he does not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he deals perversely and does not see the majesty of the LORD. O LORD, thy hand is lifted up, but they see it not. Let them see thy zeal for thy people, and be ashamed. Let the fire for thy adversaries consume them. O LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us, thou hast wrought for us all our works. O LORD our God, other lords besides thee have ruled over us, but thy name alone we acknowledge. They are dead, they will not live; they are shades, they will not arise; to that end thou hast visited them with destruction and wiped out all remembrance of them. But thou hast increased the nation, O LORD, thou hast increased the nation; thou art glorified; thou hast enlarged all the borders of the land.

O LORD, in distress they sought thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them. Like a woman with child, who writhes and cries out in her pangs, when she is near her time, so were we because of thee, O LORD; we were with child, we writhed, we have as it were brought forth wind. We have wrought no deliverance in the earth, and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen. Thy dead shall live, their bodies shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For thy dew is a dew of light, and on the land of the shades thou wilt let it fall.

Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until the wrath is past. For behold, the LORD is coming forth out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth will disclose the blood shed upon her, and will no more cover her slain.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST PETER CHRYSOLOGUS

As God sees the world tottering to ruin because of fear, he acts unceasingly to bring it back by love, invite it by grace, to hold it by charity and clasp it firmly with affection. Hence, he washes the earth grown old in evil with the avenging flood. He calls Noah the father of a new world, speaks to him gently and gives him kindly confidence. He gives him fatherly instruction about the present and consoles him with good hope for the future. He did not give orders but instead shared in the work of enclosing together in the ark all living creatures on the earth. In this way the love of being together was to banish the fear born of slavery. What had been saved by a shared work was to be preserved by a community of love.

God calls Abraham from among the nations and makes his name great. He also makes him the father of those who believe, accompanies him on his journeys, and takes care of

him among foreign peoples. He enriches him with possessions, honours him with triumphs, and binds himself to him by promises. He snatches him from harm, looks after him hospitably, and astonishes him with a son he had given up hope of ever having. All this he does, so that filled with so many good things, and drawn by the great sweetness of divine love, Abraham might learn to love God and not to be afraid of him, to worship him by love, not by trembling in fear.

He comforts the fugitive Jacob in his sleep. On his way back he calls him to the contest and grasps him with a wrestler's arms. This was to teach him to love and not to fear the father of the contest. He invites Moses to be the liberator of his people, calling him with a fatherly voice and speaking to him father's love.

The events that we have recalled where the hearts of men were fired with the flame of the love of God and their senses flooded to intoxication with that love, led them, wounded by love, to begin to want to look upon God with their bodily eyes. How could the narrowness of human vision enclose God whom the world cannot contain? The law of love has no thought about what will be, what ought to be or what can be. Love knows nothing about judgement, is beyond reason, and is incapable of moderation. Love takes no relief from the fact that its object is beyond possibility, nor is it cured by difficulties.

If love does not attain what it desires, it kills the lover. So, it goes where it is led, not where it ought to go. Love breeds desire that becomes so inflamed as to make its way towards what is forbidden. Love cannot bear not to have sight of what it loves. That is why holy people thought all that they had merited was nothing if they could not see the Lord. That is why love that longs to see God has the spirit of devotion even though it lacks judgement. That is why Moses dares to say, If I have found favour in your sight, show me your face. Finally, that is why the nations fashioned images. In these false things they wanted to see with their own eyes what they were worshipping.

St Peter Chrysologus, Sermon 147, from The Divine Office vol. I

Friday of the Second Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The vineyard of the Lord is cultivated again: Isaiah 27:1-13)

In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.

In that day: "A pleasant vineyard, sing of it! I, the LORD, am its keeper; every moment I water it. Lest any one harm it, I guard it night and day; I have no wrath. Would that I had thorns and briars to battle! I would set out against them, I would burn them up together. Or let them lay hold of my protection, let them make peace with me, let them make peace with me."

In days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots, and fill the whole world with fruit.

Has he smitten them as he smote those who smote them? Or have they been slain as their slayers were slain? Measure by measure, by exile thou didst contend with them; he removed them with his fierce blast in the day of the east wind. Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be expiated, and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin: when he makes all the stones of the altars like chalkstones crushed to pieces, no Asherim or incense altars will remain standing. For the fortified city is solitary, a habitation deserted and forsaken, like the wilderness; there the calf grazes, there he lies down, and strips its branches. When its boughs are dry, they are broken; women come and make a fire of them. For this is a people without discernment; therefore he who made them will not have compassion on them, he that formed them will show them no favour.

In that day from the river Euphrates to the Brook of Egypt the LORD will thresh out the grain, and you will be gathered one by one, O people of Israel. And in that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain at Jerusalem.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ISAIAH BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

Let us make peace with him, let us who are coming make peace. Jacob will put forth buds and Israel will blossom, and the whole world will be filled with his fruit. Like a wise counsellor the blessed prophet spoke before the event to the nations who are coming from all sides. It seems as though he foresaw that the Jews would refuse to give Christ, the Saviour of the world, their love and faith, that the people God loved would prove recalcitrant, that Christ would send his call to the Gentiles instead and through his holy Apostles would now be spreading his nets to catch men from the very ends of the earth.

And so, in the name of these Gentiles who are coming, the prophet says: Israel has abandoned its Master, the firstborn has grown recalcitrant. Israel is denying its faith and

has apostatised from the Redeemer. But as for us who are coming, or who will be coming when the time is ripe – whose coming is nothing less than a passage from darkness into light, from pagan ignorance to the recognition of him who is truly God, from sins to justification – let us make peace with him. Let us destroy the ancient enmity and live at peace with God. Sin has been done away with and Satan rendered powerless; no longer is there anything to stand in our way, to set us at variance with Christ or to separate us from him. Let us then accept his revelation, obey his every wish and word, and bow before the Gospel preaching, for thus we shall make peace with him. Paul also in his great wisdom says to those called from among the Gentiles: Being justified by faith we enjoy peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

After exhorting those who are on their way to Christ, the prophet turns to the holy Apostles themselves. Realising, or rather having learned through the Holy Spirit, that they will win the whole world for God, he almost leaps for joy and overwhelmed by gladness he cries, The children of Jacob will put forth buds; Israel will blossom, and the whole world will be filled with his fruit. The Lord's inspired disciples were born of the blood of Jacob whose new name was Israel, but from the rising of the sun to its setting through all the world their voice has gone out, and their words to the ends of earth. The multitude of the Gentiles has been called to knowledge of God. The prophecy is coming true, for the whole world has been filled with fruit. Whose fruit? Why, surely, Israel's; in the sense that the fruit is borne by those who are the descendants of Israel.

Christian believers are the fruit of the Apostles' toiling. Paul was inspired to call them his joy and his crown; for truly the holy men who initiated us in the faith have cause for boasting and a title to glory in those who through their work have reached salvation.

St Cyril of Alexandria, In Is. Lib. 3, t.1 (PG 598-599), from Word in Season 1

Saturday of the Second Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(God's judgement on Jerusalem: Isaiah 29:1-8)

Ho Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped! Add year to year; let the feasts run their round. Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be moaning and lamentation, and she shall be to me like an Ariel. And I will encamp against you round about, and will besiege you with towers and I will raise siege-works against you. Then deep from the earth you shall speak, from low in the dust your words shall come; your voice shall come from the ground like the voice of a ghost, and your speech shall whisper out of the dust.

But the multitude of your foes shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the ruthless like passing chaff. And in an instant, suddenly, you will be visited by the LORD of hosts with thunder and with earthquake and great noise, with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire. And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, all that fight against her and her stronghold and distress her, shall be like a dream, a vision of the night. As when a hungry man dreams he is eating and awakes with his hunger not satisfied, or as when a thirsty man dreams he is drinking and awakes faint, with his thirst not quenched, so shall the multitude of all the nations be that fight against Mount Zion.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY BLESSED ISAAC OF STELLA

The Son of God is the firstborn among many brethren; though by nature he is the Only-begotten, by grace he united many to himself, to be one with him. For to those who receive him he gave the power of becoming sons of God. When therefore he was made a son of man, he made many to be sons of God. By his love and power he united— as one — many to himself; in themselves, by their birth in the flesh they are many, but by their divine rebirth they are one with him.

For Christ, Head and Body, is one, whole and unique; but this one Christ is of one God in heaven and one mother on earth; this Christ is both many sons and one son. For as Head and Body are one son and many sons, so Mary and the Church are one mother and many; one virgin and many.

Each is mother, each is virgin; both conceive in holiness from the same Spirit; both bring forth a child without sin for God the Father. Mary gave birth to the absolutely sinless Head for the Body; the Church gave birth, in the forgiveness of every sin, to the Body for the Head. Each is the mother of Christ, but neither without the other gives birth to the whole Christ.

And so in the divinely inspired Scriptures, what is said in general of the Virgin Mother the Church, is said individually of the Virgin Mary; and what is said in the particular case of the Virgin Mother Mary, is rightly understood of Virgin Mother Church universally; and when mention is made of either, it is to be understood almost indifferently and conjointly of both.

Every faithful soul, spouse of the Word of God, mother, daughter and sister of Christ is understood to be a virgin with her own form of fertility. This is said of the whole Church, more particularly of Mary and individually of the faithful soul, by the Wisdom itself of God, the Father's Word.

Therefore the text continues, I shall abide in the inheritance of the Lord. The inheritance of the Lord universally is the Church, more particularly Mary, and individually every faithful soul. Christ abode for nine months in the tent of Mary's womb; he abides until the consummation of the ages in the tent of the Church's faith; he will abide for ever and ever in the knowledge and love of the faithful soul.

Bd Isaac of Stella, Sermon 51, from The Divine Office vol. I

Advent Week 3

Sunday of the Third Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(God's judgement is announced: Isaiah 29:13-24)

And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment of men learned by rote; therefore, behold, I will again do marvellous things with this people, wonderful and marvellous; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hid."

Woe to those who hide deep from the LORD their counsel, whose deeds are in the dark, and who say, "Who sees us? Who knows us?" You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay; that the thing made should say of its maker, "He did not make me"; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding"?

Is it not yet a very little while until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest? In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall exult in the Holy One of Israel. For the ruthless shall come to nought and the scoffer cease, and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off, who by a word make a man out to be an offender, and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate, and with an empty plea turn aside him who is in the right.

Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: "Jacob shall no more be ashamed, no more shall his face grow pale. For when he sees his children, the work of my hands, in his midst, they will sanctify my name; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. And those who err in spirit will come to understanding, and those who murmur will accept instruction."

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

John was a voice, but the Lord in the beginning was the Word. John was a voice for a time, Christ the eternal Word in the beginning. Take away the word and what is a voice? When it conveys no meaning, it is just an empty sound. A wordless voice strikes the ear, but it does not make the heart grow.

However, as we engage in building up our heart, let us pay attention to the order of things. If I think of what I want to say, the word is already in my heart. And if I want to talk to you, I look for some means whereby what is in my heart may also be in yours. So, wanting the word, which is already in my heart, to come over to you, and make its way into your heart, I make use of my voice to talk to you. The sound of the voice brings you to understand the word. And when my voice has done this, it ceases; but the word carried to you by the sound is now already in your heart, and has not left mine.

Take this sound then. After the word has passed into your possession, does it not seem to say, 'He must increase, but I must decrease'? The sound of the voice cried out,

performing its service, and then passed away, as though it said 'This joy of mine is now full.' Let us hold on to the word, and not let slip the word we have inwardly conceived.

Do you want to see a transient voice, and the abiding divinity of the Word? Where is John's baptism now? He served his purpose and left. It is Christ's baptism which is now administered. We all believe in Christ, and hope for salvation in him. This is precisely what the voice told us.

Since it is difficult to distinguish the voice and the word, John himself was thought to be Christ. The voice was taken to be the Word. But the voice admitted his identity, lest he might displease the Word. I am not the Christ, he said, nor Elijah, nor the prophet. In reply to, Who are you? he said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, the voice of one breaking the silence. Prepare the way of the Lord, is as though he said: I cry out to lead him into your heart – but he will not condescend to come where I am leading, unless you prepare the way.

What does to prepare the way mean, except to pray as you ought, to be humble-minded? Take an example of humility from John himself. He is thought to be the Christ, but he says he is not what people think. He does not use the mistake of others to feed his own pride. Suppose he had said: I am the Christ. How easily would he have been believed, since that was what people were thinking before he spoke! But he did not say it. He acknowledged who he was, distinguished himself from Christ, humbled himself.

St Augustine, Sermon 293, 3, from The Divine Office vol. I

Monday of the Third Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(Future happiness is promised: Isaiah 30:18-26)

Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you; therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him. Yea, O people in Zion who dwell at Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when he hears it, he will answer you. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it", when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left. Then you will defile your silver-covered graven images and your gold-plated molten images. You will scatter them as unclean things; you will say to them, "Be gone!"

And he will give rain for the seed with which you sow the ground, and grain, the produce of the ground, which will be rich and plenteous. In that day your cattle will graze in large pastures; and the oxen and the asses that till the ground will eat salted provender, which has been winnowed with shovel and fork. And upon every lofty mountain and every high hill there will be brooks running with water, in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall. Moreover the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day when the LORD binds up the hurt of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow.

A READING FROM THE TREATISE ON CONTEMPLATING GOD BY ABBOT WILLIAM OF SAINT-THIERRY

You alone are the Lord. To be ruled by you is for us salvation. For us to serve you is nothing else but to be saved by you!

Now how is it we are saved by you, O Lord, from whom salvation comes and whose blessing is upon your people, if it is not in receiving from you the gift of loving you and being loved by you? That, Lord, is why you willed that the Son of your right hand, the Man whom you made strong for your own self, should be called Jesus, that is to say, Saviour, for he will save his people from their sins. There is no other in whom is salvation except him who taught us to love himself when he first loved us, even to death on the cross. By loving us and holding us so dear he stirred us up to love himself, who first had loved us to the end.

You who first loved us did this, precisely this. You first loved us so that we might love you. And that was not because you needed to be loved by us, but because we could not be what you created us to be, except by loving. Having then in many ways and on various occasions spoken to the fathers by the prophets, now in these last days you have spoken to us in the Son, your Word, by whom the heavens were established, and all the power of them by the breath of his mouth. For you to speak thus in your Son was an open declaration, a setting in the sun as it were, of how much and in what sort of way you

loved us, in that you spared not your own Son, but delivered him up for us all. Yes, and he himself loved us and gave himself for us.

This, Lord, is your word to us, this is your all-powerful message: he who, while all things kept silence (that is, were in the depths of error), came from the royal throne, the stern opponent of error and the gentle apostle of love. And everything he did and everything he said on earth, even the insults, the spitting, the buffeting, the cross and the grave, all that was nothing but yourself speaking in the Son, appealing to us by your love, and stirring up our love for you.

For you, O God, our souls' creator, knew that this affection cannot be forced in the souls of the sons of men, but has to be evoked. And this is for the obvious reason that there is no freedom where there is compulsion, and, where freedom is lacking, so too is righteousness.

Now we on our part hold you dear by the affection of love which you have implanted in us. But, O you who are One supremely good and the ultimate Goodness, your love is your goodness, the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son! From the beginning of creation he has been borne upon the waters – on the tossing souls of men, that is – offering himself to all, drawing all to himself. And breathing into and upon them, by warding off things harmful and supplying things useful, he unites God to us and us to God.

Abbot William of Saint-Thierry, On Contemplating God 9-11, from The Divine Office vol. I

Tuesday of the Third Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(Jerusalem's salvation from the Assyrians: Isaiah 30:27-33; 31:4-9)

Behold, the name of the LORD comes from far, burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke; his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue is like a devouring fire; his breath is like an overflowing stream that reaches up to the neck; to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction, and to place on the jaws of the peoples a bridle that leads astray.

You shall have a song as in the night when a holy feast is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one sets out to the sound of the flute to go to the mountain of the LORD, to the Rock of Israel. And the LORD will cause his majestic voice to be heard and the descending blow of his arm to be seen, in furious anger and a flame of devouring fire, with a cloudburst and tempest and hailstones. The Assyrians will be terror-stricken at the voice of the LORD, when he smites with his rod. And every stroke of the staff of punishment which the LORD lays upon them will be to the sound of timbrels and lyres; battling with brandished arm he will fight with them. For a burning place has long been prepared; yea, for the king it is made ready, its pyre made deep and wide, with fire and wood in abundance; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone, kindles it.

For thus the LORD said to me, As a lion or a young lion growls over his prey, and when a band of shepherds is called forth against him is not terrified by their shouting or daunted at their noise, so the LORD of hosts will come down to fight upon Mount Zion and upon its hill. Like birds hovering, so the LORD of hosts will protect Jerusalem; he will protect and deliver it, he will spare and rescue it.

Turn to him from whom you have deeply revolted, O people of Israel. For in that day every one shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which your hands have sinfully made for you.

“And the Assyrian shall fall by a sword, not of man; and a sword, not of man, shall devour him; and he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be put to forced labour. His rock shall pass away in terror, and his officers desert the standard in panic,” says the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.

A READING FROM A HOMILY BY ST BERNARD

See, the name of the Lord is coming from afar, says the prophet. Who could doubt that something tremendous was responsible, when sublime majesty deigned to come down from such a distance to so unworthy a place? Something tremendous it assuredly was: great mercy, abundant compassion, and overwhelming charity were the cause.

For what purpose did he come, according to our faith? It will be no arduous task to find out, since both his words and his deeds clearly proclaim the reason for his coming. It was to search for the hundredth sheep which had strayed that he hastened down from the mountains; he came for our sake so that his tender mercies and his wonderful dealings with the children of Adam might more evidently give glory to the Lord. How astonishing the condescension on the part of God who searches; how great the

value of those he sought! If we should wish to boast of it we shall not be acting foolishly; not that we can claim to be anything as of ourselves, but because he who made us has made us worth so much. All riches, all the glory of the world and whatever in it is an object of desire pale before this glory, compared with which they are nothing. Lord, what is man that you make so much of him and set your heart on him?

All the same I should like to know what it means that he came to us, rather than our going to him. The need was ours, and it is not customary for the rich to go in search of the poor, even if they wish to make them some gift. It would have been seemly, therefore, for us to go to him, but there was a double hindrance. First, our eyes were dim, whereas he dwells in unapproachable light. Second, lying paralysed on our pallet as we were, we lacked the strength to reach the summit of the Godhead. So our most kindly Saviour, the physician of souls, came down from his great height and tempered his glory to our weak eyes. He shielded himself in a lantern when he took to himself that glorious body entirely free from all stain. This body assuredly is that very swift and shining cloud upon which the prophet foretold that he would ride to descend into Egypt.

St Bernard, Sermo 1 de Adventu Domini 7-8 (PL 183, 38-39), from Word in Season 1

Wednesday of the Third Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The Kingdom of true justice: Isaiah 31:1-3; 32:1-8)

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the LORD! And yet he is wise and brings disaster, he does not call back his words, but will arise against the house of the evildoers, and against the helpers of those who work iniquity. The Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses are flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD stretches out his hand, the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall, and they will all perish together.

Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice. Each will be like a hiding place from the wind, a covert from the tempest, like streams of water in a dry place, like the shade of a great rock in a weary land. Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed, and the ears of those who hear will hearken. The mind of the rash will have good judgment, and the tongue of the stammerers will speak readily and distinctly. The fool will no more be called noble, nor the knave said to be honourable. For the fool speaks folly, and his mind plots iniquity: to practice ungodliness, to utter error concerning the LORD, to leave the craving of the hungry unsatisfied, and to deprive the thirsty of drink. The knaveries of the knave are evil; he devises wicked devices to ruin the poor with lying words, even when the plea of the needy is right. But he who is noble devises noble things, and by noble things he stands.

A READING FROM THE TREATISE AGAINST HERESIES BY ST IRENAEUS

There is one God, who by his Word and Wisdom made and ordered all things. His Word is our Lord Jesus Christ who in these last times became man among men, that he might unite the end with the beginning, that is, Man with God. Therefore the prophets who received from this same Word their prophetic gift, proclaimed his advent in the flesh, by which was effected the mingling and uniting of God and man according to the Father's pleasure.

For the Word of God foretold from the beginning that God would be seen by men and would live with them on earth and converse with them; that he would be present with his creatures to bring salvation to them and to be perceived by them; that he would free us from the hands of those who hate us, that is, from the whole spirit of transgression; and would make us serve him all our days in holiness and righteousness; that man, taking to himself the Spirit of God, would pass to the glory of the Father. The prophets therefore indicated beforehand that God would be seen by men; as the Lord also says, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

I grant that in respect of his greatness and marvellous glory, no man shall see God and live, for the Father is incomprehensible. But in respect of his love and kindly mercy, and of his infinite power, he grants even this to such as love him, I mean, to see God, as the

prophets also foretold. Because the things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

Man does not see God by his own powers; but God of his own will appears to men, to whom he wills, and when he wills, and as he wills. For God can do all things: he was seen in former times prophetically through the Spirit, he is seen in the Son by adoption, and he will be seen in the kingdom of heaven as Father. The Spirit prepares man for the Son of God, the Son brings him to the Father, and the Father bestows on him incorruptibility for eternal life, which comes to everyone from his beholding God.

As those who see the light are in the light, and partake of its splendour, so those who see God are in God, partaking of his splendour. But God's splendour gives life; those therefore who see God will partake of life.

St Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses Bk 4, 20, 4-5, from The Divine Office vol. I

Thursday of the Third Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(Salvation is promised; the expectation of those who believe: Isaiah 32:14 – 33:6)

For the palace will be forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and the watchtower will become dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks; until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust for ever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places. And the forest will utterly go down, and the city will be utterly laid low. Happy are you who sow beside all waters, who let the feet of the ox and the ass range free.

Woe to you, destroyer, who yourself have not been destroyed; you treacherous one, with whom none has dealt treacherously! When you have ceased to destroy, you will be destroyed; and when you have made an end of dealing treacherously, you will be dealt with treacherously.

O LORD, be gracious to us; we wait for thee. Be our arm every morning, our salvation in the time of trouble. At the thunderous noise peoples flee, at the lifting up of thyself nations are scattered; and spoil is gathered as the caterpillar gathers; as locusts leap, men leap upon it.

The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness; and he will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is his treasure.

A READING FROM THE CONSTITUTION ON DIVINE REVELATION OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

God, who creates and maintains all things by his Word, provides men with constant evidence of himself in created realities. And furthermore, wishing to open up the way to heavenly salvation, he manifested himself to our first parents from the very beginning. After the fall, he buoyed them up with the hope of salvation, by promising redemption; and he has never ceased to take care of the human race. For he wishes to give eternal life to all those who seek salvation by patience in well-doing. In his own time God called Abraham, and made him into a great nation. After the era of the Patriarchs, he taught this nation, by Moses and the Prophets, to recognize him as the only living and true God, as a provident Father and just Judge. He taught them, too, to look for the promised Saviour. And so, throughout the ages, he prepared the way for the Gospel.

After God had spoken many times and in various ways through the Prophets, in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son. For he sent his Son, the eternal Word who enlightens all men, to dwell among men and to tell them about the inner life of God. Hence, Jesus Christ, sent as a man among men, speaks the words of God, and accomplishes the saving work which the Father gave him to do. As a result, he himself

- to see whom is to see the Father - completed and perfected Revelation and confirmed it with divine guarantees. He did this by the total fact of his presence and self-manifestation - by words and works, signs and miracles, but above all by his death and glorious resurrection from the dead, and finally by sending the Spirit of truth. He revealed that God was with us, to deliver us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to eternal life.

The Christian economy, therefore, since it is the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Second Vatican Council, Dei Verbum 3-4, from The Divine Office vol. I

Friday of the Third Week in Advent

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(Future salvation: Isaiah 33:7-24)

Behold, the valiant ones cry without; the envoys of peace weep bitterly. The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceases. Covenants are broken, witnesses are despised, there is no regard for man. The land mourns and languishes; Lebanon is confounded and withers away; Sharon is like a desert; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their leaves.

“Now I will arise,” says the LORD, “now I will lift myself up; now I will be exalted. You conceive chaff, you bring forth stubble; your breath is a fire that will consume you. And the peoples will be as if burned to lime, like thorns cut down, that are burned in the fire.”

Hear, you who are far off, what I have done; and you who are near, acknowledge my might. The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: “Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?” He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, who despises the gain of oppressions, who shakes his hands, lest they hold a bribe, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil, he will dwell on the heights; his place of defence will be the fortresses of rocks; his bread will be given him, his water will be sure.

Your eyes will see the king in his beauty; they will behold a land that stretches afar. Your mind will muse on the terror: “Where is he who counted, where is he who weighed the tribute? Where is he who counted the towers?” You will see no more the insolent people, the people of an obscure speech which you cannot comprehend, stammering in a tongue which you cannot understand. Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts! Your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet habitation, an immovable tent, whose stakes will never be plucked up, nor will any of its cords be broken. But there the LORD in majesty will be for us a place of broad rivers and streams, where no galley with oars can go, nor stately ship can pass. For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our ruler, the LORD is our king; he will save us.

Your tackle hangs loose; it cannot hold the mast firm in its place, or keep the sail spread out.

Then prey and spoil in abundance will be divided; even the lame will take the prey. And no inhabitant will say, “I am sick”; the people who dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity.

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON PSALM 37 BY ST AUGUSTINE

I cried aloud with the groaning of my heart. There is a hidden groaning which human ears cannot catch. However, if a man’s heart is so obsessed with the thought of some longed-for object that his inward suffering is expressed very audibly, somebody will want to know the reason, and will say to himself: ‘Perhaps such and such a thing has caused his grief; perhaps this or that is the matter with him.’ Who can know, except he in whose sight and hearing the suppliant groans? The reason why the psalmist says: *I cried*

aloud with the groaning of my heart is that when men hear another man groaning, what they hear is often the groaning of the flesh, they do not hear the groaning of the heart.

Now who has understood why he cried aloud? He goes on: And all my desire is before you. Not indeed before men, who cannot see into the heart: but before you is all my desire. Set your desire on him, and the Father who sees in secret will repay you. This very desire of yours is your prayer. If your desire is continual, your prayer is continual too. It was not for nothing that the Apostle said: Pray without ceasing. Was it so that we should be continuously on our knees, or prostrating our bodies or raising our hands that he says: Pray without ceasing? If that is how we say our prayers, then my opinion is that we cannot do that without ceasing.

But there is another and interior way of praying without ceasing, and that is the way of desire. Whatever else you are doing, if you long for that sabbath, you are not ceasing to pray. If you do not want to cease praying, do not cease longing. Your unceasing desire is your unceasing voice. You will lapse into silence if you lose your longing. Who did lapse into silence? Those of whom it was said: Because wickedness is multiplied, the charity of many will grow cold. The coldness of charity is the heart's silence; its glowing ardour, the heart's outcry. If charity is always present, you are ever crying out; if always crying out, you are ever longing; if longing, you have not forgotten repose.

And all my desire is before you. What if the desire is before him and the actual groaning is not? Would it be possible, since the groaning is merely the expression of the desire? Therefore the psalmist continues: And my groaning is not hidden from you. From you it is not hidden; from many a human being it is. Sometimes one hears a lowly servant of God crying: And my groaning is hidden from you. And sometimes one sees the same servant of God with a cheerful face: has that desire perished from his heart? No; if the desire is always within, so too is the groaning: it does not always come to the ears of men, but it is never absent from the ears of God.

St Augustine, En. in Ps. 37, 13-14, from The Divine Office vol. I

Advent II: 17 – 24 December

17 December

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The salvation of Israel through Cyrus: Isaiah 45:1-13)

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and ungird the loins of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: "I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut asunder the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name."

"For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I gird you, though you do not know me, that men may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe, I am the LORD, who do all these things."

"Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation may sprout forth, and let it cause righteousness to spring up also; I the LORD have created it."

"Woe to him who strives with his Maker, an earthen vessel with the potter! Does the clay say to him who fashions it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles'? Woe to him who says to a father, 'What are you begetting?' or to a woman, 'With what are you in travail?'"

Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: "Will you question me about my children, or command me concerning the work of my hands? I made the earth, and created man upon it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host. I have aroused him in righteousness, and I will make straight all his ways; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward," says the LORD of hosts.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ISAIAH BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

Isaiah speaks at some length of Cyrus, king of the Medes and Persians. Raised up against the Chaldeans, he was urged on by God himself, who opened their bronze doors to him and shattered their iron bars. Having conquered the land of Babylon and laid it waste, Cyrus released enslaved Israel from captivity and caused the foundations of the Temple in Jerusalem to be laid.

But this is only part of the story, for after indicating that the rejoicing and the release from captivity were for those of Israelite blood and for them alone, Isaiah goes on to apply these images to Emmanuel, who was consecrated by God the Father to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind; that is to say, to deliver those inescapably bound by the chains of their own sins, to declare them free from the devil's

tyranny, and so to prepare the inhabitants of the earth to return to himself, to be led by him to God the Father.

He has become the mediator between God and men, and through him we have been reconciled in the one Spirit to the Father. As Scripture says, He is our peace. He himself has rebuilt his own holy Temple, which is the Church, and has taken her to himself as a pure virgin, having neither spot nor wrinkle, nor any such imperfection, for she is holy and without fault. Thus one can very easily see in Cyrus and his deeds an image of the divine blessings bestowed by God upon all the inhabitants of the earth.

Let heaven rejoice, says Isaiah, meaning the angels and archangels who inhabit the heavenly city, possessors of that radiant and awesome dwelling place. Now the reason, surely, for the heavenly spirits' rejoicing is because through Christ, the Saviour of us all, earth's erring inhabitants have been converted to God, because the blind have received sight; in a word, because the lost have been saved. If they rejoice over one repentant sinner, how can there be any doubt of their joy at seeing the world saved? Let heaven rejoice then, says Scripture, and let the clouds rain down justice. Let earth open and bring forth both mercy and justice.

Mercy is the love which is the fulfilment of the law, for it goes hand in hand with the justice of the Gospel that Christ himself teaches us and bestows on us. It could also be said that mercy and justice coming forth and growing from the earth is our Lord Jesus Christ himself. If anyone thinks it strange for the earth to be commanded to bring forth justice, let him remember that the psalmist also says that God the Father and Emmanuel himself wrought justice in the midst of the earth. For Christ did not bring his own body down to us from heaven, but was born in the body of a woman who was one of the inhabitants of earth. So when he is said to be the fruit and offspring of the earth you must understand this to mean that according to the flesh he was born of one of those fashioned from the earth, from a woman especially chosen for this service.

St Cyril of Alexandria, In Is. Lib. 4, oratio 2 (PG 70, 955-958), from Word in Season 1

18 December

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The Lord opposes the idols of Babylon: Isaiah 46:1-13)

Bel bows down, Nebo stoops, their idols are on beasts and cattle; these things you carry are loaded as burdens on weary beasts. They stoop, they bow down together, they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity.

“Hearken to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am He, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.

“To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike? Those who lavish gold from the purse, and weigh out silver in the scales, hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; then they fall down and worship! They lift it upon their shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble.

“Remember this and consider, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose’, calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.

“Hearken to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from deliverance: I bring near my deliverance, it is not far off, and my salvation will not tarry; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.”

A READING FROM THE LETTER TO DIOGNETUS

No man has ever seen God or known him. He himself has given us the revelation of himself. But he has only revealed himself to faith, by which alone are we permitted to know God. For God, though Lord and architect of the whole world, who made and set in order each single thing that is, was something more than loving towards mankind, he was long-suffering as well. So he has always been, and is, and shall be: merciful, kind, slow to anger, and true. There is none so good as he. He conceived a design, great and beyond all telling, and he imparted it to none but his son alone.

So long as he maintained this secrecy, and kept his own wise counsel, it seemed as though he had no care for us and had put us out of his mind. But as soon as he disclosed it, through his beloved Son, and revealed what had been planned from the beginning, then straightaway he poured out all the fullness of his bounty upon us, permitting us to share his benefactions and to see and know such blessings as none of us could ever have looked for.

Next, after making these dispositions in his mind with the Son, he left us to live for the meanwhile as we pleased, giving free rein to our unruly instincts and being at the mercy

of sensuality and lust. This was not because he took any pleasure in those sins of ours; all he was doing was to put up with them. It was not that he was sanctioning that former era of lawlessness. Rather, he was preparing this present era of righteousness. His purpose was that we, who had been proved by our own works unworthy to achieve life, might in these days be made worthy of it by the goodness of God. After clearly showing our inability to enter into the kingdom of God by our own power, we might now by God's power be made able.

Accordingly, when our iniquity had come to its full height, and it was clear beyond all mistaking that retribution in the form of punishment and death must be looked for, the hour arrived in which God had determined to make known from then onwards his loving-kindness and his power.

How surpassing is the love and tenderness of God! In that hour, instead of hating us and rejecting us and remembering our wickedness against us, he showed how longsuffering he is. He bore with us, and in pity he took our sins upon himself. He gave his own Son as a ransom for us – the holy for the wicked, the sinless for sinners, the just for the unjust, the incorrupt for the corrupt, the immortal for the mortal. For was there, indeed, anything except his righteousness that could have availed to cover our sins? In whom could we, in our lawlessness and ungodliness, have been made holy, but in the Son of God alone?

O sweet exchange! O unsearchable working! O benefits unhopèd for! – that the wickedness of multitudes should thus be hidden in the One who is holy, and the holiness of One should sanctify the countless wicked!

Epistle to Diognetus 8, 5-9, 6, from The Divine Office vol. I

19 December

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(Lament over Babylon: Isaiah 47:1, 3b-15)

Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans! For you shall no more be called tender and delicate. I will take vengeance, and I will spare no man. Our Redeemer—the LORD of hosts is his name – is the Holy One of Israel.

Sit in silence, and go into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans; for you shall no more be called the mistress of kingdoms. I was angry with my people, I profaned my heritage; I gave them into your hand, you showed them no mercy; on the aged you made your yoke exceedingly heavy. You said, “I shall be mistress for ever”, so that you did not lay these things to heart or remember their end.

Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your heart, “I am, and there is no one besides me; I shall not sit as a widow or know the loss of children”: These two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day; the loss of children and widowhood shall come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your enchantments.

You felt secure in your wickedness, you said, “No one sees me”; your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray, and you said in your heart, “I am, and there is no one besides me.” But evil shall come upon you, for which you cannot atone; disaster shall fall upon you, which you will not be able to expiate; and ruin shall come on you suddenly, of which you know nothing.

Stand fast in your enchantments and your many sorceries, with which you have laboured from your youth; perhaps you may be able to succeed, perhaps you may inspire terror. You are wearied with your many counsels; let them stand forth and save you, those who divide the heavens, who gaze at the stars, who at the new moons predict what shall befall you.

Behold, they are like stubble, the fire consumes them; they cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame. No coal for warming oneself is this, no fire to sit before! Such to you are those with whom you have laboured, who have trafficked with you from your youth; they wander about each in his own direction; there is no one to save you.

A READING FROM AGAINST HERESIES BY ST IRENAEUS

God is man’s glory, but it is man who receives the effect of God’s activity, who is the recipient of all God’s wisdom and power. Just as a doctor proves himself in his patients, so God reveals himself in men. That is why Paul states: *God has imprisoned all in unbelief that he may have mercy on all*. He is speaking here of man, who was excluded from immortality as a result of his disobedience to God, but then obtained mercy through the Son of God by receiving adoption in him.

Without pride or boastfulness, man should have a true evaluation of created things and of their creator, that is, of God, the supremely powerful, who gave existence to all things. He should abide in love of God, in submission, in thanksgiving. If he does, he will receive a greater glory from God and will go on until he becomes like the one who died for him.

He too was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, in order to condemn sin and, as something now condemned, to expel it from the flesh. He came to invite man to become himself, commissioning him to imitate God, placing him under obedience to the Father so as to see God, giving him the power to apprehend the Father. He who did this is the Word of God, who dwelt in man and became Son of man in order to accustom man to receive God and accustom God to dwell in man, in accordance with the Father's will.

That is why he is a sign of our salvation, Immanuel, born of the Virgin, a sign given us by the Lord himself. It was the Lord who saved men, because they were incapable of saving themselves. When Paul says: I know that nothing good dwells in my flesh, he is affirming this weakness of man, and he is indicating that the 'good' which is our salvation comes not from ourselves but from God. In another passage he says: Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?, and then he introduces the rescuer: the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah too makes the same point: Be strong, weak hands and feeble knees; pluck up your courage, faint-hearted. Be strong, do not be afraid. See, our God is coming with justice and with retribution; he is coming himself to save us – it is not by ourselves but by the help of God that we are saved.

St Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 3., 20, 2-3, from The Divine Office vol. I

20 December

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(God alone is the Lord of the future: Isaiah 48:1-11)

Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and who came forth from the loins of Judah; who swear by the name of the LORD, and confess the God of Israel, but not in truth or right. For they call themselves after the holy city, and stay themselves on the God of Israel; the LORD of hosts is his name.

“The former things I declared of old, they went forth from my mouth and I made them known; then suddenly I did them and they came to pass. Because I know that you are obstinate, and your neck is an iron sinew and your forehead brass, I declared them to you from of old, before they came to pass I announced them to you, lest you should say, ‘My idol did them, my graven image and my molten image commanded them.’

“You have heard; now see all this; and will you not declare it? From this time forth I make you hear new things, hidden things which you have not known. They are created now, not long ago; before today you have never heard of them, lest you should say, ‘Behold, I knew them.’ You have never heard, you have never known, from of old your ear has not been opened. For I knew that you would deal very treacherously, and that from birth you were called a rebel.

“For my name’s sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. Behold, I have refined you, but not like silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.”

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON PSALM 49 BY ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

God will come openly, says the Prophet. Do you wonder whether he ever came in another way? Indeed he did. His first coming was without a sound, hidden from almost everyone and for many years unnoticed. But why do I say ‘almost everyone’ when even the Virgin carrying him had no knowledge of the mystery, his own relatives did not believe in him, and the man presumed to be his father did not regard him as being anyone very exalted?

I speak of men, but even the devil himself did not know who he was. If he had known he would not, many years later on the mountain, have asked him if he was the Son of God and repeated the question three times. So John was going to make him known, but Jesus said to him: Let it be so for now, ‘Say nothing for the present.’ The time has not yet come to reveal the mystery of my incarnation, which I still wish to keep hidden from the devil. Keep silence. It is fitting that we should.

Christ came to earth as a shepherd seeking his lost sheep, and in order to catch the rebellious creature he kept himself hidden. As a doctor takes care not to alarm his patient at the outset, so the Saviour did not wish to make himself known immediately, but only

little by little. Referring to this silent coming the Prophet says: He shall descend like rain on a fleece, like raindrops on the earth.

He did not come with a crash of thunder amid a great upheaval, earthquakes, flashes of lightning, and disturbance in the heavens. He did not come with an escort of angels, tearing the heavens apart to descend upon the clouds. No, he came without a sound. For nine months he was carried in the womb of the Virgin. He was born as the son of a carpenter and laid in a manger. He was plotted against while still in swaddling-bands and with his mother he fled into Egypt. Later, after the death of the perpetrator of such great crimes, he returned and continued to live a wandering life, being to all appearance just an ordinary man.

But this is not how he will come the second time. That coming will be so open that there will be no need to announce it. How open it will be he himself revealed when he said: If they say he is in the inner room, do not go in; if they say he is in the desert, do not go out. For as the lightning flashes across the sky, from east to west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. It will manifest and proclaim itself.

St John Chrysostom, On Psalm 49 1-2 (Bareille, t.9, 286-288), from Word in Season 1

21 December

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The new exodus: Isaiah 48:12-21; 49: 9b-13)

“Hearken to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am He, I am the first, and I am the last. My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand forth together.

“Assemble, all of you, and hear! Who among them has declared these things? The LORD loves him; he shall perform his purpose on Babylon, and his arm shall be against the Chaldeans. I, even I, have spoken and called him, I have brought him, and he will prosper in his way. Draw near to me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there.” And now the Lord GOD has sent me and his Spirit.

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go. O that you had hearkened to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea; your offspring would have been like the sand, and your descendants like its grains; their name would never be cut off or destroyed from before me.”

Go forth from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it forth to the end of the earth; say, “The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!” They thirsted not when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he cleft the rock and the water gushed out.

“They shall feed along the ways, on all bare heights shall be their pasture; they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall smite them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them. And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be raised up. Lo, these shall come from afar, and lo, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene.” Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the LORD has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his afflicted.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ST LUKE’S GOSPEL BY ST AMBROSE

When the angel was announcing the mysteries to the Virgin Mary, he also told her as a precedent, to help her to believe, that an old and barren woman had conceived. This was to show that God can do everything that pleases him. When Mary heard this she hurried off to the hill country. This was not because she disbelieved the oracle, or was uncertain about the messenger, or doubted the precedent offered, but because she was overjoyed with desire, eager to fulfil a duty of piety, and impelled by gladness.

Where could she who was filled with God hasten to, except to the heights? There is no such thing as delay in the working of the Holy Spirit. The arrival of Mary and the blessings of the Lord’s presence are also speedily declared. As soon as Elizabeth heard the

greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and she was filled with the Holy Spirit. Notice the choice of words and their precise meaning. Elizabeth was the first to hear the voice; but John was the first to experience grace. She heard according to the order of nature; he leaped because of the mystery. She recognized the arrival of Mary; he the arrival of the Lord. The woman recognized the woman's arrival; the child, that of the child. The women speak of grace; the babies make it effective from within to the advantage of their mothers who, by a double miracle, prophesy under the inspiration of their babies.

The infant leaped, the mother was filled with the Spirit. The mother was not filled before the son, but after the son was filled with the Holy Spirit, he filled his mother too. John leaped and the spirit of Mary rejoiced. As John leaped, Elizabeth is filled, but we know that Mary was not filled but her spirit rejoiced. For he who cannot be comprehended was working in his mother's womb in ways beyond comprehension. Elizabeth was filled with the Spirit after she had conceived, and Mary before. Blessed are you, she said, who believed.

But you too, who have heard and have believed, are blessed. Every soul who has believed both conceives and generates the Word of God and recognizes his works. Let the soul of Mary be in each one of you to magnify the lord. Let the spirit of Mary be in each one to exult in God. According to the flesh one woman is the mother of Christ, but according to faith, Christ is the fruit of all men. Every soul, indeed, receives the Word of God, provided it remains unstained and free from sin and preserves its chastity in unviolated modesty. The soul who has been able to reach this state magnifies the Lord, as Mary's soul magnified the Lord and her spirit rejoiced in God her saviour.

St Ambrose, In Ev. Luc. 2, 19, 22-23, 26-27, from The Divine Office vol. I

22 December

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The restoration of Zion: Isaiah 49:14 – 50:1)

But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me.” “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me. Your builders outstrip your destroyers, and those who laid you waste go forth from you. Lift up your eyes round about and see; they all gather, they come to you. As I live, says the LORD, you shall put them all on as an ornament, you shall bind them on as a bride does.

“Surely your waste and your desolate places and your devastated land – surely now you will be too narrow for your inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up will be far away. The children born in the time of your bereavement will yet say in your ears: ‘The place is too narrow for me; make room for me to dwell in.’ Then you will say in your heart: ‘Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away, but who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; whence then have these come?’”

Thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I will lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders. Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who wait for me shall not be put to shame.” Can the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of a tyrant be rescued? Surely, thus says the LORD: “Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued, for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children. I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine. Then all flesh shall know that I am the LORD your Saviour, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”

Thus says the LORD: “Where is your mother’s bill of divorce, with which I put her away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was put away.”

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ST LUKE’S GOSPEL BY ST BEDE

Mary said: My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour. The Lord, she said, has exalted me with a great and unheard of gift, which cannot be explained in any words and can scarcely be understood by the deepest feelings of the heart. And so I offer up all the strength of my soul in thanksgiving and praise. In my joy I pour out all my life, all my feeling, all my understanding in contemplating the greatness of him who is without end. My spirit rejoices in the eternal divinity of Jesus, my Saviour, whom I have conceived in time and bear in my body.

For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. Mary looks back to the beginning of the canticle, to the words: My soul glorifies the Lord. Only the soul for whom the Lord does great things can glorify and praise him as he deserves; only that soul can call on those who share the same desire and intent: Glorify the Lord with me. Together let us praise his name. The man who refuses to glorify with all his power the Lord whom he knows, and to keep his name holy, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. God's name is called holy because he transcends the whole of creation by the loftiness of his unparalleled power, and because he is set apart from all those things which he has made.

He has lifted up Israel, his child, remembering his mercy. In beautiful fashion Mary calls Israel the child of the Lord, for Israel has been lifted up by him to be saved, seeing that Israel was obedient and humble, in accordance with the words of Hosea: Because Israel was a child, I loved him. Now anyone who refuses to humble himself simply cannot be saved, nor can he say with the prophet: Behold, the Lord is my helper; it is God who lifts up my life. But whoever humbles himself like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever. Mary does not mean the natural but the spiritual posterity of Abraham; that is, not those who have only descended from him physically, but those who follow in the steps of his faith, whether they are circumcised or uncircumcised. For he too believed while uncircumcised and it was considered as justifying him. The coming of a Saviour therefore was promised to Abraham and to his posterity for ever, that is, to the children of the promise, to whom are addressed the words: If you belong to Christ, then you are the posterity of Abraham, the heirs he was promised.

It was right that the mothers of both the Lord and John should anticipate the birth of their children in prophecy. Just as sin began from women, so too it was fitting that blessings should spring from women, and that life which was lost through the deception of one woman, should be given back to the world by these two women who rival each other in giving praise.

St Bede, In Ev. Luc. 1, 46-55, from The Divine Office vol. I

23 December

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(Salvation is promised to the children of Abraham: Isaiah 51:1-11)

“Hearken to me, you who pursue deliverance, you who seek the LORD; look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for when he was but one I called him, and I blessed him and made him many. For the LORD will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song.

“Listen to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go forth from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples. My deliverance draws near speedily, my salvation has gone forth, and my arms will rule the peoples; the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be for ever, and my deliverance will never be ended.

“Hearken to me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear not the reproach of men, and be not dismayed at their revilings. For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool; but my deliverance will be for ever, and my salvation to all generations.”

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not thou that didst cut Rahab in pieces, that didst pierce the dragon? Was it not thou that didst dry up the sea, the waters of the great deep; that didst make the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over? And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

A READING FROM THE TREATISE AGAINST THE HERESY OF NOETUS BY ST HIPPOLYTUS

There is one God, and we can come to know him only through sacred Scripture. So then, let us look at what Scripture proclaims, let us discover what its teaching is. As the Father wants to be believed, so let us believe; as he wants the Son to be glorified, so let us glorify him; as he wants the Holy Spirit to be given, so let us receive him. We must not act in accordance with our own mind or our own will; we must not do violence to what God has given. We must look at things rather as God has chosen to make them known through Scripture.

God, existing alone, without contemporary of any sort, decided to make the world. He conceived it in his mind, willed it, spoke the word, and so made it, and immediately it came into being, formed as he had willed it. It is enough for us simply to know that God had no contemporary; apart from him there was nothing. But though alone, God was manifold. He was not without reason or wisdom or power or counsel. All things were in

him and he was all. When he willed, and as he willed, he revealed his Word, at times which he himself had determined. Through his Word he made all things.

The Word was in God and was invisible to the created world, but God made him visible. He spoke, as he had done before, and, begetting light from light, he sent forth his own mind to the world as its Lord. He who formerly had been visible only to God and invisible to the world was now made visible, so that through this manifestation the world could see him, and be saved. The Word is the mind of God; he came into the world and was shown forth as Son of God. All things, then, come into being through him, and he alone is from the Father. It was this one God who gave the law and the prophets. In giving them, he made them speak by the Holy Spirit: the Father's power inspires them, and they proclaim the Father's purpose and will.

And so the Word was manifested. Saint John sums up what the prophets said and shows that this is the Word through whom all things came to be: In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. Through him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him. Later he goes on: The world had its being through him, and the world did not know him. He came to his own domain and his own people did not accept him.

St Hippolytus, Adv. Noetus 9-12, from The Divine Office vol. I

24 December

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(Jerusalem is evangelised: Isaiah 51:17 – 52:2, 7-10)

Rouse yourself, rouse yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl of staggering. There is none to guide her among all the sons she has borne; there is none to take her by the hand among all the sons she has brought up. These two things have befallen you—who will condole with you? – devastation and destruction, famine and sword; who will comfort you? Your sons have fainted, they lie at the head of every street like an antelope in a net; they are full of the wrath of the LORD, the rebuke of your God.

Therefore hear this, you who are afflicted, who are drunk, but not with wine: Thus says your Lord, the LORD, your God who pleads the cause of his people: “Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering; the bowl of my wrath you shall drink no more; and I will put it into the hand of your tormentors, who have said to you, ‘Bow down, that we may pass over’; and you have made your back like the ground and like the street for them to pass over.”

Shake yourself from the dust, arise, O captive Jerusalem; loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good things, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” Hark, your watchmen lift up their voice, together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the LORD to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

Wake up, O man — it was for you that God was made man! Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light. For you, I say, was God made man. Eternal death would have awaited you had he not been born in time. Never would you be freed from your sinful flesh, had he not taken to himself the likeness of sinful flesh.

Everlasting would be your misery, had he not performed this act of mercy. You would not have come to life again, had he not come to die your death. You would have broken down, had he not come to help you. You would have perished, had he not come.

Let us joyfully celebrate the coming of our salvation and redemption. Let us celebrate the hallowed day on which the great eternal day came from the great eternal day into this, our so short and temporal day. He has become our justice, and our sanctification, and our redemption. And so, as Scripture says: Let him who glories, glory in the Lord.

Truth, then, is sprung out of the earth: Christ who said, I am the truth, is born of a virgin. And justice looked down from heaven: man, believing in him who has been born, has been justified not by himself, but by God. Truth is sprung out of the earth, for the Word

was made flesh. And justice looked down from heaven, for every best gift, and every perfect gift, is from above. Truth is sprung out of the earth — flesh born of Mary. And justice looked down from heaven, for a man cannot receive anything, unless it be given him from heaven.

Being justified by faith, let us have peace with God, for justice and peace have kissed each other, through our Lord Jesus Christ, for Truth is sprung out of the earth. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we glory in our hope of sharing the glory of God. Saint Paul does not say, our glory, but the glory of God; because justice does not proceed from us, but has looked down from heaven. Let him who glories then, glory, not in himself, but in the Lord. Because of this, when the Lord was born of the Virgin, the angels announced, Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will.

Whence is peace on earth, if not from the fact that Truth is sprung out of the earth, that is, Christ is born of flesh? And he is our peace, who has made both one, that we might be men of good will, bound together by the sweet bonds of unity.

Let us, then, rejoice in this grace, that our glory may be the testimony of our conscience, and we may glory, not in ourselves, but in the Lord. Obviously, it was because of this that it was said, my glory, who lifts up my head. For what greater grace could have dawned upon us from God, than that he, who had only one Son, made him the son of man, and so in turn made the son of man a son of God. Ask yourself whether this involved any merit, any motivation, any right on your part; and see whether you find anything but grace!

St Augustine, Sermon 185, from The Divine Office vol. I

Christmas

Christmas Day

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The Root of Jesse: Isaiah 11:1-10)

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

Today *Truth has sprung up from the earth*; Christ is born in the flesh. We must celebrate this day of joy as worthily as we can. It's a day which of its nature impels us to consider also the everlasting day, so we must not fail to turn our minds to that also: with hope that cannot be shaken, we should yearn for gifts that are eternal. Today we have received the power to be called children of God, so let us boldly be what we are. For our sake, the bringer-about of all time was himself brought into time; for our sake the maker of the world appeared in the flesh; for our sake the Creator was created. So why do we who must still die still seek our joy in perishable things; why do we put so much futile effort into clutching on to this fleeting life? A much brighter hope has now lit up the whole earth: it promises, even to us who live on earth, eternal life in heaven.

Is this difficult to believe? Well, something much more difficult to believe has already happened. God's promise is to make men gods. Well, God has already himself been made a man. He did not lose what he was, yet he chose to become what he himself had made. He added our humanity to his divinity, but he did not in any way lose his divinity in our humanity.

We wonder when told that a child has been born of a Virgin. When we try to convince unbelievers, we tell them it's a completely new way of being born. A new shoot of the human race has sprung up as if from soil without seed; a son of man has been born without any intervention of a human father; virginal integrity has remained intact, both

in the conception of a child, and in its bringing to birth. The power that can accomplish all this makes us wonder: but even more wonderful was the mercy that prompted it. It's wonderful that he could be born in this way: it's even more wonderful that he chose to be born in this way. For he was the only-begotten of his Father, and he was born today as the only-begotten of his mother. He was made within his mother; yet he was the one who had previously made his mother for himself. He who existed eternally with his Father, today was born in time of his mother. He who was made from his mother, after his mother had been made, was before all creation with his Father; and like his Father was himself unmade. The Father was never without his Son. Without her Son, his mother would never have existed at all.

Let us all together then, perfectly united in mind and heart, celebrate today the birthday of the Lord. Let us celebrate with chaste hearts and holy affections the day on which *Truth sprang up from the earth*. Does anyone think lightly of this Truth, if it sprang up from the earth? Let him consider that in order that it might come from the earth, it first came down from heaven. He who is this Truth came down in order to raise us up. Let us then learn to be rich in the one *who became poor for our sake*. Let us accept freedom from the one *who for our sake accepted the form of a slave*. In the one who for our sake sprang up from the earth, let us in turn take possession of heaven.

St Augustine, Sermon 192, 1 & 3. tr. Pluscarden.

The Octave of Christmas: Holy Family

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE EPHESIANS

(On the Christian life in family and society: Ephesians 5:21 – 6:4)

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

A READING FROM AN ADDRESS BY POPE ST PAUL VI

The home of Nazareth is the school where we begin to understand the life of Jesus — the school of the Gospel. The first lesson we learn here is to look, to listen, to meditate and penetrate the meaning — at once so deep and so mysterious — of this very simple, very humble and very beautiful manifestation of the Son of God. Perhaps we learn, even imperceptibly, the lesson of imitation. Here we learn the method which will permit us to understand who Christ is. Here everything is eloquent, all has a meaning.

Here, in this school, one learns why it is necessary to have a spiritual rule of life, if one wishes to follow the teaching of the Gospel and become a disciple of Christ. How gladly would I become a child again, and go to school once more in this humble and sublime school of Nazareth: close to Mary, I wish I could make a fresh start at learning the true science of life and the higher wisdom of divine truths. But I am only a passing pilgrim. I must renounce this desire to pursue in this home my still incomplete education in the understanding of the Gospel. I will not go on my way however without having gathered — hurriedly, it is true, and as if wanting to escape notice — some brief lessons from Nazareth.

First, then, a lesson of silence. May esteem for silence, that admirable and indispensable condition of mind, revive in us, besieged as we are by so many uplifted voices, the general noise and uproar, in our seething and over-sensitised modern life. May the

silence of Nazareth teach us recollection, inwardness, the disposition to listen to good inspirations and the teachings of true masters. May it teach us the need for and the value of preparation, of study, of meditation, of personal inner life, of the prayer which God alone sees in secret.

Next, there is a lesson on family life. May Nazareth teach us what family life is, its communion of love, its austere and simple beauty, and its sacred and inviolable character. Let us learn from Nazareth that the formation received at home is gentle and irreplaceable. Let us learn the prime importance of the role of the family in the social order.

Finally, there is a lesson of work. Nazareth, home of the 'Carpenter's Son', in you I would choose to understand and proclaim the severe and redeeming law of human work; here I would restore the awareness of the nobility of work; and reaffirm that work cannot be an end in itself, but that its freedom and its excellence derive, over and above its economic worth, from the value of those for whose sake it is undertaken. And here at Nazareth, to conclude, I want to greet all the workers of the world, holding up to them their great pattern, their brother who is God. He is the prophet of all their just causes, Christ our Lord.

POPE ST PAUL VI, Address 5 January 1964, from The Divine Office vol. I

29 December

A READING FROM THE SONG OF SONGS

(The Church, the Bride of Christ, desires the love of the King: Song of Songs 1:1-10)

The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's. O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth! For your love is better than wine, your anointing oils are fragrant, your name is oil poured out; therefore the maidens love you. Draw me after you, let us make haste. The king has brought me into his chambers. We will exult and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine; rightly do they love you.

I am very dark, but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Do not gaze at me because I am swarthy, because the sun has scorched me. My mother's sons were angry with me, they made me keeper of the vineyards; but, my own vineyard I have not kept! Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon; for why should I be like one who wanders beside the flocks of your companions?

If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the tracks of the flock, and pasture your kids beside the shepherds' tents.

I compare you, my love, to a mare of Pharaoh's chariots. Your cheeks are comely with ornaments, your neck with strings of jewels.

Sixth Day of the Octave of Christmas: 30 December

A READING FROM THE SONG OF SONGS

(Dialogue between Lover and Beloved, clearly Christ and the Church: Song of Songs 1:11 – 2:7)

We will make you ornaments of gold, studded with silver.

While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance. My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh, that lies between my breasts. My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Engedi.

Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves. Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly lovely. Our couch is green; the beams of our house are cedar, our rafters are pine.

I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

As a lily among brambles, so is my love among maidens.

As an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Sustain me with raisins, refresh me with apples; for I am sick with love. O that his left hand were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me! I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the hinds of the field, that you stir not up nor awaken love until it please.

A READING FROM THE SERMONS ON THE SONG OF SONGS BY ST BERNARD

Our bed is covered with flowers; the beams of our houses are of cedar, the panelling of cypress. She is singing her marriage-song, describing in beautiful language the marriage bed and bridal suite. She invites the bridegroom to repose: for the better thing is to remain at ease and be with Christ; but necessity drives one forth to help those who are to be saved. So now when she feels that the opportunity presents itself, she announces that the bridal suite has been furnished, and pointing to the bed with her finger she invites, as I have said, the Beloved to rest there. Like the disciples on the way to Emmaus she cannot contain the ardour in her heart, but entices him to be the guest of her soul, compels him to spend the night with her. With Peter she says: *Lord it is good for us to be here.*

Let us now seek the spiritual content of these words. And indeed in the Church the 'bed' where one reposes is, in my opinion, the cloisters and monasteries, where one lives undisturbed by the cares of the world and the anxieties of life. This bed is seen to be adorned with flowers when the conduct and life of the brothers brightly reflect the examples and rules of the Fathers, as if strewn with sweet smelling flowers. By 'houses' understand the ordinary communities of Christians. Those who enjoy high office, the Christian leaders of both orders, strongly bind them together with laws justly imposed, as beams bind the walls, lest living by their own law and will, they should fall apart from each other like tilting walls and tottering fences, and thus the whole building fall to the ground and be destroyed. The panelling however, which is firmly attached to the beams, and impressively adds to the beauty of the house, seems to me to designate the

courteous and disciplined behaviour of a well-trained clergy, who carry out their duties correctly. For how shall the clerical orders stand and fulfil their duties unless they are sustained, as by beams, by the beneficence and munificence of those who govern and protect by their power?

It is worth noting how beautifully every state of the Church is comprehended in one brief expression: the authority of prelates, the good repute of the clergy, the dutifulness of the people, the peacefulness of the monks. As she reflects on these, holy Mother Church rejoices when everything is right; and then she presents them to the beloved to contemplate, since she refers everything to his goodness as the author of all things, attributing nothing of them all to herself.

For the rest, when you hear or read these words of the Holy Spirit, do you think you can apply to yourself some of what is said? Can you recognize in yourself any share in the happiness of the bride that is celebrated by the Holy Spirit himself in this song of love?

St Bernard, Sermon 46 on the Song of Songs, tr. Kilian Walsh OCSO (1976), from Cistercian Fathers 7

Seventh Day of the Octave of Christmas: 31 December

A READING FROM THE SONG OF SONGS

(The Bride hears the Bridegroom's voice and searches for him: Song of Songs 2:8 – 3:5)

The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle, or a young stag. Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is comely. Catch us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom."

My beloved is mine and I am his, he pastures his flock among the lilies. Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle, or a young stag upon rugged mountains.

Upon my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer. "I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares; I will seek him whom my soul loves." I sought him, but found him not. The watchmen found me, as they went about in the city. "Have you seen him whom my soul loves?" Scarcely had I passed them, when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the hinds of the field, that you stir not up nor awaken love until it please.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

How should we interpret the words, *Behold he comes, leaping over the mountains*? Perhaps they foresee the divine plan, spoken of in the Gospel and foretold by the prophets, whereby the Word of God became visible to us by his coming in the flesh. See, there he stands, looking through the windows, peeping through the lattices. The Word unites humanity to God methodically, step by step. First he enlightens us through the prophets and the precepts of the law; for we take the prophets to be the windows admitting the light and the network of the law's commands to be the lattice. Through both of these steals the brilliance of the true light. Afterward comes the full illumination when by union with our nature the true light shines upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. First the light of the ideas contained in the prophets and the law shines upon the soul through windows and lattices apprehended by our minds, filling it with a desire to see the sun in the open air. Then the desire is fulfilled.

Rise up my companion, my fair one, my dove, and come. How much the Word teaches us in these few words! We watch him leading the bride to the heights along the ascending path of virtue, as though up a flight of steps. First he sends her a ray of light through the windows which are the prophets and the lattice which is the precepts of the law, calling her to approach the light and to become beautiful as she takes on in the light the form of a dove. Then when she has taken on as much of the divine beauty as she can, as though she had not yet received any part in it, he draws her once again from the beginning toward the supreme Beauty in which she is to share. As a result her desire becomes more intense the further she advances toward what is continually being revealed to her. Moreover, because of the surpassing greatness of the blessings she is always receiving by his grace who surpasses all, she seems to be making the journey for the first time.

And so, after she has risen the Word again says 'Rise' and after she has come he says 'Come'. One who has thus risen never lacks the opportunity to rise further and one who is running toward the Lord never reaches the end of the space available for the divine race. We should always be rising and those whom the race is bringing close to the goal should never stop. Each time the Word says 'Rise' and 'Come' he gives the power to ascend to still loftier heights.

St Gregory of Nyssa, Homily 5 on the Song of Songs (Jaeger 6, 140-159), from Word in Season 1

The Octave of Christmas: Mary, Mother of God

A READING FROM THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

(Christ is like his brethren in all things: Hebrews 2:9-17)

But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one.

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, "I will proclaim thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee." And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Here am I, and the children God has given me."

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage. For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

A READING FROM THE LETTER TO EPICTETUS BY ST ATHANASIUS

The Word took to himself descent from Abraham, as the Apostle says, and therefore it was essential that he should in this way become completely like his brothers, and take a body similar to ours. That is why Mary is really part of his plan, so that he may take this body from her and offer it up for us as something that is his own. Accordingly, Scripture mentions his birth, and says: She wrapped up in swaddling clothes; the breasts that suckled him were called blessed; sacrifice was offered because he was the first-born. Gabriel announced the good news to Mary with all clarity: he did not say simply: 'what is born in you', in case it might be thought that the body had been introduced into her from outside; he said: what is born of you, so that it would be accepted that what she gave birth to, came from her in the natural way.

The Word took this course of action so that he could take on himself what was ours, offer it in sacrifice, and do away with it altogether, and then clothe us in what was his, as he inspired the Apostle to say: This perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. This was no mere fiction, as some have thought. For our Saviour really did become man, and this brought about the salvation of the whole man. Our salvation is no illusion, nor is it salvation of the body only: the salvation of the whole man, body and soul, was really brought about in the Word himself.

What was born of Mary, according to Scripture, was by nature human; the Lord's body was a real one - real, because it was the same as ours. This was so because Mary was our

sister, since we are all descended from Adam. This is the meaning of John's words: The Word became flesh, as can be seen from a similar passage in Paul: Christ became a curse for us. The human body has been greatly enhanced through the fellowship and the union of the Word with it. From being mortal, it has become immortal; though physical, it has become spiritual; though made from the earth, it has passed through the gates of heaven. Though the Word took a body from Mary, the Trinity remains a Trinity, and admits neither addition nor diminution. It is always perfect. In the Trinity one Godhead is acknowledged, and so in the Church one God proclaimed, the Father of the Word.

St Athanasius, Letter to Epictetus 5-9, from The Divine Office vol. I

Before Epiphany: 2 January

A READING FROM THE SONG OF SONGS

(Christ desires the love of his Bride, the Church: Song of Songs 4:1 – 5:1)

Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them is bereaved. Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. Your neck is like the tower of David, built for an arsenal, whereon hang a thousand bucklers, all of them shields of warriors. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that feed among the lilies. Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will hie me to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. You are all fair, my love; there is no flaw in you. Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards.

You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How sweet is your love, my sister, my bride! how much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice! Your lips distil nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; the scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon. A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed. Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits, henna with nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all chief spices – a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon.

Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, let its fragrance be wafted abroad. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits.

I come to my garden, my sister, my bride, I gather my myrrh with my spice, I eat my honeycomb with my honey, I drink my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends, and drink: drink deeply, O lovers!

A READING FROM THE SERMONS ON THE SONG OF SONGS BY ST BERNARD

Throughout the whole of the Song of Songs you will find God the Word foreshadowed. This leads me to think there is a reference to the Word in the prophetic text: *Christ the Lord is the breath of life to us; under his shadow we shall live among the peoples.* We do not yet see him face to face, but only obscurely as in a mirror. However, this is true only as long as we are living among the peoples of this world. When we are with the angels, it will be different; we shall enjoy exactly the same happiness as they have now. We too shall see him as he is in his divine nature, and not in shadow.

We know that in ancient times the truth was veiled in shadows and figures, but that now the reality itself shines upon us through the grace of Christ, present in the flesh. In

the same way we ourselves live at present in the shadow of the truth concerning the world to come. No one will deny this unless he refuses to accept what the Apostle says: Our knowledge is only partial and so is our prophesying; or again: I do not consider that I have fully grasped what I aspire to. There is surely a distinction between those who walk by faith and those who enjoy clear sight; whereas the upright live by faith, the blessed rejoice in the beatific vision. We can say, then, that during this earthly life holy men live in Christ's shadow, but the holy angels in heaven are bathed in the splendour of the glory of his face.

Happy the shadow of faith that tempers the light to the sighted eye and prepares the eye to bear it! Scripture speaks of God cleansing our hearts by faith, which shows that faith does not extinguish the light, but preserves it. All that the angels see is preserved for me by the obscurity of faith; it is stored up in the believer's heart, ready to be revealed when the time is ripe. Even the Lord's mother lived in the obscurity of faith; was she not told: Blessed are you because you have believed? It was the shadow of Christ's body that fell upon her when she heard the angel say: The power of the Most High will overshadow you. Now this could be no ordinary shadow, coming as it did from the power of the Most High. There was indeed power in Christ's flesh as it cast its shadow over the Virgin. Under the protecting shadow of his life-giving body she was able to endure the presence of the divine glory and to bear light unapproachable, a thing impossible for mortal man. Clearly this was the power that defeated all the forces of the enemy; it was both strength and shade, invigorating and refreshing, scattering demons and protecting men.

St Bernard, Sermo 31 in Cant. 8-10 (Opera Omnia, Edit. Cist. 1 1957] 224-226), from Word in Season 1

Before Epiphany: 3 January

A READING FROM THE SONG OF SONGS

(The Bride seeks and praises the Bridegroom: Song of Songs 5:2 – 6:3)

I slept, but my heart was awake. Hark! my beloved is knocking. “Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.” I had put off my garment, how could I put it on? I had bathed my feet, how could I soil them? My beloved put his hand to the latch, and my heart was thrilled within me. I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, upon the handles of the bolt.

I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer. The watchmen found me, as they went about in the city; they beat me, they wounded me, they took away my mantle, those watchmen of the walls. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am sick with love.

What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you thus adjure us?

My beloved is all radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside springs of water, bathed in milk, fitly set. His cheeks are like beds of spices, yielding fragrance. His lips are lilies, distilling liquid myrrh. His arms are rounded gold, set with jewels. His body is ivory work, encrusted with sapphires. His legs are alabaster columns, set upon bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars. His speech is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Whither has your beloved gone, O fairest among women? Whither has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?

My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to pasture his flock in the gardens, and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine; he pastures his flock among the lilies.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

Those who gaze upon the infinite beauty of God never cease to find in that vision new and amazing depths, surpassing all the mind had previously comprehended. The bride in the Song of Songs is in constant wonder and amazement at what she is beginning to see, yet never stops longing to see more. Listening in silence she hears the voice of the Word re-echo: *Open to me, my sister, my companion, dove, my perfect one*. Reflection will teach you the meaning of these words.

At first God appeared to Moses in light; then he spoke to him in a cloud. Later, when Moses had progressed and become more perfect, he saw God in darkness. The lesson this

teaches us is that our original abandonment of false and mistaken ideas about God is a passage from darkness to light. Then a deeper understanding of hidden things leads the soul through sense phenomena to the invisible. This understanding becomes a kind of cloud obscuring all that can be seen, and leading and accustoming the soul to look upon what is hidden.

Journeying upward through all these stages, the soul leaves behind everything human nature can attain, and enters the sanctuary of God where it is enveloped on all sides by the divine darkness. Everything that can be apprehended by sense or reason is abandoned; the soul has nothing to contemplate but what is invisible and incomprehensible; and there God is. As Scripture says of the Lawgiver: Moses entered the dark cloud where God was.

In the Song of Songs the bride is surrounded by a divine darkness in which the Bridegroom approaches but does not reveal himself. How could the Invisible reveal himself in darkness? Concealed by the invisibility of his nature he eludes clear comprehension, although he gives the soul a certain perception of his presence. What then is the mysterious teaching which the soul receives in the night? The Word touches the door; and by the door, we may understand the intelligence which is able to apprehend the unutterable, and through which the One whom we seek makes his entrance. Truth stands outside our nature because, as the Apostle says, our knowledge is only partial. Truth knocks at the door of our intelligence with allegories and symbols, saying: Open, and along with this command gives us a hint as to how we are to open the door, handing us, so to speak, as keys to unlock it, the beautiful names: sister, companion, dove, perfect one; for the meanings of these names really are keys that can open up mysteries.

Truth says: 'If you wish to open the door, and to lift up the gates of your soul so that the King of glory may enter, you must become my sister by accepting my will in your soul; for as the Lord says in the Gospel, those who live according to his will become his brethren. You must come close to truth and become its inseparable companion. You must be perfect like a dove, in other words, without any defect; you must be completely pure and innocent.'

St Gregory of Nyssa, Commentary on the Song of Songs, 11 (Jaeger, 6.321-325), Word in Season vol. 2

Before Epiphany: 4 January

A READING FROM THE SONG OF SONGS

(Praise of the Bride: Song of Songs 6:4 – 7:9)

You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners. Turn away your eyes from me, for they disturb me – Your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of ewes, that have come up from the washing, all of them bear twins, not one among them is bereaved. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and maidens without number. My dove, my perfect one, is only one, the darling of her mother, flawless to her that bore her. The maidens saw her and called her happy; the queens and concubines also, and they praised her. “Who is this that looks forth like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army with banners?”

I went down to the nut orchard, to look at the blossoms of the valley, to see whether the vines had budded, whether the pomegranates were in bloom. Before I was aware, my fancy set me in a chariot beside my prince. Return, return, O Shulammitte, return, return, that we may look upon you. Why should you look upon the Shulammitte, as upon a dance before two armies?

How graceful are your feet in sandals, O queenly maiden! Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand. Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim. Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, overlooking Damascus. Your head crowns you like Carmel, and your flowing locks are like purple; a king is held captive in the tresses.

How fair and pleasant you are, O loved one, delectable maiden! You are stately as a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its branches. Oh, may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples, and your kisses like the best wine that goes down smoothly, gliding over lips and teeth.

A READING FROM THE SERMONS ON THE SONG OF SONGS BY ST BERNARD

I saw the new Jerusalem, the holy city, coming down from God out of heaven, adorned like a bride for her husband. And I heard a great voice from the throne saying: This is the dwelling place of God among men, where he will live with them. Why should God choose to live among men? I believe his purpose was to take a wife to himself from the human race. He came to earth in search of a bride, yet, paradoxically, he did not come without one. Does this mean that there were two brides? Not at all. In the Song of Songs the bridegroom says: My dove is one and unique. But it was the Lord's will to gather his sheep together in a single flock so that there would be

one fold and one shepherd. While the angels in their myriads had been espoused to him from the beginning, it was his good pleasure to call men together to form a Church which he would then unite to his heavenly bride, and so there would be one bride and one bridegroom. The source of this oneness is our conformity with the angels in love during our earthly life and our participation with them in glory in the life to come.

From heaven, then, we have the bridegroom Jesus, and the bride Jerusalem. In order to be seen on earth Jesus emptied himself, taking the nature of a servant, fashioned in human form and presenting himself to us in the likeness of man. But how did the bride present herself when she came down from heaven? Was it in the form of a throng of angels descending and ascending upon the Son of Man?

I think this question is better answered by saying that we were given a vision of the bride when we saw the incarnate Word, and understood that bride and bridegroom were two in one flesh. When Emmanuel, the Holy One, brought his divine teaching to earth and showed us the beauty of that heavenly Jerusalem which is our mother by revealing to us her visible likeness in himself, were we not then given a vision of the bride in the bridegroom? No one can ascend to heaven except the one who has descended from heaven - the Lord who is one and the same, bridegroom as head and bride as body. Nor was his appearing on earth a fruitless mission: it had the effect of making a great many earthborn men heavenly like himself, so fulfilling the text: The heavenly man is the model for all who are heavenly.

From that time onward men began to live the kind of life on earth that the angels live in heaven. Like those blessed celestial spirits, the Church comes from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. With chaste love she cleaves to her heavenly bridegroom. Though not yet visibly united to him in the way the angels are, she is betrothed to him by faith, in accordance with the promise made through the prophet: I will betroth you to myself in mercy and compassion; I will betroth you to myself in fidelity.

St Bernard, Sermo 27 in Cant., 6-7 (PL 183, 916-917), from Word in Season vol. 1

Before Epiphany: 5 January

A READING FROM THE SONG OF SONGS

(The last words of the Bride and a praise of love: Song of Songs 7:10 – 8:7)

I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields, and lodge in the villages; let us go out early to the vineyards, and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love. The mandrakes give forth fragrance, and over our doors are all choice fruits, new as well as old, which I have laid up for you, O my beloved.

O that you were like a brother to me, that nursed at my mother's breast! If I met you outside, I would kiss you, and none would despise me. I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother, and into the chamber of her that conceived me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, the juice of my pomegranates. O that his left hand were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me! I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you stir not up nor awaken love until it please.

Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?

Under the apple tree I awakened you. There your mother was in travail with you, there she who bore you was in travail.

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned.

A READING FROM THE SERMONS ON THE SONG OF SONGS BY ABBOT JOHN OF FORD

I despise it as nothing, can be quite appropriately taken as referring to the wealth of one's house but also to love. I mean, of course, the love with which a man loves, not the love with which God first loved this person. However great the love a man like this may have, it can only be human love. But God's love, purely out of kindness, anticipated it, and every moment the free gift of that love is all that keeps it alive, governs and nourishes it. In comparison with this love, what is a man's love but a wind that passes and returns not again? If for a single moment that love did not inspire it, there would be nothing left for it but to expire. So God's love gives life to our love, but our love is of no advantage to God's.

But the prudent merchant, who has given up all that he owns for love, must keep safely what has cost him dearly, and should make his new treasure grow greater every single minute. So he must take the advice of the true Solomon, God's wisdom who is Christ, and feel utter scorn for his own feeble love. If he does, he will be able to keep faithfully what he has gained and make a great profit on what he is keeping safe. He must always say: "It is unimportant, it is unimportant", and think of himself, not as a true lover but as an unprofitable servant. Certainly he must love, but he must realize that he has not yet even

begun to love; he must love, while holding his love in utter scorn, as meagre, unworthy, unprofitable.

God's love is love at its highest, eternally full to repletion, and so has no need of our love, but if our love is to live by him, it must ever draw life from its fullness, by the help of the only Son, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, God, forever and ever. Amen.

John of Ford, Cantici Cantorum Sermones, Sermo 110, 13 (CCCM 18, 749), from Word in Season 2

Before Epiphany: 6 January

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The Servant of the Lord, Light of the nations: Isaiah 49:1-9)

Listen to me, O coastlands, and hearken, you peoples from afar. The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." But I said, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God."

And now the LORD says, who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honoured in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength – he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the servant of rulers: "Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

Thus says the LORD: "In a time of favour I have answered you, in a day of salvation I have helped you; I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages; saying to the prisoners, 'Come forth', to those who are in darkness, 'Appear'. They shall feed along the ways, on all bare heights shall be their pasture."

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON PSALM 35 BY ST AMBROSE

We have, I believe, given fitting testimony to the poverty and suffering of the Lord, testimony provided by holy men, one announcing a prophetic vision, the other a message he had been set apart to preach. Let us now set out their testimony, trustworthy witnesses as they are, to the role of the Lord as servant: indeed, their evidence is his own, for through them he spoke about himself. Listen then to what he says: Thus says the Lord who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring back Jacob and Israel to himself. We see from this how it was to gather God's people into unity that Christ took the nature of a servant.

The Lord, he says, gave me my name from my mother's womb. Let us hear what this name is, the name given him by the Father. Behold, a virgin shall conceive in her womb and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel, meaning God with us. What else is Christ's name but 'the Son of God'? Consider another text. Gabriel also had spoken to Joseph about Mary: She shall bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. Now listen to God's voice: You, Bethlehem of Judea, are not the least among the princes of Juda, for from you shall come a prince to rule my people.

Here is a mystery: in order to establish a kingdom for God in human hearts, the child came forth from the Virgin's womb as both servant and Lord, servant to obey and Lord to command. Both are one. There are not two persons, one born from the Father and the other from the Virgin. The same person, born of the Father before all ages, was later to take a human nature from the virgin. This is why he is called both servant and Lord. Born as a servant for our sake, in the unity of the divine nature he is God born of God, a king born of a king, an equal born of an equal. The Son in whom the Father declared himself well pleased is none other than the true-born Son of the Father who begot him.

It is a great thing, God says, for you to be called my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob. Christ always retains those designations that belong to his intrinsic dignity: great God, great servant. Even in his human nature he never loses his title to that greatness which has no end. So then, in his unending greatness he is equal to God as God's Son, yet he assumed the condition of a servant in his human nature and tasted death, because the end of the law is Christ, who justifies everyone who believes in him. Let us have faith in him and adore him in the depth of our hearts. How perfect was that service by which he made us all free! How perfect was his humility, the effect of which is that at his name all bend the knee in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confesses that the Lord Jesus is in the glory of God the Father!

St Ambrose, In Ps. 35, 4-5 (CCL 64, 52-54), from Word in Season vol. 1

Before Epiphany: 7 January

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The joys and the beauty of the reborn city: Isaiah 54:1-17)

“Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in travail! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her that is married, says the LORD. Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; hold not back, lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your descendants will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities.

“Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be put to shame; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the LORD has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the LORD, your Redeemer.

“For this is like the days of Noah to me: as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you and will not rebuke you. For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

“O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted, behold, I will set your stones in antimony, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of agate, your gates of carbuncles, and all your wall of precious stones. All your sons shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the prosperity of your sons. In righteousness you shall be established; you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near you. If any one stirs up strife, it is not from me; whoever stirs up strife with you shall fall because of you. Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and produces a weapon for its purpose. I have also created the ravager to destroy; no weapon that is fashioned against you shall prosper, and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD and their vindication from me, says the LORD.”

A READING FROM THE TREATISE ON THE REFUTATION OF ALL HERESIES BY ST HIPPOLYTUS

Our faith is not founded upon empty words; nor are we carried away by mere caprice or beguiled by specious arguments. On the contrary, we put our faith in words spoken by the power of God, spoken by the Word himself at God’s command. God wished to win us back from disobedience, not by using force to reduce us to slavery, but by addressing to

our free will a call to liberty. The Word spoke first of all through the prophets, but because the message was couched in such obscure language that it could only dimly be apprehended, in the last days the Father sent the Word in person, commanding him to show himself openly so that the world could see him and be saved.

We know that by taking a body from the Virgin he refashioned our fallen nature. We know that his humanity was of the same clay as our own; if this were not so, he would hardly have been a teacher who could expect to be imitated. He wanted us to consider him as no different from ourselves, and so he worked, he was hungry and thirsty, he slept. Without protest he endured his passion, he submitted to death and revealed his resurrection. In all these ways he offered his own manhood as the firstfruits of our race to keep us from losing heart when suffering comes our way and to make us look forward to receiving the same reward as he did, since we know that we possess the same humanity.

When we have come to know the true God, both our bodies and our souls will be immortal and incorruptible. We shall enter the kingdom of heaven, because while we lived on earth we acknowledged heaven's king. Friends of God and co-heirs with Christ, we shall be subject to no evil desires or inclinations, or to any affliction of body or soul for we shall have become divine. It was because of our human condition that God allowed us to endure these things, but when we have been made sharers in his godhead and immortal, he has promised us that his attributes will be ours.

The saying, 'Know yourself', means that we should recognize and acknowledge in ourselves the God who made us in his own image, for if we do this, we in turn will be recognized and acknowledged by our Maker. So let us not be at enmity with ourselves, but change our way of life without delay. For Christ who is God, exalted above all creation, has taken away our sin and refashioned our fallen nature. In the beginning God made us in his image and so gave proof of his love for us. If we obey his holy commands and learn to imitate his goodness, we shall be like him and he will honour us. God is not beggarly, and for the sake of his own glory he has given us a share in his divinity.

St Hippolytus, Cap. 10, 33-34 (PG 16, 3452-3453), from Word in Season vol. 1

Epiphany

The Epiphany

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The revelation of the glory of the Lord over Jerusalem: Isaiah 60:1-22)

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Lift up your eyes round about, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far, and your daughters shall be carried in the arms. Then you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall come up with acceptance on my altar, and I will glorify my glorious house.

Who are these that fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows? For the coastlands shall wait for me, the ships of Tarshish first, to bring your sons from far, their silver and gold with them, for the name of the LORD your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because he has glorified you. Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you; for in my wrath I smote you, but in my favour I have had mercy on you. Your gates shall be open continually; day and night they shall not be shut; that men may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings led in procession. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; those nations shall be utterly laid waste. The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the cypress, the plane, and the pine, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious. The sons of those who oppressed you shall come bending low to you; and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet; they shall call you the City of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, with no one passing through, I will make you majestic for ever, a joy from age to age. You shall suck the milk of nations, you shall suck the breast of kings; and you shall know that I, the LORD, am your Saviour and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

Instead of bronze I will bring gold, and instead of iron I will bring silver; instead of wood, bronze, instead of stones, iron. I will make your overseers peace and your taskmasters righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise.

The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended. Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land for ever, the shoot of my planting, the

work of my hands, that I might be glorified. The least one shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation; I am the LORD; in its time I will hasten it.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AELRED OF RIEVAULX

Arise, Jerusalem, and be enlightened, for your light has come. The Jerusalem addressed in this text is the city whose true and supreme peace is the Lord Jesus, the city he is building out of stones, the Jerusalem on the march toward that blessed vision of her Lord which she firmly believes will one day be hers. This Jerusalem is holy Church; it is also any religious community, any soul in a state of grace.

Arise, Jerusalem, and be enlightened, Scripture urges her. Such an exhortation is indeed appropriate for one who is lying prostrate and blind in darkness, error, and depravity. Arise, she is told; he who would lift you up is stooping down to you. Be enlightened; he who would shine upon you is already here. Today's new star reiterates the heavenly message: Arise and be enlightened! A sign of the Lord's birth has appeared in the sky to invite us to detach ourselves from the love of earthly things and raise ourselves heavenward; and this sign consists of a star, so that we may understand that through Christ's birth we shall be flooded with new light.

But to whom was the star's invitation originally made? Unquestionably it was to that Jerusalem represented by the queen who hastened from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Solomon's name means Peacemaker; consequently the queen who came to see him stands for Jerusalem whose name means Vision of Peace. This queen is a type of the Church formed from the pagans, for she was a pagan queen. When we see how many nations and peoples the Church rules over, we easily recognize her as the queen of whom David says: On your right stands the queen in robes of gold.

Today is the birthday of the Church among those pagans who saw the star and understood its message; it is therefore the day on which this queen comes from the ends of the earth to see the face of the one described in the words: Behold a greater than Solomon here. Greater indeed is he than Solomon, for Solomon was a peacemaker only, whereas the Lord Jesus makes peace by being peace incarnate. As the Apostle says: He is our peace; he has made both Jew and pagan one. This queen of ours, then, is well named Jerusalem, Vision of Peace, since she hastens to see the King who is himself peace in person.

She is also called Queen of Sheba; a felicitous title, for Sheba means 'captivity'. The Queen of Sheba is evidently the Church who disposes and governs all things well during her time of captivity in exile from that kingdom which knows neither captivity nor distress, the kingdom she herself will receive on the Day of Judgment when the Lord says to her: Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you. Until today our queen, the holy Church of the Gentiles, has lain prostrate in the dust without sight, but now the summons comes to her: Arise, and be enlightened!

St Aelred, Sermo 3 in apparitione Domini (PL 195, 228-229), from Word in Season vol. 1

Monday after Epiphany

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The joys and the beauty of the reborn city: Isaiah 54:1-17)

“Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in travail! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her that is married, says the LORD. Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; hold not back, lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your descendants will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities.

“Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be put to shame; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the LORD has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the LORD, your Redeemer.

“For this is like the days of Noah to me: as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you and will not rebuke you. For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

“O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted, behold, I will set your stones in antimony, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of agate, your gates of carbuncles, and all your wall of precious stones. All your sons shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the prosperity of your sons. In righteousness you shall be established; you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near you. If any one stirs up strife, it is not from me; whoever stirs up strife with you shall fall because of you. Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and produces a weapon for its purpose. I have also created the ravager to destroy; no weapon that is fashioned against you shall prosper, and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD and their vindication from me, says the LORD.”

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST LEO THE GREAT

Justice and reason demand a service of genuine reverence, dearly beloved, in these days which make known the works of divine mercy. We must rejoice with all our hearts and celebrate with honour the things that have been done for our salvation. Even the law of recurring seasons calls us to this devotion, which, after the day on which the Son of God,

co-eternal with the Father, was born of the Virgin, in a short time introduced to us the feast of the Epiphany, consecrated by the Lord's appearance.

Consequently it came about by the great goodness of the divine plan that a nation living in the distant regions of the East, a nation which possessed the skill of reading stars, should receive a sign that the child who was to rule in Israel had been born. The unusual clarity of a brighter star appeared to the wise men and filled the hearts of those looking on with an admiration for its splendour. As a result, they felt that they must not neglect what had been shown through so great a portent.

As the nature of the event had shown, it was the grace of God that governed this miracle. Although, up to this point, not even all of Bethlehem had learned about Christ's Nativity, this sign brought knowledge of his birth to nations that were going to believe. What could not yet be described with human eloquence was made known by the proclamation of heaven. The wise men were also able to be reminded through the ancient pronouncements of Balaam, for they knew that it had at one time been spread abroad in a famous and memorable prediction: A star will appear out of Jacob, and a man will rise up from Israel. He will rule over the nations. So the three men, stirred by God through the shining of this unusual star, follow the course of its gleaming light ahead of them, thinking that they would find the indicated child in the royal city of Jerusalem.

When this conjecture had failed them, however, they learned from scribes and teachers of the Jews what the Sacred Scriptures had told about the Birth of Christ. Encouraged by the double evidence, they sought him out with an even more ardent faith, the one to whom both the brightness of the star and the authority of prophets pointed. When the divine oracle was put forth in the responses made by priests, the word of the Spirit was made clear, the one which said: And you, Bethlehem of Judah, are not least among the princes of Judah, for out of you will come the leader who will rule my people Israel.

Then, dearly beloved, when the wise men had been led into Bethlehem by following the star's guidance, they rejoiced with a very great joy, as the Evangelist has related, and, entering the abode, they saw the Child with Mary his Mother. Prostrating themselves, they adored him. Upon opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

St Leo, Sermon 34: 6 January 444 (Recension A), tr. Freeland & Conway (1996)

Tuesday after Epiphany

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(An everlasting covenant is promised to all by the word of the Lord: Isaiah 55:1-13)

“Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Hearken diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in fatness. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. Behold, you shall call nations that you know not, and nations that knew you not shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

“Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

“For you shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial, for an everlasting sign which shall not be cut off.”

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

The Redeemer of all nations was manifested, and so he has made a feast day for all nations. As this is the day on which he is believed to have been worshipped by the Magi, it seemed only right, was indeed right and just, that the nations should dedicate it to Christ the Lord with a solemn service of thanksgiving. Those Magi, the first Gentiles to recognize Christ the Lord, had not yet been moved by any word of his, but they followed the star that appeared to them and that spoke visibly, like a heavenly tongue, on behalf of the infant inarticulate Word.

The shepherds, of course, were the firstfruits of the Jews as regards faith in Christ and his revelation. Coming from close at hand, they saw him on the very day of his birth. They received the news from angels, whereas the Magi received it from a star. The shepherds heard the words: Glory to God in the highest; for the Magi, the prophecy:

The heavens declare the glory of God, was fulfilled. The two of them were like the beginnings of two walls coming from opposite directions, one of the circumcision, the other of the uncircumcision, and running toward the cornerstone so that he might be their peace, and make the two one.

The shepherds, then, came from nearby to see, and the Magi came from a great distance to worship. This is the humility for which the wild olive deserved to be grafted into the cultivated one and to produce olives contrary to its nature, since grace enabled it to change its nature. For like the wild olive the whole world had grown wild and bitter, but by the grace of ingrafting it became fertile. People come from the ends of the earth saying in the words of Jeremiah: Truly our ancestors worshiped lies. And they come not just from one part of the world but, as the Gospel according to Luke says, from east and west, north and south to sit at table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

The Magi, the firstfruits of the Gentiles, came to see and worship Christ, and were found worthy not only to receive their own salvation but also to be a sign of the salvation of all nations. Let us then celebrate this day with the greatest devotion, worshipping the Lord Jesus in his heavenly dwelling, who was worshiped by those firstfruits of ours as he lay in an inn. They venerated in him what was still to come; we venerate its fulfilment. The firstfruits of the nations worshipped him at his mother's breast; now the nations worship him seated at the right hand of God the Father.

St Augustine, Sermo 203 (PL 38, 1035-1037), from Word in Season 2

Wednesday after Epiphany

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(Foreigners and eunuchs are admitted into the house of the Lord: Isaiah 56:1-8)

Thus says the LORD: “Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.”

Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, “The LORD will surely separate me from his people”; and let not the eunuch say, “Behold, I am a dry tree.” For thus says the LORD: “To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which shall not be cut off.

“And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, every one who keeps the sabbath, and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant – these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.”

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST LEO THE GREAT

Dearly beloved, the day on which Christ first showed himself to the Gentiles as the Saviour of the world should be held in holy reverence among us. We should experience in our hearts the same joy as the three wise men felt when the sign of the new star led them into the presence of the King of heaven and earth, and they gazed in adoration upon the one in whose promised coming they had put their faith. Although that day belongs to the past, the power of the mystery which was then revealed has not passed away; we are not left with a mere report of bygone events, to be received in faith and remembered with veneration. God’s bounty toward us has been multiplied, so that even in our own times we daily experience the grace which belonged to those first beginnings.

The Gospel story specifically recalls the days when, without any previous teaching from the prophets or instruction in the law, three men came from the far east in search of God; but we see the same thing taking place even more clearly and extensively in the enlightenment of all those whom God calls at the present time. We see the fulfilment of that prophecy of Isaiah which says: The Lord has bared his holy arm in the sight of all nations, and the whole world has seen the salvation that comes from the Lord our God. And again: Those who have not been told about him shall see, and those who have not heard shall understand. When we witness people being led out of the abyss of error and called to knowledge of the true light, people who, far from professing faith in Jesus Christ, have hitherto devoted themselves to worldly wisdom, we can have no

doubt that the splendour of divine grace is at work. Whenever a shaft of light newly pierces darkened hearts, its source is the radiance of that same star, which impresses the souls it touches by the miracle of its appearance and leads them forward to worship God.

If on the other hand we earnestly ask ourselves whether the same threefold oblation is made by all who come to Christ in faith, shall we not discover a corresponding gift offering in the hearts of true believers? To acknowledge Christ's universal sovereignty is in fact to bring out gold from the treasury of one's soul; to believe God's only Son has made himself truly one with human nature is to offer myrrh; and to declare that he is in no way inferior to his Father in majesty is to worship him with frankincense.

St Leo the Great, Tract. 36, 1-2 (CCL 138, 195-196), from Word in Season 1

Thursday after Epiphany

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The Lord is coming: Isaiah 59:15-21)

Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.

The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intervene; then his own arm brought him victory, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as a mantle. According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, requital to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render requital. So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives.

“And he will come to Zion as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, says the LORD.

“And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says the LORD: my spirit which is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your children, or out of the mouth of your children’s children, says the LORD, from this time forth and for evermore.”

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST ODILO OF CLUNY

In order that our fallen human birth might become a new birth in the Spirit, Christ was born of a spotless virgin. He chose to be subject to the law of circumcision to make it clear that the law was of his own making and to enable us too to be circumcised after his example through the experience of spiritual joy. By this I mean that through our formation in the Christian life we might be found worthy of incorporation into God’s heavenly building.

After his circumcision Christ received the homage of the wise men, who brought him gifts of three different kinds. These gifts symbolized their belief that the child who had become man for our sake was the King and Lord of all ages. He also chose to be presented in the temple and to have offered on his behalf a turtledove and a pigeon. This he did to give us an example: when we come to the altar we must bring chastity, innocence and all other virtues as our sacrificial offerings.

At the age of twelve years Jesus remained behind in the temple without the knowledge of his virgin mother. An urgent, anxious search found him after a little while sitting among the doctors, not teaching them but listening to them and absorbing what they said. In answer to his mother’s question as to why he had stayed there without telling her, he replied that he was in his Father’s house. These were the actions of a young boy, yet they are supported by the certitude of Catholic belief. When we see the mother of Jesus searching for him, we have no doubt that he is fully human. When Jesus declares that it is fitting for him to be in his Father’s house, all the faithful believe him to be the true and

only Son of God. When they see him sitting among the doctors, listening and asking questions, they see in this a sign that only mature adults should aspire to the work of preaching.

Although as Son of God he needed neither cleansing nor purifying, yet on a particular day at a determined time when he was thirty years old he underwent the rite of baptism, that unique mystery by which alone we receive salvation. By undergoing baptism he consecrated it, and by that consecration he bestowed as a heavenly gift on all believers the holiness which baptism confers.

But while he has granted the faculty of baptizing to the ministers of his Church, the power of baptizing he keeps in his own hands, as if claiming this as a special privilege of his own. This is what the divine voice announced to the great and holy John when, without hesitation, Christ came to him for baptism. The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and rest, said that voice, is the one who is going to baptize. John himself was the friend of the Bridegroom, the faithful and humble forerunner, and Truth in person has testified that none greater than he has arisen among the sons of women. Yet even as John baptized he preached another baptism. So it is written in the holy Gospel, where John is reported as saying: I baptize you with water, but another is to follow me who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

St Odilo of Cluny, Sermo 9 in die pentecostes (PL 142, 1015-1016), from Word in Season 1

Friday after Epiphany

A READING FROM THE PROPHET BARUCH

(Zion exhorts and consoles her children: Baruch 4:5-29)

Take courage, my people, O memorial of Israel! It was not for destruction that you were sold to the nations, but you were handed over to your enemies because you angered God. For you provoked him who made you, by sacrificing to demons and not to God. You forgot the everlasting God, who brought you up, and you grieved Jerusalem, who reared you. For she saw the wrath that came upon you from God, and she said: "Hearken, you neighbours of Zion, God has brought great sorrow upon me; for I have seen the captivity of my sons and daughters, which the Everlasting brought upon them. With joy I nurtured them, but I sent them away with weeping and sorrow. Let no one rejoice over me, a widow and bereaved of many; I was left desolate because of the sins of my children, because they turned away from the law of God. They had no regard for his statutes; they did not walk in the ways of God's commandments, nor tread the paths of discipline in his righteousness. Let the neighbours of Zion come; remember the capture of my sons and daughters, which the Everlasting brought upon them. For he brought against them a nation from afar, a shameless nation, of a strange language, who had no respect for an old man, and had no pity for a child. They led away the widow's beloved sons, and bereaved the lonely woman of her daughters.

"But I, how can I help you? For he who brought these calamities upon you will deliver you from the hand of your enemies. Go, my children, go; for I have been left desolate. I have taken off the robe of peace and put on the sackcloth of my supplication; I will cry to the Everlasting all my days.

"Take courage, my children, cry to God, and he will deliver you from the power and hand of the enemy. For I have put my hope in the Everlasting to save you, and joy has come to me from the Holy One, because of the mercy which soon will come to you from your everlasting Saviour. For I sent you out with sorrow and weeping, but God will give you back to me with joy and gladness for ever. For as the neighbours of Zion have now seen your capture, so they soon will see your salvation by God, which will come to you with great glory and with the splendour of the Everlasting. My children, endure with patience the wrath that has come upon you from God. Your enemy has overtaken you, but you will soon see their destruction and will tread upon their necks. My tender sons have travelled rough roads; they were taken away like a flock carried off by the enemy.

"Take courage, my children, and cry to God, for you will be remembered by him who brought this upon you. For just as you purposed to go astray from God, return with tenfold zeal to seek him. For he who brought these calamities upon you will bring you everlasting joy with your salvation."

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST FAUSTUS OF RIEZ

On the third day there was a wedding. What wedding can this be but the joyful marriage of our salvation, a marriage celebrated on the third day, according to the symbolic

meaning of that number, by profession of faith in the Trinity or by belief in the resurrection? When we turn to another passage of the Gospel we read of the music, dancing, and wedding garments that welcomed the return of the younger son. Here the conversion of the Gentiles is signified.

Like a bridegroom coming forth from his marriage chamber, our incarnate Lord descended to earth in order to be espoused to the Church which was to be formed of all nations. To his Church he gave a pledge of betrothal and a marriage dowry: a pledge when his divinity was joined to our humanity, a dowry when he was offered in sacrifice for our salvation. By the pledge we understand our present redemption; by the dowry, eternal life.

To those who see only with the outward eye, all these events are strange and wonderful; to those who understand, they are also signs. For if we look closely we can see a certain likeness to our baptismal rebirth in the water itself. One substance is inwardly changed into another, and in a hidden way a lesser creature is changed into a greater. All this points to the hidden reality of our second birth. At Cana water was suddenly changed; it was destined later to change men.

By Christ's action in Galilee, wine is made; that is, the law withdraws and grace takes its place, the shadows fade and truth appears, the things of the flesh are paralleled by spiritual realities, and the old covenant with its outward discipline is transformed into the new. As the blessed Apostle says, the old order has passed away; now all is new. Like the water in the jars, which is not diminished in quantity but has become a different substance, so the law is not destroyed by Christ's coming but brought to fulfilment.

When the wine fails, new wine is served. The wine of the old covenant is good, but the wine of the new is better. The old covenant, which the Jews observed, has become obsolete according to the letter; the new covenant, which belongs to us, has the savour of life and is filled with grace.

St Faustus of Riez, Sermo 5 de epiphania 2 (PLS 3, 560-562), from Word in Season 1

Saturday after Epiphany

A READING FROM THE PROPHET BARUCH

(The joy of the new Jerusalem: Baruch 4:30 – 5:9)

Take courage, O Jerusalem, for he who named you will comfort you. Wretched will be those who afflicted you and rejoiced at your fall. Wretched will be the cities which your children served as slaves; wretched will be the city which received your sons. For just as she rejoiced at your fall and was glad for your ruin, so she will be grieved at her own desolation. And I will take away her pride in her great population, and her insolence will be turned to grief. For fire will come upon her from the Everlasting for many days, and for a long time she will be inhabited by demons.

Look toward the east, O Jerusalem, and see the joy that is coming to you from God! Behold, your sons are coming, whom you sent away; they are coming, gathered from east and west, at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing in the glory of God.

Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on for ever the beauty of the glory from God. Put on the robe of the righteousness from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting. For God will show your splendour everywhere under heaven. For your name will for ever be called by God, "Peace of righteousness and glory of godliness."

Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height and look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east, at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. For they went forth from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne. For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God. The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command. For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.

A READING FROM A SERMON ATTRIBUTED TO ST MAXIMUS OF TURIN

Today the true Sun has risen upon the world; amid universal darkness light has dawned. God has become man, so that men may become divine; the Lord has assumed the likeness of a slave, so that slaves may become lords. He who created the heavens as his dwelling place has made his home on earth, in order that earth's inhabitants may find their way to heaven.

O the glory of this day, eclipsing the very sun in its splendour, the culmination of centuries of waiting! The revelation to which the angels looked forward, the secret hidden from seraphim, cherubim, and every heavenly spirit has been disclosed to our generation. What former ages perceived in figures and images, we see in reality. The God who spoke to the people of Israel through Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the rest of the prophets now speaks to us through his Son. Mark the difference between the Old Testament and New! In the Old Testament God spoke in a storm cloud; in the New he speaks in the clear,

calm light of day. In the Old Testament God appeared in a bush; in the New he is born of a virgin. In the Old Testament God was present as a fire consuming the sins of his people; in the New he is present as a man who forgives them - or rather, as the Lord who pardons his servants, since no one can forgive sin but God alone.

There are various opinions current in the world, since our ideas reflect a diversity of traditions, but whether the Lord Jesus was born or baptized on this day, this much at least is clear: Christ's birth both in the flesh and in the spirit is to our benefit. Both are mysteries to me and both are advantageous to me. The Son of God had no need to be born or baptized. He had committed no sin that required forgiveness through baptism. On the contrary, his condescension is the cause of our exaltation, his cross our victory, his gibbet our triumph.

Let us joyfully raise the banner of his cross on our shoulders and bear the ensign of his victory; better still, let us carry this great standard as a sign emblazoned on our foreheads. Whenever the devil sees this sign on our doorposts he trembles; demons who have no reverence for gilded temples fear the cross. They may despise royal sceptres, grand banquets, and imperial purple, but they are cowed by the fasting and humble garb of Christians.

Let us be filled with exultation then, dear friends, and lift up holy hands to heaven in the form of a cross. When Moses held up his hands Amalek was defeated, but if he lowered them for a while Amalek prevailed. Birds too resemble the cross in shape as they are borne aloft and glide through the air on outstretched wings. Even our memorials and victory processions take the form of crosses. Surely then we ought to bear the cross not on our foreheads only but within our very souls, so that by its protection we may trample on the snake and the serpent in Christ Jesus, to whom belongs the glory for ever and ever.

St Maximus of Turin (attr.) Sermo 45, 1-3 (CCL 23, 182-183)

The Baptism of the Lord

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(The meek servant of the Lord, the light of the nations: Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-19)

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.

Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: "I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to graven images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them."

Listen to me, O coastlands, and hearken, you peoples from afar. The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." But I said, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God."

And now the LORD says, who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honoured in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength – he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the servant of rulers: "Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

Thus says the LORD: "In a time of favour I have answered you, in a day of salvation I have helped you; I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages; saying to the prisoners, 'Come forth', to those who are in darkness, 'Appear'. They shall feed along the ways, on all bare heights shall be their pasture."

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST CHROMATIUS OF AQUILEIA

Since Jesus was to give a new baptism for the salvation of the human race and the forgiveness of sin, he deigned to be himself baptized first, not in order to put off sins, since he alone had not sinned, but in order to sanctify the waters of baptism that these might wash away the sins of believers. For the waters of baptism could never have cleansed believers of their sins, unless they had first been sanctified by contact with the Lord's body. He was baptized, therefore, so that we might be washed clean of sins. He was immersed in the water so that we might be cleansed of the filth of sin. He accepted the bath of rebirth so that we might be reborn of water and the Holy Spirit, for as he himself says elsewhere: Unless reborn of water and the Holy Spirit, no one shall enter the kingdom of heaven.

While John did indeed baptize our Lord and Saviour, in a deeper sense he was baptized by Christ, for Christ sanctified the waters, John was sanctified by them; Christ bestowed grace, John received it; John laid aside his sins, Christ forgave them. The reason? John was a man, Christ was God. For it is God's prerogative to forgive sins, as it is written: Who can forgive sins, except God alone? This is why John says to Christ: I ought to be baptized by you, and do you come to me? For John needed baptism, since he could not be without sin; Christ, however, did not need a baptism, since he had committed no sin.

In this baptism, then, our Lord and Saviour washed away the sins first of John and then of the entire world. It is for this reason that he says: Allow it to be so now. For it is fitting that we should fulfil all justice. The grace of his baptism had been mystically prefigured long ago, when the people were led across the river Jordan into the promised land. Just as at that time a way was opened for the people through the Jordan, with the Lord going on before, so now through the same waters of the river Jordan access has for the first time been given to the heavenly path by which we are led to that blessed land of promise, that is, to possession of the kingdom of heaven. For the people long ago Joshua, son of Nun, was their leader through the Jordan; our leader through baptism to eternal salvation is Jesus Christ the Lord, the only-begotten Son of God, who is blessed forever and ever. Amen

St Chromatius of Aquileia, Tractatus XII In Math. III, 13-15 (CCL 9A, 244-246), from Word in Season 2

Lent

Ash Wednesday

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(On the fast that pleases God: Isaiah 58:1-12)

“Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. ‘Why have we fasted, and thou seest it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and thou takest no knowledge of it?’ Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a rush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD?”

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, Here I am.

“If you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. And the LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your desire with good things, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Why do we fast for forty days? Formerly many believers approached the sacraments without any particular preparation, especially at the time when Christ first gave them to us. But when the fathers realized the harm that could result from such neglect, they took counsel together and decreed that a period of forty days of fasting be set aside, during which the people would meet to pray and listen to the word of God. During this Lenten season each of the faithful would undergo a thorough purification by means of prayer, almsgiving, fasting, watching, repentant tears, confession, and every other remedial measure. Then when they had done all in their power to cleanse their consciences, they could approach the sacraments.

It is certain that the fathers did well to use such lenience in their desire to establish us in the habit of fasting. As we know, we could proclaim a fast throughout the whole year, and no one would pay any attention. But now, with a set time for fasting of only forty days, even the most sluggish need no exhortation to rouse themselves to undergo it; they accept it as a regular observance and recurring encouragement.

So, when someone asks you why you fast, you should not answer: because of the Passover, or because of the Cross. Neither of these is the reason for our fasting. We fast because of our sins, since we are preparing to approach the sacred mysteries. Moreover, the Christian Passover is a time for neither fasting nor mourning, but for great joy, since the Cross destroyed sin and made expiation for the whole world. It reconciled ancient enmities and opened the gates of heaven. It made friends of those who had been filled with hatred, restoring them to the citizenship of heaven. Through the Cross our human nature has been set at the right hand of the throne of God, and we have been granted countless good things besides. Therefore we must not give way to mourning or sadness; we must rejoice greatly instead over all these blessings.

Listen to the exultant words of Saint Paul: God forbid that I should boast of anything but the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. And elsewhere he writes: God shows his own love for us because when we were still sinners Christ died for our sake.

Saint John's message is the same. *God loved the world so much*, he declares, and then, passing over every other manifestation of God's love, he comes at once to the crucifixion. *God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son*, that is, he gave him up to be crucified, *so that those who believed in him might not perish but might have eternal life*. If, then, the Cross has its foundation in love and is our glory, we must not say we mourn because of the Cross. Far from it. What we have to mourn over is our own sinfulness, and that is why we fast.

St John Chrysostom, Oratio 3 Adversus Iudaeos (PG 48, 867-868); from Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(The oppression of Israel: Exodus 1:1-22)

THESE are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. All the offspring of Jacob were seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt. Then Joseph died, and all his brothers, and all that generation. But the descendants of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong; so that the land was filled with them.

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war befall us, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens; and they built for Pharaoh store-cities, Pithom and Rameses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they made the people of Israel serve with rigor, and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field; in all their work they made them serve with rigor.

Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, she shall live." But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. So the king of Egypt called the midwives, and said to them, "Why have you done this, and let the male children live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and are delivered before the midwife comes to them." So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live."

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST LEO THE GREAT

Among all the days which Christian devotion holds honourable in many ways, there is none more excellent than the Paschal Feast, through which the dignity of all the solemnities in the Church of God is consecrated. Even the very birth of our Lord from a human mother is credited to this mystery, for there was no other reason for the Son of God to be born than that he could be fixed to a cross. Our mortal flesh was taken up in the womb of a Virgin, and in this mortal flesh the unfolding of his Passion was accomplished. Thus the mercy of God fulfilled a plan too deep for words: Christ's humanity became for us a sacrifice of redemption, the destruction of sin, and the firstfruits of resurrection to eternal life.

When we consider what the entire world owes to our Lord's Cross, we realize our need to prepare for the celebration of Easter by a fast of forty days if we are to take part worthily in these sacred mysteries. It is not only the highest bishops or the priests of the second order, nor the ministers who administer the sacraments alone, but the whole body of the Church and the entire company of the faithful who must be purified, so that in the Temple of God, whose foundation is its Founder himself, every stone may be beautiful and all parts radiant.

If it is reasonable to embellish a king's palace or governor's residence with every ornamental art, so that the greater a person's importance the more splendid his dwelling, what zeal ought to be expended in building the House of God himself, and how distinguished should be its furnishing! No doubt such a task can be neither undertaken nor completed without the architect; nevertheless the builder of the house has given it the power to grow in stature through its own efforts. In the building of this Temple living and intelligent materials are being used, which of their own free will assemble themselves into a single structure at the prompting of the Spirit of grace. There was a time when they neither loved God nor sought him; but he loved and sought them so that they might begin to love and seek him in return. This is what the blessed apostle John speaks of when he says: *Let us love God, for he first loved us.*

Since therefore the entire company of the faithful and each believer in particular form one and the same Temple of God, there must be the same perfection in each individual as there is in the whole; for even if all are not alike in beauty nor is there equal merit in such a diversity of membership, yet the bond of love ensures communion of beauty among them all. While those who are united in holy love may not all have received the same gifts of grace, they rejoice nonetheless in their mutual blessings. Nothing that they love can be wanting to them, for they become rich in their own increase when they rejoice in another's progress.

St Leo the Great, Sermon 48.1 (CCL 138A:279-280); from Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(The birth and flight of Moses: Exodus 2:1-22)

Now a man from the house of Levi went and took to wife a daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could hide him no longer she took for him a basket made of bulrushes, and daubed it with bitumen and pitch; and she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds at the river's brink. And his sister stood at a distance, to know what would be done to him. Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, and her maidens walked beside the river; she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to fetch it. When she opened it she saw the child; and lo, the babe was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away, and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son; and she named him Moses, for she said, "Because I drew him out of the water."

One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together; and he said to the man that did the wrong, "Why do you strike your fellow?" He answered, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid, and thought, "Surely the thing is known." When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses.

But Moses fled from Pharaoh, and stayed in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well. Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. The shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock. When they came to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come so soon today?" They said, "An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and even drew water for us and watered the flock." He said to his daughters, "And where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread." And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah. She bore a son, and he called his name Gershom; for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."

A READING FROM THE TREATISE ON THE HOLY SPIRIT BY ST BASIL

The type manifests things to come by imitating them, foreshadowing future events in order to make them understood. For example, *Adam was a type of the One who was to come*, the rock was a type of Christ, and the water that flowed from the rock was a type of the life-giving power of the Word, for the Lord said: *If anyone is thirsty, let him come*

to me and drink. The manna typified the living bread that came down from heaven and the serpent fixed to the pole typified the saving Passion consummated upon the Cross, which is why all who looked at it were saved.

Similarly, the reason the story is told of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt is that they prefigure those who are saved by baptism. The firstborn of the Israelites were saved in the same way as are the bodies of the baptized, since grace was given to those marked by the blood. For the blood of the lamb was a symbol of the first man who was created and who of necessity still exists in us, transmitted through succeeding generations until the end of the world.

The sea and the cloud had the immediate effect of producing faith because of the amazement they aroused, but in relation to the future they were types foreshadowing the grace to come. *Who is wise enough to understand these things*, to understand how the sea is a type of baptism because it separated the Israelites from Pharaoh just as baptism separates us from the tyranny of the devil? In its waters the sea destroyed the enemy and in baptism is slain our enmity with God. From those waters the people emerged unharmed, and we emerge from the waters of baptism as though we had died and come to life again, saved by the grace of him who called us. As for the cloud, that foreshadowed the gift of the Spirit, who cools the heat of the passions by the mortification of our body.

St Basil the Great, On the Holy Spirit, 14.31 (SC 17bis:354-358); from Word in Season II, 1st ed.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(The call of Moses and the revelation of the Name of God: Exodus 3:1-20)

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." Then he said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the LORD said, "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" He said, "But I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain."

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you', and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, 'I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt; and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.'" And they will hearken to your voice; and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, we pray you, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.' I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand and smite Egypt with all the wonders which I will do in it; after that he will let you go."

A READING FROM THE LIFE OF MOSES BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

Let us, like Moses, live a solitary life, no longer entangled with adversaries or mediating between them. Let us live among those of like mind who are fed by us, while all the movements of our soul are led by reason like sheep by their shepherd. Then, as we are living at peace, the truth will shine upon us and its radiance will illuminate the eyes of our soul.

Now this truth is God. Once in an ineffable and mysterious vision it manifested itself to Moses, and it is not without significance for us that the flame from which the soul of the Prophet was illuminated was kindled from a thorn-bush.

If truth is God and if it is also light – two of the sublime and sacred epithets by which the Gospel describes the God who manifested himself to us in the flesh – it follows that a virtuous life will lead us to a knowledge of that light which descended to the level of our human nature. It is not from some luminary set among the stars that it sheds its radiance, which might then be thought to have a material origin, but from a bush on the earth, although it outshines the stars of heaven.

This also symbolizes the mystery of the Virgin, from whom came the divine light that shone upon the world without damaging the bush from which it emanated or allowing the virgin shoot to wither.

This light teaches us what we must do to stand in the rays of the true light, and that it is impossible with our feet in shackles to run toward the mountain where the light of truth appears. We have first to free the feet of our soul from the covering of dead skins in which our nature was clad in the beginning when it disobeyed God's will and was left naked.

To know that which is, we must purify our minds of assumptions regarding things which are not. In my opinion the definition of truth is an unerring comprehension of that which is. He who is immutable, who does not increase or diminish, who is subject to no change for better or worse, but is perfectly self-sufficient; he who alone is desirable, in whom all else participates without causing in him any diminution, he indeed is that which truly is, and to comprehend him is to know the truth.

It is he whom Moses approached and whom today all approach who like Moses free themselves from their earthly coverings and look toward the light coming from the bramble bush, at the ray shining on us from the thorns, which stand for the flesh, for as the Gospel says, that ray is the real light and the truth. Then such people will also be able to help others find salvation. They will be capable of destroying the forces of evil and of restoring those enslaved by them to liberty.

St Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, 2.17-26 (SC 1:36-39); from Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Lent Week 1

Sunday of the First Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(The oppression of the people: Exodus 5:1 – 6:1)

Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.’” But Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should heed his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover I will not let Israel go.” Then they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us; let us go, we pray, a three days’ journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.” But the king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get to your burdens.” And Pharaoh said, “Behold, the people of the land are now many and you make them rest from their burdens!” The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen, “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as heretofore; let them go and gather straw for themselves. But the number of bricks which they made heretofore you shall lay upon them, you shall by no means lessen it; for they are idle; therefore they cry, ‘Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.’ Let heavier work be laid upon the men that they may labour at it and pay no regard to lying words.”

So the taskmasters and the foremen of the people went out and said to the people, “Thus says Pharaoh, ‘I will not give you straw. Go yourselves, get your straw wherever you can find it; but your work will not be lessened in the least.’” So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt, to gather stubble for straw. The taskmasters were urgent, saying, “Complete your work, your daily task, as when there was straw.” And the foremen of the people of Israel, whom Pharaoh’s taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and were asked, “Why have you not done all your task of making bricks today, as hitherto?”

Then the foremen of the people of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, “Why do you deal thus with your servants? No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, ‘Make bricks!’ And behold, your servants are beaten; but the fault is in your own people.” But he said, “You are idle, you are idle; therefore you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.’ Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, yet you shall deliver the same number of bricks.” The foremen of the people of Israel saw that they were in evil plight, when they said, “You shall by no means lessen your daily number of bricks.” They met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for them, as they came forth from Pharaoh; and they said to them, “The LORD look upon you and judge, because you have made us offensive in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.”

Then Moses turned again to the LORD and said, “O LORD, why hast thou done evil to this people? Why didst thou ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he has done evil to this people, and thou hast not delivered thy people at all.”

But the LORD said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, yea, with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.”

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

As we begin our annual Lenten observance with its solemn call to conversion, it is incumbent upon me to make the customary solemn exhortation to all of you. Indeed, it is more than ever my pastoral duty to nourish your minds with the word of God when you are about to mortify your bodies by fasting, for once you have been inwardly refreshed by the food of the spirit you will be able to undertake physical hardships more courageously and endure them with greater stamina.

We are soon to celebrate the Passion of our crucified Lord. It is therefore in keeping with our commitment to him that we should crucify ourselves by restraining the desires of the flesh. As the Apostle says: *You cannot belong to Christ Jesus unless you crucify all your self-indulgent passions and desires.* Such is the Cross upon which we Christians must continually hang, since our whole lives are beset by trials and temptations. Not for us, as long as we live, to be rid of those nails we read of in the psalm: *Pierce my flesh with the nails of your fear.*

Flesh means the desires of our lower nature; nails, the demands of God’s justice and holiness. With these the fear of the Lord pierces our flesh and fastens us to the Cross as an acceptable sacrifice to him. In a similar passage the apostle Paul appeals to us by the mercy of God to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

To hang on such a Cross brings no shame to the servants of God; it is something in which they glory, as Saint Paul does when he says: *Far be it from me to glory in anything except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

This crucifixion, I repeat, is something that must continue throughout our life, not for forty days only. It is true that Moses, Elijah, and our Lord himself fasted for forty days; but in Moses, Elijah, and Christ we are meant to see the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospel, and to learn from them not to cling to this present world or imitate its ways, but to nail our unregenerate selves to the Cross. Christians must always live in this way, without any wish to come down from their Cross, otherwise they will sink beneath the world's mire. But if we have to do so all our lives, we must make an even greater effort during these days of Lent. It is not a simple matter of living through forty days; Lent is the epitome of our whole life.

St Augustine, Sermon 205.1 (PL 38:1039-1040); from Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Monday of the First Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(Another story of the call of Moses: Exodus 6:2-13)

And God said to Moses, "I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they dwelt as sojourners. Moreover I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold in bondage and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment, and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.'" Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel; but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel bondage.

And the LORD said to Moses, "Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the people of Israel go out of his land." But Moses said to the LORD, "Behold, the people of Israel have not listened to me; how then shall Pharaoh listen to me, who am a man of uncircumcised lips?" But the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them a charge to the people of Israel and to Pharaoh king of Egypt to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST LEO THE GREAT

The mystery of the Lord's Passion was ordained before the beginning of time for the salvation of the human race and foretold by many signs in every era of the past. No longer do we look forward to something yet to be made manifest; we bow in adoration before what has already been fulfilled. Both the Old and New Testaments agree for our instruction, and the Gospel story unfolds for us what the prophet's trumpet had sounded. As Scripture says: *Deep calls to deep in the roar of your torrents*, since from the depths of each Testament voice answers voice, telling the same story of the glory of God's grace. What was formerly hidden behind a veil of symbols is now clear in the light of Revelation.

Despite the miracles of performed by our Saviour for all to see, few recognized the presence of Truth himself. If his disciples themselves were troubled by the Passion he voluntarily undertook, and if they yielded to the temptation of fear when faced with the scandal of the Cross, where can our faith find understanding, our minds find strength, except in the fact that all those events we know to have been accomplished were foretold in the Scriptures?

Now the Saviour's triumph has been accomplished, dearly beloved, and those things which all the words of the Old Testament announced have found their completion, let carnal Jews mourn while spiritual Christians rejoice! This Feast, which has turned into night for unbelievers, shines forth upon us with its light, because the same Cross of Christ brings glory to believers and punishment to unbelievers.

Now that his power and strength have been made manifest in the assumption of human weakness, there must be no sadness among the faithful to cast a shadow upon the Paschal Solemnity. We should not recollect the story of his sufferings with any sadness, since our Lord put the malice of the Jews to such use that his will to show mercy has been fulfilled through their intention to do harm. If, *during the exodus of Israel from Egypt*, freedom was restored through the blood of a lamb and the wrath of the destroying angel averted through the sacrifice of a beast. And if this deliverance was marked by the institution of a solemn festival, how great should be the joy of Christian people, for whose sake the almighty Father *spared not his only Son but delivered him up for us all!* Consequently that Passover in the killing of Christ became the true Passover and unique sacrifice, no longer saving a single people from subjection to Pharaoh, but delivering the whole world from bondage to the devil.

St Leo the Great, Sermon 60.1-2 – Palm Sunday 445 (PL 54:342-343); from Word in Season II, 1st ed.

blood throughout all the land of Egypt. But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts; so Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them; as the LORD had said. Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not lay even this to heart. And all the Egyptians dug round about the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the Nile.

Seven days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile.

A READING FROM THE LIFE OF MOSES BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

Those who love Christ should not be troubled at our taking the transformation of the staff into a serpent as a reference to the incarnation. The serpent may seem an incongruous symbol for this mystery and yet it is an image Truth himself does not repudiate, since he says in the Gospel: *As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.* And the meaning is clear. Holy Scripture calls the father of sin a serpent, so what is born of him must be a serpent too; sin must have the same name as its father. Now since the Apostle asserts that the Lord was made sin for our sake by clothing himself in our sinful nature, it cannot be inappropriate to apply this symbol to him. If sin is a serpent and the Lord became sin, it must be obvious to all that in becoming sin he became a serpent, which is simply another name for sin.

He became a serpent for our sake, so that he could consume and destroy the serpents of Egypt brought to life by the sorcerers. Once he had done this he was changed into a staff again, and by this staff sinners are chastised and those who are climbing the difficult ascent of virtue are supported. With good hope they lean upon the staff of faith, since *faith is the assurance of things hoped for.*

Those who attain an understanding of these mysteries become gods in comparison with people who resist the truth, who are seduced by the deceitfulness of the material and contingent, and disdain as useless listening to Him Who Is. They value nothing but material benefits satisfying to their irrational instincts.

On the other hand, those who receive strength from the Light and great power and authority over their enemies are like well-trained athletes, stripping to confront their opponents with courage and confidence. They hold in their hands the staff which is the teaching of faith, and by that staff they will conquer the serpents of Egypt.

St Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, 2.31-36 (SC 1bis:40-41); Word in Season II, 1st ed.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(The plague of darkness and announcement of the plague of the firstborn: Exodus 10:21 – 11:20)

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.” So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days; they did not see one another, nor did any rise from his place for three days; but all the people of Israel had light where they dwelt. Then Pharaoh called Moses, and said, “Go, serve the LORD; your children also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind.” But Moses said, “You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God. Our cattle also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must take of them to serve the LORD our God, and we do not know with what we must serve the LORD until we arrive there.” But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let them go. 28 Then Pharaoh said to him, “Get away from me; take heed to yourself; never see my face again; for in the day you see my face you shall die.” Moses said, “As you say! I will not see your face again.”

The LORD said to Moses, “Yet one plague more I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence; when he lets you go, he will drive you away completely. Speak now in the hearing of the people, that they ask, every man of his neighbour and every woman of her neighbour, jewellery of silver and of gold.” And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants and in the sight of the people.

And Moses said, “Thus says the LORD: About midnight I will go forth in the midst of Egypt; and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sits upon his throne, even to the first-born of the maidservant who is behind the mill; and all the first-born of the cattle. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever shall be again. But against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, not a dog shall growl; that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between the Egyptians and Israel. And all these your servants shall come down to me, and bow down to me, saying, ‘Get you out, and all the people who follow you.’ And after that I will go out.” And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger. Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh will not listen to you; that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt.”

Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh; and the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land.

A READING FROM THE PHILOKALIA OF ORIGEN

Nearly all readers of the Book of Exodus, both believers and unbelievers, are disturbed at the frequently occurring words, *The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh*, and, *I will harden the heart of Pharaoh*. For among many other causes of men’s disbelief we must include

this: that things unworthy of God are spoken about God; and it is unworthy of God to bring about the hardening of any man's heart so that he may disobey the will of him who hardens. For readers who are convinced that there is no other God but the Creator think that God arbitrarily has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and hardens whom he will, when there is no reason why this should be so. Others, better advised than these, say they look upon Scripture as containing many secrets, and do not on that account turn aside from the sound faith. One of the secrets they hold to be the true account of this portion of Scripture. Others, alleging that there is a God other than the Creator, will have him to be just but not good, very foolishly and impiously going the length of severing righteousness from goodness.

For ourselves, we are convinced, as we study the sacred Scriptures and contemplate creation with its evidence of orderly design, that things visible and invisible, things temporal and things eternal, come from God the Creator, who is the same with the Father of our Lord and Saviour, the good and just and wise God. In handling the Scriptures we strive to keep that steadily in view, begging God our Saviour to show us all things pertaining to a good and just and wise God, for we suppose that the things we speak of cannot be regarded, at least by intelligent beings, as the result of chance, but that we must ask ourselves whether they are consistent with his goodness and justice and wisdom.

Something like this, then, we suppose is the meaning of the words, *The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh*. The Word of God is a physician of souls and uses the most diverse methods of healing the sick. Some of these methods of healing give pain and torment to those who are under treatment, some act speedily and some slowly. The whole of inspired Scripture abounds in proofs of each of these statements. The God who designed souls knows all their different constitutions, and, because he is an expert in the art of healing, it is for him alone to say what is best to be done for each, and when.

So it is, I think, when God says, *I will harden the heart of Pharaoh*. The one who hears this as the oracle of God accepts it, and whoever seeks, finds a way even here of showing the goodness of God. For through the many miracles the people of Israel were assured of safety; and there was even goodness as regards the Egyptians, because many, amazed at what took place, decided to follow the Hebrews. There was perhaps also a deeper and more secret purpose of benefiting Pharaoh himself, to enable him not to conceal the poison within but to bring it forth into the light, and then perhaps put a stop to it. Thus, having gone through all the stages of the wickedness within him, he may find the tree which bore the evil fruit less vigorous when he is overwhelmed by the sea; not, as one might suppose, to perish altogether, but that he may be relieved of the burden of his sins, and, perhaps, descend to Hades in peace.

Origen, The Philokalia (compiled by SS Basil and Gregory Nazianzen) 27.1.3-5; tr. G. Lewis (1911).

Thursday of the First Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread: Exodus 12:1-20)

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, “This month shall be for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month they shall take every man a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household; and if the household is too small for a lamb, then a man and his neighbour next to his house shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old; you shall take it from the sheep or from the goats; and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs in the evening. Then they shall take some of the blood, and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat them. They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled with water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. And you shall let none of it remain until the morning, anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. In this manner you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD’s passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

“This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance for ever. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the first day you shall put away leaven out of your houses, for if any one eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly; no work shall be done on those days; but what every one must eat, that only may be prepared by you. And you shall observe the feast of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt: therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as an ordinance for ever. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, and so until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses; for if any one eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.”

A READING FROM THE TREATISE ON THE PASSOVER BY ORIGEN

Most of the brethren, perhaps all, think that the Passover takes its name from the Passion of the Saviour. Among the Hebrews, however, the real name of this feast means 'passage', and should one of us in conversation with Hebrews too rashly mention that the Passover takes its name from the suffering of the Saviour, he would be ridiculed by them as one ignorant of the meaning of the word.

Now when the Apostle says, *Christ our paschal lamb has been sacrificed, let us, therefore, celebrate the feast*, he teaches us that the Passover still takes place today, that the sheep is sacrificed and that the people come up out of Egypt. If Jesus Christ our Passover has been sacrificed, those who sacrifice Christ come up out of Egypt, cross the Red Sea, and will see Pharaoh engulfed; and if there are any among you who would like to return to Egypt, they will not enter into the Holy Land.

But the lamb was sacrificed by the saints and Nazirites, while the Saviour was sacrificed by sinners. If the Passover lamb was sacrificed by saints and if *Christ our paschal lamb has been sacrificed*, then Christ has been sacrificed according to the type of the Passover but not by the saints; thus the Passover is indeed a type of Christ but not of his Passion. It is necessary for us to sacrifice the true lamb and to cook and eat its flesh, but if this did not take place in the Passion of the Saviour, then the antitype of the Passover is not his suffering; rather the Passover becomes the type of Christ himself who was sacrificed for us. To show that the true Passover is something spiritual and not this material Passover, he himself says, *Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you*. Are we then to eat his flesh and drink his blood in a physical manner? If these words are said spiritually, then the Passover is spiritual not physical.

If the Lamb is Christ and Christ is the Word, what is his flesh that is to be roasted with fire if not the divine Scriptures? Should some cling just to the words themselves, they would eat the flesh of the Saviour raw and would merit death and not life, since the Apostle teaches us that *the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life*; but the Spirit is given us from God and *our God is a devouring fire*, so we must roast the Scriptures with this fire. The words are changed by such a fire and we will see that they are sweet and nourishing.

Finally, just as these mysteries of the Passover which are celebrated in the Old Testament are superseded by the truth of the New Testament, so too will the mysteries of the New Testament, which we must now celebrate in the same way, not be necessary in the resurrection, a time which is signified by the *morning in which nothing will be left, and what does remain of it will be burned by fire*.

Origen, Treatise on the Passover 1, 3, 12-14, 26, 32; Ancient Christian Writers 54 (1992) tr. Daly.

Friday of the First Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(The plague of the firstborn: Exodus 12:21-36)

Then Moses called all the elders of Israel, and said to them, "Select lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood which is in the basin; and none of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. For the LORD will pass through to slay the Egyptians; and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to slay you. You shall observe this rite as an ordinance for you and for your sons for ever. And when you come to the land which the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the LORD's passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he slew the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

At midnight the LORD smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of the cattle. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where one was not dead. And he summoned Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise up, go forth from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also!"

And the Egyptians were urgent with the people, to send them out of the land in haste; for they said, "We are all dead men." So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their mantles on their shoulders. The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked of the Egyptians jewellery of silver and of gold, and clothing; and the LORD had given the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they despoiled the Egyptians.

A READING FROM A TREATISE UPON THE PASSION BY ST THOMAS MORE

The Lord commanded Moses that on the tenth day of the month they should take for every household a lamb without spot, and on the fourteenth day of the same month in the evening, offer it and eat it up entirely, head, entrails, and all, so that nothing thereof should be left. But if anything were left they should burn it up.

That innocent lamb without spot was a figure signifying our Saviour Christ, the true, innocent Lamb of whom Saint John the Baptist witnessed: *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*. By whose immolation and sacrifice on the Cross, and by his holy body received into ours, as that lamb was into theirs, his faithful folk should be delivered out of the thralldom of the devil's dominion. And therefore we may to the benefit of our souls consider in the aforesaid figure of these Egyptians, that in Egypt (which by interpretation signifies darkness) do labour to keep in captivity the children of Israel, the people which God calls from their bondage into the liberty of his service – we may, I say, understand by the proud king Pharaoh and his chief captains, that great high, proud prince, the Sultan of Babylon, the devil. And the two special courtiers of that proud, base Sultan we may well consider to be the world and the flesh. And the whole people of the Egyptians under them may well betoken the devilish people, and the worldly people, and the fleshly people that follow them and are willingly governed by them. For truly, all these labour to draw into their service and to make their vassal servants, bondsmen, and slaves all those whom the goodness of God calls out of the dark devilish, worldly, and fleshly subjection into the lightsome liberty of his celestial service.

By the first-begotten children of the Egyptians we may well understand the first motions of sin, such as the subtle inward suggestions of the devil, and the inward incitement of the flesh, and the outward occasions and provocations of the world and evil people, by all which kind of motions good, well-disposed folk are in many ways drawn into sin. And surely these first-begotten children must be killed, not only of the Egyptian people, that is to say the first motions unto such vices as have their origin in the soul, but also the first-begotten of their animals too, that is to say the first motions unto such vices as specially spring from the sensual animal body, or else it will be very hard for the children of Israel, the well-disposed people, to escape safely out of the bondage of these Egyptians.

St Thomas More, On the Passion, Ch.1, Sermon 1; from Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Saturday of the First Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(The Hebrews depart; laws about Passover and the firstborn: Exodus 12:37-49; 13:11-16)

And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very many cattle, both flocks and herds. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any provisions.

The time that the people of Israel dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, on that very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. It was a night of watching by the LORD, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; so this same night is a night of watching kept to the LORD by all the people of Israel throughout their generations.

And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the ordinance of the passover: no foreigner shall eat of it; but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him. No sojourner or hired servant may eat of it. In one house shall it be eaten; you shall not carry forth any of the flesh outside the house; and you shall not break a bone of it. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you.

"And when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, you shall set apart to the LORD all that first opens the womb. All the firstlings of your cattle that are males shall be the LORD's. Every firstling of an ass you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every first-born of man among your sons you shall redeem. And when in time to come your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage. For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of cattle. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb; but all the first-born of my sons I redeem.' It shall be as a mark on your hand or frontlets between your eyes; for by a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt."

A READING FROM THE PASCHAL HOMILIES OF ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

In Egypt the Israelites sacrificed a lamb at the bidding of Moses, who told them to eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. *For seven days*, says Scripture, *you shall eat unleavened bread and bitter herbs*. Must we then continue to observe customs that are

only types and symbols? Remember the words of Paul, for he was truly learned in the Law and very wise. He says: *We know that the Law is spiritual*. Can anyone doubt that he who had Christ within him spoke the plain truth and did not deceive? Moreover, Christ himself said clearly: *Do not imagine that I have come to do away with the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to do away with them, but to fulfil them. I assure you that the Law will not lose a single dot or stroke until its purpose is achieved. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away*. In what way then must we also fulfil the ancient law?

For us who have been called to live a life of holiness through faith the true lamb has been sacrificed, the lamb that takes away the sin of the world. To this sacrifice we must add a food that is spiritual, wholly good and truly sacred, a food typified in the Law by the unleavened bread, which we now understand in a spiritual way.

In the divinely inspired Scriptures yeast always signifies wickedness and sin. Our Lord Jesus Christ, warning his holy disciples to be on their guard, said: *Beware of the yeast of the scribes and Pharisees*. And Paul in his great wisdom wrote that those who have once been sanctified should put far from them the yeast of impurity that corrupts mind and heart. *Purify yourselves of the old yeast*, he urged, *and become a fresh batch of bread, since you really are unleavened*.

This urgent plea prompted by concern for our well-being shows that spiritual communion with Christ the Saviour of us all is not only a benefit to us but also a real need. It also shows how important it is for us to keep our minds pure by refraining from sin and washing away every stain. In a word, we must avoid everything that defiled us in the past, for it is then, when no fault of ours bars the way and we are wholly free from reproach, that we shall open the way to this communion with Christ.

But we also have to eat bitter herbs. These stand for the bitter sufferings we must undergo, and we should greatly value the endurance they demand. It would indeed be quite absurd if those desiring to serve God imagined they could achieve great virtue, and glory in the supreme reward, without having first contended for it and given proof of the most steadfast courage. The approach to this goal is rugged and steep, and it is inaccessible to most people. It becomes easy only for those whose desire to arrive is so strong that they are dismayed by nothing and are ready to face hardship and toil. Christ's own words urge us to do this: *Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the road easy that leads to damnation, and those who enter by it are many. The gate is narrow and the road hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few*.

St Cyril of Alexandria, Paschal Homilies 19.2 (PG 77:824-825); from Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Lent Week 2

Sunday of the Second Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(The journey as far as the Red Sea: Exodus 13:17 – 14:9)

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, “Lest the people repent when they see war, and return to Egypt.” But God led the people round by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him; for Joseph had solemnly sworn the people of Israel, saying, “God will visit you; then you must carry my bones with you from here.” And they moved on from Succoth, and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night; the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-ha-hiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp over against it, by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, ‘They are entangled in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’ And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.” And they did so.

When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, “What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, and took six hundred picked chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt and he pursued the people of Israel as they went forth defiantly. The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-ha-hiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

A READING FROM A HOMILY ON EXODUS BY ORIGEN

Let us consider the path God pointed out to Moses. From Etham, he said, turn back and make your way between Pi-hahiroth and Migdol, which is opposite Baal-zephon.

We might suppose a path pointed out by God would be a smooth and pleasant one, free of obstacles and requiring no effort from the traveller, but in fact God’s way is an ascent, a tortuous and rugged climb. There can be no downhill road to virtue – it is uphill all the way, and the path is narrow and arduous. Listen also to the Lord’s warning in the Gospel: *The way that leads to life, he says, is narrow and hard.* Notice how close the agreement is between the Gospel and the Law. In the Law the way of virtue is shown to be a tortuous climb; the Gospels speak of the way that leads to life as narrow and hard. Is it not obvious then, even to the blind, that the Law and the Gospels were both written by one and the same Spirit?

And so the road they followed was a winding ascent, an ascent surmounted by a beacon. The ascent refers to works and the beacon to faith, so that we can see the great difficulty and laborious effort involved in both faith and works. Many are the temptations we shall meet and many the obstacles to faith that lie in store for us in our desire to pursue the things of God.

Pharaoh said: 'The Israelites are wandering in the wilderness.' In his eyes anyone who obeyed God was wandering in the wilderness because the way of wisdom is a tortuous route, rugged and winding. Thus, when we profess our belief in one God and in the same confession assert that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, to unbelievers this seems difficult, incomprehensible, and involved. When we go on to say that the Lord of majesty is also the Son of Man who descended from heaven and was crucified, they find this baffling and cannot understand it. Whoever hears this and cannot respond to it with faith will say of believers: 'They are wandering in the wilderness.' But stand firm in your belief, cast aside all doubt, for we know that the way of faith has been laid down for us by God. We cannot expect the road to life to be a smooth one, free from trials. As Saint Paul warns: *All who wish to live a godly life in Christ will suffer persecution.* Yet for anyone in search of the perfect life death on the road is preferable to failure even to set out on the quest.

Origen, Homilies on Exodus 5.3-4; from Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Monday of the Second Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(The crossing of the Red Sea: Exodus 14:10-31)

When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them; and they were in great fear. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD; and they said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.'" And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be still." The LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. Lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go on dry ground through the sea. And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."

Then the angel of God who went before the host of Israel moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness; and the night passed without one coming near the other all night.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. The Egyptians pursued, and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And in the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down upon the host of the Egyptians, and discomfited the host of the Egyptians, clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily; and the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before Israel; for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians."

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen." So Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its wonted flow when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled into it, and the LORD routed the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen and all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not so much as one of them remained. But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore. And Israel saw the great work which the LORD did

against the Egyptians, and the people feared the LORD; and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

A READING FROM THE CATECHESSES OF ST CYRIL OF JERUSALEM

I long ago desired, true born and dearly beloved children of the Church, to speak to you concerning these spiritual and heavenly mysteries in which you came to participate. Knowing well that seeing is far more persuasive than hearing, I waited until now with the hope of finding you more open to the influence of my words from the actions you experience. Thus I might take and lead you to the brighter and more fragrant meadow of this present paradise, especially as you have been made fit to receive the more sacred mysteries and have been counted worthy of divine and life-giving baptism.

On that evening of your baptism you entered into the outer hall of the Baptistry, and there facing toward the west you heard the command to stretch forth your hand, and as in the presence of Satan, you renounced him. This figure is found in ancient history. For when Pharaoh, that most cruel and ruthless tyrant, oppressed the free and royal people of the Hebrews, God sent Moses to bring them out of the evil grip of the Egyptians. Then the doorposts were anointed with the blood of the lamb that the destroyer might flee from the houses which had the sign of the blood. And the Hebrew people were marvellously delivered. The enemy, however, after their rescue, pursued them, and saw the sea wondrously parted for them. Nevertheless he went on, following in their footsteps and was all at once overwhelmed and engulfed in the Red Sea.

Now turn from the ancient to the recent, from the figure to the reality. There, we have Moses sent from God to Egypt; here, Christ sent by his Father into the world. There, that Moses might lead forth an oppressed people out of Egypt; here, that Christ might rescue mankind who is overwhelmed with sins. There, the blood of a lamb was the spell against the destroyer; here, the blood of the unblemished Lamb Jesus Christ is made the charm to scare evil spirits. There, the tyrant pursued even to the sea that ancient people; and in like manner this daring and shameless spirit, the author of evil, followed you, even to the very streams of salvation. The tyrant of old was drowned in the sea; and this present one disappears in the saving water.

What then did each of you standing up say? 'I renounce Satan', meaning 'I fear your power no longer, for Christ has overthrown it, having partaken with me of flesh and blood, that through these he might by death destroy death that I might not for ever be subject to bondage. I renounce you, you crafty and most subtle serpent. I renounce you, plotter as you are, who under the guise of friendship brought about disobedience and the apostasy of our first parents. I renounce you, Satan, the source of all wickedness.'

When you renounced Satan, utterly breaking all covenants with him, that ancient connection with hell, there is opened to you the paradise of God, which he planted toward the east, where for his transgression our first father was exiled. Symbolic of this was your turning from the west to the east, the place of light. Then you were told to say: I believe in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, and in one baptism of repentance.

St Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechesis XIX, On the Mysteries 1:1-4.9; from Word in Season II, 2nd ed.

Tuesday of the Second Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(The rain of manna in the desert: Exodus 16:1-18, 35)

They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily." So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, "At evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your murmurings against the LORD. For what are we, that you murmur against us?" And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you in the evening flesh to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your murmurings which you murmur against him – what are we? Your murmurings are not against us but against the LORD."

And Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, 'Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your murmurings.'" And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. And the LORD said to Moses, "I have heard the murmurings of the people of Israel; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning dew lay round about the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as hoarfrost on the ground. When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat. This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Gather of it, every man of you, as much as he can eat; you shall take an omer apiece, according to the number of the persons whom each of you has in his tent.'" And the people of Israel did so; they gathered, some more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; each gathered according to what he could eat.

And the people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land; they ate the manna, till they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON EXODUS BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

We shall think of the manna as a figure foreshadowing the teaching and the spiritual gifts of Christ. These also are from heaven, and have nothing earthly about them. They produce no physical nausea, and are real food not only of men but of angels as well.

In his own person the Son has revealed the Father to us, and through the Son we have come to believe the teaching about the holy and consubstantial Trinity, and have been well and truly guided into all the paths of virtue. The orthodox and unadulterated knowledge of these things is the food of the spirit

To the people of old the manna was given at dawn, as the light began to shine, because the wealth of Christ's teaching would be distributed so to speak by daylight. The day has dawned upon us who believe, as Scripture says; the morning star has risen in all our hearts, and the Sun of Righteousness, Christ, the giver of spiritual manna, has appeared.

From his own words to the Jews we can be certain that Christ himself is the true manna, and the material manna was but an image: *Your ancestors ate manna in the desert and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that anyone who eats it may never die. I am the living bread come down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. The bread I shall give is my flesh which I shall give for the life of the world.*

Our Lord Jesus Christ nourishes us for eternal life both by his commands, which teach us how to live holy lives, and by the Eucharist. In himself, therefore, he is truly the divine, life-giving manna. Anyone who eats it will be exempt from corruption and will escape death, unlike those who ate the material manna. The type had no power to save, but was merely an imitation of the reality.

God sent down manna like rain from above, and ordered everyone to gather as much as necessary, those who shared a tent gathering together if they wished. *Gather it, each of you, he said, with those who share your tent. Let none of it be left over till the morning.* That is to say, we must fill ourselves with the divine teaching of the Gospel.

St Cyril of Alexandria, Glaphyra in Exodus 2:3 (PG 69:456-457); from Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Wednesday of the Second Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(Water from the rock; the battle against Amalek: Exodus 17:1-16)

All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people found fault with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you find fault with me? Why do you put the LORD to the proof?" But the people thirsted there for water, and the people murmured against Moses, and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?" So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand the rod with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the faultfinding of the children of Israel, and because they put the LORD to the proof by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Then came Amalek and fought with Israel at Rephidim. And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out, fight with Amalek; tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand." So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands grew weary; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat upon it, and Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; so his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua mowed down Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

And the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD is my banner, saying, "A hand upon the banner of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

A READING FROM THE SERMONS OF ST AELRED OF RIEVAULX

We read in the Old Testament that, after the people of Israel left Egypt with Moses at their head, the Amalekites, a savage race, came and did battle against them. Moses sent an army against them, while *he himself went up on to a mountain to pray* for them and raised his hands to the Lord. And *it came to pass that* while he kept his hands raised, the people of Israel were triumphant but whenever he lowered his hands Amalek started to win. Why was it, do you think, that *the raising of his hands* possessed such grace? Without doubt God usually takes more account of the attachments of the mind than of the postures of the body.

Why was it then? Did his prayer have no effect before God unless he raised his hands? That lifting up of his hands had such an effect that their enemies could not withstand the Israelites. The reason why this lifting up of hands had such force was that it signified the raising of the hands of him who said in the psalm, The lifting up of my hands is like an evening sacrifice. For, when evening had already come upon the world, his sweetest hands were stretched out on the Cross and there was offered up that evening sacrifice that took away the sins of the whole world.

So that *raising of Moses' hands* signified the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ who *went up on to a mountain to pray* because he ascended into heaven to plead our cause with the Father. There he lifts up his hands so that Amalek – that is, the devil – will not be able to vanquish us. For there he appears *in God's sight on our behalf* and represents to him the Passion that he underwent for us. As for us, brothers, as long as we are in this wretched life which is *a trial upon earth*, as long as *our fight is against the principalities and powers, against the rulers of the dark things of the world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens*, we need to have our Lord lifting up his hands within us – that is to say, the remembrance of his Passion should be continually present in our minds. We can be quite sure, my brothers, that as long as the memory of his Passion is in our heart, as long as our hope is directed to where *Christ is pleading our cause at the right hand of the Father*, the spiritual Amalek – that is, the devil – will not be able to vanquish us. And therefore, my brothers, let us see that this attachment, this remembrance, does not through some negligence on our part grow lukewarm in us. For then we shall immediately grow faint and our enemy will gain the upper hand and cause us distress.

St Aelred of Rievaulx, Sermon 13.27-29 (1st Clairvaux Coll.); CF 58 (2001) tr. Berkeley & Pennington.

Thursday of the Second Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(Judges are appointed under Moses: Exodus 18:13-27)

On the morrow Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from morning till evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand about you from morning till evening?" And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God; when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between a man and his neighbour, and I make them know the statutes of God and his decisions." Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you; you are not able to perform it alone. Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You shall represent the people before God, and bring their cases to God; and you shall teach them the statutes and the decisions, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do. Moreover choose able men from all the people, such as fear God, men who are trustworthy and who hate a bribe; and place such men over the people as rulers of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And let them judge the people at all times; every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves; so it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace."

So Moses gave heed to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And they judged the people at all times; hard cases they brought to Moses, but any small matter they decided themselves. Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went his way to his own country.

A READING FROM THE INSTITUTES OF ST JOHN CASSIAN

Whoever seeks to be received into the discipline of the cenobium is never admitted until, by lying outside for ten days or more, he has given an indication of his perseverance and desire, as well as of his humility and patience.

When a person has been admitted, has been tested in the perseverance about which we have spoken, and has put aside his own garments and been clothed in the monastic habit, he is not permitted to join the community of the brothers immediately but is assigned to an elder who dwells not very far from the entrance of the monastery and is responsible for being hospitable to travellers and strangers. And when he has served for a full year there and has without any complaining waited upon travellers, having in this way been exposed to his first training in humility and patience, and he is about to be admitted from this to the community of the brothers, he is given over to another elder who is responsible for ten younger men, who have been entrusted to him by the Abba.

This elder both teaches and rules them in accordance with what we read in Exodus was established by Moses.

The chief concern and instruction of this man, whereby the young man who was brought to him may be able to ascend even to the loftiest heights of perfection, will be, first of all, to teach him to conquer his desires. In order to exercise him assiduously and diligently in this respect, he will purposely see to it that he always demands of him things that he would consider repulsive. For, taught by numerous experiences, they declare that a monk, and especially the younger men, cannot restrain their yearning for pleasure unless they have first learned to mortify their desires through obedience. And so they assert that someone who has not first learned to overcome his desires can never extinguish anger or sadness or the spirit of fornication, nor can he maintain true humility of heart or unbroken unity with his brothers or a solid and enduring peace, nor can he even stay in the cenobium for any length of time.

With these institutes, then, as with the rudiments of the alphabet, they initiate those whom they strive to direct toward perfection. In this way they discern clearly whether they are grounded in a humility that is deceptive and imaginary or in one that is real. In order to be able to arrive easily at this, they are then taught never, through a hurtful shame, to hide any of the wanton thoughts in their hearts but to reveal them to their elder as soon as they surface, nor to judge them in accordance with their own discretion but to credit them with badness or goodness as the elder's examination discloses and makes clear. Thus the clever foe is never able to get the better of a young man when he sees that he is protected not by his own but by his elder's discretion. Indeed, the devil in all his slyness will not be able to deceive or cast down a young man unless he induces him, either by haughtiness or by embarrassment, to cover up his thoughts. For they declare that it is an invariable and clear sign that a thought is from the devil if we are ashamed to disclose it to an elder.

St John Cassian, Institutes 4.3, 7-9; Ancient Christian Writers 58 (2000) tr. Ramsey.

Friday of the Second Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(Promise of the covenant and appearance of the Lord on Sinai: Exodus 19:1-19; 20:18-21)

On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone forth out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. And when they set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, they encamped in the wilderness; and there Israel encamped before the mountain. And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him. And all the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. And the LORD said to Moses, "Lo, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you for ever."

Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD. And the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments, and be ready by the third day; for on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. And you shall set bounds for the people round about, saying, 'Take heed that you do not go up into the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death; no hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain." So Moses went down from the mountain to the people, and consecrated the people; and they washed their garments. And he said to the people, "Be ready by the third day; do not go near a woman."

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.

Now when all the people perceived the thunderings and the lightnings and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled; and they stood afar off, and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die." And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to prove you, and that the fear of him may be before your eyes, that you may not sin."

And the people stood afar off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

A READING FROM THE LIFE OF MOSES BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

Moses entered into the darkness and there he saw God. What does this signify? This present account seems in a way to contradict that of the first theophany. Then God appeared in light, but now he appears in darkness. Yet we must not imagine this to be at variance with our normal experience of spiritual contemplation. By this statement the text teaches us that religious knowledge is first experienced as light. All that is seen to be opposed to religion is darkness, and darkness vanishes when we receive the light. But the more the mind advances and by ever increasing and more perfect application attains an intellectual comprehension of realities and approaches contemplation, the more clearly it sees that the divine nature is invisible. Having left behind all appearances, not only those perceived by the senses but also those the intellect seems to see, it plunges ever deeper within itself, until by spiritual effort it penetrates to the invisible and the unknowable, and there it sees God.

This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness. This is why John the contemplative, who had penetrated this luminous darkness, said that *no one had ever seen God*, declaring by this negation that the divine essence is beyond the reach not only of men but of every rational nature as well.

And so, when Moses had advanced in knowledge he declared that he saw God in the darkness, or in other words that he recognized that the Divinity is essentially that which transcends all knowledge and which no mind can apprehend. The text says: *Moses entered into the darkness where God was*. What God? He who has *made the darkness his covering*, as David declared, who had himself been initiated into the divine mysteries in that same sanctuary.

When Moses arrived there, he was taught by word what he had formerly learned from darkness, so that, I think, the doctrine on this matter may be made more firm for us by the witness of the divine voice. The divine word at the beginning forbade that the Divine be likened to any of the things known by men, since every concept which comes from some comprehensible image constitutes an idol of God and does not proclaim God.

St Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, 2.162-66 (SC 1, 80-82); from Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Saturday of the Second Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(The Law is given on Sinai: Exodus 1-17)

And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

"You shall have no other gods before me.

"You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

"Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

"You shall not kill.

"You shall not commit adultery.

"You shall not steal.

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

"You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbour's."

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Make it up with your adversary while he is with you on the road. This life is called a road, along which everybody travels. And this adversary does not go away. But who is this adversary? This adversary is not the devil, for Scripture would never urge you to come to an agreement with the devil. So who is this adversary? It is the word of God. Why is it your adversary? Because it commands things against the grain which you do not do. It tells you: *Your God is one*; worship one God. What you want is to put away the one God who is like the lawful husband of your soul and go fornicating, and what is much more serious, not openly deserting and repudiating him as apostates do, but remaining in your

husband's house and letting in adulterers. That is, as if you were a Christian you do not leave the Church but you consult astrologers or sorcerers.

You are told, *Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain* and you are told to observe the Sabbath in a spiritual way, in hope of the future rest which the Lord has promised you. Whoever does whatever he can for the sake of that future rest, even though what he is doing seems toilsome, nonetheless he already has the Sabbath in hope, though he does not yet have it in fact. But as for you, the reason you want to rest is in order to work, whereas you ought to be working in order to rest. You are told, *Honour your father and your mother*. You heap insults on your parents, which you certainly do not want to endure from your children. You are told, *You shall not kill*. But you want to kill your enemy; and the only reason you do not do it is that you are afraid of the human judge. Do you not realize that God is the witness of your thoughts? The man you want dead is alive, but God holds you to be a murderer in your heart.

You were singing earlier on: *O God, I will sing you a new song, on a harp of ten strings I will play to you*. Now I am strumming these ten strings. You see, the decalogue of the Law has ten commandments. These ten commandments are arranged in such a way that three refer to God and seven refer to men. Commandments on three strings refer to God. But to the other commandment, that is, the love of neighbour, seven strings refer to how people should live together. This series of seven, like seven strings, begins with the honouring of parents: *Honour your father and your mother*. God gave his servant Moses two tablets on the mountain, and on these two stone tablets were inscribed the ten commandments of the Law – the harp of ten strings – three referring to God on one tablet, and seven referring to our neighbour on the other tablet. Let us join these to those three that refer to love of God, if we wish to sing the new song to the harp of the ten strings.

The ten commandments are reducible to those two commandments, that we should love God and our neighbour, and these two to the one we are looking for: *What you do not want done to you, do not do to another*. There the ten are contained, and there also are contained the two. Sing to the harp of ten strings, sing a new song, and come to an agreement with the word of God, while it is with you on the road.

St Augustine, Sermon 9:1-3, 6-7, 14, 16; from Word in Season II, 2nd ed.

Lent Week 3

Sunday of the Third Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(Laws about the stranger and the poor; the Book of the Covenant: Exodus 22:20 – 23:9)

“Whoever sacrifices to any god, save to the LORD only, shall be utterly destroyed.

“You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you do afflict them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

“If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be to him as a creditor, and you shall not exact interest from him. If ever you take your neighbour’s garment in pledge, you shall restore it to him before the sun goes down; for that is his only covering, it is his mantle for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

“You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.

“You shall not delay to offer from the fullness of your harvest and from the outflow of your presses.

“The first-born of your sons you shall give to me. You shall do likewise with your oxen and with your sheep: seven days it shall be with its dam; on the eighth day you shall give it to me.

“You shall be men consecrated to me; therefore you shall not eat any flesh that is torn by beasts in the field; you shall cast it to the dogs.

“You shall not utter a false report. You shall not join hands with a wicked man, to be a malicious witness. You shall not follow a multitude to do evil; nor shall you bear witness in a suit, turning aside after a multitude, so as to pervert justice; nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his suit.

“If you meet your enemy’s ox or his ass going astray, you shall bring it back to him. If you see the ass of one who hates you lying under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it, you shall help him to lift it up.

“You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his suit. Keep far from a false charge, and do not slay the innocent and righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked. And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the officials, and subverts the cause of those who are in the right.

“You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

A READING FROM THE DEGREES OF HUMILITY AND PRIDE BY ST BERNARD

Knowledge of the truth comprises three degrees, which I will try to set out as briefly as possible. In the first place we seek truth in ourselves; then we seek it in our neighbour,

and last of all we search for truth in its own essential nature. We discover truth in ourselves when we pass judgment on ourselves; we find it in our neighbour when we suffer in sympathy with others; we search out its own nature by contemplation in purity of heart.

Notice not only the number of these degrees, but also their order. Before we inquire into the nature of truth, Truth itself must first teach us to seek it in our neighbour. Then we shall understand why, before we find it in our neighbour, we must seek it in ourselves. The sequence of beatitudes given in the Sermon on the Mount places the merciful before the pure in heart. The merciful are those who are quick to see truth in their neighbour; they reach out to others in compassion and identify with them in love, responding to the joys and sorrows in the lives of others as if they were their own. They make themselves weak with the weak, and burn with indignation when others are led astray. They are always ready to share the joys of those who rejoice and the sorrows of those who mourn.

Men whose inner vision has thus been cleansed by the exercise of charity toward their neighbour can delight in the contemplation of truth in itself, for it is love of truth which makes them take upon themselves the misfortunes of others. But can people find the truth in their neighbour if they refuse to support their brothers in this way – if on the contrary they either scoff at their tears or disparage their joys, being insensitive to all feelings but their own? There is a popular saying which well suits them: A healthy person cannot feel the pains of sickness, nor can one who is well-fed feel the pangs of hunger. The more familiar we are with sickness or hunger, the greater will be our compassion for others who are sick or hungry.

Just as pure truth can only be seen by the pure in heart, so the sufferings of our fellow men and women are more truly felt by hearts that know suffering themselves. However, we cannot sympathize with the wretchedness of others until we first recognize our own. Then we shall understand the feelings of others by what we personally feel, and know how to come to their help. Such was the example shown by our Saviour, who desired to suffer himself in order that he might learn to feel compassion, and to be afflicted in order that he might learn how to show mercy. Scripture says of him that he learned the meaning of obedience through what he suffered. In the same way he learned the meaning of mercy. Not that the Lord whose mercy is from age to age was ignorant of mercy's meaning until then; he knew its nature from all eternity, but he learned it by personal experience during his days on earth.

St Bernard, Degrees of Humility and Pride 3.6 (Opera Omnia, 1963, 3:20-21); Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Monday of the Third Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(The agreement of the Covenant on Mount Sinai: Exodus 24:1-18)

And he said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship afar off. Moses alone shall come near to the LORD; but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him."

Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do." And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.

The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tables of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction." So Moses rose with his servant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. And he said to the elders, "Tarry here for us, until we come to you again; and, behold, Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a cause, let him go to them."

Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days; and on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. And Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

A READING FROM A TREATISE UPON THE PASSION BY ST THOMAS MORE

In the twenty-fourth chapter of Exodus it is related that Moses, in confirmation of the old Law, put half the blood of the sacrifice into a cup, and the other half he shed upon the altar. And, after the book of the Law had been read, he sprinkled the blood upon the people and said unto them: *This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in all these words.* And so was the Old Testament ratified and confirmed with blood.

And in like manner was the New Testament confirmed with blood, saving that, in order to declare the greater excellence of the New Testament brought by the Son of God, above the Old Testament brought by the prophet Moses, whereas the Old Testament was ratified with the blood of a brute beast, the New Testament was ratified with the blood of a rational man, and of that man who was also God, that is to say, with the blessed blood of our holy Saviour himself. And that self-same blood did our Lord here give unto his apostles in this blessed sacrament, as he plainly declared himself, saying: *This is my blood of the New Testament, or: This is the chalice of the New Testament in my blood which shall be shed for you and for many for the remission of sins.*

When our Lord said this, he declared therein the efficacy of the New Testament above the old, in that the old Law in the blood of beasts could only promise the remission of sin that was to come later. For as Saint Paul says: It was impossible that sin should be taken away by the blood of brute beasts. But the new Law with the blood of Christ does perform the thing that the old Law promised, that is, the remission of sin And therefore our Saviour said: *This is the chalice of the New Testament in my blood* – that is, to be confirmed in my blood – *which shall be shed for the remission of sins.*

His words also declared the wonderful excellence of this new blessed sacrament above the sacrifice of the paschal lamb, in these words: *For you and for many.* For in these words our Saviour spoke, says Saint Chrysostom, as though he meant to say: The blood of the paschal Lamb was shed only for the first-born among the children of Israel, but this blood of mine shall be shed for the remission of the sin of all the whole world.

St Thomas More, A Treatise upon the Passion, 4.1; from Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Tuesday of the Third Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(The golden calf: Exodus 32:1-20)

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron, and said to him, "Up, make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." And Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people took off the rings of gold which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made a molten calf; and they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt! When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD." And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down; for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves; they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them; they have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people; now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; but of you I will make a great nation."

But Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does thy wrath burn hot against thy people, whom thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them forth, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people.

Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou didst swear by thine own self, and didst say to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it for ever.'" And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people.

And Moses turned, and went down from the mountain with the two tables of the testimony in his hands, tables that were written on both sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables. When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp." But he said, "It is not the sound of shouting for victory, or the sound of the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing that I hear." And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tables out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt

it with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it upon the water, and made the people of Israel drink it.

A READING FROM ON THE DIVINE IMAGES BY ST JOHN OF DAMASCUS

God, the best physician of souls, prohibits from making images those who are still infants and ill with a diseased inclination to idolatry, those who are apt to venerate idols as gods. For it is impossible to make an image of God who is incorporeal, invisible, and with neither shape nor circumscription; how can what cannot be seen be depicted? That they did venerate idols as gods, listen to what Scripture says in Exodus, when Moses went up on to Mount Sinai and was there for some time, waiting to receive the Law from God. The senseless people rose up against the servant of God, Aaron, saying, *Make us gods to go before us; as for this man, Moses, we do not know what has become of him.*

I know what the One who cannot lie said: The Lord your God is one Lord, and you shall not make any carved likeness, of anything in heaven or on the earth, and all who venerate carved images shall be put to shame. I venerate one God, one divinity but also I worship a trinity of persons, God the Father and God the Son incarnate and God the Holy Spirit. I do not offer three veneration, but one, not to each of the persons separately, but I offer one veneration to the three persons together as one God. I do not venerate the creation instead of the creator, but I venerate the Creator, created for my sake, who came down to his creation that he might glorify my nature and bring about communion with the divine nature. I venerate together with the King and God the purple robe of his body, not as a garment, nor as a fourth person (God forbid!), but as unchangeably equal to God and the source of anointing. For the nature of the flesh did not become divinity, but as the Word became flesh immutably, remaining what it was, so also the flesh became the Word without losing what it was, being rather made equal to the Word hypostatically. Therefore I am emboldened to depict the invisible God, not as invisible, but as he became visible for our sake, by participation in flesh and blood. I do not depict the invisible divinity, I depict God made visible in the flesh.

It was, therefore, for the Jews, on account of their sliding into idolatry, that these things were ordained by the Law. To speak theologically, however, we, who, passing beyond childhood to reach maturity, are no longer under a custodian, have received the habit of discrimination from God and know what can be depicted and what cannot be delineated in an image. For it is now clear that you cannot depict the invisible God. When you see the bodiless become human for your sake, then you may accomplish the figure of a human form; then you may depict him on a board and set up to view the One who has accepted to be seen. Depict his ineffable descent, his birth from the Virgin, his being baptized in the Jordan, his transfiguration on Tabor, what he endured to secure our freedom from passion, the miracles which are symbols of his divine nature and activity accomplished through the activity of the flesh, the saving tomb of the Saviour, the resurrection, the ascent into heaven. Depict all these in words and in colours, in books and on tablets.

Wednesday of the Third Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(Moses is given the full revelation of God: Exodus 33:7-11, 18-23; 34:5-9, 29-35)

Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp; and he called it the tent of meeting. And every one who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose up, and every man stood at his tent door, and looked after Moses, until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the door of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the door of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, every man at his tent door. Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tent.

Moses said, "I pray thee, show me thy glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live." And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen."

And the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." And Moses made haste to bow his head toward the earth, and worshiped. And he said, "If now I have found favour in thy sight, O Lord, let the Lord, I pray thee, go in the midst of us, although it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thy inheritance."

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tables of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. And when Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. And afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he took the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people

of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone; and Moses would put the veil upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON PSALM 118 BY ST AMBROSE

Let your face shine on your servant, and teach me your precepts. The Lord enlightens his saints and makes his light shine in the hearts of the just. This means that when you see wisdom in anyone you can be sure that the glory of God has come down and flooded that person's mind with the light of understanding and knowledge of divine truth. With Moses, however, it was different: God's glory affected his body also, causing his face to shine. Indeed, his countenance was so transfigured that the Jews were afraid to look at him, and he was obliged to cover his face with a veil so that the children of Israel should not be alarmed at the sight of it.

Now the face of Moses represents the splendour of the Law; yet this splendour is not to be found in the written letter but in the Law's spiritual interpretation. As long as Moses lived, he wore a veil over his face whenever he spoke to the Jewish people. But after his death Jesus, or Joshua, the son of Nun, spoke to the elders and the people without a veil. When he did so no one was afraid, even though God had spoken to Joshua as well as to Moses, assuring him that he would be with him just as he had been with Moses and would make him resplendent also. Joshua's glory, however, would be seen in his deeds rather than in his face. By this the Holy Spirit signified that when Jesus, the true Joshua, came, he would lift the veil from the heart of anyone who turned to him in willingness to listen, and that person would then see his true Saviour with unveiled face.

So it was that, through the coming of his Son, God the almighty Father made his light shine into the hearts of the Gentiles, bringing them to see his *glory in the face of Christ Jesus*. This is clearly stated in the Apostle's letter, where we find the following written: *The God who commanded light to shine out of darkness has made his light shine in our hearts, to enlighten us with the knowledge of God's glory shining in the face of Christ Jesus.*

And so when David says to the Lord Jesus: *Let your face shine upon your servant*, he is expressing his longing to see the face of Christ, so that his mind may be capable of enlightenment. These words can be taken as referring to the incarnation, for as the Lord himself declared: *Many prophets and righteous men have desired to have this vision*. David was not asking for what had been denied to Moses, namely that he might see the face of the incorporeal God with his bodily eyes. (And yet if Moses, who was such a wise and learned man, could ask for this direct, unmediated vision, it was because it is inherent in our human nature for our desire to reach out beyond us.) There was nothing wrong, therefore, in David's desire to see the face of the Virgin's Son who was to come; he desired it in order that God's light might shine in his heart, as it shone in the hearts of the disciples who said: *Were not our hearts burning within us when he opened up the Scriptures to us?*

St Ambrose, On Psalm 118 17:26-29 (CSEL 62:390-392); from Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Thursday of the Third Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(The other Book of the Covenant: Exodus 34:10-28)

And he said, "Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been wrought in all the earth or in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD; for it is a terrible thing that I will do with you.

"Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither you go, lest it become a snare in the midst of you. You shall tear down their altars, and break their pillars, and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they play the harlot after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and one invites you, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters play the harlot after their gods and make your sons play the harlot after their gods.

"You shall make for yourself no molten gods.

"The feast of unleavened bread you shall keep. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month Abib; for in the month Abib you came out from Egypt. All that opens the womb is mine, all your male cattle, the firstlings of cow and sheep. The firstling of an ass you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. All the first-born of your sons you shall redeem. And none shall appear before me empty.

"Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in ploughing time and in harvest you shall rest. And you shall observe the feast of weeks, the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year's end. Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the LORD God, the God of Israel. For I will cast out nations before you, and enlarge your borders; neither shall any man desire your land, when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year.

"You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven; neither shall the sacrifice of the feast of the passover be left until the morning. The first of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk."

And the LORD said to Moses, "Write these words; in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.

A READING FROM THE TREATISE ON PRAYER BY TERTULLIAN

Prayer is the spiritual offering that has replaced the ancient sacrifices. What good do I receive from the multiplicity of your sacrifices? asks God. I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams, and I do not want the fat of lambs and the blood of bulls and goats. Who has asked for these from your hands? What God has asked for, we learn from the Gospel: The hour will come, it says, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. God is spirit, and so he looks for worshipers who are like himself.

We are the true worshipers and the true priests. Praying in spirit we offer prayer to God as a sacrifice. Prayer is an appropriate and an acceptable sacrifice to God. It is the offering he has asked for and the offering he expects. We must make this offering with our whole heart. We must fatten it on faith, prepare it by truth, keep it unblemished by innocence, spotless by chastity, and we must crown it with love. We must escort it to the altar of God in a procession of good works to the sound of psalms and hymns. Then it will gain for us all that we ask of God. What can God refuse to prayer offered in spirit and in truth, when he himself asks for such prayer? How many proofs of its efficacy we read about, hear of, and believe!

Of old prayer brought deliverance from fire and beasts and hunger even before it received its pattern from Christ. How much greater then is the power of Christian prayer! It does not bring an angel of comfort to the heart of a fiery furnace, or shut the mouths of lions, or transport to the hungry food from the fields. The grace it wins does not remove all sense of pain, but it does endow those who suffer with the capacity to endure and the faith to know what the Lord will give those who suffer for the name of God.

In the past prayer caused plagues, routed armies, withheld the blessing of rain. Now the prayer of good people turns aside the anger of God, keeps vigil for their enemies, pleads for their persecutors. If prayer once had the power to call down fire from heaven, is it any wonder that it can call down from heaven the waters of grace? Prayer is the one thing that can conquer God. But Christ has willed that it should work no evil: all the power he has given it is for good.

All the angels pray. Every creature prays. Cattle and wild beasts pray and bend the knee. As they come from their barns and caves they look up to heaven and call out, lifting up their spirit in their own fashion. The birds too rise and lift themselves up to heaven: they open out their wings, instead of hands, in the form of a cross, and give voice to what seems to be a prayer.

What more need be said about the duty of prayer? Even the Lord himself prayed. To him be honour and power for ever and ever. Amen.

Tertullian, De oratione 28-29 (CCL 1:273-274); from Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Friday of the Third Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(The building of the Sanctuary and the Ark: Exodus 35:30 – 36:1; 37:1-9)

And Moses said to the people of Israel, “See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft. And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab the son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan. He has filled them with ability to do every sort of work done by a craftsman or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet stuff and fine twined linen, or by a weaver – by any sort of workman or skilled designer.

“Bezalel and Oholiab and every able man in whom the LORD has put ability and intelligence to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the LORD has commanded.”

Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood; two cubits and a half was its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. And he overlaid it with pure gold within and without, and made a moulding of gold around it. And he cast for it four rings of gold for its four corners, two rings on its one side and two rings on its other side. And he made poles of acacia wood, and overlaid them with gold, and put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark. And he made a mercy seat of pure gold; two cubits and a half was its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. And he made two cherubim of hammered gold; on the two ends of the mercy seat he made them, one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end; of one piece with the mercy seat he made the cherubim on its two ends. The cherubim spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, with their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat were the faces of the cherubim.

A READING FROM THE LIFE OF MOSES BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

What then is that tabernacle not made with hands which was shown to Moses on the mountain and to which he was commanded to look as to an archetype so that he might reproduce it in a handmade structure? God said, *See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.* Of what things not made with hands are these an imitation? And what benefit does the material imitation of those things Moses saw there convey to those who look at it?

Taking a hint from what has been said by Paul, who partially uncovered the mystery of these things, we say that Moses was earlier instructed by a type in the in mystery of the tabernacle which encompasses the universe. This tabernacle would be Christ *who is the power and the wisdom of God*, who in his own nature was not made with hands, yet capable of being made when it became necessary for this tabernacle to be erected among us. Thus, the same tabernacle is in a way both unfashioned and fashioned, uncreated in

pre-existence but created in having received this material composition. This one is the Only Begotten God, who encompasses everything in himself but who also pitched his own tabernacle among us.

Whenever the prophet looks to the tabernacle above, he sees the heavenly realities through these symbols. But if one should look at the tabernacle below, since in many places the Church also is called Christ by Paul, he would see the Church. In this tabernacle both the sacrifice of praise and the incense of prayer are seen offered continually at morning and evening. The great David allows us to perceive these things when he directs the incense of his prayer in *an odour of sweetness to God*, performing his sacrifice through the *lifting up of his hands*.

The skin dyed red and the coverings made of hair, which add to the decoration of the tabernacle, are perceived respectively as the mortification of the sinful flesh and the ascetic way of life. By these the tabernacle of the church is especially beautified. By nature these skins do not have in themselves a vital power, but they become bright red because of the red dye. This teaches that grace, which flourishes through the Spirit, is not found in men unless they first make themselves dead to sin. Whether or not Scripture signifies by the red dye chaste modesty, I leave for whoever wishes to decide. The woven hair, which produced a fabric rough and hard to the touch, foreshadows the self-control which is rough and consumes the habitual passions. The life of virginity demonstrates in itself all such things, as it chastises the flesh of all those who live this way.

If the interior, which is called the Holy of Holies, is not accessible to the multitude, let us not think that this is at variance with the sequence of what has been perceived. For the truth of reality is truly a holy thing, a holy of holies, and is incomprehensible and inaccessible to the multitude. Since it is set in the secret and ineffable areas of the tabernacle of mystery, the apprehension of the realities above comprehension should not be meddled with; one should rather believe that they do exist and that they remain in the secret and ineffable areas of the intelligence.

St Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses 170, 173-175, 184-188; CWS (1978) tr. Malherbe & Ferguson

Saturday of the Third Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(The Tabernacle is built; the Cloud of the Lord: Exodus 40:16-38)

Thus did Moses; according to all that the LORD commanded him, so he did. 17 And in the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was erected. 18 Moses erected the tabernacle; he laid its bases, and set up its frames, and put in its poles, and raised up its pillars; and he spread the tent over the tabernacle, and put the covering of the tent over it, as the LORD had commanded Moses. And he took the testimony and put it into the ark, and put the poles on the ark, and set the mercy seat above on the ark; and he brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up the veil of the screen, and screened the ark of the testimony; as the LORD had commanded Moses. And he put the table in the tent of meeting, on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the veil, and set the bread in order on it before the LORD; as the LORD had commanded Moses. And he put the lampstand in the tent of meeting, opposite the table on the south side of the tabernacle, and set up the lamps before the LORD; as the LORD had commanded Moses. And he put the golden altar in the tent of meeting before the veil, and burnt fragrant incense upon it; as the LORD had commanded Moses. And he put in place the screen for the door of the tabernacle. And he set the altar of burnt offering at the door of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, and offered upon it the burnt offering and the cereal offering; as the LORD had commanded Moses. And he set the laver between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it for washing, with which Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet; when they went into the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar, they washed; as the LORD commanded Moses. And he erected the court round the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the screen of the gate of the court. So Moses finished the work.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting, because the cloud abode upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would go onward; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not go onward till the day that it was taken up. For throughout all their journeys the cloud of the LORD was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel.

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

Emmanuel, God-with-us, is presented in figure and image when Scripture says: *And you will place the ark of the testimony in the tabernacle and cover it with the veil.* For in the preceding account the Word was described to us as in the whole tabernacle; for it was the house in which God dwelt, namely, the holy body of Christ. But despite that, the ark gives us the same meaning in detail. For it was made of acacia wood, for you to perceive his incorruptibility. *It was entirely overlaid with pure gold,* as it is written, *both inside and outside.* For everything in him, both divine and human, is precious and splendid; *and in everything he is pre-eminent,* as Paul says. Gold, then, stands for honour and pre-eminence

in general. So the ark was made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold, and had the divine Law put into it as a symbol of the indwelling Word of God united to a holy body. For the Word of God was also the Law, even, if not in human form, as the Son is. But it is covered with the veil.

It was much the same with God the Word made man, the covering of his own body obscured to the many. He, too, was hidden by his holy flesh as by a veil. Some of the Jews, therefore, failing to recognize his divine majesty, sometimes tried to stone him to death, accusing him of claiming to be God, when he was a man. Others again did not hesitate to say: *Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How, then, can he say: 'I have come down from heaven.'* So the laying of a veil on the ark tells us symbolically that Jesus would not be recognized by the many. Then even the ark itself was a symbol of him. So it was even he who went before the Israelites in the desert, taking the place of God at that time; for it was he who led the people. The psalmist is also a witness to this, saying: *When you went before your people, O God, when you crossed the desert, the earth shook and the heavens, too, poured down rain.* For the ark being always in front clearly means that God leads the way.

For Christ is one, but is understood in many and various ways: he is the tabernacle, because of the veil of flesh; he is the ark, containing the divine Law, as he is the Word of God the Father; again he is the table, as life and nourishment; the lampstand, as intellectual and spiritual light; he is the altar of sacrifice, as the fragrant odour in sanctity; and the altar of offerings, as an offering for the life of the world. Thus all things in life are sanctified, for Christ is entirely holy, in whatever way he is understood.

St Cyril of Alexandria, On John IV.4 (PG 73:620-621, 625); from Word in Season II, 2nd ed.

Lent Week 4

Sunday of the Fourth Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

(Consecration of the priests: Leviticus 8:1-17; 9:22-24)

The LORD said to Moses, "Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments, and the anointing oil, and the bull of the sin offering, and the two rams, and the basket of unleavened bread; and assemble all the congregation at the door of the tent of meeting." And Moses did as the LORD commanded him; and the congregation was assembled at the door of the tent of meeting.

And Moses said to the congregation, "This is the thing which the LORD has commanded to be done." And Moses brought Aaron and his sons, and washed them with water. And he put on him the coat, and girded him with the girdle, and clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod upon him, and girded him with the skilfully woven band of the ephod, binding it to him therewith. And he placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim. And he set the turban upon his head, and on the turban, in front, he set the golden plate, the holy crown, as the LORD commanded Moses.

Then Moses took the anointing oil, and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them. And he sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all its utensils, and the laver and its base, to consecrate them. And he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head, and anointed him, to consecrate him. And Moses brought Aaron's sons, and clothed them with coats, and girded them with girdles, and bound caps on them, as the LORD commanded Moses.

Then he brought the bull of the sin offering; and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the bull of the sin offering. And Moses killed it, and took the blood, and with his finger put it on the horns of the altar round about, and purified the altar, and poured out the blood at the base of the altar, and consecrated it, to make atonement for it. And he took all the fat that was on the entrails, and the appendage of the liver, and the two kidneys with their fat, and Moses burned them on the altar. But the bull, and its skin, and its flesh, and its dung, he burned with fire outside the camp, as the LORD commanded Moses.

Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them; and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting; and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. And fire came forth from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat upon the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted, and fell on their faces.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ST JOHN'S GOSPEL BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

As a man the Mediator between God and man intercedes on our behalf, and because he is our very great and most holy High Priest who offers himself as a sacrifice for us, his prayers appease the anger of his Father. Christ is himself both sacrifice and priest, both

mediator and victim without blemish, the true lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

The mediation of Moses in ancient times was a clear type and symbol of the mediation of Christ as manifested in the last days, and the high priest of the Law was a figure of the High Priest who is above the Law. Indeed, all that relates to the Law is a foreshadowing of the truth. The saintly Moses, and with him the celebrated Aaron, always stood between God and the people of Israel. They placated God's anger at the people's sins, calling on heaven to be merciful to their weakness; they invoked blessings on them and offered the sacrifice and gifts ordained by the Law for sins, or as thank-offerings for the blessings God had given them.

But Christ, who appeared in the last days to supersede the types and symbols of the Law, is both High Priest and Mediator. As a man he intercedes for us, but as God he is one with God the Father in bestowing blessings upon those who are worthy of them. Paul's saying, *Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ*, teaches us this quite clearly. Christ prays for us as a man, but as God he also gives. For being a High Priest who is holy, innocent, and undefiled, he did not offer himself in sacrifice for his own frailty as did those to whom it fell to offer sacrifice according to the Law. No, it was for the salvation of our souls and on account of our sin that he made this offering, and made it once for all. *He undertook to plead on our behalf and he is himself the sacrifice for our sins, and not for our sins only but also for the sins of the whole world*, for the sins of every nation and race that is called to attain righteousness and holiness through faith.

St Cyril of Alexandria, On John 11.8 (PG 74:505-508); from Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Monday of the Fourth Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

(The Day of Atonement: Leviticus 16:2-28)

The LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at all times into the holy place within the veil, before the mercy seat which is upon the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat. But thus shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. He shall put on the holy linen coat, and shall have the linen breeches on his body, be girded with the linen girdle, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water, and then put them on. And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.

"And Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. Then he shall take the two goats, and set them before the LORD at the door of the tent of meeting; and Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel. And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD, and offer it as a sin offering; but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house; he shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself. And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small; and he shall bring it within the veil and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat which is upon the testimony, lest he die; and he shall take some of the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle the blood with his finger seven times.

Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood within the veil, and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it upon the mercy seat and before the mercy seat; thus he shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel, and because of their transgressions, all their sins; and so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which abides with them in the midst of their uncleannesses. There shall be no man in the tent of meeting when he enters to make atonement in the holy place until he comes out and has made atonement for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel. Then he shall go out to the altar which is before the LORD and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar round about. And he shall sprinkle some of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it and hallow it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel.

And when he has made an end of atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat; and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their

transgressions, all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and send him away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities upon him to a solitary land; and he shall let the goat go in the wilderness.

Then Aaron shall come into the tent of meeting, and shall put off the linen garments which he put on when he went into the holy place, and shall leave them there; and he shall bathe his body in water in a holy place, and put on his garments, and come forth, and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people, and make atonement for himself and for the people. And the fat of the sin offering he shall burn upon the altar. And he who lets the goat go to Azazel shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp. And the bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall be carried forth outside the camp; their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be burned with fire. And he who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF BARNABAS

Bear in mind, O children of joy, that there is not a single thing which the Lord in his goodness has not made clear to us beforehand, so that we may know to whom all our thanks and praises are due. Though the Son of God was the divine Lord, and the future Judge of living and dead alike, yet nevertheless he suffered, in order that his affliction might win life for us.

Notice the directions he gave. Take a couple of goats, unblemished and well-matched; bring them for an offering, and let the priest take one of them for a burnt offering. And what are they to do with the other? The other, he declares, is accursed. (Now see how plainly the type of Jesus appears.) Spit on it, all of you; thrust your goads into it, wreath its head with scarlet wool, and so let it be driven out into the desert. This is done, and the servant leads the animal into the desert, where he takes off the wool and leaves it there, on the bush we call a bramble (the plant we usually eat the berries of, if we come across it in the countryside; nothing has such tasty fruit as a bramble). Now what does that signify? Notice that the first goat is for the altar, and the other is accursed; and that it is the accursed one that wears the wreath. That is because they shall see him on That Day clad to the ankles in his red woollen robe, and will say, 'Is not this he whom we once crucified, and mocked and pierced and spat upon? Yes, this is the man who told us that he was the son of God.' But how will he resemble the goat? The point of there being two similar goats, both of them fair and alike, is that when they see him coming on the Day, they are going to be struck with terror at the manifest parallel between him and the goat. In this ordinance, then, you are to see typified the future sufferings of Jesus.

But why should they put the wool on the thorns? This too is a type of Jesus, meant for the Church's instruction. For if one wanted to take the scarlet wool for himself, it would cost him much suffering, since the thorns were fearsome and could only be mastered with anguish. Similarly, says he, those who would behold me and possess my kingdom must go through affliction and suffering before they can reach me.

What now, do you suppose, is the significance of his next direction to the Jews? Men whose sins had come to a head were to bring a heifer for an offering, and slay it and burn it. Then, after gathering up the ashes and putting them into basins of water, young children were to tie scarlet wool on branches of wood (here again, you see, we have the scarlet wool and the type of the Cross), together with sprigs of hyssop; and with these the people were to be sprinkled, man by man, by the youngsters, to cleanse them from their sins. See how clearly he is speaking to you here! The calf is Jesus, and the sinners who offer it are those who dragged him to the slaughter. Why was the wool put on living wood? Because the royal realm of Jesus is founded on a Tree, and they who hope in him shall have eternal life. To ourselves it is plain enough that these were the true reasons for doing things in this way; but to them it was all dark, because their ears were deaf to the voice of the Lord.

The Letter of Barnabas 7-8; Ancient Christian Writers 6 (1948) tr. Kleist.

Tuesday of the Fourth Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

(Commandments concerning one's neighbour: Leviticus 19:1-18, 31-37)

And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, You shall be holy; for I the LORD your God am holy. Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God. Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods: I am the LORD your God.

"When you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD, you shall offer it so that you may be accepted. It shall be eaten the same day you offer it, or on the morrow; and anything left over until the third day shall be burned with fire. If it is eaten at all on the third day, it is an abomination; it will not be accepted, and every one who eats it shall bear his iniquity, because he has profaned a holy thing of the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from his people.

"When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field to its very border, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.

"You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. And you shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.

"You shall not oppress your neighbour or rob him. The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

"You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbour. You shall not go up and down as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand forth against the life of your neighbour: I am the LORD.

"You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason with your neighbour, lest you bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD.

"Do not turn to mediums or wizards; do not seek them out, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God.

"You shall rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

"When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity. You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. And you shall observe all my statutes and all my ordinances, and do them: I am the LORD.”

A READING FROM THE WRITINGS OF ST DOROTHEUS OF GAZA

When God created man, he implanted in us something of his own divinity, in the way of a more ardent disposition, with a shining spark of reason to illuminate our minds and teach us the difference between good and evil. This is called conscience, which is the natural law. It was by submitting to this law, that is, to the conscience, that the patriarchs and all the faithful in the days before the written Law were well-pleasing to God. But since conscience was clogged and trampled on by humanity in general through successive sins, we needed the written Law, we needed the holy Prophets, and we needed the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to uncover and awaken it, and to bring the buried spark back to life through the observance of his holy commands. So it is now up to us either to keep it buried, or to allow it to shine in us and illuminate us if we obey it. For when our conscience tells us to do something and we ignore it, and it speaks again and we still do nothing but trample on it, we finally bury it, and it can no longer speak clearly to us because of the weight pressing on it.

Let us take the greatest care, then, brothers, to guard our conscience as long as we live in this world, and not allow it to convict us of any wrongdoing, nor despise it even in the smallest matters for any reason at all. For, as you know, from scorning such small and supposedly unimportant things we are led to despise even great things. Both living a good life and living a life of sin grow from small beginnings, to end in either great good or great evil.

Then we must guard our conscience in relation to God, in relation to our neighbour and in relation to material things. In relation to God, so as not to despise his commands, even if no one sees us or expects anything of us. We guard our conscience for God in secret, for instance, when we do not neglect prayers and, when our mind is inflamed with passion, we agree to calm down and relax; and, when we see our neighbour talking or doing anything, we refrain from suspecting and condemning him for appearing to be up to no good.

Guarding our conscience in relation to our neighbour means to do nothing at all which we know will distress or frighten our neighbour, either by deed, word, gesture or look. For, as I have often told you before, even a gesture can upset a neighbour, and so can a look.

Guarding our conscience in relation to material things means not to misuse anything, nor let anything be wasted or left lying about, but if we see anything lying about not to ignore it, even if it is something quite unimportant, but pick it up and return it to its right place; it also means not to neglect our clothes. Equally with food: you can satisfy your needs with a small amount of vegetables or lentils, or a few olives; but to refuse to

do so, and to insist on having either pleasanter or more expensive food – all such things are against conscience.

St Dorotheus of Gaza, On Conscience, 40-45 (SC 92:209-216); from Word in Season II, 2nd ed.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

(Rewards and punishments are promised by God: Leviticus 26:3-17, 38-45)

“If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall last to the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last to the time for sowing; and you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land securely. And I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid; and I will remove evil beasts from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land. And you shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand; and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. And I will have regard for you and make you fruitful and multiply you, and will confirm my covenant with you. And you shall eat old store long kept, and you shall clear out the old to make way for the new. And I will make my abode among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the LORD your God, who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves; and I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

“But if you will not hearken to me, and will not do all these commandments, if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my ordinances, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, I will do this to you: I will appoint over you sudden terror, consumption, and fever that waste the eyes and cause life to pine away. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it; I will set my face against you, and you shall be smitten before your enemies; those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you.

“And you shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. And those of you that are left shall pine away in your enemies’ lands because of their iniquity; and also because of the iniquities of their fathers they shall pine away like them.

“But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery which they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me, so that I walked contrary to them and brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity; then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. But the land shall be left by them, and enjoy its Sabbaths while it lies desolate without them; and they shall make amends for their iniquity, because they spurned my ordinances, and their soul abhorred my statutes. Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them, neither will I abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God; but I will for their sake remember the covenant with their forefathers, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD.”

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON LEVITICUS BY ORIGEN

The omnipotent God, who lays down for men the contest of observing his Law in this world, lists what ought to be done and not done, announces suitably at the end of the book of Leviticus where each individual observance is established, what reward he who fulfils them bears and what punishment he who does not observe them undergoes.

But if the Law, according to what the Jews maintain, is not spiritual but carnal, there is no doubt that he grants carnally observed blessings also to those who observe them carnally. But if, as it seems to the Apostle Paul, *the Law is spiritual* then it must be observed spiritually and there is a spiritual reward of the blessings for which they hope. For it is by a perfect logic that the spiritual Law gives spiritual blessings and by a no less perfect logic that the curses and condemnations of the spiritual Law are not physical. So that what we say may not be doubted, let us hear the voice of the Apostle Paul himself writing about spiritual blessings to the Ephesians: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in heaven.*

And you will eat your bread in abundance. I do not take that to be a physical blessing, as if he who keeps the Law of God obtains this ordinary bread in abundance. Why? Do not the impious and wicked eat bread not only in abundance but even in delight? Therefore, if we turn our attention more to him who said, *I am the living bread which descended from heaven, and whoever eats this bread will live forever*, and if we consider that he who said this was the Word by which souls are nourished, then we will understand about which bread it was said, *And you will eat your bread in abundance.* In Proverbs, Solomon also proclaims similar things about the just man when he says, *When the just man eats, he will fill his soul; but the souls of the impious will be in extreme poverty.* If you take it according to the literal sense, it appears false. For the souls of the impious take food with eagerness and strive after satiety; but the just meanwhile are hungry. Paul was just and he said, *Up to this hour we are hungry, and thirsty, and naked, and we are beaten with fists.* But if you consider how *the just man* always and *without interruption* eats from *the living bread* and fills his soul with the heavenly food which is the Word of God and his Wisdom, you will find how the just man *eats his bread in abundance* from the blessing of God.

And you will dwell secure upon your land. The unjust man is never secure but is always moved and *wavers and is carried about by every wind of doctrine.* But the just man who keeps the Law of God *dwells secure upon his land.* For his understanding is made firm by saying to God, *Confirm me, O Lord, in your words.* Therefore, *he lives upon his land grounded in the faith* because *his building is not placed upon sand*, and his root is not 'upon a rock', but indeed *his house was founded upon the earth*, but his plant took root *in the depth of the earth*, that is, in the interior of his soul. Therefore, it is rightly said to a soul of this kind in the blessings, *You will dwell secure upon your land; and I will give peace upon your land.*

Origen, In Lev. 16:1-3, 4-5; Fathers of the Church 83 (1990) tr. G.W. Buckley.

Thursday of the Fourth Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

(The laws of the Levites: Numbers 3:1-13; 8:5-11)

These are the generations of Aaron and Moses at the time when the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. These are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab the first-born, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar; these are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he ordained to minister in the priests office. But Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD when they offered unholy fire before the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the lifetime of Aaron their father.

And the LORD said to Moses, "Bring the tribe of Levi near, and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister to him. They shall perform duties for him and for the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister at the tabernacle; they shall have charge of all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, and attend to the duties for the people of Israel as they minister at the tabernacle. And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the people of Israel. And you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall attend to their priesthood; but if any one else comes near, he shall be put to death."

And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every first-born that opens the womb among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be mine, for all the first-born are mine; on the day that I slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the first-born in Israel, both of man and of beast; they shall be mine: I am the LORD."

And the LORD said to Moses, "Take the Levites from among the people of Israel, and cleanse them. And thus you shall do to them, to cleanse them: sprinkle the water of expiation upon them, and let them go with a razor over all their body, and wash their clothes and cleanse themselves. Then let them take a young bull and its cereal offering of fine flour mixed with oil, and you shall take another young bull for a sin offering. And you shall present the Levites before the tent of meeting, and assemble the whole congregation of the people of Israel. When you present the Levites before the LORD, the people of Israel shall lay their hands upon the Levites, and Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD as a wave offering from the people of Israel, that it may be theirs to do the service of the LORD."

A READING FROM AGAINST THE HERESIES BY ST IRENAEUS

From the beginning God formed man in view of his gifts. He chose the Patriarchs in order to save them. He began to prepare a people, teaching it, obstinate as it was, to follow him. He provided Prophets, to make men accustomed to having God's Spirit within them and to having communion with God. God indeed needed no one's company, but he shared his company with those who needed him. For those who pleased him he set down, like an architect, his plan of salvation. In his own person he gave guidance to

his people in Egypt, though they did not see him. To those in the desert, who were restless, he gave an appropriate Law. To those who entered the good land he gave a fitting inheritance. For those who returned to the Father he killed the fatted calf, and put on them the best robe in these many ways he blended the human race to a harmony of salvation.

For this reason John said in the Apocalypse, *His voice was like the sound of many waters.* The Spirit of God is indeed like many waters, because the Father is both rich and great. And the Word passing through all those men, without grudging gave help to all who were obedient by drawing up in writing a Law adapted and applicable to every class among them. By this Law he prescribed how they were to make the Tabernacle, build the Temple, choose Levites, offer sacrifices and oblations, carry out rites of purification, and fulfil all the rest of their service.

He himself has no need of these things. Even before the time of Moses, every good was to be found in him, and the origin of every fragrance and all the smoke of pleasant incense. The people were quick to turn back to idols, but God instructed them. Many times he freed them, urging them to persevere in his service. He called them to things of supreme importance by means of things of less importance, that is, he called them by shadows to those things which are real; he called them by temporal things to eternal things, by the carnal to the spiritual, by the earthly to the heavenly.

God told Moses, *See that you make them all after the pattern which you have seen on the mountain.* For forty days Moses was learning to remember God's words, the heavenly patterns, the spiritual images, the foreshadowing of things to come. Paul, too, says this, *For they drank from that spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.* Paul, again, listed the things which were in the Law, and concluded, *All these things happened to them but they were written down as a warning to us upon whom the end of the ages has come.*

By means of shadows they began to learn the fear of God and perseverance in his service. So the Law was both instruction for them and the foretelling of things to come.

St Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 4.14.2-3; 15, 1; from The Divine Office II.

Friday of the Fourth Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

(The Cloud upon the Tabernacle and the silver trumpets: Numbers 9:15 – 10:10, 33-36)

On the day that the tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony; and at evening it was over the tabernacle like the appearance of fire until morning. So it was continually; the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. And whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tent, after that the people of Israel set out; and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the people of Israel encamped. At the command of the LORD the people of Israel set out, and at the command of the LORD they encamped; as long as the cloud rested over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. Even when the cloud continued over the tabernacle many days, the people of Israel kept the charge of the LORD, and did not set out. Sometimes the cloud was a few days over the tabernacle, and according to the command of the LORD they remained in camp; then according to the command of the LORD they set out. And sometimes the cloud remained from evening until morning; and when the cloud was taken up in the morning, they set out, or if it continued for a day and a night, when the cloud was taken up they set out. Whether it was two days, or a month, or a longer time, that the cloud continued over the tabernacle, abiding there, the people of Israel remained in camp and did not set out; but when it was taken up they set out. At the command of the LORD they encamped, and at the command of the LORD they set out; they kept the charge of the LORD, at the command of the LORD by Moses.

The LORD said to Moses, "Make two silver trumpets; of hammered work you shall make them; and you shall use them for summoning the congregation, and for breaking camp. And when both are blown, all the congregation shall gather themselves to you at the entrance of the tent of meeting. But if they blow only one, then the leaders, the heads of the tribes of Israel, shall gather themselves to you. When you blow an alarm, the camps that are on the east side shall set out. And when you blow an alarm the second time, the camps that are on the south side shall set out. An alarm is to be blown whenever they are to set out. But when the assembly is to be gathered together, you shall blow, but you shall not sound an alarm. And the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets. The trumpets shall be to you for a perpetual statute throughout your generations. And when you go to war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the LORD your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies. On the day of your gladness also, and at your appointed feasts, and at the beginnings of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; they shall serve you for remembrance before your God: I am the LORD your God."

So they set out from the mount of the LORD three days' journey; and the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them three days journey, to seek out a resting place for them. And the cloud of the LORD was over them by day, whenever they set out from the camp.

And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, “Arise, O LORD, and let thy enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee.” And when it rested, he said, “Return, O LORD, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel.”

A READING FROM THE ADORATION AND WORSHIP OF GOD IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

The glory of Christ filled the true Tabernacle, which is the Church, from the very moment it was set up on earth. This, surely, is what is signified by the cloud that covered the first Tabernacle. Christ has filled the Church with his glory, and now like a fire, he shines forth to give light to those who live in the darkness of ignorance and error. He shades and protects those already enlightened by the dawn of his day in their hearts. He refreshes them with the heavenly dew of his consolations sent down from above through the Spirit. This is what we should understand by the saying that by night he appeared in the form of fire, and by day in the form of cloud. Those who were as yet uninstructed in the teaching of Christ required spiritual enlightenment to bring them to a knowledge of God; but the more advanced, whose minds had been illumined by faith, were in need of protection from the scorching heat of the day, and of courage to bear the burdens of this present life. *For all who desire to live a godly life in Christ will suffer persecution.*

Whenever the cloud moved forward, the Tabernacle went with it; when the cloud settled, the Tabernacle came to rest with it and the Israelites broke their journey. Now the meaning of this for us is that wherever Christ leads, the Church, the holy multitude of believers, follows him. The faithful are never separated from the Saviour who calls them to himself. We may not be able to find any special meaning in the constant halts and new departures throughout our spiritual journey under Christ's guidance. It is the whole journey, following the cloud whether it moves forward or settles, that symbolizes our desire to be with God.

Nevertheless, if we would have a more subtle interpretation, we could perhaps say that our first departure is from unbelief to faith, from ignorance to knowledge, and from having no perception of the true God to clear recognition of the Creator and Lord of the universe. The second stage, and an essential one, is conversion from sin and licentiousness to a desire for amendment both in thought and deed. But the best and most glorious is the third part of the journey, because in it we leave behind what is deficient and move onward toward what is perfect both in our actions and in our belief.

So, little by little, we advance toward the ideal we see in Christ, to become the perfect man, sharing in the perfection of Christ himself. This surely is what Saint Paul means by saying: *Forgetting what lies behind me and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the goal, the heavenly reward to which God calls me in Christ Jesus.*

St Cyril of Alexandria, The Adoration and Worship of God in Spirit and in Truth, 5 +(PG 68:393-396); Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Saturday of the Fourth Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

(The Spirit is poured out upon the elders and Joshua: Numbers 11:4-6, 10-30)

Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving; and the people of Israel also wept again, and said, "O that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at."

Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, every man at the door of his tent; and the anger of the LORD blazed hotly, and Moses was displeased. Moses said to the LORD, "Why hast thou dealt ill with thy servant? And why have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou dost lay the burden of all this people upon me? Did I conceive all this people? Did I bring them forth, that thou shouldst say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries the sucking child', to the land which thou didst swear to give their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' I am not able to carry all this people alone, the burden is too heavy for me. If thou wilt deal thus with me, kill me at once, if I find favour in thy sight, that I may not see my wretchedness."

And the LORD said to Moses, "Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. And I will come down and talk with you there; and I will take some of the spirit which is upon you and put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone. And say to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the hearing of the LORD, saying, "Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt." Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall not eat one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, but a whole month, until it comes out at your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the LORD who is among you, and have wept before him, saying, "Why did we come forth out of Egypt?"'" But Moses said, "The people among whom I am number six hundred thousand on foot; and thou hast said, I will give them meat, that they may eat a whole month! Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to suffice them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them?" And the LORD said to Moses, "Is the LORD's hand shortened? Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not."

So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD; and he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people, and placed them round about the tent. Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was upon him and put it upon the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did so no more.

Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested upon them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone

out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp. And Joshua the son of Nun, the minister of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, "My lord Moses, forbid them." But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!" And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp

A READING FROM THE CONFERENCES OF ST JOHN CASSIAN

Now something must be said about the renunciations which the tradition of the Fathers and the authority of Holy Scripture show to be three and which each one of us ought to pursue with all our zeal. The first is that by which in bodily fashion we despise all the wealth and resources of the world. The second is that by which we reject the former behaviour, vices, and affections of soul and body. The third is that by which we call our mind away from everything that is present and visible and contemplate only what is to come and desire those things that are invisible.

We read that the Lord commanded Abraham to do these three things all at once when he said to him, *Leave your country and your kinsfolk and your father's house*. First he spoke of *your country* – namely, of the resources of this world and of earthly wealth; secondly, of *your kinsfolk* – namely, of the former way of life and behaviour and vices that have been related to us from our birth by a connection as it were of a certain affinity or consanguinity; thirdly, of *your father's house* – namely, of every vestige of this world which the eyes gaze upon.

Therefore, if we desire to achieve true perfection we ought to strive so that, just as with our body we have disdained parents, homeland, wealth, and the pleasures of the world, we may also in our heart abandon all these things and not turn back again in our desires to what we have left behind, like those who were led out by Moses. Although, to be sure, they did not return in body, nonetheless they are said to have turned back to Egypt in their heart, for they abandoned the God who had led them out with such powerful signs and they venerated the idols of Egypt that they had once disdained. Scripture recalls it thus: In their hearts they turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron: Make for us gods who will go before us. We would be censured along with those who dwelled in the desert and who desired the disgusting food of vice and filthiness after having eaten the heavenly manna, and we would seem to complain like them: It was well with us in Egypt, when we sat over pots of flesh and ate onions and garlic and cucumbers and melons. Although this manner of speaking first referred to that people, nonetheless we see it now daily fulfilled in our life and profession. For everyone who has first renounced this world and then returns to his former pursuits and his erstwhile desires proclaims that in deed and in intention he is the same as they were, and he says: 'It was well with me in Egypt'.

I fear that there will be found as many such people as we read there were multitudes of sinners in the time of Moses. For although six hundred and three thousand armed men were said to have left Egypt, no more than two of these entered the promised land. Hence we must strive to take our models of virtue from the few and far between, since, according to that figure of speech in the Gospel, many are said to be called but few are said to be chosen. Bodily renunciation and removal from Egypt, as it were, will be of no value to us, therefore, if we have been unable to obtain at the same time the renunciation of heart which is more sublime and more beneficial.

St John Cassian, Conference 3.6.1, 7.5-7; Ancient Christian Writers, tr. Ramsey.

Lent Week 5

Sunday of the Fifth Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

(The murmuring of Miriam and Aaron against Moses: Numbers 12:1-15)

Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman; and they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" And the LORD heard it. Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth. And suddenly the LORD said to Moses and to Aaron and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting." And the three of them came out. And the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the door of the tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forward. And he said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. 8 With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in dark speech; and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"

And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them, and he departed; and when the cloud removed from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. And Aaron turned towards Miriam, and behold, she was leprous. And Aaron said to Moses, "Oh, my lord, do not punish us because we have done foolishly and have sinned. Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb." And Moses cried to the LORD, "Heal her, O God, I beseech thee." But the LORD said to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut up outside the camp seven days, and after that she may be brought in again." So Miriam was shut up outside the camp seven days; and the people did not set out on the march till Miriam was brought in again.

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON NUMBERS BY ORIGEN

According to St Paul, everything that happened to the Israelites was symbolic, and was recorded as a warning to us. If this is so we should try to learn what we can from the story of Aaron and Miriam, who were rebuked by God for speaking against their brother Moses. Miriam received the additional punishment of leprosy. The chosen people took this chastisement so much to heart that they discontinued their journey to the promised land, and the Tent of the Presence stood still, until Miriam had completed her seven days' exclusion from the camp. What we are given here, in the first place, is a useful and necessary lesson not to speak ill of our neighbours, and not to make derogatory remarks about good and holy people, or indeed about anyone at all, when we see the anger and vengeance of God that result. Those who do so may be said to speak against Moses. Because of this they become spiritual lepers; their unclean hearts exclude them from the camp which is the Church of God.

Now whether speaking against Moses means that these people are heretics, or whether they are members of the Church who slander their brothers and sisters and speak ill of their neighbours, there is no doubt that all who practise this vice are lepers at heart. In

the case of Miriam, this leprosy was healed on the seventh day, thanks to the intervention of Aaron the High Priest; but as for us, if we allow ourselves to indulge our cruel habit of speaking ill of people and our souls are punished with leprosy, we shall continue in our spiritual uncleanness until the last day of all, that is until the day of resurrection, unless we change our ways while there is still time for us to repent and turn to the Lord Jesus, asking him to help us to do penance and be purified.

And now let us hear the account of what happened afterward, and how the Holy Spirit paid tribute to Moses. Scripture tells us that the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the door of the Tent of the Presence. Aaron and Miriam were summoned, and they both came forward. The Lord said to them: *Listen to my words. If any one of you is a prophet, I make myself known to him in visions, and speak to him in dreams. It is not so, however, with my servant Moses; he alone is faithful of all my household. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not by means of symbols or parables, and he has seen the glory of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?* Scripture goes on to say that the Lord's anger struck them, and he dismissed them from his presence. When the cloud departed from the tent, there stood Miriam, white as snow with leprosy.

You see what punishment those envious tongues brought on themselves, and in contrast what honours they earned for the brother they had abused. He was honoured, they were disgraced; he was covered with glory, they were covered with leprosy; he was praised, they were blamed.

Origen, In Num. 7.1-2 (SC 29:133-136); Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Monday of the Fifth Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

(Scouts are sent into Canaan: Numbers 12:16 – 13:3, 17-33)

After that the people set out from Hazereth, and encamped in the wilderness of Paran.

The LORD said to Moses, "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I give to the people of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers shall you send a man, every one a leader among them." So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran, according to the command of the LORD, all of them men who were heads of the people of Israel.

Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, "Go up into the Negeb yonder, and go up into the hill country, and see what the land is, and whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, and whether the land that they dwell in is good or bad, and whether the cities that they dwell in are camps or strongholds, and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there is wood in it or not. Be of good courage, and bring some of the fruit of the land." Now the time was the season of the first ripe grapes.

So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, near the entrance of Hamath. They went up into the Negeb, and came to Hebron; and Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the descendants of Anak, were there. (Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) And they came to the Valley of Eshcol, and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole between two of them; they brought also some pomegranates and figs. That place was called the Valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster which the men of Israel cut down from there.

At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Yet the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan."

But Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go up at once, and occupy it; for we are well able to overcome it." Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we." So they brought to the people of Israel an evil report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone, to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are men of great stature. And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim); and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."

A READING FROM A LETTER BY ST AUGUSTINE

When the time came for the grace of the New Testament to be revealed through the man Christ Jesus, there was no question of his attracting us to himself with the promise of earthly happiness. This explains our Lord's willingness to undergo suffering, to be scourged, spat upon, mocked, nailed to the Cross, and to accept death itself like one conquered and humiliated. All this he endured so that those who believed in him might learn what recompense for their dutiful service they could ask for and expect from God who had made them his children. They had to learn to serve him without any eye to earthly prosperity, for to value their faith at so low a price would be tantamount to rejecting it and trampling it underfoot.

By his great human compassion and by appearing among us in the form of a servant, Christ, who is both God and man, meant to teach us what we should spurn in this life and what we should hope for in the next. It was accordingly at the very height of his Passion, when his enemies thought they had won such a mighty victory, that he gave voice to our human weakness which was being crucified together with our former selves to set our sinful bodies free; and his cry was *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

In taking up this expression of our frailty our Head is praying the psalm: *My God, my God, look upon me: why have you forsaken me?* Here the suppliant feels abandoned; his prayer seems to be of no avail. Jesus made these words his own; they are the words of his Body, that is, of the Church which must endure the travail of conversion from unregenerate human nature into the new creation. His is the voice of our human weakness, which has to be weaned from the good things of the Old Testament and taught to long after and hope for those of the New.

St Augustine, Letter 140.13-15 (PL 33:543-544); Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Tuesday of the Fifth Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

(The murmuring of the people and the intercession of Moses: Numbers 14:1-25)

Then all the congregation raised a loud cry; and the people wept that night. And all the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron; the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why does the LORD bring us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey; would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?"

And they said to one another, "Let us choose a captain, and go back to Egypt." Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the people of Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, rent their clothes, and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, "The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey. Only, do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us; their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them." But all the congregation said to stone them with stones.

Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel. And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs which I have wrought among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."

But Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for thou didst bring up this people in thy might from among them, and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that thou, O LORD, art in the midst of this people; for thou, O LORD, art seen face to face, and thy cloud stands over them and thou goest before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if thou dost kill this people as one man, then the nations who have heard thy fame will say, 'Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore to give to them, therefore he has slain them in the wilderness.' And now, I pray thee, let the power of the LORD be great as thou hast promised, saying, The LORD is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of fathers upon children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation. Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray thee, according to the greatness of thy steadfast love, and according as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

Then the LORD said, "I have pardoned, according to your word; but truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD, none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs which I wrought in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the proof these ten times and have not hearkened to my voice, shall see the land which I swore to give to their fathers; and none of those who despised me shall see it. But

my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me fully, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it. Now, since the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwell in the valleys, turn tomorrow and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea.”

A READING FROM A HOMILY ON ST JOHN'S GOSPEL BY ST AUGUSTINE

The Lord marked out for us the fullness of love we ought to have for each other when he told us: *There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.* Taking into account his previous words, namely: *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you,* the conclusion we must draw is the same as that of the evangelist John who recorded these statements. In his first letter John tells us that *we ought to lay down our lives for our brethren in the same way as Christ laid down his life for us,* loving one another after the example of Christ who loved us and made the supreme sacrifice for us.

Surely this is what we read in the Proverbs of Solomon: When you sit down to eat at the table of a ruler, consider carefully what is set before you, then stretch out your hand and take your portion knowing that you in your turn will have to provide the same kind of meal. What is this ruler's table, if not the altar at which we receive the body and blood of him who laid down his life for us? And what does it mean to sit at this table, if not to approach it with humility? What does it mean to stretch out your hand and take your portion knowing that you will have to provide the same kind of meal yourself, if not what I have already told you, namely that just as Christ laid down his life for us so we too ought to lay down our lives for our brethren? This is what the apostle Peter said: Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we might follow in his footsteps.

This is what it means to provide the same kind of meal, and what their burning love enabled the blessed martyrs to do. If we are to give true meaning to our celebration of their memorials, approaching the Lord's table at the very feast at which they were fed, we must, like them, provide the same kind of meal. At this table we do not commemorate the martyrs in the same way as we commemorate others who now rest in peace, so as to include them in our prayers, but rather in order that they should pray for us and help us to follow in their footsteps. They practiced that perfect love which Christ said could not be surpassed, offering their brethren the same kind of meal as they themselves had received from the table of the Lord.

This must not be understood as implying that we can be the Lord's equals by bearing witness to him to the extent of shedding our blood. Christ had the power to lay down his life and to take it up again; but we cannot choose how long we shall live, and death comes to us even against our will. Finally, even if martyrs die for their brethren, none of them by shedding his blood brings forgiveness for the sins of his brothers, as Christ brought forgiveness to us. In this he gave us not so much an example to imitate as a reason for rejoicing. Insofar, then, as they shed their blood for their brethren, the martyrs provided the same kind of meal as they themselves had received from the table of the Lord. Let us therefore love one another as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

(The mutiny of Korah, Dathan and Abiram: Numbers 16:1-11, 16-24, 28-35)

Now Korah the son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; and they rose up before Moses, with a number of the people of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men; and they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said to them, "You have gone too far! For all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them; why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" When Moses heard it, he fell on his face; and he said to Korah and all his company, "In the morning the LORD will show who is his, and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to him; him whom he will choose he will cause to come near to him. Do this: take censers, Korah and all his company; put fire in them and put incense upon them before the LORD tomorrow, and the man whom the LORD chooses shall be the holy one. You have gone too far, sons of Levi!" And Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi: is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do service in the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister to them; and that he has brought you near him, and all your brethren the sons of Levi with you? And would you seek the priesthood also? Therefore it is against the LORD that you and all your company have gathered together; what is Aaron that you murmur against him?"

And Moses said to Korah, "Be present, you and all your company, before the LORD, you and they, and Aaron, tomorrow; and let every one of you take his censer, and put incense upon it, and every one of you bring before the LORD his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; you also, and Aaron, each his censer." So every man took his censer, and they put fire in them and laid incense upon them, and they stood at the entrance of the tent of meeting with Moses and Aaron. Then Korah assembled all the congregation against them at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation.

And the LORD said to Moses and to Aaron, "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces, and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be angry with all the congregation?" And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to the congregation, Get away from about the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram."

And Moses said, "Hereby you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, and that it has not been of my own accord. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they are visited by the fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth, and swallows them up, with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the LORD."

And as he finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split asunder; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men that belonged to Korah and all their goods. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. And all Israel that were round about them fled at their cry; for they said, "Lest the earth swallow us up!" And fire came forth from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men offering the incense.

A READING FROM THE TREATISE ON THE TRINITY BY DIDYMUS THE BLIND

The font in which they are baptized in the name of the Trinity is the source of salvation for all believers, and those washed in it escape the jaws of the serpent. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the font becomes a universal mother while remaining a virgin.

In that font we receive every grace. In it we are given a pledge of the blessings of paradise; in it he who created our soul takes it for his bride, according to the words of Paul: *I have betrothed you to Christ, so as to present you as a pure bride to this one husband.* But how shall I tell briefly of the most wonderful grace of all? He whom the angels in heaven do not dare to call Father, we on earth learn to call by that name without fear. In psalm twenty-six we sing: *My father and mother have forsaken me* (because Adam and Eve lost their immortality), *but the Lord has taken me into his care.* It is the same as saying: 'The Lord has given me baptism as a mother, the Most High as a father, and the Saviour who was baptized for us as a brother. Now I know that I have really been born again and have been saved, since I no longer hear it said, *Weep for the dead man who lies in darkness,* but the invitation I longed for, *Come, all you that labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.* I will anoint each one of you, I will wash you and clothe you with myself, completely and for ever, and I will feed you with my body and blood.'

Now it is time to enumerate the passages I have found, some even in the Old Testament, that refer to the Holy Spirit and to the baptism by which we are born to eternal life. The undivided and transcendent Trinity, foreseeing from all eternity the frailty of human nature, created water out of nothing for our healing. It is clear, therefore, that when the Holy Spirit moved over the waters, they were sanctified for ever and endowed with life-giving power.

The Holy Spirit appeared above the waters of the Jordan when our Lord was baptized and rested upon him. The Spirit appeared this time in the form of a dove because the dove is a symbol of innocence and the Lord said: *You must be innocent as doves.*

The flood too, which purified the world from its primeval wickedness, prefigures our purification from sin by holy baptism. And the ark itself, which saved those who entered it, was an image of holy Church and of the good hope she holds out to us. The dove that carried an olive branch to the ark as a sign that the waters had subsided symbolized the coming of the Holy Spirit and our reconciliation with God, the olive being a symbol of peace. The Red Sea received the Israelites whose faith did not waver and delivered them

from the perils they faced in Egypt from Pharaoh and his army. The whole history of their journey from Egypt was therefore a foreshadowing of our salvation through baptism.

Didymus the Blind, On the Trinity 2.13-14 (PG 39:691-698); Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Thursday of the Fifth Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

(Concerning the waters of Meribah and the bronze serpent: Numbers 20:1-13; 21:4-9)

And the people of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there.

Now there was no water for the congregation; and they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people contended with Moses, and said, "Would that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! Why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain, or figs, or vines, or pomegranates; and there is no water to drink." Then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tent of meeting, and fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them, and the LORD said to Moses, "Take the rod, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water; so you shall bring water out of the rock for them; so you shall give drink to the congregation and their cattle." And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him.

And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his rod twice; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their cattle. And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel contended with the LORD, and he showed himself holy among them.

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." So Moses made a bronze serpent, and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON GALATIANS BY ST AUGUSTINE

If our natural, sinful life had not been symbolically hanging on the Cross when the Lord died, the unregenerate instincts that were once ours would not have been crucified with

him. But the apostle Paul assures us that our former selves were put to death with Christ on the Cross. The Lord died to free our bodies from the tyranny of sin. He intended us to be slaves of sin no longer.

Christ's death and our sin were foreshadowed long ago in the desert, when Moses fastened a serpent to a wooden stake and held it on high. We must remember that it was through heeding the voice of a serpent that the human race had incurred the penalty of death, and so it was appropriate that a serpent, fastened to a wooden standard and raised aloft, should prefigure the death of Christ. In that symbol we have an image of the Lord's death by hanging.

Now if Scripture were to say: *Cursed be all that hang from a tree*, we should scarcely feel disturbed. Yet that serpent hanging from a tree represents our Lord's physical death. He himself confirmed this interpretation by saying: *Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up above the earth*. No one therefore will be likely to accuse Moses of intending to insult the Lord by this action, when he understands the power the Cross contains for the healing of the human race. Only because the serpent was a symbol of our Lord's Cross did Moses command it to be erected, so that the people who were dying from snakebite might find instant cure through fixing their gaze upon it.

The serpent was fashioned from bronze as a symbol of faith in the enduring effects of the Lord's Passion (A number of ancient artefacts, commonly called bronzes, are actually in existence today.) The fact is that if people were to forget that Christ died for them and every record of the time of his Passion were to be destroyed, the human race would indeed be in the grip of death. But faith in Christ's Cross abides for ever; it is as enduring as bronze. Despite the constant cycle of birth and death the Cross continues to be held high above the earth for the healing of all who gaze upon it.

There need be no surprise, then, at the way in which Christ dealt with the curse on the human race. He overcame that curse by taking it upon his own person. He vanquished death by undergoing death himself, sin by identifying himself with sin, and the ancient serpent by means of another serpent. Death, sin and the serpent were all included in God's curse, but the Cross has triumphed over each of them. And so there is profound truth in that word of Scripture: *Cursed be all that hang on a tree*. Christ grants justification to those who believe in him, simply because they have faith and not because they observe the Law. This means that any fear of falling under the curse attached to the Cross has been taken away, while love endures. The blessing granted to Abraham for his exemplary faith is extended to the Gentiles, so that we may receive the promised Spirit through faith. In other words, the promised gift to believers is not a spirit of outward observance based on fear, but one of inward devotion inspired by love.

St Augustine, In Gal. 22 (PL 35:2120-2121); Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Friday of the Fifth Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

(Balaam is called to curse Israel: Numbers 22:1-8, 20-35)

Then the people of Israel set out, and encamped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan at Jericho. And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. And Moab was in great dread of the people, because they were many; Moab was overcome with fear of the people of Israel. And Moab said to the elders of Midian, "This horde will now lick up all that is round about us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field." So Balak the son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River, in the land of Amaw to call him, saying, "Behold, a people has come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the earth, and they are dwelling opposite me. Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land; for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."

So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam, and gave him Balak's message. And he said to them, "Lodge here this night, and I will bring back word to you, as the LORD speaks to me"; so the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam.

And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men have come to call you, rise, go with them; but only what I bid you, that shall you do."

So Balaam rose in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. But God's anger was kindled because he went; and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the way as his adversary. Now he was riding on the ass, and his two servants were with him. And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand; and the ass turned aside out of the road, and went into the field; and Balaam struck the ass, to turn her into the road. Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on either side. And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she pushed against the wall, and pressed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck her again. Then the angel of the LORD went ahead, and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left. When the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam; and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the ass with his staff. Then the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" And Balaam said to the ass, "Because you have made sport of me. I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you." And the ass said to Balaam, "Am I not your ass, upon which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Was I ever accustomed to do so to you?" And he said, "No."

Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed his head, and fell on his face. And the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your ass these three times? Behold, I have come forth to withstand you, because your way is perverse before me; and

the ass saw me, and turned aside before me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, surely just now I would have slain you and let her live.” Then Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, “I have sinned, for I did not know that thou didst stand in the road against me. Now therefore, if it is evil in thy sight, I will go back again.” And the angel of the LORD said to Balaam, “Go with the men; but only the word which I bid you, that shall you speak.” So Balaam went on with the princes of Balak.

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS BY ORIGEN

While we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. Few people would die for a righteous man, though perhaps for a good man one might have the courage to die.

Saint Paul has just told us that the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Now in his desire to demonstrate the power of that love more fully, he gives us the convincing proof that it was not for good men but for sinners that Christ died. It is indeed true that we were sinners before we turned to God, and that our Lord Jesus Christ laid down his life for us before we believed in him. This he surely could not have done without an immense love for us, either the love he himself showed by dying for sinners, or the love God the Father showed by giving his only Son for our redemption.

Few people would give their lives even for a righteous man, and all of us face death with reluctance, even in a just cause. How great a Saviour we have then, and how deeply we ought to ponder his love for us! It is a clear proof of his divine goodness that when the appointed time came, he did not hesitate to suffer and die for the ungodly and the unjust. In the Gospel it is said that no one is good but God the Father; and so unless our Saviour had been his Son, sharing in the Father's very substance, he could not have shown such great goodness toward us. By this proof, therefore, we can recognize in him that good man for whom someone might have the courage to die.

Once people have understood the extent of Christ's goodness toward them and his love has been poured into their hearts, they will long not only to die for this good man Christ, but to die voluntarily. In fact we often see this happen, when Christians whose hearts are overflowing with the love of Christ present themselves before their persecutors of their own free will and with the utmost courage, confessing the name of Christ in the presence of angels and men for the whole world to hear. Not only do they have the courage to suffer injustice for the name of this good man, but for his sake they are even ready to give their lives. Few would do this even for a righteous man, since our love of this mortal life is so great that even in a just cause hardly anyone can bear to die. Only for God's sake will people have the courage to submit to death of their own free will. For any other reason they can scarcely endure it, even in the cause of justice and in obedience to the laws of nature.

Origen, In Rom. 4.10-11 (PG 14:997-999); Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Saturday of the Fifth Week in Lent

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

(The Oracles of Balaam: Numbers 24:1-19)

When Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not go, as at other times, to look for omens, but set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and saw Israel encamping tribe by tribe. And the Spirit of God came upon him, and he took up his discourse, and said, "The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, but having his eyes uncovered: how fair are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel! Like valleys that stretch afar, like gardens beside a river, like aloes that the LORD has planted, like cedar trees beside the waters. Water shall flow from his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brings him out of Egypt; he has as it were the horns of the wild ox, he shall eat up the nations his adversaries, and shall break their bones in pieces, and pierce them through with his arrows. He couched, he lay down like a lion, and like a lioness; who will rouse him up? Blessed be every one who blesses you, and cursed be every one who curses you."

And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he struck his hands together; and Balak said to Balaam, "I called you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have blessed them these three times. Therefore now flee to your place; I said, I will certainly honour you, but the LORD has held you back from honour." And Balaam said to Balak, "Did I not tell your messengers whom you sent to me, 'If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I would not be able to go beyond the word of the LORD, to do either good or bad of my own will; what the LORD speaks, that will I speak?' And now, behold, I am going to my people; come, I will let you know what this people will do to your people in the latter days." And he took up his discourse, and said, "The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, but having his eyes uncovered: I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh: a star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab, and break down all the sons of Sheth. Edom shall be dispossessed, Seir also, his enemies, shall be dispossessed, while Israel does valiantly. By Jacob shall dominion be exercised, and the survivors of cities be destroyed!"

A READING FROM A HOMILY BY ST GREGORY NAZIANZEN

We are soon going to share in the Passover, and although we still do so only in a symbolic way, the symbolism already has more clarity than it possessed in former times, because under the Law the Passover was, if I may dare to say so, only a symbol of a symbol. Before long, however, when the Word drinks the new wine with us in the kingdom of his Father, we shall be keeping the Passover in a yet more perfect way, and with deeper understanding: he will then reveal to us and make clear what he has so far only partially disclosed. For this wine, so familiar to us now, is eternally new.

It is for us to learn what this drinking is, and for him to teach us. He has to communicate this knowledge to his disciples, because teaching is food, even for the teacher.

So let us take our part in the Passover prescribed by the Law, not in a literal way, but according to the teaching of the Gospel; not in an imperfect way, but perfectly; not only for a time, but eternally. Let us regard as our home the heavenly Jerusalem, not the earthly one; the city glorified by angels, not the one laid waste by armies. We are not required to sacrifice young bulls or rams, beasts with horns and hoofs that are more dead than alive and devoid of feeling; but instead, let us join the choirs of angels in offering God upon his heavenly altar a sacrifice of praise. We must now pass through the first veil and approach the second, turning our eyes toward the Holy of Holies. I will say more: we must sacrifice ourselves to God, each day and in everything we do, accepting all that happens to us for the sake of the Word, imitating his Passion by our sufferings, and honouring his blood by shedding our own. We must be ready to be crucified.

If you are a Simon of Cyrene, take up your Cross and follow Christ. If you are crucified beside him like one of the thieves, now like the good thief acknowledge your God. For your sake, and because of your sin, Christ himself was regarded as a sinner; for his sake, therefore, you must cease to sin. Worship him who was hung on the Cross because of you, even if you are hanging there yourself. Derive some benefit from the very shame; purchase salvation with your death. Enter paradise with Jesus, and discover how far you have fallen. Contemplate the glories there, and leave the other scoffing thief to die outside in his blasphemy.

If you are a Joseph of Arimathea, go to the one who ordered his crucifixion, and ask for Christ's body: make your own the expiation for the sins of the whole world. If you are a Nicodemus, like the man who worshiped God by night, bring spices and prepare Christ's body for burial. If you are one of the Marys, or Salome, or Joanna, weep in the early morning. Be the first to see the stone rolled back, and even the angels perhaps, and Jesus himself.

St Gregory Nazianzen, Oration 45:23-24 (PG 36:653-656); Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Passiontide

Palm (Passion) Sunday

A READING FROM THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

(Against wicked kings; a righteous king, son of David, is promised: Jeremiah 22:1-9; 23:1-8)

Thus says the LORD: "Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word, and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, O King of Judah, who sit on the throne of David, you, and your servants, and your people who enter these gates. Thus says the LORD: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. For if you will indeed obey this word, then there shall enter the gates of this house kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their servants, and their people. But if you will not heed these words, I swear by myself, says the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation. For thus says the LORD concerning the house of the king of Judah: "You are as Gilead to me, as the summit of Lebanon, yet surely I will make you a desert, an uninhabited city. I will prepare destroyers against you, each with his weapons; and they shall cut down your choicest cedars, and cast them into the fire.

"And many nations will pass by this city, and every man will say to his neighbour, "Why has the LORD dealt thus with this great city?" And they will answer, "Because they forsook the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshiped other gods and served them.""

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" says the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, says the LORD.

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

"Therefore, behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when men shall no longer say, 'As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt', but 'As the LORD lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.' Then they shall dwell in their own land."

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AELRED OF RIEVAULX

Our Lord Jesus Christ worked our salvation not in one way only, but undoubtedly in many ways. Since it was in mercy that he had planned our redemption, he wrought this

redemption in such a way that he might serve as an example for us. My brothers, in this season you are recalling this redemption of ours. Be careful, then, to reflect not only on the fact of this redemption but also on two other points: the manner in which this redemption was wrought, and the place in which it was wrought. The manner of redemption is the suffering of the Cross; the place, outside the city.

Let us then learn from the Cross of Jesus our proper way of living. Should I say 'living' or, instead, 'dying'? Rather, both living and dying. Dying to the world, living for God. Dying to vices and living by the virtues. Dying to the flesh, but living in the spirit. Thus in the Cross of Christ there is death and in the Cross of Christ there is life. The death of death is there, and the life of life. The death of sins is there and the life of the virtues. The death of the flesh is there, and the life of the spirit. But why did God choose this manner of death? He chose it as both a mystery and an example. In addition, he chose it because our sickness was such as to make such a remedy appropriate.

It was fitting that we who had fallen because of a tree might rise up because of a tree. Fitting that the one who had conquered by means of a tree might also be conquered by means of a tree. Fitting that we who had eaten the fruit of death from a tree might be given the fruit of life from a tree. And because we had fallen from the security of that most blessed place on earth into *this great, expansive sea*, it was fitting that wood should be made ready to carry us across it. For no one crosses the sea except on wood, or this world except on the Cross.

Let me say something now about the mystery contained in the manner of our redemption. Death on a Cross is endured not on the earth but above the earth; and the victim's limbs are not cut off but stretched. They are stretched horizontally and perpendicularly, so that the crucified man is stretched out in the four directions and seems to embrace the four quarters of the world, taking possession of both heaven and earth. For when a Cross is set upright, the head is directed to heaven and the feet to earth, and the outstretched arms to what is located between heaven and earth. Moreover, if you lay a crucified man on the ground, one part of him will occupy the east, another the west, another the south, and another the north.

Do you see, now, the mystery in the kind of death Christ chose? The Apostle sets forth this point with clarity, when he says: *He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross*. And, revealing the mystery, he says: *Therefore God exalted him and gave him the name that is above all names, so that at the name of Jesus every knee might bend of those who are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth*. Since, then, he was to take possession of heaven and earth through the Cross, on the Cross he embraced heaven and earth.

St Aelred, In Hebd. Sancta, sermon 36.1-2.4 (CCM 2A:294-295); Word in Season II, 2nd ed.

Monday in Holy Week

A READING FROM THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

(Jeremiah is in danger of death because of the oracle of the ruined temple: Jeremiah 26:1-15)

In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the LORD, "Thus says the LORD: Stand in the court of the LORD's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah which come to worship in the house of the LORD all the words that I command you to speak to them; do not hold back a word. It may be they will listen, and every one turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the evil which I intend to do to them because of their evil doings. You shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD: If you will not listen to me, to walk in my law which I have set before you, and to heed the words of my servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently, though you have not heeded, then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth.'"

The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. And when Jeremiah had finished speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, then the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold of him, saying, "You shall die! Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, 'This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant'?" And all the people gathered about Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.

When the princes of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the LORD and took their seat in the entry of the New Gate of the house of the LORD. Then the priests and the prophets said to the princes and to all the people, "This man deserves the sentence of death, because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears."

Then Jeremiah spoke to all the princes and all the people, saying, "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you have heard. Now therefore amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God, and the LORD will repent of the evil which he has pronounced against you. But as for me, behold, I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you. Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the LORD sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears."

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST LEO THE GREAT

I think that the instructions I have given you about our share in Christ's Cross have sufficiently shown how the Paschal Mystery should enter into the very life of the faithful, and how our daily conduct should be a proclamation of what we honour at the Easter festival. You yourselves have experienced the value of this participation, and you have learned by your Lenten exercises how much both soul and body have to gain from extended fasting, prolonged prayers, and increased generosity in almsgiving. There is

scarcely anyone who has not been enriched by these practices, and who has not preserved in the depths of his memory something in which he may justifiably rejoice.

Since, then, the aim of our forty days' observance has been to know something about the Cross in this season of our Lord's Passion, we must also strive to be found companions of Christ's resurrection, and to pass from death to life while we are yet in this mortal body.

The result of our undergoing a conversion from one state to another is that we cease to be what we were and begin to be something more. But the end of our dying or living is of the utmost importance, for there is a death that brings life, and a life that brings death. It is only in this fleeting world that both are sought together, so that the difference in our future rewards depends upon the quality of our present actions. We must therefore be dead to Satan and alive to God; we must abandon sin in order to rise to holiness. And since Truth himself says: *No one can serve two masters*, let our master be the Lord who has raised up the fallen to glory, not the one who has brought the upright to ruin.

The Apostle tells us: The first man came from the earth, a man of dust: the second man is from heaven. As the man of dust was, so are those who are of the dust; and as the man of heaven is, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have been fashioned after the man of dust, so we shall also be fashioned after the man of heaven. There is therefore every reason for us to rejoice at this exchange, which translates us from earthly disrepute to heavenly honour through the untold mercy of him who descended to our level in order to lift us up to his, by assuming not only the reality of our human nature but also its sinful condition, and allowing his divine impassibility to be assailed by all the sufferings which are our mortal lot.

St Leo the Great, Sermon 71.1-2 – Easter Vigil 443 (PL 54:386-387); Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Tuesday in Holy Week

A READING FROM THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

(Lamentation over the Lord's vineyard: Jeremiah 8:13 – 9:8)

“When I would gather them, says the LORD, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them.” Why do we sit still? Gather together, let us go into the fortified cities and perish there; for the LORD our God has doomed us to perish, and has given us poisoned water to drink, because we have sinned against the LORD. We looked for peace, but no good came, for a time of healing, but behold, terror.

“The snorting of their horses is heard from Dan; at the sound of the neighing of their stallions the whole land quakes. They come and devour the land and all that fills it, the city and those who dwell in it. For behold, I am sending among you serpents, adders which cannot be charmed, and they shall bite you,” says the LORD.

My grief is beyond healing, my heart is sick within me. Hark, the cry of the daughter of my people from the length and breadth of the land: “Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not in her?” “Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images, and with their foreign idols?” “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.” For the wound of the daughter of my people is my heart wounded, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold on me.

Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored?

O that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! O that I had in the desert a wayfarers' lodging place, that I might leave my people and go away from them! For they are all adulterers, a company of treacherous men. They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, says the LORD.

Let every one beware of his neighbour, and put no trust in any brother; for every brother is a supplanter, and every neighbour goes about as a slanderer. Every one deceives his neighbour, and no one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they commit iniquity and are too weary to repent. Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, they refuse to know me, says the LORD.

Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: “Behold, I will refine them and test them, for what else can I do, because of my people? Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks deceitfully; with his mouth each speaks peaceably to his neighbour, but in his heart he plans an ambush for him.”

A READING FROM ON THE VIRTUE OF PATIENCE BY ST CYPRIAN

Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, said that he had come down to earth to do his Father's will. Among the virtues that revealed his divine majesty was the endurance that

mirrored his Father's patience. Every act of his, from the moment of his first appearing, bore the stamp of the patience with which it was carried out. He was no sinner, but the Son of God; yet when he descended to earth from the heights of heaven, he did not disdain to assume human nature and bear the sins of men. Laying aside his immortality for a while, he suffered himself to be made mortal, in order that the innocent could die to save the guilty. He, the Lord, was baptized by a servant, and though he had come to grant forgiveness of sins he did not think it beneath him to wash in the life-giving waters. He fasted for forty days, yet it is through him that others are filled with good things. If he hungered and thirsted, it was to enable those who were faint for want of the word and grace of God to be filled with bread from heaven. He engaged in combat with the devil who tempted him, but was content to defeat his enemy by words alone.

He did not govern his disciples as a master rules his slaves. He was kind and gentle, loving them as brothers, even washing the feet of the apostles, showing by his example how a servant should bear himself toward his equals when his master dealt in such a way with his servants. No wonder he could show such goodness to the disciples who obeyed him, if he was able to bear so long and so patiently with Judas, eating and drinking with his enemy, recognizing the foe in his own household yet neither exposing him publicly nor refusing his treacherous kiss.

At the time of his Passion and Cross, even before it had gone as far as the inhuman crucifixion and the shedding of his blood, how patiently he bore reviling and reproach, insult and mockery! A little while before, he had cured the eyes of a blind man with his spittle, yet now he allowed his tormentors to spit in his face. His servants today scourge the devil and his angels in the name of Christ, but at the time of his Passion Christ himself submitted to being scourged. He crowns the martyrs with never-fading flowers, though he himself was crowned with thorns. Others he clothes in the garment of immortality, yet he himself was stripped of his earthly garments. He had fed them with bread from heaven, yet he himself was fed with gall; and he who had poured out the saving cup was offered vinegar to drink.

He the innocent, he the just, he rather who is the embodiment of innocence and justice, is counted among evil-doers. Truth is confuted by false evidence. The future judge is subjected to judgment; the Word of God is led to the Cross in silence. At the Lord's crucifixion the stars are thrown into confusion, the elements are disturbed, earth trembles, and night swallows up day. But he himself is silent, unmoved, hiding every sign of his godhead throughout the whole duration of his Passion. Enduring all things, he perseveres to the end, so that in him patience may be brought to its full measure of perfection.

St Cyprian, On the Virtue of Patience 6-7 (CSEL 3:401-402); Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Wednesday in Holy Week

A READING FROM THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

(The Prophet's soul is poured forth: Jeremiah 11:18-20; 12:1-13)

The LORD made it known to me and I knew; then thou didst show me their evil deeds. 19 But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. I did not know it was against me they devised schemes, saying, "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more." But, O LORD of hosts, who judgest righteously, who triest the heart and the mind, let me see thy vengeance upon them, for to thee have I committed my cause."

Righteous art thou, O LORD, when I complain to thee; yet I would plead my case before thee. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive? Thou plantest them, and they take root; they grow and bring forth fruit; thou art near in their mouth and far from their heart. But thou, O LORD, knowest me; thou seest me, and triest my mind toward thee. Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and set them apart for the day of slaughter. How long will the land mourn, and the grass of every field wither? For the wickedness of those who dwell in it the beasts and the birds are swept away, because men said, "He will not see our latter end."

"If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? And if in a safe land you fall down, how will you do in the jungle of the Jordan? For even your brothers and the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you; they are in full cry after you; believe them not, though they speak fair words to you."

"I have forsaken my house, I have abandoned my heritage; I have given the beloved of my soul into the hands of her enemies. My heritage has become to me like a lion in the forest, she has lifted up her voice against me; therefore I hate her. Is my heritage to me like a speckled bird of prey? Are the birds of prey against her round about? Go, assemble all the wild beasts; bring them to devour. Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard, they have trampled down my portion, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. They have made it a desolation; desolate, it mourns to me. The whole land is made desolate, but no man lays it to heart. Upon all the bare heights in the desert destroyers have come; for the sword of the LORD devours from one end of the land to the other; no flesh has peace. They have sown wheat and have reaped thorns, they have tired themselves out but profit nothing. They shall be ashamed of their harvests because of the fierce anger of the LORD."

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST LEO THE GREAT

When God, whose absolute being is immune from suffering, assumed our fragile humanity in Christ, he strengthened it beyond measure. Henceforth it was no longer to remain under death's dominion; through a nature immortal in itself, mortal man would be raised to life.

We must strive, dearly beloved, with great effort of soul and body to join ourselves inseparably to this mystery. While failure to observe the Paschal Solemnity would be a very grave offence, it would be still more dangerous to be united with congregations at Church but have no sharing in our Lord's Passion. The apostle's saying is true: *If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him*. No one can truly worship the suffering, dead and risen Christ unless he himself suffers, dies, and rises again with him.

For all the Church's children this sharing in Christ's death and resurrection begins at the mystery of regeneration, when sin is destroyed and we are born to new life. There the Lord's three-day sojourn in the grave is represented by a three-fold immersion. The stone is, as it were, rolled away from the tomb, and those who enter the font in their old, sin-stained condition are brought forth new by the baptismal waters. What has been effected in mystery, however, must still be carried out in their daily lives. As long as they are in this mortal body, those who are born of the Spirit must take up their cross.

Christ has lifted us up with himself on the Cross: there let the Christian take his stand. He knows it is the place where his human nature was redeemed, and all his steps should be directed toward it – for the Lord's Passion is prolonged until the end of the world. Just as it is he whom we honour and love in the saints, he whom we feed and clothe in the poor, so too it is he who suffers in all who endure adversity for the sake of what is right, unless, indeed, we are to imagine that, with the spread of the faith, all persecution has come to an end together with every conflict which ever raged against the blessed martyrs – as if the bearing of the Cross were reserved only for those who have to suffer atrocious torments for the love of Christ.

Wise souls who have learned to fear and love the one and only Lord and to hope in him alone, mortify their passions and crucify their bodily senses. They prefer the will of God to their own lives, and insofar as they renounce love of self for love of God, they love themselves all the more truly. In such members of Christ's body, beloved brethren, the Holy Passover is celebrated properly and they shall lack none of those victories which our Saviour's Passion has won.

St Leo the Great, Sermon 70.3-5 – Good Friday 443 (PL 54,:382-384); Word in Season II, 2nd ed.

Maundy Thursday

A READING FROM THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

(A lamentation of the Prophet; his call is repeated: Jeremiah 15:10-21)

Woe is me, my mother, that you bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land! I have not lent, nor have I borrowed, yet all of them curse me. So let it be, O LORD, if I have not entreated thee for their good, if I have not pleaded with thee on behalf of the enemy in the time of trouble and in the time of distress! Can one break iron, iron from the north, and bronze?

“Your wealth and your treasures I will give as spoil, without price, for all your sins, throughout all your territory. I will make you serve your enemies in a land which you do not know, for in my anger a fire is kindled which shall burn for ever.” O LORD, thou knowest; remember me and visit me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In thy forbearance take me not away; know that for thy sake I bear reproach. Thy words were found, and I ate them, and thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by thy name, O LORD, God of hosts. I did not sit in the company of merry-makers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone, because thy hand was upon me, for thou hadst filled me with indignation. Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Wilt thou be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail?

Therefore thus says the LORD: “If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them. And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, says the LORD. I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.”

A READING FROM THE WRITINGS OF ST EPHREM OF SYRIA

The evening before our Lord gave himself up to death he shared his own body with his Apostles and offered them his blood, with the command that they were to do what he had done in order to keep the memory of his Passion alive. Then a strange thing happened. Earlier Jesus had charged his disciples not to fear death. *Do not be afraid of those who have power to kill your body*, he had said. But now he himself showed fear, and begged to be spared the cup of suffering. *Father*, he prayed *if it be possible, let this cup pass me by*. How are we to explain this?

The answer is that our Lord's petition was wrung from the human weakness he had made his own. There was no pretence about his incarnation; it was absolutely real. And since the donning of our poor humanity had made him puny and defenceless, it was only natural that he should experience fear and alarm. Eating to alleviate hunger, showing weariness after exertion, and revealing human weakness by the need for sleep were all the effects of his taking our flesh and clothing himself with our infirmity. Consequently

when the moment of death drew near, he necessarily experienced the ultimate frailty of our human condition; he was gripped by a dreadful horror of dying.

It was then that Jesus said to his disciples: *Stay awake and pray that you may be spared the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.* And in answer to our question he might well say: 'When you are afraid, it is not your spirit that trembles but your human weakness. Remember then that I myself tasted the fear of death in my desire to convince you that I truly shared your flesh and blood.'

A further answer to our question is that Jesus wished to teach his disciples how to commit themselves to God both in life and in death. His own divine knowledge made him supremely wise, yet he prayed for what his Father judged to be expedient. How much more ought we ignorant men to surrender our wills to God's omniscience!

We may also tell ourselves that we too were in our Lord's mind as he prayed. In time of temptation our minds become confused and our imagination runs riot. By persevering in prayer Jesus was showing us how much we ourselves need to pray if we are to escape the wiles and snares of the devil. It is only by constant prayer that we gain control of our distracted thoughts.

Finally, there is our Lord's desire to strengthen all who are afraid of death. By letting them see that he himself had experienced fear he would show them that fear does not necessarily lead to sin, provided one continues to resist it. This is the force of our Lord's concluding prayer: Not my will, Father, but yours be done. He is saying: 'Yes, Father, I am ready to die in order to bring life to many.'

St Ephrem of Syria, Diatessaron 20.3-4, 6-7 (CSCO 145:201-204); Word in Season II, 2nd ed.

Good Friday

A READING FROM THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

(The loneliness of the Prophet: Jeremiah 16:1-15)

The word of the LORD came to me: "You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place. For thus says the LORD concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place, and concerning the mothers who bore them and the fathers who begot them in this land: They shall die of deadly diseases. They shall not be lamented, nor shall they be buried; they shall be as dung on the surface of the ground. They shall perish by the sword and by famine, and their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth.

"For thus says the LORD: Do not enter the house of mourning, or go to lament, or bemoan them; for I have taken away my peace from this people, says the LORD, my steadfast love and mercy. Both great and small shall die in this land; they shall not be buried, and no one shall lament for them or cut himself or make himself bald for them. No one shall break bread for the mourner, to comfort him for the dead; nor shall any one give him the cup of consolation to drink for his father or his mother. You shall not go into the house of feasting to sit with them, to eat and drink. For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will make to cease from this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride.

"And when you tell this people all these words, and they say to you, 'Why has the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? What is our iniquity? What is the sin that we have committed against the LORD our God?' then you shall say to them: 'Because your fathers have forsaken me, says the LORD, and have gone after other gods and have served and worshiped them, and have forsaken me and have not kept my law, and because you have done worse than your fathers, for behold, every one of you follows his stubborn evil will, refusing to listen to me; therefore I will hurl you out of this land into a land which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favour.'

"Therefore, behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, 'As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt', but 'As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.' For I will bring them back to their own land which I gave to their fathers."

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST LEO THE GREAT

When our Lord was handed over to the will of his cruel foes, they ordered him, in mockery of his royal dignity, to carry the instrument of his own torture. This was done to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah: *A child is born for us, a son is given to us; sovereignty is laid upon his shoulders*. To the wicked, the sight of the Lord carrying his own Cross was indeed an object of derision; but to the faithful a great mystery was revealed, for the

Cross was destined to become the sceptre of his power. Here was the majestic spectacle of a glorious conqueror mightily overthrowing the hostile forces of the devil and nobly bearing the trophy of his victory.

As the crowd accompanied Jesus to the place of execution, the soldiers found a man called Simon of Cyrene, onto whose shoulders they transferred the weight of the Lord's Cross. This action prefigured the faith of the Gentiles, to whom the Cross of Christ would mean glory rather than shame. By this substitution the atonement of the unblemished lamb and the fulfilment of all the rites of the old Law passed from the people of the circumcision to the Gentiles, from the children born of the flesh to those born of the spirit

In the words of the Apostle: *Christ our Passover is sacrificed*. As the new and authentic sacrifice of reconciliation, it was not in the Temple, whose cult was now at an end, that he offered himself to the Father; nor was it within the walls of the city doomed to destruction for its crimes. It was beyond the city gates, outside the camp, that he was crucified, in order that when the ancient sacrificial dispensation came to an end a new victim might be laid on a new altar, and the Cross of Christ become the altar not of the Temple, but of the world.

You drew all things to yourself, Lord, when all the elements combined to pronounce judgment in execration of that crime. Figures gave way to reality, prophecy to manifestation, Law to Gospel. You drew all things to yourself in order that the worship of the whole human race could be celebrated everywhere in a sacramental form which would openly fulfil what had been enacted by means of veiled symbols in that single Jewish Temple.

St Leo the Great, Sermon 59.4-6 – Weds in HWK 444 (PL 54:339-341); Word in Season II, 1st ed.

Holy Saturday in the Easter Triduum

A READING FROM THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

(The anxieties of the Prophet: Jeremiah 20:7-18)

O LORD, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived; thou art stronger than I, and thou hast prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; every one mocks me. For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, "Violence and destruction!" For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name", there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. For I hear many whispering. Terror is on every side! "Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" say all my familiar friends, watching for my fall. "Perhaps he will be deceived, then we can overcome him, and take our revenge on him." But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, they will not overcome me. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonour will never be forgotten. O LORD of hosts, who triest the righteous, who seest the heart and the mind, let me see thy vengeance upon them, for to thee have I committed my cause.

Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers.

Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, "A son is born to you", making him very glad. Let that man be like the cities which the LORD overthrew without pity; let him hear a cry in the morning and an alarm at noon, because he did not kill me in the womb; so my mother would have been my grave, and her womb for ever great. Why did I come forth from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?

A READING FROM A BYZANTINE CANON FOR HOLY SATURDAY

O Lord my God, I will sing to you a funeral hymn, a song at your burial: for by your burial you have opened for me the gates of life, and by your death you have slain death and hell. All things above and all beneath the earth quaked with fear at your death, as they beheld you, my Saviour, upon your throne on high and in the tomb below. For you lie before our eyes in a way beyond our understanding: a corpse and yet the very source of life.

Today you keep holy the seventh day, which you blessed of old by resting from your works. You bring all things into being and make all things new, observing the sabbath rest, my Saviour, and restoring your strength. You have gained the victory by your greater strength: your soul was parted from your body yet by your power, O Word, you have burst asunder the bonds of death and hell. Hell was filled with bitterness when it met you, O Word, for it saw a man deified, marked by wounds yet all-powerful; and it shrank back in terror at this sight.

You were torn but not separated, O Word, from the flesh you had taken. For though your temple was destroyed at the time of your Passion, the person of your Godhead and of

your flesh is one: in both you are one Son, the Word of God, both God and man. The fall of Adam brought death to man but not to God. Hell is king over mortal men, but not for ever. Laid in the tomb, mighty Lord, with your mighty hand you burst asunder the bars of death. To those from every age who slept in the tombs, you have proclaimed true deliverance, O Saviour, who have become the firstborn from the dead.

Be astounded, O heavens, and let the foundations of the earth be shaken. He who dwells on high is numbered among the dead and dwells as a stranger in a narrow tomb. The second Adam, he who dwells on high, has come down to the first Adam in the depths of hell. The disciples' courage failed, but Joseph of Arimathea was more bold; for seeing the God of all a naked corpse, he asked for the body and buried him.

Coming forth from a birth without travail and wounded in your side with a spear, O My Maker, you have brought to pass the re-creation of Eve. Becoming Adam, you have in a way surpassing nature slept a life-giving sleep, awakening life from sleep and from corruption by your almighty power.

'Do not weep for me O Mother, beholding in the tomb the Son whom you conceived in your womb without seed. For I shall rise and be glorified, and as God I shall exalt in everlasting glory those who magnify you with faith and love.'

'O Son without beginning, I was blessed by your strange birth in ways surpassing nature, for I was spared all travail. But now looking upon you, my God, as a lifeless corpse, I am pierced by the sword of bitter sorrow. But arise, that I may be truly magnified.'

From Matins of Holy Saturday in The Lenten Triodion (1978)

Easter

Easter Sunday

The Office of Readings today is only recited by those who have not been to the Easter Vigil.

Easter Monday

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Appearances and Ascension of the Lord; election of Matthias: Acts 1:1-26)

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the Apostles whom he had chosen. To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God. And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away; and when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

In those days Peter stood up among the brethren (the company of persons was in all about a hundred and twenty), and said, “Brethren, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David, concerning Judas who was guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was numbered among us, and was allotted his share in this ministry. (Now this man bought a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘Let his habitation become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it’; and ‘His office let another take.’ So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us – one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, “Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two thou hast chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside, to go to his own place.” And

they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was enrolled with the eleven Apostles.

A READING FROM A PASCHAL HOMILY ATTRIBUTED TO ST HIPPOLYTUS

Now the holy rays of the light of Christ shine forth, the pure stars of the pure Spirit rise, the heavenly treasures of glory and divinity lie open. In this splendour the long dark night has been swallowed up and the dreary shadows of death have vanished.

For us who believe in him a glorious day has dawned, a long unending day, the mystical Passover symbolically celebrated by the Law and effectually accomplished by Christ, a wonderful Passover, a miracle of divine virtue, a work of divine power. This is the true festival and the everlasting memorial, the day upon which freedom from suffering comes from suffering, immortality from death, life from the tomb, healing from a wound, Resurrection from the fall, and Ascension into heaven from the descent into hell.

To show that he had power over death Christ had exercised his royal authority to loose death's bonds even during his lifetime, as for example when he gave the commands, Lazarus, come out and Arise, my child. For the same reason he surrendered himself completely to death, so that in him that gluttonous beast with his insatiable appetite would die completely. Since death's power comes from sin, it searched everywhere in his sinless body for its accustomed food, for sensuality, pride, disobedience or, in a word, for that ancient sin which was its original sustenance. In him, however, it found nothing to feed on and so, being entirely closed in upon itself and destroyed for lack of nourishment, death became its own death.

Many of the just, proclaiming the Good News and prophesying, were awaiting him who was to become by his Resurrection *the firstborn from the dead*. And so, to save all members of the human race, whether they lived before the Law, under the Law, or after his own coming, Christ dwelt three days beneath the earth. After his Resurrection it was the women who were the first to see him, for as a woman brought the first sin into the world, so a woman first announced the news of life to the world. Thus they heard the holy words, *Women, rejoice*; for sadness was to be swallowed up by the joy of the Resurrection.

When Christ had clothed himself completely in the humanity created in God's image and transformed into *the heavenly man* the *old man* he had put on, the image united to himself ascended with him into heaven. At the sign of the great mystery of human nature now ascending with God the angelic powers cried out with joy, commanding the hosts of heaven: *Lift up your gates, you princes, be lifted up, you everlasting doors, and the king of glory shall enter*. They, seeing the unheard of wonder of human nature united to God, exclaimed in their turn: *Who is this King of glory?* and received the reply: *The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory, the strong, the mighty, the powerful in battle*.

O God, spiritual and eternal Lord, and Christ, Lord and King, we entreat you to extend your strong protecting hands over your holy Church and over your holy people, for ever devoted to you. Raise high in our defence the trophies of your triumph and grant that we

like Moses may sing a hymn of victory, for yours is the glory and the power throughout all ages. Amen.

St Hippolytus (attr.), Paschal Homily (SC 27:116-118, 184-190); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Easter Tuesday

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(The descent of the Holy Spirit and Peter's first address: Acts 2:1-21)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. And they were amazed and wondered, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day. And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'"

A READING FROM ON THE PASCHAL SOLEMNITY BY EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA

Each year we mark the beginning of the paschal season by a feast for which we prepare by a period of fasting. Our fast, like that of Moses and Elijah, lasts for forty days, but the feast itself we shall celebrate repeatedly until the end of time.

When we set out on our journey to God we gird our loins with chastity and, safeguarding the steps of our soul as though with sandals, we prepare to run the race of our heavenly vocation. Repelling our enemies with the staff of the word of God and with the power of prayer, we hasten eagerly toward our Passover into heaven, away from things below toward those above, away from this mortal life toward life everlasting.

For when we have successfully accomplished our Passover an even greater feast awaits us. The Jews call this feast Pentecost and it is a foreshadowing of the kingdom of heaven. Moses said: *You are to count seven weeks from the time when you begin to harvest the grain, and then you shall offer the new loaves of this new harvest to God.* In the symbol of the harvest he was clearly referring prophetically to the vocation of the Gentiles. The new loaves are the souls offered to God through Christ; they are the Churches made up of all nations, for whom God in his love for us gives the greatest feast of all. Reaped by the sickles of the Apostles' teaching, we are gathered into the Churches all over the world, as though onto threshing-floors. We are made into one body by our common faith, salted by the word of God in which we are instructed, reborn through water and the fire of the Holy Spirit, and offered to God through Christ like loaves full of goodness, a pleasing and acceptable sacrifice.

So now that the Mosaic types have given place to the sacred reality they foreshadowed, we have learned to celebrate this more joyful festival as though already united to our Saviour in the blessedness of his kingdom. During this feast we are allowed to rest from our labours, for we are taught to imitate the rest that we hope to enjoy in heaven. We neither kneel for prayer nor exhaust ourselves with fasting: it is not fitting for those who have been granted the grace of Resurrection to cast themselves onto the ground again, nor for those who have been freed from their passions to endure the same hardships as those still enslaved.

Accordingly, we celebrate the feast of Pentecost for seven full weeks after Easter, just as in the six weeks before Easter we spent forty days in courageous self-denial. Six is a number associated with activity, since we are told that God created the world in six days: but as the number seven symbolizes rest, it is appropriate for our labours to be followed by a period of rest lasting seven weeks, during which we celebrate a second great feast. Because we see in these holy days of Pentecost an image of the rest to come, it is right for our souls to rejoice and for our bodies to find repose and cease fasting as though already united to the bridegroom

Eusebius of Caesarea, On the Paschal Solemnity 4-5 (PG 24:698-699); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Easter Wednesday

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Peter's proclamation of Jesus crucified and risen: Acts 2:22-41)

Peter said, "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know – this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will dwell in hope. For thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let thy Holy One see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou wilt make me full of gladness with thy presence.'

"Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens; but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet.' Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him." And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

A READING FROM THE MYSTAGOGICAL CATECHESSES OF ST CYRIL OF JERUSALEM

When you were baptized into Christ and clothed yourselves in him, you were transformed into the likeness of the Son of God. Having destined us to be his children by adoption, God gave us a likeness to Christ in his glory, and, living as you do in communion with Christ, you yourselves are rightly called 'christs' or anointed ones. When he said: *Do not touch my anointed ones*, God was speaking of you.

You became 'christs' when you received the sign of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, everything took place in you by means of images, because you yourselves are images of Christ. Christ bathed in the river Jordan, imparting to its waters the fragrance of his divinity, and when he came up from them the Holy Spirit descended upon him; like resting upon like. So you also, after coming up from the sacred waters of Baptism, were anointed with chrism, which signifies the Holy Spirit, by whom Christ was anointed and of whom blessed Isaiah prophesied in the name of the Lord: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me; he has sent me to preach good news to the poor.*

Christ's anointing was not by human hands, nor was it with ordinary oil. On the contrary, having destined him to be the Saviour of the whole world, the Father himself anointed him with the Holy Spirit. The words of Peter bear witness to this: *Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit.* And David the prophet proclaimed: *Your throne, O God, shall endure forever, your royal sceptre is a sceptre of justice. You have loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above all your fellows.*

The oil of gladness with which Christ was anointed was a spiritual oil; it was in fact the Holy Spirit himself who is called *the oil of gladness* because he is the source of spiritual joy. But you also have been anointed with oil, and by this anointing you have entered into fellowship with Christ and have received a share in his life. Beware of thinking of this chrism as merely ordinary oil. As the eucharistic bread after the invocation of the Holy Spirit is no longer ordinary bread but the body of Christ, so also the oil after the invocation is no longer plain ordinary oil but Christ's gift which by the presence of his divinity becomes the instrument through which you receive the Holy Spirit. While symbolically, on your foreheads and organs of sense, your bodies are anointed with this oil that we see; your souls are sanctified by the holy and life-giving Spirit.

St Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechesis 21.1-3 (PG 33:1087-1091); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Easter Thursday

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(The fellowship of the first community. Healing of the sick man: Acts 2:42 – 3:10)

And they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the Apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at that gate of the temple which is called Beautiful to ask alms of those who entered the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, with John, and said, "Look at us." And he fixed his attention upon them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and walked and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

A READING FROM THE CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

In ancient times God, who wishes everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, spoke to our fathers through the prophets in many different ways. Then in the fullness of time he sent his Son, the word made flesh and anointed by the Holy Spirit, to preach the Good News to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart, to be a physician for both body and soul and the mediator between God and the human race. Through his human nature united with the person of the Word, we have been saved. Christ made the perfect satisfaction needed to reconcile us with God and he gave us the means of worshipping God worthily.

The work of redeeming our race and giving full glory to God, foreshadowed by the divine wonders performed among the people of the old covenant, was accomplished by Christ the Lord principally by the paschal mystery of his blessed Passion, Resurrection from the dead, and Ascension in glory. By dying he destroyed our death and by rising he restored our life. From his side as he slept the sleep of death on the Cross came forth the wonderful Sacrament which is the whole Church.

As Christ was sent by the Father, so he in his turn sent the Apostles, men filled with the Holy Spirit, to preach the Good News to all creation. They were to proclaim that by his death and Resurrection the Son of God has freed us from the power of Satan and from death and introduced us into the kingdom of the Father. Moreover, they were to give effect to the saving work they proclaimed by means of the sacrifice around which all our liturgical life revolves.

So it is that by Baptism men, women, and children are plunged into the paschal mystery, dying, being buried, and rising again with Christ. They receive the Spirit who makes them children of God so that they cry out, *Abba, Father*, and become the true worshipers the Father seeks. So likewise they proclaim the Lord's death until he comes every time they eat the Lord's Supper. On the very day of Pentecost, when the Church appeared before the world, those who believed the word of Peter were baptized. They then devoted themselves to listening to the Apostles' teaching, sharing the common life, breaking bread, and praying. *They gave praise to God and won the good will of all the people.*

From that time onward the Church has never failed to gather together to celebrate the paschal mystery. It reads what is written about Christ in every part of Scripture, it celebrates the Eucharist, in which the triumphant victory of his death is once again made present, and at the same time it praises God's glory by thanking him for the priceless gift he has given us in Christ Jesus.

Second Vatican Council, Sacrosanctum Concilium 5-6; Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Easter Friday

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Peter's address on the glorification of Jesus: 3:11 – 4:4)

While the man who had been healed clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomons, astounded. And when Peter saw it he addressed the people, "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong whom you see and know; and the faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

"And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old. Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul that does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came afterwards, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness."

And as they were speaking to the people, the Priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the morrow, for it was already evening. But many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

A READING FROM THE MYSTAGOGICAL CATECHESSES OF ST CYRIL OF JERUSALEM

On the night he was betrayed our Lord Jesus Christ took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples and said: 'Take, eat: this is my body.' He took the cup, gave thanks and said: 'Take, drink: this is my blood.' Since Christ himself has declared the bread to be his body, who can have any further doubt? Since he himself has said quite categorically, This is my blood, who would dare to question it and say that it is not his blood?

Therefore it is with complete assurance that we receive the bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ. His body is given to us under the symbol of bread, and his blood is given to us under the symbol of wine, in order to make us by receiving them one body and one blood with him. Having his body and blood in our members, we become bearers of Christ and sharers, as Saint Peter says, in the divine nature.

Once when speaking to the Jews Christ said: *Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you shall have no life in you.* This so horrified them that they left him. Not understanding his words in a spiritual way, they thought the Saviour wished them to practise cannibalism.

Under the old covenant there was showbread, but it came an end with the old dispensation to which it belonged. Under the new covenant there is bread from heaven and the cup of salvation. These sanctify both soul and body, the bread being adapted to the sanctification of the body, the Word to the sanctification of the soul.

Do not, then, regard the Eucharistic elements as ordinary bread and wine: they are in fact the body and blood of the Lord, as he himself has declared. Whatever your senses may tell you, be strong in faith.

You have been taught and you are firmly convinced that what looks and tastes like bread and wine is not bread and wine but the body and the blood of Christ. You know also how David referred to this long ago when he sang: *Bread strengthens the heart and makes the face glow with the oil of gladness.* Strengthen your heart, then, by receiving this bread as spiritual bread, and bring joy to the face of your soul.

May purity of conscience remove the veil from the face of your soul so that by contemplating the glory of the Lord, as in a mirror, you may be transformed from glory to glory in Christ Jesus our Lord. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

St Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechesis 22.1. 3-6 (PG 33:1098-1106); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Easter Saturday

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Peter and John before the Sanhedrin: Acts 4:5-31)

On the morrow their rulers and Elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the High Priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and Elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, by what means this man has been healed, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well. This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they wondered; and they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man that had been healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the Council, they conferred with one another, saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is manifest to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any one in this name." So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people; for all men praised God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

When they were released they went to their friends and reported what the Chief Priests and the Elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who by the mouth of our father David, thy servant, didst say by the Holy Spirit, 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves in array, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed' – for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus." And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.

A READING FROM AN EASTER SERMON BY BLESSED GUERRIC OF IGNY

Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Christ is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep and the firstborn from the dead. His Resurrection, which is the prototype of all others, has guaranteed the rising of our souls in the first resurrection and of our bodies in the second, for he offers his own risen body to our souls as Sacrament and to our bodies as exemplar. Even for our souls Christ's single Resurrection has prepared a twofold grace: through the living out of the paschal mystery in our daily lives we rise from the death of sin, and by our joyful celebration of the paschal feast today we rouse ourselves from the torpor of sleep.

Truly slothful and half-hearted must that person be who does not feel a thrill of joy, a sense of new life and vigour, at the glad cry: *The Lord is risen!* For myself; when I looked upon the dead Jesus I was overwhelmed by despairing grief, but *in the living God*, as Scripture says, *my heart and my flesh rejoice*. It is with no mean profit to faith, no slight dividend of joy, that Jesus returns to me from the tomb, for I recognize the living God where only a little while ago I mourned a dead man. My heart was sorrowing for him as slain; but now that he is risen, not only my heart but my flesh also rejoices in the confident hope of my own resurrection and immortality.

I slept and I arose, Christ says. *Awake*, then, my sleeping soul, *and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light!* As the new sun rises from below, the grace of the Resurrection already casts its radiance over the whole world, a radiance reflected in the eyes of those who have watched for him since daybreak, a dawn that ushers in the day of eternity. This is the day that knows no evening, the day whose sun will never set again. Only once has that sun gone down, and now once and for all it has ascended above the heavens, leading death captive in its train.

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad. And you also, if you watch daily at the threshold of wisdom, fixing your eyes on the doorway and, like the Magdalen, keeping vigil at the entrance to his tomb, you also will find what she found. You will know that what was written of Wisdom was written of Christ: *She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her. Anyone who rises early to seek her will have no trouble; he will find her sitting at his gates.* While it was still dark Mary had come to watch at the tomb, and she found Jesus whom she sought standing there in the flesh. But you must know him now according to the spirit, not according to the flesh, and you can be sure of finding his spiritual presence if you seek him with a desire like hers, and if he observes your persevering prayer. Say then to the Lord Jesus, with Mary's love and longing: *My soul yearns for you in the night, my spirit within me earnestly seeks for you.* Make the Psalmist's prayer your own as you say: *O God, my God, I watch for you at morning light; my soul thirsts for you.* Then see if you do not also find yourselves singing with them both: *In the morning fill us with your love; we shall exult and rejoice all our days.*

Bd Gueric of Igny, Sermon 3 On the resurrection 1-2 (PL 185:148-149); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Easter Week 2

Second Sunday of Easter (Easter Octave Day)

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE COLOSSIANS

(New life in Christ: Colossians 3:1-17)

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you once walked, when you lived in them. But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

A READING FROM A PASCHAL HOMILY BY BISHOP BASIL OF SELEUCIA

Christ descended into hell to liberate its captives. In one instant he destroyed all record of our ancient debt incurred under the Law, in order to lead us to heaven where there is no death but only eternal life and righteousness.

By the Baptism which you, the newly-enlightened, have just received, you now share in these blessings. Your initiation into the life of grace is the pledge of your resurrection. Your Baptism is the promise of the life of heaven. By your immersion you imitated the burial of the Lord, but when you came out of the water you were conscious only of the reality of the Resurrection.

Believe in this reality, of which previously you saw only the outward signs. Accept the assurance of Paul when he says: *If we have been united to Christ in a death like his, we shall be united to him also in a resurrection like his.* Baptism is the planting of the seed of immortality, a planting which takes place in the font and bears fruit in heaven. The grace of the Spirit works in a mysterious way in the font, and the outward appearance must not obscure the wonder of it. Although water serves as the instrument, it is grace which gives rebirth. Grace transforms all who are placed in the font just as the seed is

transformed in the womb. It refashions all who go down into the water as metal is recast in a furnace. It reveals to them the mysteries of immortality; it seals them with the pledge of resurrection

These wonderful mysteries are symbolized for you, the newly-enlightened, even in the garments you wear. See how you are clothed in the outward signs of these blessings. The radiant brightness of your robe stands for incorruptibility. The white band encircling your head like a diadem proclaims your liberty. In your hand you hold the sign of your victory over the devil. Christ is showing you that you have risen from the dead. He does this now in a symbolic way, but soon he will reveal the full reality if we keep the garment of faith undefiled and do not let sin extinguish the lamp of grace. If we preserve the crown of the Spirit, the Lord will call from heaven in a voice of tremendous majesty, yet full of tenderness: *Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you since the beginning of the world.* To him be glory and power forever, through endless ages. Amen.

Bishop Basil of Seleucia, Paschal Homily (PG 28:1079-1082); World in Season III, 1st ed.

Monday of the Second Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(The first Christian community. Ananias and Sapphira: Acts 4:32 – 5:16)

Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the Apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the Apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need. Thus Joseph who was surnamed by the Apostles Barnabas (which means, Son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the Apostles' feet.

But a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the Apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Hark, the feet of those that have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole Church, and upon all who heard of these things.

Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the Apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high honour. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and pallets, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

A READING FROM THE CONFERENCES OF ST JOHN CASSIAN

There are in Egypt three kinds of monks. Two of them are very good, whilst the third is lukewarm and utterly to be avoided. The first is that of the cenobites, who live together in a community and are governed by the judgement of one elder. The greatest number of

monks dwelling in Egypt are of this kind. The second is that of the anchorites. These are first instructed in the cenobia and then, perfected in their practical way of life, choose the recesses of the desert. We too have chosen to be part of this profession. The third and blameworthy type is that of the sarabaites.

The discipline of the cenobites took its rise at the time of the apostolic preaching. For such was the whole multitude of believers in Jerusalem described in the Acts of the Apostles: *The multitude of believers had one heart and one soul, and none of them said that what he possessed was his own, but all things were common to them. They sold their possessions and their belongings and distributed them to all as each had need.*

Such, I say, was the whole Church then, whereas now it is difficult to find even a few like that in the cenobia. But, at the death of the Apostles, the multitude of believers began to grow lukewarm, especially those who came over to the faith of Christ from different foreign nations. Because of their rudimentary faith and inveterate paganism, the Apostles asked nothing more of them than that they abstain *from things sacrificed to idols, from fornication, from things strangled, and from blood.* But this liberty, which was conceded to the pagans because of the weakness of their new faith, gradually began to spoil the perfection of the Church in Jerusalem, and, as its number daily increased, the warmth of that new faith grew cold, and not only newcomers to the faith of Christ but even the leaders of the Church relaxed their strictness. For some people, thinking that what they saw conceded to the pagans because of their weakness was lawful for them as well, thought that it would be no loss to themselves if they believed in and confessed Christ whilst keeping their belongings and property.

Those in whom the apostolic fervour still existed, however, were mindful of that earlier perfection. Abandoning their towns and the company of the negligent, they began to live in rural and more secluded places and to practise privately and individually what they remembered had been taught by the Apostles throughout the body of the Church. As time went on they gradually separated themselves from the crowds of believers because they abstained from marriage, cut themselves off from the company of their parents and from the life of this world. They were called monks or *monazontes* because of the strictness of their solitary lives. They are also called cenobites from their common fellowship, and their cells and dwelling places are called cenobia. This alone, then, was the most ancient kind of monks, which is first not only in time but also in grace, and which remained inviolable throughout the years, up until the era of Abba Paul and Abba Antony. We see that remnants of it endure even now in strict cenobia.

St John Cassian, The Conferences 18.4.2-5.4; ACW 57 (1997) tr Ramsey.

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(The Apostles before the Sanhedrin: Acts 5:17-42)

The High Priest rose up and all who were with him, that is, the party of the Sadducees, and, filled with jealousy, they arrested the Apostles and put them in the common prison. But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and taught.

Now the High Priest came and those who were with him and called together the Council and all the senate of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, and they returned and reported, "We found the prison securely locked and the sentries standing at the doors, but when we opened it we found no one inside." Now when the captain of the temple and the Chief Priests heard these words, they were much perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. And some one came and told them, "The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people." Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but without violence, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

And when they had brought them, they set them before the Council. And the High Priest questioned them, saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the Apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

When they heard this they were enraged and wanted to kill them. But a Pharisee in the Council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, held in honour by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a while. And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you do with these men. For before these days Theudas arose, giving himself out to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was slain and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!"

So they took his advice, and when they had called in the Apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for

the name. And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

A READING FROM THE ASCETICON OF ST BASIL THE GREAT

Is it necessary first to renounce everything and then come to the way of life according to God?

Since our Lord Jesus Christ says to all, If anyone comes to me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me; and again, whoever does not renounce all he has cannot be my disciple, we think that this commandment extends to a necessary estrangement from many things. For first of all, we who have given up the hidden things of shame renounce the devil and the passions of the flesh, family ties and human friendships and any manner of life that conflicts with the strictness of the Gospel of salvation. And, what is still more necessary, he who has put off the old nature with its practices which is corrupt through deceitful desires renounces even himself. He also renounces all affections of this world which can hinder the aim of godliness.

Such a man regards as his true parents those who have given birth to him by the Gospel, he regards as his brothers those who received the same spirit of adoption, and he will consider all possessions as foreign to him, as indeed they are. In a word, how can he to whom the whole world has been crucified on account of Christ, and he to the world, be a sharer any longer in the cares of the world? For our Lord Jesus Christ goes to extremes in hatred of the soul and denial of self, when he says, If anyone comes to me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. Again, If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Perfect renunciation, therefore, consists in one's attaining freedom from desire concerning this life and having *the sentence of death* so as not to rely on oneself. Its beginnings, however, are alienation from external things such as possessions, vainglory, the common customs of life, or attachment to useless things. Examples are given us by the holy disciples of the Lord: John and James, who left their father Zebedee and even their boat, their only source of livelihood; Matthew, who rose up from the tax-office and followed the Lord, not only leaving the profits in the tax-office, but also despising the dangers likely to come upon himself and his family at the hands of the authorities for leaving the accounts of the tax-office in disorder. To Paul the whole world was crucified, and he to the world.

In the same way one who is violently seized by the desire to follow Christ can no longer care for anything to do with this life: not for the love of parents or relations, if this is in opposition to the commandments of the Lord; not for the fear of men according to the example of the saints who said, *we must obey God rather than men*; and not because of derision from outsiders on account of their good works.

St Basil the Great, The Asketikon, Longer Response 8; tr. Pluscarden

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Seven men filled with the Holy Spirit are chosen: Acts 6:1-15)

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the Apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them.

And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the Priests were obedient to the faith.

And Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, arose and disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. Then they secretly instigated men, who said, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." And they stirred up the people and the Elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the Council, and set up false witnesses who said, "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us." And gazing at him, all who sat in the Council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

You have all heard in the reading how the blessed Stephen was ordained Deacon with six others, himself being the seventh, and how he won through to his heavenly crown. This is the first special privilege of the first martyr: that whilst we can scarcely lay hands on the stories of other martyrs to read them as we celebrate their feasts, the passion of this one is to be found in a book from the canon of Scripture, The Acts of the Apostles. The reading of this book starts on Easter Sunday, as is the custom of the Church. In this book you have heard how seven Deacons, including St Stephen, were elected and then ordained by the Apostles. The Apostles first, the Deacons second; and the Deacons produced a martyr before the Apostles, the lambs provided a victim before the rams.

But what a very similar passion he underwent to that of his Lord and Saviour! False witnesses against the one as against the other; and about the same matter. You know what the false witnesses said against the Lord Christ: *We heard him say ourselves, I will pull down this temple, and after three days I will build another new one.* The Lord, though, hadn't actually said this; but falsehood wanted to stick close to the truth. Where he said 'Pull down', the false witnesses said 'I will pull down'. They changed a few syllables; but the false witnesses were all the worse, for wishing to stick near the truth in their calumny.

And what was Stephen charged with? *We heard him say that Jesus the Nazarene will destroy this temple, and change the custom of the Law.* They were giving false testimony, and prophesying the truth. Just as Caiaphas, their master, chief of the priests, when advising the Jews that Christ should be killed, said this: *It is expedient that one should die, rather than that the whole nation should perish;* but the evangelist says, *This he did not say of himself; but since he was High Priest that year, he prophesied that it was necessary for Christ to die for the people.* What's this, brothers? Great indeed is the force of truth. People hate the truth, and they prophecy the truth without knowing it. Actually, they don't do it, but it is done through them.

They brought him before the Council, in order to obtain a more impressive judgement. But the friend of Christ, when they had stated their case, proclaimed the truth about his Lord. He was going to die; why should a God-fearing tongue keep quiet before the godless? Why not die for the truth? In this one respect he was unlike his Lord when their trials are compared, because of a very definite mystery. When the Lord was brought to his Passion, he preferred to keep quiet on being interrogated; this man did not keep quiet. Why did Christ prefer to keep quiet? Because it had been foretold about him: Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb without a voice before its shearer, so he did not open his mouth. Why, though, did St Stephen refuse to keep quiet? Because the Lord himself had said, What I tell you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear in the ear, proclaim on the rooftops.

St Augustine, Sermon 315, 1-3; WSA (1994), tr. Hill

Thursday in the Second Week of Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Stephen begins a sermon on the history of the Fathers: Acts 7:1-16)

The High Priest said, "Is this so?" And Stephen said: "Brethren and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, 'Depart from your land and from your kindred and go into the land which I will show you.' Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living; yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him in possession and to his posterity after him, though he had no child. And God spoke to this effect, that his posterity would be aliens in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and ill-treat them four hundred years. 'But I will judge the nation which they serve,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.' And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.

"And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him, and rescued him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him governor over Egypt and over all his household. Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent forth our fathers the first time. And at the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh. And Joseph sent and called to him Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five souls; and Jacob went down into Egypt. And he died, himself and our fathers, and they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem."

A READING FROM THE EXHORTATION TO MARTYRDOM BY ORIGEN

If passing from unbelief to faith means that we have passed from death to life, we should not be surprised to find that the world hates us. Anyone who has not passed from death to life is incapable of loving those who have departed from death's dark dwelling place to enter a dwelling made of living stones and filled with the light of life. Jesus laid down his life for us; so we too should lay down our lives, I will not say for him, but for ourselves and also, surely, for those who will be helped by the example of our martyrdom.

Now is the time for Christians to rejoice. Scripture says: We should rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering trains us to endure with patience, patient endurance makes us pleasing to God, and being pleasing to God gives us ground for a hope that will not be disappointed. Only let the love of God be poured forth in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

The more we share in the sufferings of Christ, the more we share, through him, in his consolation. We should be extremely eager to share in Christ's sufferings and to let them be multiplied in us if we desire the superabundant consolation that will be given to those who mourn. This consolation will not perhaps be the same for all, for if it were, Scripture would not say: *The more we share in the sufferings of Christ, the more we share in his consolation.* Sharing in his consolation will be proportionate to our sharing in his suffering.

God says through the prophet: *At an acceptable time I heard you, on the day of salvation I helped you.* What time could be more acceptable than when, for our fidelity to God in Christ, we are made a public spectacle and led away under guard, not defeated but triumphant?

In Christ and with Christ the martyrs disarm the principalities and powers and share in his triumph over them, for their share in Christ's sufferings makes them sharers also in the mighty deeds those sufferings accomplished. What could more appropriately be called the day of salvation than the day of such a glorious departure from this world?

Origen, Exhortation to Martyrdom, 41-42 (PG 11:618-619); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Friday in the Second Week of Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(The story of Moses in Stephen's sermon: Acts 7:17-43)

Stephen said to the Council, "But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt till there arose over Egypt another king who had not known Joseph. He dealt craftily with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, that they might not be kept alive. At this time Moses was born, and was beautiful before God. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house; and when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.

"When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking the Egyptian. He supposed that his brethren understood that God was giving them deliverance by his hand, but they did not understand. And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarrelling and would have reconciled them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you wrong each other?' But the man who was wronging his neighbour thrust him aside, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' At this retort Moses fled, and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

"Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it he wondered at the sight; and as he drew near to look, the voice of the Lord came, 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. And the Lord said to him, 'Take off the shoes from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have surely seen the ill-treatment of my people that are in Egypt and heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.'

"This Moses whom they refused, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' God sent as both ruler and deliverer by the hand of the angel that appeared to him in the bush. He led them out, having performed wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years. This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up.' This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living oracles to give to us. Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and rejoiced in the works of their hands. But God turned and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: 'Did you offer to me slain beasts and sacrifices, forty years in the wilderness, O

house of Israel? And you took up the tent of Moloch, and the star of the god Rephan, the figures which you made to worship; and I will remove you beyond Babylon.”

A READING FROM THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

In the liturgy the Holy Spirit is the teacher of the faith of the People of God and the artisan of ‘God’s masterpieces’, the Sacraments of the New Covenant. The desire and work of the Spirit in the heart of the Church is that we may live from the life of the risen Christ. When the Spirit encounters in us the response of faith which he has aroused in us, he brings about genuine cooperation. Through it, the liturgy becomes the common work of the Holy Spirit and the Church.

In this sacramental dispensation of Christ’s mystery the Holy Spirit acts in the same way as at other times in the economy of salvation: he prepares the Church to encounter her Lord; he recalls and makes Christ manifest to the faith of the assembly. By his transforming power, he makes the mystery of Christ present here and now. Finally the Spirit of communion unites the Church to the life and mission of Christ.

In the sacramental economy the Holy Spirit fulfils what was prefigured in the Old Covenant. Since Christ’s Church was ‘prepared in marvellous fashion in the history of the people of Israel and in the Old Covenant’, the Church’s liturgy has retained certain elements of the worship of the Old Covenant as integral and irreplaceable, adopting them as her own: notably, reading the Old Testament; praying the Psalms; above all, recalling the saving events and significant realities which have found their fulfilment in the mystery of Christ: promise and covenant, Exodus and Passover, kingdom and temple, exile and return.

It is on this harmony of the two Testaments that the Paschal catechesis of the Lord is built, and then, that of the Apostles and the Fathers of the Church. This catechesis unveils what lay hidden under the letter of the Old Testament: the mystery of Christ. It is called ‘typological’ because it reveals the newness of Christ on the basis of the ‘figures’ or ‘types’ which announce him in the deeds, words, and symbols of the first covenant. By this re-reading in the Spirit of Truth, starting from Christ, the figures are unveiled. Thus the flood and Noah’s ark prefigured salvation by Baptism, as did the cloud and the crossing of the Red Sea. Water from the rock was the figure of the spiritual gifts of Christ, and manna in the desert prefigured the Eucharist, *the true bread from heaven*.

For this reason the Church, especially during Advent and Lent and above all at the Easter Vigil, re-reads and re-lives the great events of salvation history in the ‘today’ of her liturgy. But this also demands that catechesis help the faithful to open themselves to this spiritual understanding of the economy of salvation as the Church’s liturgy reveals it and enables us to live it.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1091-1095

Saturday in the Second Week of Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(End of Stephen's sermon and his martyrdom: Acts 7:44 – 8:3)

Stephen said to the Council, "Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, even as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations which God thrust out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, who found favour in the sight of God and asked leave to find a habitation for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for him. Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands; as the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, and earth my footstool. What house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?'

"You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."

Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was consenting to his death.

And on that day a great persecution arose against the Church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles. Devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the Church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

What did Stephen do? First take a look at the one whom this good friend was imitating. While the Lord Jesus Christ was hanging on the Cross, he said, *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit*. He, though, said, *Father*; Stephen said, *Lord Jesus*. What else did he also say? *Receive my spirit*. You spoke to the Father, I to you. I recognize the Mediator; you came to lift up the fallen; you hadn't fallen with me. *Receive*, he said, *my spirit*.

That was his prayer for himself; something else came into his mind, in which he might imitate his Lord. Recall the words of the one hanging on the Cross, and mark the words

of the one who was being stoned for confessing him. What did the former say? *Father, forgive them, because they know not what they do.* Possibly, Stephen was at that time among those who did not know what they were doing. Many of them, you see, afterward came to believe. And we are not certain which group the blessed Stephen came from, whether he was one of those who had previously believed in Christ. If not, then that prayer also availed for him: *Father, forgive them, because they know not what they do.*

And yet Saul too was one of those. When Stephen the lamb was being stoned, he was still a wolf, still thirsting for blood, still thinking his own hands were not enough to stone him with, and therefore keeping the coats of those who were doing the stoning. So Stephen recalled what had been said for him, *Father, forgive them, because they know not what they do;* and to imitate his Lord even in this respect, in order to be his friend, he too said, *Lord, do not hold this sin against them.* Do you suppose Saul heard these words? He certainly heard, but he jeered; and yet he was included in Stephen's prayer. He was still rampaging around, and already Stephen was being heard on his behalf.

Such a lovely picture this is: where you see holy Stephen being stoned, you can see Saul keeping the coats of those doing the stoning. This man is *Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus,* this man is *Paul, the servant of Christ Jesus.* Yes, you listened very well to the voice saying *Why are you persecuting me?* You were laid low, you were raised up; laid low as a persecutor, raised up as a preacher. Tell us, let us hear it: *Paul, the servant of Christ Jesus by the will of God.* Certainly not by your will, was it, dear Saul? We have seen the fruit of your will: Stephen was slain by your will. We can see your fruits that came by the will of God: you are read everywhere, chanted everywhere, everywhere you are converting to Christ the hearts that oppose him, everywhere as a good shepherd you are gathering huge flocks.

You are reigning with the one you stoned, reigning with Christ. There you can both see each other, can both now hear my sermon; both of you please pray for us. He will listen to you both, the one who crowned you; first one, and then the other; one who suffered persecution, the other who did the persecuting. Then the first was a lamb, the other a wolf; now, though, both are lambs. May the lambs acknowledge us, and see us in the flock of Christ. May they commend us to him in their prayers, so as to obtain a quiet and tranquil life for the Church of their Lord.

St Augustine, Sermon 316, 3-5; WSA (1994) tr. Hill

Easter Week 3

Sunday in the Third Week of Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Philip in Samaria. Simon the Magician: Acts 8:4-25)

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did. For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralysed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city.

But there was a man named Simon who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the nation of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. They all gave heed to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is that power of God which is called Great." And they gave heed to him, because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

Now when the Apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the Apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me also this power, that any one on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

Sing to the Lord a new song; his praise is in the assembly of the saints. We are urged to sing a new song to the Lord. This new song is the song that has been learned by the new man. Now a song it is a thing of joy; more profoundly, it is a thing of love. It is the person who has learned to love the new life who has learned to sing the new song. In order to be able to sing the new song, therefore, we need to be reminded of the nature of the new life, for the new man, the new song, the new covenant, all belong to the same kingdom. Not only, then, will the new man sing the new song, he will also belong to the *new covenant*.

There is no one who does not love something, but the question is, what to love. The psalms do not tell us not to love, but to choose the object of our love. But how can we choose unless we are first chosen? We cannot love unless someone has loved us first. Listen to the Apostle John: *We love him, because he first loved us.* The source of our love for God can only be found in the fact that God loved us first. He has given us himself as the object of our love, and he has also given us its source. What this source is you may learn more clearly from the Apostle Paul who tells us: *The love of God has been poured into our hearts.* This love is not something we generate ourselves; it comes to us *through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

Since we have such an assurance, then, let us love God with the love he has given us. As John tells us more fully: *God is love, and whoever dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him.* It is not enough to say: *Love is from God.* Which of us would dare to pronounce the words of Scripture: *God is love?* He alone could say it who knew what it was to have God dwelling within him. God offers us a short route to the possession of himself. He cries out: Love me and you will have me, for you would be unable to love me if you did not possess me already.

My dear brethren and children, fruit of the true faith and holy seed of heaven, all you who have been born again in Christ and whose life is from above, listen to me; or rather, listen to the Holy Spirit saying through me: *Sing to the Lord a new song.* Look you tell me, I am singing. Yes indeed, you are singing; you are singing clearly, I can hear you. But make sure that your life does not contradict your words. Sing with your voices, your hearts, your lips, and your lives: *Sing to the Lord a new song.*

Now it is your unquestioned desire to sing of him whom you love, but you ask me how to sing his praises. You have heard the words: *Sing to the Lord a new song,* and you wish to know what praises to sing. The answer is: *His praise is in the assembly of the saints;* it is in the singers themselves. If you desire to praise him, then live what you express. Live good lives, and you yourselves will be his praise.

St Augustine, Sermon 34, 1-3.5-6 (CCL 41:424-426); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Monday in the Third Week of Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Philip baptizes the eunuch: Acts 8:26-40)

But an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert road. And he rose and went. And behold, an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a minister of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of all her treasure, had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless some one guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the scripture which he was reading was this: "As a sheep led to the slaughter or a lamb before its shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken up from the earth." And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, pray, does the prophet say this, about himself or about some one else?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus. And as they went along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?" And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus, and passing on he preached the gospel to all the towns till he came to Caesarea.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

The Lord said somewhere, after he had risen from the dead, Receive the Holy Spirit, and after saying Receive the Holy Spirit, he immediately added, Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them; that is, it's the Spirit who forgives, not you. But the Spirit is God. So it's God who forgives, not you. What, though, are you in relation to the Spirit? Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you? So God dwells in his holy temple, that is among his holy faithful, in his Church and it is through them he forgives sins.

But if he forgives through human agency, he can also forgive apart from human agency. To some he gave forgiveness through John; through whom did he give grace to John himself? Wishing to demonstrate this and to confirm this truth, God very suitably arranged that when some people in Samaria had been evangelized and baptized, and baptized by Philip, one of the seven Deacons originally chosen, they did not receive the Holy Spirit, and yet they had been baptized. This was told to the disciples in Jerusalem, and they came to Samaria so that those who had been baptized might receive the Holy Spirit by their laying on their hands.

When Simon saw this, he thought it was something possessed by men, and wanted to possess it himself. Thinking it was possessed by men, he wanted to buy it from men. Then Peter denounced him and said, *You have neither part nor portion in this faith. For you thought the gift of God is something to be bought with money.* Now I would like you to take note of why I have wanted to remind you of this story. It was proper for God to

show first that he works through men; but next that he works through himself, in case people should think what Simon thought, that that sort of power belongs to men, not to God – though the disciples themselves already knew this. After all, one hundred and twenty people had been gathered together when the Holy Spirit came upon them without the laying on of anyone's hands. I mean, who had then imposed hands on them? And yet he came, and they were the first ones he filled.

After that scandal of Simon, what did God do? Notice him teaching, not by words but by events. Philip had baptized people and the Holy Spirit hadn't come upon them until the Apostles had come along and laid their hands upon them. This same Philip later baptised the eunuch of Queen Candace. He had been worshipping in Jerusalem, and on his way back from there was reading the prophet Isaiah in his chariot and not understanding it. Philip was prompted to approach the chariot, and he explained the reading, insinuated the faith, preached Christ. The eunuch believed in Christ, and said when they came to some water, *Look, here is water; who is to prevent me being baptized? Philip said to him, Do you believe in Jesus Christ? He answered, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And immediately he went down with him into the water.* Once the mystery and Sacrament of Baptism had been carried out, since there was no expectation of the Apostles coming as on the previous occasion, so that no one should think the gift of the Holy Spirit was at the disposal of men, the Holy Spirit came immediately. That put an end to Simon's ideas, to make sure he didn't have imitators in that kind of thinking.

St Augustine, Sermon 99, 9-11; WSA (1992) tr. Hill

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(The calling of Saul: Acts 9:1-22)

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the High Priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were travelling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for a man of Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he is praying, and he has seen a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the Chief Priests to bind all who call upon thy name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized, and took food and was strengthened.

For several days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, "He is the Son of God." And all who heard him were amazed, and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called on this name? And he has come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the Chief Priests." But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

We have heard the Apostle's words, or rather through the Apostle the words of Christ speaking in the one whom he made into a preacher out of a persecutor; the lamb slain by wolves making lambs out of wolves. What happened in the case of Paul had been foretold in a notable prophecy when the holy Patriarch Jacob was blessing his sons. This concerned them as present then, but also looked forward to things to come. Paul, as he informs us himself, was of the tribe of Benjamin. Now when Jacob, in blessing his sons,

came to the blessing of Benjamin, he said about him, *Benjamin is a ravenous wolf*. So what, then? If the wolf is ravenous, is it always ravenous? Surely not! *In the morning he will ravage, at evening he will divide the prey*. This was fulfilled in the Apostle Paul, because it had also been foretold about him.

Now, if you agree, let us take a look at him ravaging in the morning, and in the evening dividing the prey. *Morning and evening* were said, as though to say, 'Before and after'. So let us take it like this: 'He will ravage before, he will divide the prey afterward.' Observe him ravaging: *Saul*, as the Acts of the Apostles tell us, *on receiving letters from the chief priests, that wherever he should find followers of the way of God, he should arrest and bring them*, to be punished, of course, *went off breathing and panting slaughter*.

We have heard how *in the morning he will ravage*; let us see how *at evening he will divide the prey*. He was laid low by the voice of Christ from heaven, and as he received the injunction forbidding him to rage, he fell on his face. First he must be laid low, then raised up; first he must be struck, later on healed. Christ, after all, would not be able to live in him later on, unless what had previously lived badly were slain in him. So what did he hear when he was laid low? *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goad*. And he said: *Who are you, Lord?* And the voice from above: *I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting*. The head in heaven was crying out for his members still located on earth, and he didn't say, 'Why are you persecuting my servants?' but *Why are you persecuting me?* And he answered *What do you wish me to do?*

He is now preparing himself to obey, where previously he had worked himself up to destroy. Already the preacher is being fashioned out of the persecutor, the sheep out of the wolf, the loyal soldier out of the enemy. He heard what he must do. Yes, certainly he was struck blind. For his heart to shine with an inner light, the outer light was for a time snatched away from him; it was withdrawn from the persecutor, to be restored in due course to the preacher. And yet during the period when he couldn't see anything else, he was seeing Jesus. Thus even in his very blindness the mystery of what it is to be a believer was taking shape; since those who believe in Christ ought to fix their gaze on him, ought to reckon everything else as scarcely even real; so that the creature becomes cheap in their eyes, while the creator grows all the dearer in their hearts.

St Augustine, Sermon 279,1-2; WSA (1994) tr. Hill

Wednesday of the Third Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Saul in Jerusalem. Peter's miracles: Acts 9:23-43)

When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill Saul, but their plot became known to him. They were watching the gates day and night, to kill him; but his disciples took him by night and let him down over the wall, lowering him in a basket.

And when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the Apostles, and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists; but they were seeking to kill him. And when the brethren knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him off to Tarsus.

So the Church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied.

Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints that lived at Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years and was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

Now there was at Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him entreating him, "Please come to us without delay." So Peter rose and went with them. And when he had come, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping, and showing tunics and other garments which Dorcas made while she was with them. But Peter put them all outside and knelt down and prayed; then turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, rise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. And he gave her his hand and lifted her up. Then calling the saints and widows he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

A READING FROM THE WRITINGS OF ST ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA

If it is by the sign of the Cross and by faith in Christ that death is trampled underfoot, it is clear that it is Christ himself and none other who is the Archvictor over death and has robbed it of its power. Death used to be strong and terrible, but now, since the advent of the Saviour and the death and Resurrection of his body, it is despised. When the sun rises

after the night and the whole world is lit up by it, nobody doubts that it is the sun which has thus shed its light everywhere and driven away the dark. Equally clear is it, since this utter scorning and trampling down of death has ensued upon the Saviour's manifestation in the body and his death on the Cross, that it is he himself who brought death to nought and daily raises monuments to his victory in his own disciples. How can you think otherwise, when you see people naturally weak hastening to death, unafraid at the prospect of corruption, fearless of the descent into Hades, even indeed with eager soul provoking it, not shrinking from tortures, but preferring thus to rush on death for Christ's sake, rather than to remain in this present life?

If, as we have shown, death was destroyed and everybody tramples on it because of Christ, how much more did he himself first trample and destroy it in his own body! How could the destruction of death have been manifested at all, had not the Lord's body been raised?

People who are dead cannot take effective action; their power of influence on others lasts only till the grave. Deeds and actions that energise others belong only to the living. Well, then, look at the facts in this case. The Saviour is working mightily among us every day. He is invisibly persuading numbers of people all over the world to accept his faith and be obedient to his teaching. Can anyone, in face of this, still doubt that he has risen and lives, or rather that he is himself the Life? Does a dead man prick the consciences of men, so that they throw all the traditions of their fathers to the winds and bow down before the teaching of Christ? If he is no longer active in the world, as would be the case if he were dead, how is it that he makes the living to cease from their activities, the adulterer from his adultery, the murderer from murdering, the unjust man from avarice, while the profane and godless become religious? This is the work of One who lives, not of one dead; and, more than that, it is the work of God.

St Athanasius, On the Incarnation, 29-30; Word in Season III, 2nd ed.

Thursday of the Third Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Peter called into the house of the Centurion Cornelius: Acts 10:1-33)

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, and prayed constantly to God. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius." And he stared at him in terror, and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and bring one Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside." When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those that waited on him, and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

The next day, as they were on their journey and coming near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. And he became hungry and desired something to eat; but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heaven opened, and something descending, like a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common." This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision which he had seen might mean, behold, the men that were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down, and accompany them without hesitation; for I have sent them." And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?" And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house, and to hear what you have to say." So he called them in to be his guests.

The next day he rose and went off with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his kinsmen and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man." And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered; and he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit any one of another nation; but God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me."

And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was keeping the ninth hour of prayer in my house; and behold, a man stood before me in bright apparel, saying, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the seaside.' So I sent to you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here present in the sight of God, to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

All the commandments given to the Jews are shadowy signs of things to come. After the light of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ, has come, they are read only in order to be understood, not also in order to be observed. So Christians have been given the freedom to eat what they like, in moderation, with a blessing, with thanksgiving. So perhaps Peter too was told *Kill and eat* in this sense, that he need no longer be bound to Jewish observances.

But all the same, to prove to you that all this was a symbolic showing, that vessel contained creeping things; could he possibly eat creeping things? So what does all this symbolism mean? That receptacle signifies the Church; the four lines it was hanging from are the four quarters of the earth, through which the Catholic Church stretches. So all those who wish to go apart into a sect and to cut themselves off from the whole, do not belong to the sacred reality signified by the four lines. God says his holy ones are to be gathered together at the end from the four winds, because now the Gospel faith is being spread abroad through all those four cardinal points of the compass. So those animals are the nations which were unclean in their superstitions and lusts before Christ came.

It's clear, you see, from many places in Scripture that Peter can stand for, or represent, the Church; the Church is the body of Christ. Let him then receive the Gentiles now made clean, their sins having been forgiven; that's why the gentile Cornelius had sent for him. This man's charities had been accepted and had cleansed him after a fashion; it only remained for him, like clean food, to be incorporated into the Church, that is, into the Lord's body. Peter, though, was worried about handing the Gospel over to the Gentiles, because those of the circumcision who believed were not allowing the Apostles to hand on the Christian faith to the uncircumcised unless they accepted circumcision, which had been the tradition of their ancestors.

So that receptacle removed this hesitation of his; and that's why after that vision he was allowed by the Holy Spirit to go with the men who had come from Cornelius; and off he went. Cornelius, you see, and the people with him were to be regarded as being among those animals which had been shown him in that receptacle; God, however, had already made them clean, because he had accepted the charitable acts they had performed from there. So now they had to be killed and eaten; that is, the old life in which they had not known Christ was to be slain in them, and they were to pass over into his body, as into the new life of the fellowship of the Church.

Why was it let down three times from heaven? Because all these nations, who belong to the four quarters of the globe, where the Church signified by the four lines to which that receptacle was connected is being sown like seed, are baptized in the name of the Trinity. They are being renewed by believing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in order to belong to the communion of the saints. So the four lines and the triple letting down also yields the number twelve of the Apostles; as though three each were allotted to the four quarters. Four threes, you see, make twelve. I think that's enough, don't you, about this vision.

St Augustine, Sermon 149, 5-10; WSA (1992), tr. Hill

Friday of the Third Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Cornelius baptized by the Holy Spirit. Peter's justification: Acts 10:34 – 11:4, 15-18)

Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Now the Apostles and the brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them? But Peter began and explained to them in order:

"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" When they heard this they were silenced. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life."

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON PSALM 96 BY ST AUGUSTINE

Sion heard and was glad. What did Sion hear? That all God's angels worship him? Yes, to be sure; but what else did Sion hear? This is what it heard: the heavens have proclaimed his justice, and the nations have seen his glory. Let all who worship graven images be put to shame, those who boast of their idols. The Church had not yet extended to the Gentiles, you see. Some of the Jews in Judea had come to believe, but these Jews imagined

that they alone belonged to Christ. Then the Apostles were sent to the Gentiles, and the word was preached to Cornelius.

He believed and was baptised, and his companions were baptised with him. You know what had happened to lead them to Baptism: Peter came to Cornelius' house; but Cornelius was from the Gentiles, so he and his friends were uncircumcised. In order, therefore that Peter and his companions might have no hesitation about delivering the Gospel to uncircumcised persons, the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and the others even before they were baptised; the Spirit filled them and they began to speak in tongues. Until this time the Holy Spirit had never fallen upon any unbaptised person; but he fell on these before their Baptism. Peter might well have hesitated over whether to baptise the uncircumcised, but the Holy Spirit came and they began to speak in tongues. The invisible gift was conferred and removed any doubt about the visible Sacrament; so they were all baptised.

Now you find it recorded in Scripture that the Apostles and the brethren in Judea heard that the Gentiles too had accepted the word of God, and they glorified God. It is this thanksgiving on their part which is mentioned in our psalm: Sion heard and was glad, and the daughters of Judea leapt for joy. What did Sion hear, to inspire such gladness? That the Gentiles too had accepted the word of God. One wall had already been set in place, but as yet there was no corner. The Church in Judea is rightly called Sion here. Scripture records that the Apostles and the brethren in Judea heard – does that not mean that the daughters of Judea leapt for joy. What did they hear? That the Gentiles too had accepted the word of God. And where does the psalm testify to the same event? The heavens have proclaimed his justice and all nations have seen his glory. And since they were Gentiles who had come to believe, former idol-worshippers, the psalm continued, Let all who worship graven images be put to shame, those who boast of their idols. Rightly, then, is it said, Sion heard and was glad, and the daughter of Judea leapt for joy.

St Augustine, Exposition of Psalm 96, 13; WSA (2002) tr. Maria Boulding

Saturday of the Third Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Foundation of the Church of Antioch: Acts 11:19-30)

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number that believed turned to the Lord. News of this came to the ears of the Church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad; and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose; for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a large company was added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the Church, and taught a large company of people; and in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians.

Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world; and this took place in the days of Claudius. And the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea; and they did so, sending it to the Elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

A READING FROM ON CHRISTIAN PERFECTION BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

No one has known Christ better than Paul, nor has anyone surpassed him in the example he gave of what anyone should be who bears Christ's name. So perfectly did he mirror his Master that he became his very image. He was transformed into his model and it seemed to be no longer Paul who lived and spoke, but Christ himself living in Paul. His words *Since you seek a proof that it is Christ who speaks in me, and, It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me*, show his keen awareness of this grace.

Paul teaches us the meaning of Christ's name when he calls him the power and wisdom of God, our peace, the unapproachable light in which God dwells, our sanctification and redemption, our great High Priest, our paschal sacrifice, our expiation; when he declares him to be the reflection of God's glory, the perfect likeness of his nature, the Creator of all ages, our spiritual food and drink, the rock and the water, the foundation of our faith, the cornerstone, the image of the invisible God. He shows what Christ's name means when he says that he is the mighty God, the Head of his Body the Church, the firstborn of the new creation, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep, the firstborn from the dead, the eldest of many brethren, and when he tells us that Christ is the mediator between God and man, the only-begotten Son crowned with glory and honour, the Lord of glory, the beginning of all things, the King of justice and of peace, the King of the whole universe, the ruler of a realm that has no boundaries.

Paul calls Christ by many other titles too numerous to mention. Their cumulative force when taken together gives some conception of what the name 'Christ' really means, and shows us his inexpressible majesty in so far as our minds can comprehend it. Since by the goodness of God we who are called Christians have been granted the honour of sharing this name, the greatest, the highest, the most sublime of all names, each of the titles that explains its meaning should have its reflection in us: if we are not to be false to this name we must bear witness to it by our lives.

St Gregory of Nyssa, On Christian Perfection (Jaeger 8:174-177); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Easter Week 4

Sunday of the Fourth Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Beheading of James and freeing of Peter. Punishment of Herod: Acts 12:1-23)

About that time Herod the king laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the Church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword; and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. So Peter was kept in prison; but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the Church.

The very night when Herod was about to bring him out, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison; and behold, an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your mantle around you and follow me." And he went out and followed him; he did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened to them of its own accord, and they went out and passed on through one street; and immediately the angel left him. And Peter came to himself, and said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and told that Peter was standing at the gate. They said to her, "You are mad." But she insisted that it was so. They said, "It is his angel!" But Peter continued knocking; and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell this to James and to the brethren." Then he departed and went to another place.

Now when day came, there was no small stir among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. And when Herod had sought for him and could not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and remained there.

Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and they came to him in a body, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food. On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and made an oration to them. And the people shouted, "The voice of a god, and not of man!" Immediately an

angel of the Lord smote him, because he did not give God the glory; and he was eaten by worms and died.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST MAXIMUS OF TURIN

Christ is risen! He has burst open the gates of hell and let the dead go free; he has renewed the earth through the members of his Church now born again in Baptism, and has made it blossom afresh with men brought back to life. His Holy Spirit has unlocked the doors of heaven, which stand wide open to receive those who rise up from the earth. Because of Christ's Resurrection the thief ascends to Paradise, the bodies of the blessed enter the holy city, and the dead are restored to the company of the living; there is an upward movement in the whole of creation, each element raising itself to something higher. We see the underworld restoring its victims to the upper regions, earth sending its buried dead to heaven, and heaven presenting the new arrivals to the Lord. In one and the same movement our Saviour's Passion raises men from the depths, lifts them up from the earth, and sets them in the heights.

Christ is risen! His rising brings life to the dead, forgiveness to sinners, and glory to the saints. And so David the prophet summons all creation to join in celebrating the Easter festival: *Rejoice and be glad, he cries, on this day which the Lord has made.*

The light of Christ is an endless day that knows no night. Christ is this day, says the Apostle; such is the meaning of his words: *Night is almost over; day is at hand.* He tells us that night is almost over, not that it is about to fall. By this we are meant to understand that the coming of Christ's light puts Satan's darkness to flight, leaving no place for any shadow of sin. His everlasting radiance dispels the dark clouds of the past and checks the hidden growth of vice. The Son himself is the day to whom The Day, his Father, communicates the mystery of his Divinity. He it is who says through the mouth of Solomon, *I have caused an unfailing light to rise in heaven.* And as in heaven no night can follow day, so no sin can overshadow the justice of Christ. The celestial day is perpetually bright and shining with brilliant light; clouds can never darken its skies. In the same way, the light of Christ is eternally glowing with luminous radiance, and can never be extinguished by the darkness of sin. This is why John the Evangelist says: *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never been able to overpower it.*

And so, my friends, each of us ought surely to rejoice on this holy day. Let no one, conscious of his sinfulness, withdraw from our common celebration, nor let anyone be kept away from our public prayer by the burden of guilt. Sinner one may indeed be, but no one must despair of pardon on this day which is so highly privileged; for if a thief could receive the grace of Paradise, how could a Christian be refused forgiveness?

St Maximus of Turin, Sermon 53, 1-2 (CCL 23:214-216); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Monday of the Fourth Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(The mission of Barnabas and Paul in the work of the Gospel: Acts 12:24 – 13:14a)

The word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, bringing with them John whose other name was Mark.

Now in the Church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Mana-en a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet, named Bar-Jesus. He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) withstood them, seeking to turn away the proconsul from the faith. But Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind and unable to see the sun for a time." Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem; but they passed on from Perga and came to Antioch of Pisidia.

A READING FROM THE WRITINGS OF BISHOP EUSEBIUS OF EMESA

Two men entered a city, carrying with them no food, no money, no extra garment. Who do you think welcomed them? What lodging was prepared for them, and where? Do you not marvel at the authority of the one who sent them and at the faith of those who were sent? Two strangers entered a city. What did they possess? What did they preach? 'He was crucified,' they said. They were humble, untrained, unlettered, needy. Yet what they preached was the Cross, and it was from this preaching that faith was to come!

But despite the obstacles virtue won out. The Cross was preached and temples were razed; the Cross is preached and kings are won over. The Cross is preached and the wise are proved wrong, pagan feasts are abolished, and their gods are melted down. Why do you marvel that the Apostles were believed or that they were received? Let not these

great wonders pass us by. Men who were strangers, unknown and knowing no one, and bringing nothing to catch the eye, traversed the world, preaching the crucified one, and commending fasting in place of drunkenness, a troublesome chastity in place of lust: a serious burden to those who were concerned to accept these exhortations to moral behaviour in place of abominable practices.

These men took possession of peoples and made cities their own. Yet what treasure did they have? The power of the Cross. Consider the riches of kings and the riches of the Apostles. See how different is their condition. A king is magnificent, the Apostles are humble; though mortal, they effect by God's power the deeds of God.

Before the crucifixion the disciples do nothing, but after it they act. If they accomplished anything before the crucifixion, they did so in obscurity. But after the sacred blood erased the decree written against us; after we who were unclean were sprinkled; after death was put to death by death; after God, through a man, conquered him who was devouring men; after death swallowed him up, only to cast him forth; after sin was put to death by obedience; after Adam had been restored by another man; after error had been corrected by the Virgin; after the thief entered Paradise on the very day on which Adam had departed from Paradise; after error that had entered through a tree was corrected through a tree; after thorns on the forehead replaced the thorns produced by the soil; after the Father showed mercy and the Son received this mercy in our place; after sin was put to death and corruption was destroyed – then the disciples, who before the crucifixion had been fearful, after the crucifixion raised their voices.

The Apostles obey; they rouse up men laid low in darkness. For power was imparted to those to whom the Apostles came. They were no longer what they had been, what we had been; but they were clad with power. And just as iron is cold before the fire is kindled, but when it is placed in the fire and grows white-hot, it casts off its coldness and enkindles other things with its heat, so do mortal men who have put on Jesus.

Bishop Eusebius of Emesa, The Apostles and the Faith, 2:15-16; Word in Season III, 2nd ed.

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Paul's sermon in the Synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia: Acts 13:14b-43)

On the sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said:

"Men of Israel, and you that fear God, listen. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. And for about forty years he bore with them in the wilderness. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance, for about four hundred and fifty years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king; and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king; of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.' Of this man's posterity God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised. Before his coming John had preached a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'

"Brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you that fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning him. Though they could charge him with nothing deserving death, yet they asked Pilate to have him killed. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead; and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, 'Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee.' And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he spoke in this way, 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' Therefore he says also in another psalm, 'Thou wilt not let thy Holy One see corruption.' For David, after he had served the counsel of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption; but he whom God raised up saw no corruption. Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him every one that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Beware, therefore, lest there come upon you what is said in the prophets: 'Behold, you scoffers, and wonder, and perish; for I do a deed in your days, a deed you will never believe, if one declares it to you.'"

As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next sabbath. And when the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

A READING FROM ON THE SACRAMENTS BY ST AMBROSE

You were asked: 'Do you believe in God the Father almighty?' You replied: 'I believe', and you were immersed: that is, buried. You were asked for a second time: 'Do you believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and in his Cross?' You replied: 'I believe', and you were immersed: which means that you were buried with Christ. For one who is buried with Christ rises again with Christ. You were asked a third time: 'Do you believe also in the Holy Spirit?' You replied: 'I believe', and you were immersed a third time, so that the threefold confession might absolve the manifold lapses of the past.

We can give you an illustration of this. The holy Apostle Peter appeared to lapse through human weakness during the Lord's Passion. To wipe out and absolve the fault of his denial, he was asked by Christ three times if he loved him. Peter replied: *Lord, you know that I love you*. He answered three times so as to be absolved three times.

Thus the Father forgives sin, so does the Son, and so does the Holy Spirit. Do not be surprised that we are baptized in one name: in the name, that is, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; because Christ spoke of only one name where there is one substance, one divinity, one majesty. This is the name of which it is written: *In this must all find salvation*. It is in this name that you have all been saved, that you have been restored to the grace of life.

So the Apostle exclaims, as you have just heard in the reading, *Whoever is baptized, is baptized in the death of Jesus*. What does *in the death* mean? It means that just as Christ died, so you will taste death; that just as Christ died to sin and lives to God, so through the Sacrament of Baptism you are dead to the old enticements of sin and have risen again through the grace of Christ. This is a death, then, not in the reality of bodily death, but in likeness. When you are immersed, you receive the likeness of death and burial, you receive the Sacrament of his Cross; because Christ hung upon the Cross and his body was fastened to it by the nails. So you are crucified with him.

The font has the shape and appearance of a sort of tomb. When we believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we are received and immersed in it; that is, we are restored to life. You also receive the *myrrh*, that is, the chrism, over your heads. Why over your heads? Because *the faculties of the wise man are situated in his head*, says Solomon. Wisdom without grace is inert; but when wisdom receives grace, then its work begins to move toward fulfilment. This is called regeneration.

What is regeneration? You can read in the Acts of the Apostles that a verse from the second Psalm, *You are my son, today I have begotten you*, seems to refer to the Resurrection. That is why he is also called *The firstborn from the dead*. For what is resurrection except that we rise from death to life? So it is in Baptism, which is an image of death: when you are immersed and rise up again, there, certainly, is an image of the

Resurrection. So as Christ's Resurrection is interpreted by the Apostle as a regeneration, so also this resurrection from the font is a regeneration.

St Ambrose, On the Sacraments 2:20-23, 3:1-2; (1972) tr. Yarnold

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Paul and Barnabas turn to the Gentiles: Acts 13:44 – 14:7)

The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted what was spoken by Paul, and reviled him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.'"

And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord spread throughout all the region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue, and so spoke that a great company believed, both of Jews and of Greeks. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, and some with the Apostles. When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to molest them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country; and there they preached the gospel.

A READING FROM THE WRITINGS OF ST PROSPER OF AQUITAINE

There can be no reason to doubt that Jesus Christ our Lord died for the unbelievers and the sinners. If there had been anyone who did not belong to these, then Christ would not have died for all. But he did die for all without exception. There is no one, therefore, in all mankind who was not, before the reconciliation which Christ effected in his blood, either a sinner or an unbeliever.

The whole of mankind was under the sway of sin, in fetters because of the very same guilt. No one of the ungodly, who differed only in their degree of unbelief, could be saved without Christ's redemption. This redemption spread throughout the world to become the good news for all without any distinction. In fact, on the fiftieth day after the paschal feast on which the true Lamb had offered himself as a victim to God, when the Apostles and those who were of one mind with them were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the language of all the nations, a multitude of men of different races, stirred by the miracle, flocked together, and in them the whole world was to hear the Gospel of Christ. There were then assembled, as Scripture says, *Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and*

inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews also and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, who all heard the wonderful works of God preached in their own tongues. Their testimony was to spread far and wide also to the more distant nations. We believe that God's providence had willed the expansion of the Roman Empire as a preparation for his design over the nations, who were to be called into the unity of the body of Christ: He first gathered them under the authority of one Empire.

But the grace of Christianity is not content with the boundaries that are Rome's. Grace has now submitted to the sceptre of the Cross of Christ many peoples whom Rome could not subject with her arms, though Rome by her primacy of the apostolic priesthood has become greater as the citadel of religion than as the seat of power.

St Prosper of Aquitaine, The Call of all Nations II.16; Word in Season III, 2nd ed.

Thursday of the Fourth Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Healing of the cripple at Lystra. Going up to Jerusalem: Acts 14:8 – 15:4)

Now at Lystra there was a man sitting, who could not use his feet; he was a cripple from birth, who had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking; and Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and walked. And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, because he was the chief speaker, they called Hermes. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the people. But when the Apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out among the multitude, crying, "Men, why are you doing this? We also are men, of like nature with you, and bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. 16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways; yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." With these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

But Jews came there from Antioch and Iconium; and having persuaded the people, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city; and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed Elders for them in every Church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed.

Then they passed through Pisidia, and came to Pamphylia. And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia; and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled. And when they arrived, they gathered the Church together and declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they remained no little time with the disciples.

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the Apostles and the Elders about this question. So, being sent on their way by the Church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, reporting the conversion of the Gentiles, and they gave great joy to all the brethren. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the Church and the Apostles and the Elders, and they declared all that God had done with them.

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON AN EASTER HYMN OF ST GREGORY NAZIANZEN BY ST DOROTHEUS OF GAZA

The Apostle urges us to worship God in a way worthy of rational creatures, by offering him our bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to him. How are we to offer our bodies to God as a living sacrifice? By no longer *obeying the promptings of body and mind, but being guided by the Spirit, and not gratifying the desires of our fallen nature*. For that is how we put to death what is earthly in us. Such a sacrifice is said to be living, holy, and pleasing to God.

But why is it called a living sacrifice? Because while an animal victim is sacrificed and dies at the same time, Christians who offer themselves to God sacrifice themselves daily but remain alive. As David says: *For your sake we are put to death all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter*.

'Let us offer ourselves,' says St Gregory; that is, let us sacrifice ourselves, let us die to ourselves all day long, like all the Saints, for the sake of Christ our God, for the sake of him who died for us.

But how did the Saints die to themselves? By not loving the world or anything in the world, as the Catholic Epistles say, but renouncing *everything that panders to the appetites, or entices the eyes, and all pride in possessions*, that is, pleasure-seeking, covetousness, and vainglory, and taking up the Cross to follow Christ, crucifying the world to themselves and themselves to the world. About this the Apostle says: *Those who belong to Christ have crucified the body, with its passions and desires. That is how the Saints died to themselves*.

But how did they offer themselves? By not living for themselves, but according to God's commandments, giving up their own desires in order to obey God, and to love him and their neighbours. As St Peter said: *We have given up everything to follow you*. What did he give up? He had no money or property, no silver or gold. All he had was his fishing net, and that was old, as St John Chrysostom remarked. But he gave up, as he said, all his own desires, all worldly attachments, so that it is clear that if he had possessed wealth and property he would have despised these as well. Then he took up his Cross and followed Christ, according to the words: *It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me*. That is how the Saints offered themselves: dying, as we said, to all disordered inclinations and self-will, and living only for Christ and his commandments.

St Dorotheus of Gaza, Discourse 16,167-169 (SC 92:462-464); Word in Season III, 2nd ed.

Friday of the Fourth Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(The Apostles deliberate; the decision of the Council of Jerusalem: Acts 15:5-35)

But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up, and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses."

The Apostles and the Elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter rose and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us; and he made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

And all the assembly kept silence; and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brethren, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, as it is written, 'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old.' Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood. For from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every sabbath in the synagogues."

Then it seemed good to the Apostles and the Elders, with the whole Church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, with the following letter: "The brethren, both the Apostles and the Elders, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greeting. Since we have heard that some persons from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."

So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. And when they read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation. And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, exhorted the brethren with many words and strengthened them. And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brethren to those who had sent them. But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

A READING FROM THE DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

The Lord Jesus, having prayed at length to the Father, called to himself those he desired and appointed twelve to be with him, whom he might send to preach the kingdom of God. These Apostles he established in the form of a College or permanent assembly, at the head of which he placed Peter who was chosen from amongst them. He sent them first of all to the children of Israel and then to all peoples, so that, sharing in his power, they might make all peoples his disciples and sanctify and govern them. Thus they would spread the Church, administer it under the guidance of the Lord, and shepherd it until the end of the world. They were fully confirmed in this mission on the day of Pentecost according to the Lord's promise: *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit descends on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

So, just as by the Lord's decree St Peter and the rest of the Apostles constitute a unique apostolic College, so the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, and the Bishops, the successors of the Apostles, are related with and united to one another. By ancient discipline the Bishops throughout the whole world lived in communion with one another and with the Roman Pontiff in a bond of unity, charity and peace; they also held Councils in order to settle together, in a decision rendered balanced and equitable by the advice of many, all questions of major importance. Both these facts show clearly the collegiate character and structure of the episcopal order, which is confirmed by the holding of Ecumenical Councils in the course of the centuries. Indeed, pointing to it also quite clearly is the custom, dating from very early times, of summoning a number of Bishops to take part in the elevation of one newly chosen to the highest sacerdotal office. A man is made a member of the episcopal body by sacramental consecration and hierarchical communion with the head and members of the College.

This College, composed of many members, is the expression of the diversity and universality of the People of God. It also shows the unity of the flock of Christ because it is assembled under one head. In it the Bishops, whilst loyally respecting the primacy and preeminence of their head, exercise their own proper authority for the good of their faithful and of the whole Church, whose organic structure and harmony are strengthened by the continued influence of the Holy Spirit. The supreme authority over the whole Church, which this College possesses, is exercised in a solemn way in an Ecumenical Council. Every Ecumenical Council is confirmed or at least recognized as

such by the successor of Peter and it is the prerogative of the Roman Pontiff to convoke such Councils, to preside over them and to confirm them.

Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium 19, 22

Saturday of the Fourth Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Beginning of Paul's second journey. Conversion of Lydia: Acts 15:36 – 16:15)

And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Come, let us return and visit the brethren in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." And Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp contention, so that they separated from each other; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the Churches.

And he came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer; but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions which had been reached by the Apostles and Elders who were at Jerusalem. So the Churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing beseeching him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Setting sail therefore from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the leading city of the district of Macedonia, and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days; and on the sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul. And when she was baptized, with her household, she besought us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

A READING FROM ON THE MYSTERIES BY ST AMBROSE

What did you see? Water, certainly, but not water alone; you saw the Deacons ministering there, and the Bishop asking questions and sanctifying. First of all, the Apostle taught you that you should not consider *the things which we see, but the things*

which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. Believe, then, that the presence of the Godhead is there. Do you believe the working, and not believe the presence? How can you have the working without the presence?

Consider, however, how ancient is this mystery which was prefigured even in the origin of the world itself. In the very beginning, when God made the heaven and the earth, *the Spirit*, it is said, *moved upon the waters*. Take another testimony. All flesh was corrupted by its iniquities, as God said, *My Spirit shall not remain among men, because they are flesh*, by which he shows that the grace of the Spirit is turned away by carnal impurity and the pollution of grave sin. Because of this God, who desired to restore what was lacking, sent the flood and commanded the just man Noah to go up into the ark. Noah, as the flood was subsiding, first sent out a raven which did not return and then sent a dove which returned with an olive branch. You see the water, you see the wood, you see the dove, do you still hesitate as to the mystery?

The water, then, is that in which the flesh is dipped, that all carnal sin may be washed away and all wickedness therein buried. The wood is that on which the Lord Jesus was fastened when he suffered for us. The dove is that in the form of which the Holy Spirit descended, as you have read in the New Testament, who inspires in you peace of soul and tranquillity of mind. The raven is the figure of sin, which goes forth and does not return, if, in you, too, righteousness is preserved both inwardly and outwardly. You must not, then, trust your bodily eyes; that which is not seen is seen more truly, for the object of sight is temporal, but what is discerned by the mind and the spirit is eternal.

Is there, then, here any room left for doubt, when the Father clearly calls from heaven in the Gospel narrative, and says: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased?* When the Son also speaks, upon whom the Holy Spirit showed himself in the likeness of a dove? When the Holy Spirit also speaks, who came down in the likeness of a dove? When Scripture testifies that at the prayer of Jerubbaal, fire came down from heaven, and again, when Elijah prayed, fire was sent forth and consecrated the sacrifice.

Do not consider the merits of individuals, but the office of the priests. Or, if you look at the merits, consider the priest as Elijah. Look also upon the merits of Peter and Paul who handed down to us this mystery which they had received of the Lord Jesus. To those of old a visible fire was sent that they might believe; for us who believe, the Lord works invisibly. Believe, then, that the Lord Jesus who said, *where two or three are, there am I also*, is present at the invocation of the priest. How much more where the Church is and where his Mysteries are does he truly impart his presence!

St Ambrose, On the Mysteries, 3.8-12, 15; 5.26-28; NPNF 2.10 (1989) tr. de Romestin

Easter Week 5

Sunday of the Fifth Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Paul beaten, imprisoned and miraculously freed at Philippi: Acts 16:16-40)

As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by soothsaying. She followed Paul and us, crying, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul was annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the rulers; and when they had brought them to the magistrates they said, "These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice." The crowd joined in attacking them; and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and every one's fetters were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out and said, "Men, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family. Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God. But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." And the jailer reported the words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go; now therefore come out and go in peace." But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now cast us out secretly? No! let them come themselves and take us out." The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens; so they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. So they went out of the prison, and visited Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they exhorted them and departed.

A READING FROM ON THE PASCHAL SOLEMNITY BY EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA

In the time of Moses the paschal lamb was sacrificed only once a year, on the fourteenth day of the first month toward evening, but we of the new covenant celebrate our Passover every week on the Lord's day. We are continually being filled with the body of the Saviour and sharing in the blood of the Lamb. Daily we gird ourselves with chastity and prepare, staff in hand, to follow the path of the Gospel. Leaning on the rod that came forth from the root of Jesse, we are always departing from Egypt in search of the solitude of the desert. We are constantly setting out on our journey to God and celebrating the Passover. The Gospel would have us do these things not only once a year but daily.

We hold our eucharistic celebration every week on the day of our Lord and Saviour, for this is our paschal feast, the feast of the true Lamb who redeemed us. We do not circumcise the body with a knife, but with the sharp edge of the word of God we cut away all evil from our souls. We use no unleavened bread, except for that of sincerity and truth. Grace has freed us from outworn Jewish customs and created us anew in the image of God. It has given us a new Law, a new circumcision, a new Passover, and made us Jews inwardly, thus releasing us from our former bondage.

On the fifth day of the week, while having supper with his disciples, the Saviour said to them: *With all my heart I have longed to eat this Passover with you.* It was not the old Jewish Passover that he desired to share with his disciples, but the new Passover of the new covenant that he was giving to them, and that many prophets and upright people before him had longed to see. He proclaimed his desire for the new Passover which he, the Word himself, in his infinite thirst for the salvation of the whole human race, was establishing as a feast to be celebrated by all peoples everywhere. The Passover of Moses was not for all peoples, indeed it could not be, because the Law allowed it to be celebrated only in Jerusalem. Christ's desire, then, must have been not for that old Passover, but for the saving mystery of the new covenant which was for everyone.

And so we too should eat this Passover with Christ. We should cleanse our minds of all the leaven of evil and wickedness and be filled with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, becoming Jews inwardly, in our souls, where the true circumcision takes place. We should anoint the lintel of our mind with the blood of the Lamb who was sacrificed for us, and so ward off our destroyer. We should do this not only once a year, but every week, continually.

On the day before the Sabbath we fast in memory of our Saviour's Passion, as the Apostles were the first to do when the bridegroom was taken from them. On the Lord's day we receive life from the sacred body of our saving Passover and our souls are sealed with his precious blood.

Eusebius of Caesarea, On the Paschal Solemnity 7.9.10-12 (PG 24:701-706); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Monday of the Fifth Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Paul goes on to Athens: Acts 17:1-18)

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and for three weeks he argued with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded, and joined Paul and Silas; as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked fellows of the rabble, they gathered a crowd, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the people. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brethren before the city authorities, crying, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them; and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard this. And when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Beroea; and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. But when the Jews of Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Beroea also, they came there too, stirring up and inciting the crowds. Then the brethren immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the market place every day with those who chanced to be there. Some also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers met him. And some said, "What would this babbling say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities" – because he preached Jesus and the resurrection.

A READING FROM A HOMILY BY ST ANASTASIUS OF ANTIOCH

Christ, who had shown by his words and actions that he was truly God and Lord of the universe, said to his disciples as he was about to go up to Jerusalem: *We are going up to Jerusalem now, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the Gentiles and the chief priests and scribes to be scourged and mocked and crucified.*

These words bore out the predictions of the prophets, who had foretold the death he was to die in Jerusalem. From the beginning Holy Scripture had foretold Christ's death, the

sufferings that would precede it, and what would happen to his body afterward. Scripture also affirmed that these things were going to happen to one who was immortal and incapable of suffering because he was God.

Only by reflecting upon the meaning of the incarnation can we see how it is possible to say with perfect truth both that Christ suffered and that he was incapable of suffering, and why the Word of God, in himself incapable of suffering, came to suffer. In fact we could have been saved in no other way, as Christ alone knew and those to whom he revealed this truth. For he knows all the secrets of the Father, even as *the Spirit penetrates the depths* of all mysteries.

It was necessary for Christ to suffer: his Passion was absolutely unavoidable. He said so himself when he called his companions dull and slow to believe because they failed to recognize that he had to suffer and so enter into his glory. Leaving behind him the glory that had been his with the Father before the world was made, he had gone forth to save his people. This salvation, however, could be achieved only by the suffering of the author of our life, as Paul taught when he said that *the author of our life himself was made perfect through suffering*. Because of us he was deprived of his glory for a little while, the glory that was his as the Father's only begotten Son, but through the Cross this glory is seen to have been restored to him in a certain way in the body that he had assumed. Explaining what water the Saviour referred to when he said: *He that has faith in me shall have rivers of living water flowing from within him*, John says in his Gospel that *he was speaking of the Holy Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive, for the Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified*. The glorification he meant was his death upon the Cross for which the Lord prayed to the Father before undergoing his Passion, asking his Father to give him the glory that he had in his presence before the world began.

St Anastasius of Antioch, Oration 4,1-2 (PG 89:1347-1349); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Tuesday of the Fifth Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Paul speaks in the Areopagus of Athens: Acts 17:19-34)

Those with whom Paul argued took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you present? For you bring some strange things to our ears; we wish to know therefore what these things mean." Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

So Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man. 'The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, 'because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead.'

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, "We will hear you again about this." So Paul went out from among them. But some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

Your Graces will have noticed when the book of the Acts of the Apostles was being read that Paul was talking at Athens. The Athenians enjoyed a great reputation among other peoples for every kind of learning. The city was the native home of great philosophers. From it had spread through the rest of Greece and other countries of the world a complex variety of philosophies. That's where the Apostle was talking, that's where he was proclaiming *Christ crucified, to the Jews indeed a stumbling block, to the nations folly; but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* When he finished his address and they heard mention of the resurrection of the dead, which is the most distinctive point of the faith of Christians, some of them scoffed, while others said, *We will hear you again on this matter.*

Now, there is one overriding concern common to all philosophers within which they divide up into five different sets of special opinions. In common, all philosophers strive by dedication, investigation, discussion, by their way of life, to lay hold of the blessed life. This is their one reason for philosophising; but I rather think the philosophers also have this in common with us. I mean, if I were to ask you why you became Christians, every single one of you would answer me truthfully: 'For the sake of the blessed life.' Therefore the urge for the blessed life is common to philosophers and Christians, and I would even say common to the whole human race. People who are good, after all, are good in order to be happy, and those who are bad would not be bad unless they hoped they would thereby be made happy.

Now set before your eyes Epicureans, Stoics, and the Apostle; that is: Epicureans, Stoics, and Christians. Let's first question the Epicureans on what thing it is that makes life happy. They answer, 'Bodily pleasure.' The Stoic answers: 'A virtuous mind.' The Christian: 'The gift of God.' And so brethren, in front of our very eyes Epicureans and Stoics are debating with the Apostle, and teaching us by their debate what we should reject and what we ought to choose. A virtuous mind is something very praiseworthy; but tell me, Stoic, where do you get it from? It is not really your virtuous mind that makes you happy, but the one who has given you virtue, who has inspired you to desire it, and granted you the capacity for it.

There is no life that deserves the name, to be called life, but a blessed life; and there can be no blessed life that is not eternal. This is what everybody wants: truth and life. But how is one to get to such a great possession, such a grand fortune? The philosophers have worked out for themselves ways that go wrong. They have missed the true way, because God opposes the proud. We would also miss it, unless it had come to us. That's why the Lord says, *I am the way*. Lazy traveller, you didn't want to come to the way; the way came to you. You were inquiring how you should go: *I am the way*; you were asking where you should go: *I am the truth and the life*. This is the doctrine of Christians; certainly not something to be set beside the doctrines of the philosophers, but to be set incomparably above them, whether the sordid one of the Epicureans, or the arrogant one of the Stoics.

St Augustine, Sermon 150, 1-2, 4, 8-10; WSA (1992) tr. Hill

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Paul is accused by the Jews at Corinth: Acts 18:1-28)

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them; and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them, and they worked, for by trade they were tentmakers. And he argued in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks.

When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with preaching, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you; for I have many people in this city." And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack upon Paul and brought him before the tribunal, saying, "This man is persuading men to worship God contrary to the law." But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, I should have reason to bear with you, O Jews; but since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves; I refuse to be a judge of these things." And he drove them from the tribunal. And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to this.

After this Paul stayed many days longer, and then took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he cut his hair, for he had a vow. And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there; but he himself went into the synagogue and argued with the Jews. When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined; but on taking leave of them he said, "I will return to you if God wills", and he set sail from Ephesus.

When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the Church, and then went down to Antioch. After spending some time there he departed and went from place to place through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue;

but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully confuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

A READING FROM THE LIFE IN CHRIST BY NICHOLAS CABASILAS

After receiving the Sacrament of Chrismation, we approach the Holy Table, the consummation of our life in Christ, which leaves no further happiness to be desired. Now it is no longer a question of sharing in Christ's death or burial or in a higher kind of life, but of welcoming the risen Lord himself. It is no longer the gifts of the Spirit that we receive, insofar as we are able, but our benefactor himself, the very temple that enshrines all gifts.

Christ is present in each of the Sacraments: he himself confirms us and cleanses us, and he is our food. He is present to those receiving the Sacraments of initiation, though in different ways. In Baptism he takes away the stain of sin and imprints his own image on the baptized. In Chrismation he brings into action the gifts of the Holy Spirit, of which his own flesh is the repository. But when he leads communicants to his Table and gives them his body to eat he completely transforms them, raising them to his own level. This is the last Sacrament we receive because it is impossible to go beyond it or to add to it anything whatever.

We remain imperfect even after Baptism has produced in us its full effect because we have not yet received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are given in Chrismation. Those baptized by Philip did not receive the Holy Spirit simply by the grace of Baptism: it was necessary for John and Peter to lay their hands on them. As Scripture says, *the Holy Spirit had not yet come down on any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.*

Yet even among those who had been filled with the Spirit and who prophesied, spoke in tongues and displayed other such gifts, there were some in the time of the Apostles who were so far from being divine and spiritual as to be guilty of envy, rivalry, contention, and other similar vices. This is what Paul referred to when he wrote to them: *You are still unspiritual and are living on a purely human plane.* They were indeed spiritual by reason of the graces they had received, but these graces did not suffice to free them from all sinfulness. With the Eucharist, however, it is different. No such charge can be brought against those in whom the Bread of Life, which has saved them from death, has had its full effect and who have not brought to this feast any wrongful dispositions. If this Sacrament is fully effective it is quite impossible for it to allow the slightest imperfection to remain in those who receive it.

If you would know the reason for this, it is because through communion, in fulfilment of his promise, Christ dwells in us and we in him. *He lives in me*, he said, *and I in him.* When Christ lives in us, what can we lack? When we live in Christ, what more can we desire? We at once become spiritual in body and soul and in all our faculties because our soul is

united to his soul, our body to his body, our blood to his blood. The consequence is that the higher prevails over the lower, the divine over the human. As Paul says, referring to the Resurrection: *What is mortal is swallowed up by life*. And elsewhere he writes: *It is no longer I who live: it is Christ who lives in me*.

Nicholas Cabasilas, The Life in Christ, 4 (PG 150:582-583); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Thursday of the Fifth Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Paul at Ephesus. Conversions and miracles: Acts 19:1-20)

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve of them in all.

And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God; but when some were stubborn and disbelieved, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

And God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to pronounce the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." Seven sons of a Jewish High Priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, mastered all of them, and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this became known to all residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks; and fear fell upon them all; and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Many also of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all; and they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily.

A READING FROM THE LIFE IN CHRIST BY NICHOLAS CABASILAS

The purpose of Chrismation is to enable us to share in the power of the Holy Spirit. This anointing brings the Lord Jesus himself to dwell in us, our only salvation and hope. Through him we are made sharers in the Holy Spirit and are led to the Father. Unfailingly it procures for Christians those gifts that are needed in every age, gifts such as faith, reverence for God, prayer, love, and purity. It does so even though many are unaware of having received such gifts. Many do not know the power of this Sacrament or even that there is a Holy Spirit, as it says in the Book of Acts, because they were anointed before reaching the age of reason and afterward they blinded their souls by sin. Nevertheless, the Spirit does in truth give the newly initiated his gifts, *distributing them*

to each one as he wills; and our Lord, who promised to be with us always, never ceases to shower blessings on us.

Chrismation cannot be superfluous. We obtain the remission of our sins in Baptism and we receive the body of Christ at the Altar. These Sacraments will remain until the unveiled appearance of their author. It cannot be doubted, then, that Christians also enjoy the benefits that belong to this holy anointing and receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. How could some Sacraments be fruitful and this one without effect? How can we believe that Saint Paul's words: *He who promised is faithful*, apply to some Sacraments but not to this one? If we discount the value of any Sacrament we must discount the value of all, since it is the same power that acts in each of them, it is the immolation of the same Lamb, it is the same death and the same blood that gives each of them its efficacy.

The Holy Spirit is given to some, as St Paul says, to enable them to do good to others and to edify the Church by prophesying, teaching revealed truth, or healing the sick by a mere word. The spirit is given to others for their own sanctification, imparting to them a shining faith and reverence for God, or making them outstanding in purity, charity, or humility.

Nicholas Cabasilas, The Life in Christ, 3 (PG 150:574-575); Word in Season III, 2nd ed.

Friday of the Fifth Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Rioting against Paul in Ephesus: Acts 19:21-40)

Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

About that time there arose no little stir concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen of like occupation, and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only at Ephesus but almost throughout all Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable company of people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may count for nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship."

When they heard this they were enraged, and cried out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" So the city was filled with the confusion; and they rushed together into the theatre, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel. Paul wished to go in among the crowd, but the disciples would not let him; some of the Asiarchs also, who were friends of his, sent to him and begged him not to venture into the theatre. Now some cried one thing, some another; for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, wishing to make a defence to the people. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all with one voice cried out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, "Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? Seeing then that these things cannot be contradicted, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against any one, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls; let them bring charges against one another. But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. For we are in danger of being charged with rioting today, there being no cause that we can give to justify this commotion."

A READING FROM THE LETTERS OF ST AUGUSTINE

In accordance with ancient prediction, he comes: the promised Christ; and in his birth, life, words, and actions, in his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension, all that the prophets foretold is fulfilled. He sends the Holy Spirit upon the believers as they are all

gathered together in one place, waiting with expectant longing for the promised gift. And as soon as they are filled with the Holy Spirit, they begin to speak in the languages of every nation, to refute errors boldly, to preach the saving truth of the Gospel, to urge people to repent of their former sinful lives, and to promise them the grace of God's forgiveness. Their proclamation of the true religion and of God's loving kindness is confirmed by signs and wonders. Unbelievers stir up cruel persecution against them. They endure what they have been warned to expect, they hope for what they have been promised, and they teach what they have been commanded. Few in number, they are no sooner dispersed throughout the world than they convert whole peoples with marvellous ease; in the midst of their enemies they grow in strength. Persecution multiplies them; no suffering, no trial can hinder them from spreading to the very ends of the earth. Once a despised handful of ignorant men, they become a noble company of enlightened teachers, brilliantly gifted and of polished speech, who press into Christ's service for the preaching of the Gospel all the skill and experience of the wise, the eloquent, and the learned.

Now in adversity, now in prosperity, they vigilantly practice patience and self-control, and in the calamities which exhaust the earth and herald the final consummation at the end of the world, they discern the fulfilment of prophecy and so look forward with increased confidence to the eternal happiness of their heavenly country. Although in all these events unbelieving and godless nations continue to rage against the Church of Christ, the Church gains the victory by its endurance and by the profession of a faith unshaken by the cruelty of its adversaries.

For long ages the truth lay hidden behind mysterious prophecies, but now it is revealed in the sacrifice of Christ, and those sacrificial rites which foreshadowed it are abolished by the destruction of the Jewish temple. By degrees the temples of the heathen divinities are also being destroyed together with their images and impious rites, as the prophets foretold. Under cover of Christ's name heresies spring up against his very person. This too was predicted, but by means of such errors the doctrines of our holy faith are developed.

All these things we now see accomplished in fulfilment of the Scriptures, and from so many important instances of fulfilled prophecy we confidently look forward to the fulfilment of the remainder. Is there anyone, then, longing for eternity and conscious of the shortness of this present life, who can resist such clear and perfect proofs of the divine origin of our faith?

St Augustine, Letter 137, 16 (PL 33:523-524); Word in Season III, 2nd ed.

Saturday of the Fifth Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Breaking of bread at Troas: Acts 20:1-16)

After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples and having exhorted them took leave of them and departed for Macedonia. When he had gone through these parts and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he determined to return through Macedonia. Sopater of Beroea, the son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. These went on and were waiting for us at Troas, but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and he prolonged his speech until midnight. There were many lights in the upper chamber where we were gathered. And a young man named Eutychus was sitting in the window. He sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer; and being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down and bent over him, and embracing him said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. And they took the lad away alive, and were not a little comforted.

But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there; for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land. And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we came to Miletus. For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

A READING FROM THE FIRST APOLOGY IN DEFENCE OF THE CHRISTIANS BY ST JUSTIN MARTYR

None may share the Eucharist with us unless they believe that what we teach is true; unless they are washed in the regenerating waters of Baptism for the remission of their sins; and unless they live in accordance with the principles given us by Christ.

We do not consume the eucharistic bread and wine as ordinary food and drink, for we have been taught that as Jesus Christ our Saviour became a man of flesh and blood by the power of the Word of God, so also the food that our flesh and blood assimilates for its nourishment becomes the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus by the power of his own words contained in the prayer of thanksgiving.

The Apostles in their recollections, which are called Gospels, handed down to us what Jesus commanded them to do. They tell us that he took bread, gave thanks and said: *Do this in memory of me, this is my body*. In the same way he took the cup, he gave thanks and

said: *This is my blood*, and he distributed it only to them. Ever since then we have constantly reminded one another of these things. The rich among us help the poor and we are always united. For all that we receive we praise the Creator of the universe through his Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit

On Sunday we have a common assembly of all our members, whether they live in the city or in the outlying districts. The recollections of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. When the reader has finished, the president of the assembly speaks to us, urging everyone to imitate the examples of virtue we have heard about in the readings. Then we all stand up together and pray.

On the conclusion of our prayer, bread and wine and water are brought forward. The president offers prayers and gives thanks to the best of his ability, and the people give their assent by saying, 'Amen'. The Eucharist is distributed, everyone present communicates, and the Deacons take it to those who are absent

The wealthy if they wish may make a contribution, and they themselves decide the amount. The collection is placed in the custody of the president, who uses it to help the orphans and widows and all who for any reason are in distress, whether because they are sick, in prison, or away from home. In a word, he takes care of all who are in need.

We hold our common assembly on Sunday because it is the first day of the week the day on which God put darkness and chaos to flight and created the world, and because on that same day our Saviour Jesus Christ rose from the dead. For he was crucified on Friday and on Sunday he appeared to his Apostles and disciples and taught them the things that we have passed on for your consideration.

St Justin Martyr, First Apology, 66-67; Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Easter Week 6

Sunday of the Sixth Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(From Miletus Paul summons the Elders of the Church at Ephesus: Acts 20:17-38)

And from Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus and called to him the Elders of the Church. And when they came to him, he said to them:

“You yourselves know how I lived among you all the time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which befell me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit, not knowing what shall befall me there; except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that all you among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the Church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

And when he had spoken thus, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they all wept and embraced Paul and kissed him, sorrowing most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they should see his face no more. And they brought him to the ship.

A READING FROM A HOMILY ON ST JOHN'S GOSPEL BY ST AUGUSTINE

The Lord said, I tell you the truth: it is for your own good that I am going away, because unless I go the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go I will send him to you.

In other words, it is to your advantage that I should be taken from you as I am now, in the condition of a servant. Now indeed I dwell among you as the Word made flesh; but I do not want you to go on loving me with a merely natural affection, content with baby's milk and lacking any ambition to leave the nursery. *It is for your own good that I am going*

away, because unless I do the Advocate will not come to you. So far I have given you nothing but children's food. Unless I wean you, you will never have any appetite for solid meat. As long as you cling to my bodily presence in a purely natural way you will remain incapable of receiving the Holy Spirit.

A question arises, however: when the Lord said that he had to go before the Advocate could come to the disciples, and that if he went he would send him to them, did he mean that it was impossible for him to send the Holy Spirit while he was still on earth? Surely no one would make such an assertion. He had never left the dwelling-place of the Spirit; nor had he come from the Father in such a way as no longer to be with the Father. Besides, how could it have been impossible for Christ to send the Holy Spirit while he was yet on earth, when we know he had received the abiding presence of the Spirit at his Baptism? In fact, we know that he and the Holy Spirit were inseparable.

What this Gospel passage means is that the disciples could not receive the Holy Spirit as long as they only knew Christ according to the flesh. Hence the assertion made by the Apostle Paul after he himself had received the Holy Spirit: *Even if we used to think of Christ according to the flesh, we do so no longer.* When we know the incarnate Word spiritually, our knowledge even of his flesh becomes more than merely according to the flesh. This, without any doubt, is the lesson their good Master wanted to give the disciples when he told them he was going away for their own good, otherwise the Advocate would not come to them.

The withdrawal of Christ's bodily presence from his disciples meant not only that the Holy Spirit would come to them, but that the Father and the Son would also dwell with them in a spiritual manner. Christ's departure did not mean that the Holy Spirit would simply take his place. It meant rather that together with Christ the Spirit would make his home in the hearts of the disciples. If this were not so, what would become of our Lord's promise to be with his disciples always, to the end of time? And what of that other saying of his, *The Father and I will come to him and make our home with him?* The fact is that our Lord promised to send the Holy Spirit in such a way that he himself would always remain with his disciples. And when through the coming of the Spirit their purely natural and human affections had become spiritualised, then they would be capable of the indwelling of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

St Augustine, Commentary on John's Gospel, 94.4-5 (PL 35:1869-1870); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Monday of the Sixth Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Journey to Jerusalem. Agabus prophesies. Council of James and the Elders: Acts 21:1-26)

And when we had parted from the Elders of Ephesus and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard, and set sail. When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo. And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. Through the Spirit they told Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. And when our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey; and they all, with wives and children, brought us on our way till we were outside the city; and kneeling down on the beach we prayed and bade one another farewell. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.

When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and we greeted the brethren and stayed with them for one day. On the morrow we departed and came to Caesarea; and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. And he had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. While we were staying for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us he took Paul's girdle and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this girdle and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" When we heard this, we and the people there begged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "The will of the Lord be done."

After these days we made ready and went up to Jerusalem. And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge.

When we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James; and all the Elders were present. After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed; they are all zealous for the law, and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs. What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you but that you yourself live in observance of the law. But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and

from unchastity.” Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself with them and went into the temple, to give notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for every one of them.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST MAXIMUS OF TURIN

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Our Lord blossomed afresh when he rose from the tomb, and he bore fruit when he ascended to heaven. As a flower he burgeoned from the depths of the earth; as the fruit he took his place on his lofty throne. Enduring the torment of the Cross alone, he is that grain which he himself describes; surrounded by his Apostles, now unshakeable in their faith, he is the fruit. In his converse with his disciples during those forty days after his Resurrection, he taught them the fullness of mature wisdom, and reaped from them an abundant harvest by the life-giving power of his words. Then he ascended to heaven, bringing his Father the fruits of his incarnate life, and leaving in his disciples the seed of holiness. Just as the eagle leaves the low lying ground, makes for the heights, and climbs high to heaven, in like manner our Saviour left the lower regions, made for the heights of Paradise, and reached heaven’s highest summit.

But what of the fact that an eagle often steals its prey by carrying off what belongs to another? Even so, our Saviour did something not unlike that, for in a manner of speaking he stole his prey when he snatched the manhood he had assumed from the jaws of hell and carried it off to heaven, freeing the human race from slavery to an alien prince, that is, from the power of the devil, and leading it captive into a higher captivity. As the prophet says, *Ascending on high he led captivity captive; he gave gifts to men.* The undoubted meaning of these words is this: that since the devil held the human race captive, our Lord, by wresting it from him, took it captive himself and as the prophet tells us led that very captivity to the heights of heaven. Both captivities do indeed bear the same name, but they differ one from the other. The devil’s captivity means enslavement; Christ’s, on the contrary, means restoration to freedom.

St Maximus of Turin, Sermon 56, 1-2 (CCL 23:224-225); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Paul is attacked by a violent crowd: Acts 21:27-39)

When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, who had seen him in the temple, stirred up all the crowd, and laid hands on him, crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching men everywhere against the people and the law and this place; moreover he also brought Greeks into the temple, and he has defiled this holy place." For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. Then all the city was aroused, and the people ran together; they seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. And as they were trying to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. He at once took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them; and when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the tribune came up and arrested him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he was and what he had done. Some in the crowd shouted one thing, some another; and as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd; for the mob of the people followed, crying, "Away with him!"

As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, "May I say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek? Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?" Paul replied, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; I beg you, let me speak to the people."

A READING FROM A SERMON ON THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

The Gospel describes the Lord's life upon earth and his return to heaven. But the sublime prophet David, as though unencumbered by the weight of his body, rose above himself to mingle with the heavenly powers and record for us their words as they accompanied the Master when he came down from heaven. Ordering the angels on earth entrusted with the care of human life to raise the gates, they cried: *Lift up your gates, you princes; be lifted up you everlasting doors. Let the King of glory enter.*

But because wherever he is, he who contains all things in himself makes himself like those who receive him, not only becoming a man among men, but also when among angels conforming his nature to theirs, the gatekeepers asked: *Who is this King of glory?*

He is the strong one, they were told, mighty in battle, the one who is to grapple with and overthrow the captor of the human race who has the power of death. When this last enemy has been destroyed, he will restore us to freedom and peace.

Now the mystery of Christ's death is fulfilled, victory is won, and the Cross, the sign of triumph, is raised on high. He who gives us the noble gifts of life and a kingdom has

ascended into heaven, *leading captivity captive*. Therefore the same command is repeated. Once more the gates of heaven must open for him. Our guardian angels, who have now become his escorts, order them to be flung wide so that he may enter and regain his former glory. But he is not recognized in the soiled garments of our life, in clothes reddened by the winepress of human sin. Again the escorting angels are asked: *Who is this King of glory?* The answer is no longer, *The strong one, mighty in battle*, but, *The lord of hosts*, he who has gained power over the whole universe, who has recapitulated all things in himself who is above all things, who has restored all creation to its former state: *He is the King of glory*.

You see how much David has added to our joy in this feast and contributed to the gladness of the Church. Therefore as far as we can let us imitate the prophet by our love for God, by gentleness and by patience with those who hate us. Let the prophet's teaching help us to live in a way pleasing to God in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

St Gregory of Nyssa, On the Ascension (Jaeger 9.1.323-327); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Wednesday of the Sixth Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Paul tells the Jews of his conversion: Acts 21:40 – 22:21)

And when the tribune had given him leave, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying:

“Brethren and fathers, hear the defence which I now make before you.”

And when they heard that he addressed them in the Hebrew language, they were the more quiet. And he said:

“I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the High Priest and the whole Council of Elders bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brethren, and I journeyed to Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

“As I made my journey and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ And I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.’ Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.’ And when I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.

“And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing by me said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And in that very hour I received my sight and saw him. And he said, ‘The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.’

“When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get quickly out of Jerusalem, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’ And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in thee. And when the blood of Stephen thy witness was shed, I also was standing by and approving, and keeping the garments of those who killed him.’ And he said to me, ‘Depart; for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

Christ's going to the Father is at once a source of sorrow because it involves his absence, and of joy because it involves his presence. And out of the doctrine of his Resurrection and Ascension spring those Christian paradoxes, often spoken of in Scripture, that we are sorrowing yet always rejoicing; as having nothing yet possessing all things.

This, indeed, is our state at present; we have lost Christ and we have found him; we see him not, yet we discern him. We embrace his feet, yet he says, *Touch me not*. How is this? It is thus: we have lost the sensible and conscious perception of him; we cannot look on him, hear him, converse with him, follow him from place to place; but we enjoy the spiritual, immaterial, inward, mental, real sight and possession of him; a possession more real and more present than that which the Apostles had in the days of his flesh, *because it is spiritual, because it is invisible*. When he says that he should go away, and come again and abide forever, he is speaking not merely of his omnipresent, divine nature, but of his human nature. As being Christ he says that he, the incarnate mediator, shall be with his Church forever.

But again, you may be led to explain his declaration thus: 'He has come again, but in his Spirit; that is, his Spirit has come instead of him; and when it is said that he is with us, this only means that his Spirit is with us.' No one, doubtless, can deny this most gracious and consolatory truth, that the Holy Spirit has come; but why has he come? To supply Christ's absence or to accomplish his presence? Surely to make him present. Let us not suppose that God the Holy Spirit comes in such sense that God the Son remains away. No; he has not so come that Christ does not come, but rather he comes that Christ may come in his coming. Through the Holy Spirit we have communion with Father and Son. *In Christ we are built together, says St Paul, for a dwelling place of God through the Spirit. You are the temple of God, the Spirit of God dwells in you*. Thus the Holy Spirit does not take the place of Christ in the soul, but secures that place for Christ. St Paul insists much on this presence of Christ in those who have his Spirit. *Do you not know, he says, that your bodies are the members of Christ? By one Spirit we are all baptized one body... you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it?*

The Holy Spirit, then, vouchsafes to come to us, that by his coming Christ may come to us, not carnally or visibly, but may enter into us. And thus he is both present and absent, absent in that he has left the earth, present in that he has not left the faithful soul; or, as he says himself: *The world sees me no more, but you see me*.

St John Henry Newman, Parochial and Plain Sermons, VI, 121-127; Word in Season III, 2nd ed.

Thursday of the Sixth Week in Easter

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Paul in the presence of the Sanhedrin: Acts 22:22 – 23:11)

Up to this word they listened to Paul; then they lifted up their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he ought not to live." And as they cried out and waved their garments and threw dust into the air, the tribune commanded him to be brought into the barracks, and ordered him to be examined by scourging, to find out why they shouted thus against him. But when they had tied him up with the thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman citizen, and uncondemned?" When the centurion heard that, he went to the tribune and said to him, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen." So the tribune came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes." The tribune answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum." Paul said, "But I was born a citizen." So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him instantly; and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.

But on the morrow, desiring to know the real reason why the Jews accused him, he unbound him, and commanded the Chief Priests and all the Council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them.

And Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day." And the High Priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, "God shall strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?" Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's High Priest?" And Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the High Priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"

But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead I am on trial." And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. Then a great clamor arose; and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?" And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn in pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them and bring him into the barracks.

The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified about me at Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also at Rome."

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ST JOHN'S GOSPEL BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

As the reason for his departure, our Lord mentioned his desire to open the way for our ascent to the heavenly places and to prepare a safe passage for us by making smooth the road that had previously been impassable. For heaven was then completely inaccessible to us – human foot had never trodden that pure and holy country of the angels. It was Christ who first prepared the way for our ascent there. By offering himself to God the Father as the first fruits of all who are dead and buried, he gave us a way of entry into heaven and was himself the first man the inhabitants of heaven ever saw. The angels in heaven, knowing nothing of the sacred and profound mystery of the incarnation, were astonished at his coming and almost thrown into confusion by an event so strange and unheard of. *Who is this coming from Edom?* they asked; that is, from the earth. But the Spirit did not leave the heavenly throng ignorant of the wonderful wisdom of God the Father. Commanding them to open the gates of heaven in honour of the king and master of the universe, he cried out: *Lift up your gates, you princes, and be lifted up, you everlasting doors, that the king of glory may come in.*

And so our Lord Jesus Christ has opened up for us a new and living way, as Paul says, *not by entering a sanctuary made with hands, but by entering heaven itself to appear before God on our behalf.* For Christ has not ascended in order to make his own appearance before God the Father. He was, is, and ever will be in the Father and in the sight of him from whom he receives his being, for he is his Father's unfailing joy. But now the Word, who had never before been clothed in human nature, has ascended as a man to show himself in a strange and unfamiliar fashion. And he has done this on our account and in our name, so that being like us, though with his power as the Son, and hearing the command, *Sit at my right hand*, as a member of our race, he might transmit to all of us the glory of being children of God.

As man then he appeared before the Father on our behalf, to enable us whom original sin had excluded from his presence to see the Father's face once more. As the Son he took his seat to enable us as sons through him to be called children of God. So Paul, who claims to speak for Christ, teaching that the whole human race has a share in the events of Christ's life, says that *God has raised us up with him and enthroned us with him in heaven.* To Christ as the Son by nature belongs the prerogative of sitting at the Father's side; this honour can rightly and truly be ascribed to him alone. Yet because his having become man means that he sits there as one who is in all respects like ourselves, as well as being as we believe God from God, in some mysterious way he passes this honour on to us.

St Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on St John's Gospel, 9 (PG 74:182-183); Word in Season III, 2nd ed.

Friday of the Sixth Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(The Jews' plot against Paul: Acts 23:12-35)

When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. There were more than forty who made this conspiracy. And they went to the Chief Priests and Elders, and said, "We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul. You therefore, along with the Council, give notice now to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near."

Now the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush; so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. And Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the tribune; for he has something to tell him." So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, "Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you." The tribune took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?" And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the Council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him. But do not yield to them; for more than forty of their men lie in ambush for him, having bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you." So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, "Tell no one that you have informed me of this."

Then he called two of the centurions and said, "At the third hour of the night get ready two hundred soldiers with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea. Also provide mounts for Paul to ride, and bring him safely to Felix the governor." And he wrote a letter to this effect:

"Claudius Lysias to his Excellency the governor Felix, greeting. This man was seized by the Jews, and was about to be killed by them, when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen. And desiring to know the charge on which they accused him, I brought him down to their Council. I found that he was accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment. And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him."

So the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. And on the morrow they returned to the barracks, leaving the horsemen to go on with him. When they came to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they presented Paul also before him. On reading the letter, he asked to what province he belonged. When he learned that he was from Cilicia he said, "I will hear you when your accusers arrive." And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod's praetorium.

A READING FROM A SERMON ON THE ASCENSION BY ST LEO THE GREAT

The faith of the infant Church was increased by the Lord's Ascension and strengthened by the gift of the Spirit; it was to remain unshaken by fetters and imprisonment, exile and hunger, fire and ravaging beasts, and the most refined tortures ever devised by brutal persecutors. Even the blessed Apostles, though they had been strengthened by so many miracles and instructed by so much teaching, took fright at the cruel suffering of the Lord's Passion and could not accept his Resurrection without hesitation. Yet they made such progress through his Ascension that they now found joy in what had terrified them before. They were able to fix their minds on Christ's divinity as he sat at the right hand of the Father, since what was presented to their bodily eyes no longer hindered them from turning all their attention to the realization that he had not left his Father when he came down to earth, nor abandoned his disciples when he ascended into heaven.

The truth is that the Son of Man was revealed as Son of God in a more perfect and transcendent way once he had entered into his Father's glory. He now began to be indescribably more present in his divinity to those from whom he was further removed in his humanity. A more mature faith enabled their minds to stretch upward to the Son in his equality with the Father; it no longer needed contact with Christ's tangible body, in which as man he is inferior to the Father. For while his glorified body retained the same nature, the faith of those who believed in him was now summoned to heights where, as the Father's equal, the only-begotten Son is reached not by physical handling but by spiritual discernment. This explains why our Lord said to the Church in the person of Mary Magdalene, as she ran forward to cling to him: *Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father*. In other words, I do not want you to come to me corporeally, to recognize me by what your bodily senses tell you; I want you to wait for something higher.

And when the eyes of his disciples, rapt in wonder, followed their ascending Lord to heaven, there stood beside them two angels, in garments of marvellously shining whiteness, who said to them: *Men of Galilee, why are you standing looking up to heaven? This Jesus who has been taken from you will come again in the same way as you have seen him going up to heaven*. By these words all the Church's children have been taught to believe that Jesus Christ will come again visibly in the same flesh in which he ascended, and that there can be no doubt concerning the subjection of all things to him who was served by angels from the moment of his birth. As it was an angel who announced to the blessed Virgin that Christ would be conceived of the Holy Spirit, so too it was the song of heavenly beings that told the shepherds of his virginal birth; and as the first attestations of his rising from the dead were delivered by messengers from on high, so it was the task of angels to proclaim that he would come in the same flesh to judge the world. All these things were intended to make us realise what tremendous angelic powers are to accompany him when he comes to judge, since such mighty spirits ministered to him even when he came to be judged himself.

St Leo the Great, Sermon 74, 3-4 (CCL 138A:457-459); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Saturday of the Sixth Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Paul defends himself before Felix: Acts 24:1-27)

And after five days the High Priest Ananias came down with some Elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul; and when he was called, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying:

“Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your provision, most excellent Felix, reforms are introduced on behalf of this nation, in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude. But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, an agitator among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. By examining him yourself you will be able to learn from him about everything of which we accuse him.”

The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all this was so. And when the governor had motioned to him to speak, Paul replied:

“Realizing that for many years you have been judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defence. As you may ascertain, it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship at Jerusalem; and they did not find me disputing with any one or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues, or in the city. Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me. But this I admit to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the law or written in the prophets, having a hope in God which these themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward God and toward men. Now after some years I came to bring to my nation alms and offerings. As I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia – they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, if they have anything against me. Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the Council, except this one thing which I cried out while standing among them, ‘With respect to the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you this day.’”

But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, “When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case.” Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but should have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.

After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess; and he sent for Paul and heard him speak upon faith in Christ Jesus. And as he argued about justice and self-control and future judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, “Go away for the present; when I have an opportunity I will summon you.” At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him. But when two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and desiring to do the Jews a favour, Felix left Paul in prison.

A READING FROM A SERMON ON THE ASCENSION BY ST LEO THE GREAT

Dearly beloved, let us exult with spiritual joy and rejoice before the Lord with the thanksgiving that is his due, freely raising the eyes of our hearts to Christ's dwelling place on high. Let no earthly desires weigh down the minds that are summoned heavenward, no perishable things encumber those predestined for what is everlasting, no deceptive snares entangle the feet that have entered upon the path of truth. The faithful should make their way swiftly through these temporal things, knowing themselves to be mere pilgrims in this earthly vale. The world's consolations may attract us, but they must be bravely passed by; it would be an unworthy act for us to embrace them. We are urged to such total dedication by the blessed Apostle Peter, who, in that zeal for feeding Christ's sheep, which his threefold profession of love for his Lord inspired in him, entreats us *as strangers and pilgrims to abstain from carnal desires which war against the soul*. And on whose behalf do these carnal desires wage war? Are they not tools of the devil, who enjoys bringing upward-striving men into bondage to lust for passing pleasures and robbing them of the place from which he himself has fallen? Against his plots each of the faithful must keep careful watch, so that he may be able to repulse the enemy from whatever quarter he may attack.

Now nothing is more effective against the devil's wiles, dearly beloved, than tender compassion and unselfish love; by these every sin can be either avoided or conquered. But such a degree of virtue cannot be attained until its contrary is overcome; and there is surely nothing so hostile to mercy and works of charity as the love of money, from the root of which all evil springs up. Unless this noxious weed is starved to death, it is inevitable that the heart in which it has taken root will bring forth the thorns and briars of vice rather than any flower of true virtue. Therefore, my beloved, let us resist this most pestilent of evils and make charity our aim, for no virtue can flourish without it; and then by the same path of love which Christ trod when he came down to us, we shall be able to ascend to him, to whom, with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, belong honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

St Leo the Great, Sermon 74, 5 (CCL 138A:459-461); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Easter Week 7

The Ascension

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE EPHESIANS

(Ascending on high, he led captivity captive: Ephesians 4:1-24)

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (In saying, "He ascended", what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.

Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practise every kind of uncleanness. You did not so learn Christ! – assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

A READING FROM A SERMON ON THE ASCENSION BY ST LEO THE GREAT

After the blessed and glorious Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, when the divine power in three days raised the true Temple of God which Jewish wickedness had destroyed, on this very day, dearly beloved, the number of the forty holy days is completed. While the Lord draws out the time of his bodily presence, our faith in his Resurrection is being strengthened by the necessary signs. The Death of Christ had greatly disturbed the hearts of the disciples. When the holy women, as the Gospel story has told us, proclaimed that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, the sepulchre

was empty, and that angels were witnesses of the living Lord, their words seemed to the Apostles and other disciples as pure nonsense.

The Spirit of Truth would by no means have permitted this wavering in human weakness to enter the hearts of his preachers, if their trembling anxiety and questioning delay were not to have established the foundations of our faith. Consequently, it was our doubts, our danger, that was being considered in the Apostles. We, in the guise of the Apostles, were being instructed against the slanders of the wicked and the proofs of earthly wisdom. Let us give thanks for necessary slowness of the Holy Fathers. They doubted so that we need not doubt.

These days, dearly beloved, between the Resurrection of the Lord and his Ascension provided the opportunity to confirm great mysteries, to reveal great secrets. In these days the Holy Spirit was poured into all the Apostles by the breath of the Lord; and to blessed Peter above all the others, after the keys of the kingdom, the care of the Lord's sheep is entrusted. Through all this time which went by between the Resurrection of the Lord and his Ascension, the providence of God took thought for this: that they should recognize the Lord Jesus Christ as truly risen, who was truly born, truly suffered, and truly died.

The result was that not only were they not afflicted with sadness but were filled with great joy when the Lord went into the heights of heaven. Truly it was a great and indescribable source of rejoicing when, in the sight of the heavenly multitudes, the nature of our human race ascended over the dignity of all heavenly creatures, to pass the angelic orders and to be raised beyond the heights of archangels. In its ascension it did not stop at any other height until this same nature was received at the seat of the eternal Father, to be associated on the throne of the glory of that One to whose nature it was joined in the Son.

Since the Ascension of Christ is our elevation, and since, where the glory of the Head has preceded its, there hope for the body is also invited, let us exult, dearly beloved, with worthy joy and be glad with a holy thanksgiving. Today we are established not only as possessors of Paradise, but we have even penetrated the heights of the heavens in Christ, prepared more fully for it through the indescribable grace of Christ which we had lost through *the ill will of the devil*. Those whom the violent enemy threw down from the happiness of our first dwelling, the Son of God has placed, incorporated within himself, at the right hand of the Father, the Son of God who lives and reigns with God the Father Almighty and with the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

St Leo the Great, Sermon 73; FoC 93 (1996) tr. Freeland & Conway

Monday of the Seventh Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Paul appeals to Caesar and is summoned by King Agrippa: Acts 25:1-27)

Now when Festus had come into his province, after three days he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. And the Chief Priests and the principal men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they urged him, asking as a favour to have the man sent to Jerusalem, planning an ambush to kill him on the way. Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea, and that he himself intended to go there shortly. "So," said he, "let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them accuse him."

When he had stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea; and the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. And when he had come, the Jews who had gone down from Jerusalem stood about him, bringing against him many serious charges which they could not prove. Paul said in his defence, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended at all." But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favour, said to Paul, "Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem, and there be tried on these charges before me?" But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried; to the Jews I have done no wrong, as you know very well. If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death; but if there is nothing in their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar." Then Festus, when he had conferred with his Council, answered, "You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you shall go."

Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to welcome Festus. And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a man left prisoner by Felix; and when I was at Jerusalem, the Chief Priests and the Elders of the Jews gave information about him, asking for sentence against him. I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up any one before the accused met the accusers face to face, and had opportunity to make his defence concerning the charge laid against him. When therefore they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought in. When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed; but they had certain points of dispute with him about their own superstition and about one Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wished to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them. But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I commanded him to be held until I could send him to Caesar." And Agrippa said to Festus, "I should like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," said he, "you shall hear him."

So on the morrow Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then by command of Festus Paul was brought in. And Festus said, "King Agrippa and all who are

present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. But I found that he had done nothing deserving death; and as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to send him. But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you, and, especially before you, King Agrippa, that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him.”

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ST JOHN’S GOSPEL BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

All who receive the sacred flesh of Christ are united with him as members of his body. This is the teaching of St Paul when he speaks of the mystery of our religion that was hidden from *former generations, but has now been revealed to the holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit; namely, that the Gentiles are joint-heirs with the Jews, that they are members of the same body, and that they have a share in the promise made by God in Christ Jesus.*

If in Christ all of us, both ourselves and he who is within us by his own flesh, are members of the same body, is it not clear that we are one both with one another and with Christ? He is the bond that unites us, because he is at once both God and man

With regard to our unity in the Spirit we may say, following the same line of thought, that all of us who have received one and the same Spirit, the Holy Spirit, are united intimately both with one another and with God. Taken separately we are many, and Christ sends the Spirit who is both the Father’s Spirit and his own, to dwell in each of us. Yet that Spirit, being one and indivisible, gathers together those who are distinct from each other as individuals and causes them all to be seen as a unity in himself. Just as Christ’s sacred flesh has power to make those in whom it is present into one body, so the one, indivisible Spirit of God, dwelling in all, causes all to become one in spirit

Therefore Saint Paul appeals to us to bear with one another charitably, and to spare no effort in securing by the bonds of peace, the unity that comes from the Spirit. There is but one body and one Spirit just as there is but one hope held out to us by God’s call. There is one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and works through all, and is in all. If the one Spirit dwells in us, the one God and Father of all will be in us, and he through his Son will gather together into unity with one another and with himself all who share in the Spirit.

There is also another way of showing that we are made one by sharing in the Holy Spirit. If we have given up our worldly way of life and submitted once for all to the laws of the Spirit it must surely be obvious to everyone that by repudiating in a sense our own life, and taking on the supernatural likeness of the Holy Spirit who is united to us, our nature is transformed so that we are no longer mere men but also children of God, spiritual men, by reason of the share we have received in the divine nature. We are all one, therefore, in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We are one in mind and

holiness, we are one through our communion in the sacred flesh of Christ, and through our sharing in the one Holy Spirit.

St Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on St John's Gospel, 11.11 (PG 74:559-562); Word in Season III.1

Tuesday of the Seventh Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Paul explains his cause in the presence of King Agrippa: Acts 26:1-32)

Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defence:

"I think myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am to make my defence today against all the accusations of the Jews, because you are especially familiar with all customs and controversies of the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

"My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and at Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. And now I stand here on trial for hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

"I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem; I not only shut up many of the saints in prison, by authority from the Chief Priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme; and in raging fury against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

"Thus I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the Chief Priests. At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining round me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.' And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles – to whom I send you to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

"Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and throughout all the country of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and perform deeds worthy of their repentance. For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles."

And as he thus made his defence, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are mad; your great learning is turning you mad." But Paul said, "I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time you think to make me a Christian!" And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am – except for these chains."

Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them; and when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment." And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

A READING FROM THE TREATISE ON THE HOLY SPIRIT BY ST BASIL THE GREAT

Who is there who can hear the names of the Holy Spirit and not feel exaltation in his soul, not lift up his thoughts to that supreme nature? For he is called the Spirit of God, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, the upright Spirit, the guiding Spirit. His chief and distinguishing name is Holy Spirit.

To the Spirit all creatures turn for their sanctification; all who live virtuously seek him, and are, by his influence, refreshed and helped towards their own natural end.

He is the source of holiness, the light of our understanding, for to every mind he offers his own light for the discovery of truth.

Though by nature he is inaccessible, yet through his generosity men can receive him in themselves. He fills all creatures with his power, but only those who are worthy can participate in him. But all do not share him in the same measure; he distributes his power in proportion to men's faith.

He is simple in essence, but manifold in power. He is present to each in his fullness, and in his fullness is present everywhere. He is divided, but does not suffer by the division; all share in him, but he remains whole, like a sunbeam whose kindly influence benefits each creature as though it were present to that creature alone, and shines over land and sea and dissolves in the air.

So too the Spirit is present like the sun to each individual who is capable of receiving him, and emits an influence which is sufficient to help them all, but is not divided; and they profit by sharing in him according to their natures, not according to his power.

Through him hearts are raised on high, the weak are led by the hand, those who are advanced gain perfection. He it is who shines on those whose hearts are purified and stainless and makes them truly spiritual through the common communion they have with him.

Even as bright and shining bodies, once touched by a ray of light falling on them, become even more glorious and themselves cast another light, so too souls that carry the Spirit,

and are enlightened by the Spirit, become spiritual themselves and send forth grace upon others.

This grace enables them to foresee the future, to understand mysteries, to grasp hidden things, to receive spiritual blessings, to have their thoughts fixed on heavenly things, and to dance with the angels. So is their joy unending, so is their perseverance in God unfailing, so do they acquire likeness to God, so – most sublime of all – do they themselves become divine.

St Basil the Great, On the Holy Spirit, 9.22-23; The Divine Office II

Wednesday of the Seventh Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Paul sails for Rome: Acts 27:1-20)

And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort, named Julius. And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica. The next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul kindly, and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for. And putting to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. And when we had sailed across the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy, and put us on board. We sailed slowly for a number of days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind did not allow us to go on, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

As much time had been lost, and the voyage was already dangerous because the fast had already gone by, Paul advised them, saying, "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." But the centurion paid more attention to the captain and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. And because the harbour was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to put to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbour of Crete, looking northeast and southeast, and winter there.

And when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close inshore. But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land; and when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven. And running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the boat; after hoisting it up, they took measures to undergird the ship; then, fearing that they should run on the Syrtis, they lowered the gear, and so were driven. As we were violently storm-tossed, they began next day to throw the cargo overboard; and the third day they cast out with their own hands the tackle of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars appeared for many a day, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

A READING FROM THE DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

On the day of Pentecost when the Son had completed the work on earth assigned to him by the Father, the Holy Spirit was sent to sanctify the Church unceasingly so that through Christ, in the one Spirit, believers would have access to the Father. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life, a fountain of water welling up to give a life that is eternal. Through him the Father gives life to those who were dead because of their sins, and at last raises up their mortal bodies.

Building up and guiding the Church by means of varied gifts, both hierarchical and charismatic, and adorning her with his fruits, the Spirit leads her into all truth and gives her unity in communion and service. The Spirit is perpetually renewing the Church's youth by the power of the Gospel and leading her to perfect union with her Bridegroom.

The Spirit and the bride say to the Lord Jesus: 'Come!'

The whole Church is thus shown to be a people made one as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one.

The body of believers as a whole, each one of whom has been anointed by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of faith. They demonstrate this special inerrancy of theirs when their supernatural instinct of faith causes all from the Bishops down to the most humble lay person to agree in matters of faith and morals.

Through this instinct of faith, which is awakened and kept alive by the Spirit of truth, the people of God hold indefectibly to the faith once delivered to the Saints; with true insight they penetrate it more deeply and they apply it ever more perfectly in their lives. They do all this under the guidance of the sacred Magisterium of the Church to which they loyally defer, not as to the words of men, but as to the very word of God.

The Holy Spirit sanctifies and guides God's people and enriches them with virtues through the Sacraments and other ministrations of the Church. He also distributes special graces among believers in every state of life, *apportioning his gifts to each one as he wills*. By these gifts the Spirit prepares them and makes them eager to undertake various tasks and offices which serve the renewal and building up of the Church. As Scripture says: *The power of the Spirit is shown in a particular way in each one for the good of all.*

These charisms, the simpler and more widespread as well as the most outstanding, should fill us with a sense of gratitude, for they are especially adapted to the needs of the Church and are of the greatest value to her.

Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium 4, 12; Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Thursday of the Seventh Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Paul's encouragement and the shipwreck: Acts 27:21-44)

As they had been long without food, Paul then came forward among them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and should not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. I now bid you take heart; for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night there stood by me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and lo, God has granted you all those who sail with you.' So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we shall have to run on some island."

When the fourteenth night had come, as we were drifting across the sea of Adria, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. So they sounded and found twenty fathoms; a little farther on they sounded again and found fifteen fathoms. And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let out four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come. And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the boat into the sea, under pretence of laying out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the boat, and let it go.

As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing. Therefore I urge you to take some food; it will give you strength, since not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you." And when he had said this, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. (We were in all two hundred and seventy-six persons in the ship.) And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.

Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to bring the ship ashore. So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders; then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. But striking a shoal they ran the vessel aground; the bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was broken up by the surf. The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape; but the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their purpose. He ordered those who could swim to throw themselves overboard first and make for the land, and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all escaped to land.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ST JOHN'S GOSPEL BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

After Christ had completed his mission on earth, it still remained necessary for us to become sharers in the divine nature of the Word. We had to give up our own life and be so transformed that we should begin to live an entirely new kind of life that would be pleasing to God. This was something we could do only by sharing in the Holy Spirit.

It was most fitting that the sending of the Spirit and his descent upon us should take place after the departure of Christ the Saviour. As long as Christ was with them in the flesh, it must have seemed to believers that they possessed every blessing in him; but when the time came for him to ascend to his heavenly Father, it was necessary for him to be united through his Spirit to those who worshiped him, and to dwell in our hearts through faith. Only by his own presence within us in this way could he give us the confidence to cry out, *Abba, Father*, make it easy for us to grow in holiness and, through our possession of the all-powerful Spirit, fortify us invincibly against the wiles of the devil and the assaults of other men.

It can easily be shown from examples both in the Old Testament and the New that the Spirit changes those in whom he comes to dwell; he so transforms them that they begin to live a completely new kind of life. Saul was told by the prophet Samuel: *The Spirit of the Lord will take possession of you, and you shall be changed into another man*. St Paul writes: *As we behold the glory of the Lord with unveiled faces, that glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit, transforms us all into his own likeness, from one degree of glory to another*.

Does this not show that the Spirit changes those in whom he comes to dwell and alters the whole pattern of their lives? With the Spirit within them it is quite natural for people who had been absorbed by the things of this world to become entirely otherworldly in outlook, and for cowards to become people of great courage. There can be no doubt that this is what happened to the disciples. The strength they received from the Spirit enabled them to hold firmly to the love of Christ and to face without fear the violence of their persecutors. Very true, then, was our Saviour's saying that it was to their advantage for him to return to heaven: his return was the time appointed for the descent of the Holy Spirit.

St Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on St John's Gospel, 10 (PG 74:434); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Friday of the Seventh Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Paul on the Isle of Malta. Journey to Rome: Acts 28:1-14)

After we had escaped, we then learned that the island was called Malta. And the natives showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, when a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. They waited, expecting him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead; but when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

Now in the neighbourhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery; and Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him healed him. And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. They presented many gifts to us; and when we sailed, they put on board whatever we needed.

After three months we set sail in a ship which had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the Twin Brothers as figurehead. Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium; and after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. There we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome.

A READING FROM THE MIRROR OF FAITH BY BLESSED WILLIAM OF SAINT-THIERRY

If you feel a natural hesitation when confronted with the more profound mysteries of faith, take courage, Christian soul, and say not contentiously but with loving submission: 'How can these things be?' Let your question be a prayer, let it be an expression of love, piety, and humble longing. Seek not to explore the heights of the divine majesty, but to find salvation in the saving deeds of God our Saviour.

Then the Messenger of God's great design will reply: When the Paraclete comes, whom I shall send you from the Father, he will remind you of everything and teach you all truth. Even as no one knows the thoughts of man except the spirit of the man that is within him, so no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

Hasten therefore to share in the Holy Spirit. He is with you when you call upon him; you can call upon him only because he is already present. When he comes in answer to your

prayer, he comes with an abundance of divine blessings. He is the river whose streams give joy to the city of God.

If when he comes he finds you humble, silent, and trembling at the words of God, he will rest upon you and reveal what God the Father has hidden from the wise and the prudent of this world. You will then begin to understand the things holy Wisdom could have told his disciples on earth, but which they were unable to bear until the Spirit of truth came who was to teach them all truth. We cannot hope to learn from the lips of any man truths that Truth himself could not convey. For he himself has told us: *God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth*, so those who wish to know him must seek understanding of their faith and perception of its pure and simple truth only through the Holy Spirit.

In the darkness and ignorance of this life the Holy Spirit is the light that enlightens the poor in spirit, the love that draws them on, the sweetness that attracts them, their access to God, the love of the loving. The Spirit is devotion and piety. From one degree of faith to the next the Spirit reveals to believers the justice of God, so that grace follows grace, and the faith that comes from hearing gives place to a faith enlightened by understanding.

Blessed William of Saint-Thierry, The Mirror of Faith (PL 180:384); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Saturday of the Seventh Week in Eastertide

A READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

(Paul a captive in Rome: Acts 28:15-31)

And the brethren at Rome, when they heard of us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them Paul thanked God and took courage. And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier that guarded him.

After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews; and when they had gathered, he said to them, “Brethren, though I had done nothing against the people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar – though I had no charge to bring against my nation. For this reason therefore I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.” And they said to him, “We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brethren coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against.”

When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in great numbers. And he expounded the matter to them from morning till evening, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, while others disbelieved. So, as they disagreed among themselves, they departed, after Paul had made one statement: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: ‘Go to this people, and say, You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall indeed see but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn for me to heal them.’ Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” And he lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered.

A READING FROM ON THE TRINITY BY DIDYMUS THE BLIND

The Holy Spirit renews us in Baptism through his Godhead, which he shares with the Father and the Son. Finding us in a state of deformity, the Spirit restores our original beauty and fills us with his grace, leaving no room for anything unworthy of our love. The Spirit frees us from sin and death, and changes us from the earthly men we were, made of dust and ashes, into spiritual men, sharers in the divine glory, sons and heirs of God the Father, who bear a likeness to the Son and are his coheirs and his brothers, destined to reign with him and to share his glory. In place of earth the Spirit reopens heaven to us and gladly admits us into Paradise, giving us even now greater honour than

the angels, and by the holy waters of Baptism extinguishing the unquenchable fires of hell.

We have two conceptions: to the human body we owe our first conception; to the divine Spirit, our second. John says: To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. All who believed in Christ, he says, received power to become children of God, that is, of the Holy Spirit, and to gain kinship with God. To show that their parent was God the Holy Spirit, he adds these words of Christ: I give you this solemn warning, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Visibly, through the ministry of priests, the font gives symbolic birth to our visible bodies. Invisibly, through the ministry of angels, the Spirit of God, whom even the mind's eye cannot see, baptizes into himself both our souls and bodies, giving them a new birth

Speaking quite literally, and also in harmony with the words, *of water and the Spirit*, John the Baptist says of Christ: *He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire*. Since we are only vessels of clay, we must first be cleansed in water and then hardened by spiritual fire – for *God is a consuming fire*. We need the Holy Spirit to perfect and renew us, for the fire of the Spirit can also wash us and the water of the Spirit can also melt us down and recast us.

Didymus the Blind, On the Trinity, 2.12 (PG 39:667-674); Word in Season III, 1st ed.

Pentecost & Feastdays

Pentecost

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE ROMANS

(Whoever receives the Spirit of God, are children of God: Romans 8:5-27)

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you.

So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

The blessed day has dawned for us on which holy Church makes her first radiant appearance to the eyes of faith and sets the hearts of believers on fire. It is the day on which we celebrate the sending of the Holy Spirit by our Lord Jesus Christ, after he had

risen from the dead and ascended into glory. In the Gospel it is written: *If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, rivers of living water shall flow from his heart.* The evangelist explains these words by adding: *Jesus said this about the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive. For the Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified.* Now the glorification of Jesus took place when he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, but all was not yet accomplished. The Holy Spirit still had to be given; the one who made the promise had to send him. This is precisely what occurred at Pentecost.

After being in the company of his disciples for the forty days following his Resurrection, the Lord ascended into heaven, and on the fiftieth day – the day we are now celebrating – he sent the Holy Spirit. The account is given in Scripture: *Suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and there appeared to them tongues like fire, which separated and came to rest on each one of them, And they began to speak in other tongues, as the Holy Spirit gave them power of utterance.* That wind cleansed the disciples' hearts, blowing away fleshly thoughts like so much chaff. The fire burnt up their unregenerate desires as if they were straw. The tongues in which they spoke as the Holy Spirit filled them were a foreshadowing of the Church's preaching of the Gospel in the tongues of all nations.

After the flood, in pride and defiance of the Lord, an impious generation erected a high tower and so brought about the division of the human race into many language groups, each with its own peculiar speech which was unintelligible to the rest of the world. At Pentecost, by contrast, the humble piety of believers brought all these diverse languages into the unity of the Church. What discord had scattered, love was to gather together. Like the limbs of a single body, the separated members of the human race would be restored to unity by being joined to Christ, their common head, and welded into the oneness of a holy body by the fire of love. Anyone therefore who rejects the gift of peace and withdraws from the fellowship of this unity cuts himself off from the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So then, my fellow members of Christ's body, you are the fruits of unity and the sons of peace. Keep this day with joy, celebrate it in freedom of spirit, for in you is fulfilled what was foreshadowed in those days when the Holy Spirit came. At that time, whoever received the Holy Spirit spoke in many languages, individual though he was. Now in the same way unity itself speaks through all nations in every tongue. If you yourselves are established in that unity you have the Holy Spirit among you, and nothing can separate you from the Church of Christ which speaks in the languages of every nation of the world.

St Augustine, Sermon 271 (PL 38:1245-1246); Word in Season III, 2nd ed.

Holy Trinity

A READING FROM THE FIRST LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

(The great mystery of the will of God: 1 Corinthians 2:1-16)

When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him", God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.

The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

A READING FROM THE ORATION ON HOLY BAPTISM BY ST GREGORY NAZIANZEN

Before all else, I beg you, keep the good deposit of the faith, by which I live and work; with which I endure all that is so distressful and despise all delights; that is, hold fast to the confession of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

This I commit unto you today; with this I will baptize you and make you grow. This I give you to share, and to defend all your life, the one Godhead and power, found in the Three in unity, and comprising the Three separately, not unequal in substance or nature, neither increased nor diminished by superiorities or inferiorities; in every respect equal, in every respect the same; just as the beauty and the greatness of the heavens is one. This is the infinite conjunction of three infinite Ones, each is God when considered in Himself; as the Father, so the Son; as the Son, so the Holy Spirit.

No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three I think of him as the Whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking of escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that One so as to attribute a greater greatness to the Rest. When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the Undivided Light.

I should like to call the Father the greater, because from him flows both the equality and the being of the equals, but I am afraid to use the word 'origin', lest I should make him the origin of inferiors and thus insult him by creating a precedence of honour. For to put down those who are from him gives no glory to him as the source. I fear you should take hold of this word 'greater', and divide the nature, using the word greater in *all* senses, although in reality it does not apply to the nature but only to origination. For in the consubstantial Persons there is nothing greater or less in terms of substance.

Are you afraid of being reproached with Tritheism? Just accept this one good thing, the unity in the Three, and leave me to fight the battle. Let me be the ship-builder, and you use the ship. See how great is my indulgence; see the goodness of the Spirit; the war shall be mine, yours the achievement; I will be under fire, and you shall live in peace; only join with your defender in prayer. I have three stones which I will sling at the Philistine; I have three floods against the brushwood with which I will consecrate the sacrifice with water, raising the most unexpected fire; and I will throw down the prophets of shame by the power of the Sacrament.

What need have I any more of speech? It is the time for teaching, not for controversy. I protest before God and the elect angels: be baptized in this faith. If there is any other writing on your heart than that which my teaching demands, come and have the writing changed; I am no unskilled calligrapher of these truths. I write that which is written upon my own heart; I teach that which I have been taught, and I have kept it from the beginning even up to the time of these grey hairs.

St Gregory Nazianzen, Oration 40, 41-44: NPNF 2.7, tr. Browne & Swallow

Corpus Christi

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS

(They beheld God, and ate and drank: Exodus 24:1-11)

God said to Moses, 'Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the Elders of Israel, and worship afar off. Moses alone shall come near to the LORD; but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.'

Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, 'All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do.' And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.' And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.'

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the Elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.

A READING FROM THE BULL TRANSITURUS OF POPE URBAN IV

Bishop Urban, servant of the servants of God, to the venerable brothers, Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops, and other prelates of the Church, health and the apostolic blessing.

About to pass from this world to the Father, our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, since the time of his Passion was at hand, instituted the great and wonderful Sacrament of his Body and Blood, bestowing his Body as food and his Blood as drink. For, *as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we announce the death of the Lord*. Indeed, at the institution of this Sacrament, he himself said to the Apostles: *Do this in memory of me*: so that for us the special and outstanding memorial of his love would be this venerable Sacrament; a memorial in which we attain the corporeal Presence of the Saviour himself.

Other things which we remember we embrace spiritually and mentally: we do not thereby obtain their real presence. However, in this sacramental commemoration, Jesus Christ is present with us in his proper substance, although under another form. As he was about to ascend into heaven, he said to the Apostles and their helpers, *I will be with you all days even unto the consummation of the world*. He comforted them with a gracious promise that he would remain and would be with them even by his corporeal presence. Therefore he gave himself as nourishment, so that, since man fell by means of the food of the death-giving tree; man is raised up by means of the food of the life-giving tree.

Eating wounded us, and eating healed us. Thus the Saviour says, *My Flesh is real food*. This bread is taken but truly not consumed, because it is not transformed into the eater. Rather, if it is worthily received, the recipient is conformed to it.

We should celebrate continuously the memory of this memorial, because the more frequently his gift and favour are looked upon, so much the more firmly are they kept in memory. Therefore, although this memorial Sacrament is frequented in the daily solemnities of the Mass, we nevertheless think suitable and worthy that, at least once a year – especially to confound the lack of faith and the infamy of heretics – a more solemn and honourable memory of this Sacrament be held. This is so because on Holy Thursday, the day on which the Lord himself instituted this Sacrament, the universal Church, occupied with the reconciliation of penitents, blessing the chrism, fulfilling the Commandments about the washing of the feet and many other such things, is not sufficiently free to celebrate so great a Sacrament.

Moreover we know that, while we were constituted in a lesser office, it was divinely revealed to certain Catholics that a feast of this kind should be celebrated generally throughout the Church. Therefore, to strengthen and exalt the Catholic Faith, we decree that, besides the daily memory that the Church makes of this Sacrament, there be celebrated a more solemn and special annual memorial. Then let the hearts and mouths of all break forth in hymns of saving joy; then let faith sing, hope dance, charity exult, devotion applaud, the choir be jubilant, and purity delight. Then let each one with willing spirit and prompt will come together, laudably fulfilling his duties, celebrating the Solemnity of so great a Feast.

Pope Urban IV, The Bull *Transiturus*; tr. O'Connor (1988) from *The Hidden Manna*

Sacred Heart of Jesus

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE ROMANS

(The love of God made manifest in Christ: Romans 8: 28-39)

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against Gods elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A READING FROM CHRIST, THE IDEAL OF THE MONK BY BLESSED COLUMBA MARMION

When a person fails in charity, and receives Christ in Holy Communion, he cannot say to him: 'My Jesus, I love you with all my heart.' It would be a lie, since he does not envelop Christ and his members with a self-same love. He has not accepted the mystery of the Incarnation in its totality; he stops at Christ's individual manhood, and forgets the spiritual prolongation of the Incarnation which is the Mystical Body of Jesus. So, then, when we communicate, we ought ever to be ready to embrace, in one and the same charity, Christ and all that is united to him; for the measure of the giving of Christ to our souls is that of our own donation to our brethren. The Eucharist is a Sacrament of union with Christ, and of union between souls.

Thus a soul who draws near to our Lord, in Communion, in these dispositions of unreserved love towards the neighbour is very pleasing to the Sacred Heart. Christ showers magnificent gifts upon it; moreover, faults and shortcomings in respect to the other virtues are at once forgiven, because of this fervent love it bears towards the members of Jesus. When, on Maundy Thursday, the Abbot has communicated all the members of the monastic family, the angels who behold us see that we are all one in Christ, each one being united to Christ Jesus, and Christ being one, we are then truly one in him. We thus fulfil the dearest desire of the Word Incarnate.

Indeed, at the supreme farewell hour, when Christ Jesus spoke for the last time with his Apostles before entering into his sorrowful Passion and sacrificing himself for the

world's salvation, what is the exclusive theme of his discourse and the first object of his prayer? Spiritual charity. *A new commandment I give unto you... by this shall all men know that you are my disciples... Father... that they may be one, as we also are one, I in them, and you in me, that they may become perfectly one.* That is the testament of Christ's Heart.

Our Blessed Father St Benedict, in concluding his Rule, also leaves us as his last testament, his magnificent teaching on good zeal. After having set forth in detail the ordering of our life, he sums up all his doctrine in this short chapter. And what does he tell us? Does he speak to us of prayer? Of contemplation? Of mortification? Undoubtedly, the holy Patriarch forgets nothing of all this, as we have seen; but having reached the end of his long life so full of experience, at the moment of closing the monastic code which contains for us the secret of perfection, he speaks to us, before all else, of mutual love; he wishes, with that intense desire which was that of Jesus at the Last Supper, to see us excel in most fervent love. This chapter is the worthy crowning of a Rule which is but the pure reflection of the Gospel.

Blessed Columba Marmion, *Christ, the Ideal of the Monk*, 2.17.5

Season of the Year / Week 01

Monday of the First Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(The creation of heaven and earth: Genesis 1:1-2:4a)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

And God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to

their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation.

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

A READING FROM AGAINST HERESIES BY ST IRENAEUS

The heretics do not accept the Incarnation and so they remain in Adam who was conquered and cast out of Paradise. They fail to see that, just as when we were formed in Adam the breath of life was added to make a rational animal, so, at the end, the Word of the Father and the Spirit of God were united to the same ancient substance of Adam. This made man truly alive and perfect, capable of knowing the perfect Father. It was done so that, as in the 'animal man' we all die, so in the 'spiritual man' we might all be made alive. Adam at no time escaped the hands of God, the Son and the Spirit, to whom the Father said, *Let us make man in our image and likeness*. That is why, at the end, *not by the will of the flesh or the will of a man*, but by the good pleasure of the Father, these hands of God made the living Man, so that Adam might come at last into the image and likeness of God.

The soul and the spirit may be *part* of man, but they are certainly not the complete man. The complete man is a mixture and a union: the soul, which has received the Spirit of the Father, mixed with the flesh fashioned in the image of God. If you take away the substance of the flesh, the shaped clay, and consider just the naked spirit, what you are left with is not 'the spiritual man', but merely 'the spirit of a man' or 'the Spirit of God'. However, when this Spirit is blended with the soul and united to the shaped clay, the result, thanks to the outpouring of the Spirit, is a spiritual and complete man. It is this, the complete man, who is made in the image and likeness of God. Thus the Apostle, in his first letter to the Thessalonians, explains that the redeemed man is this complete and

spiritual man: *May the God of peace sanctify you completely, and may your whole being, spirit and soul and body, be kept blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

The truth of all this was shown when the Word of God became man. He assimilated himself to man and man to himself, so that man, by his resemblance to the Son, might become precious to the Father. For in times past it was merely *said* that man was made in the image of God, but not *shown*, because the Word, in whose image man was made, was still invisible. That is why man lost the likeness so easily. But when the Word of God was made flesh, he confirmed both things: he showed the true image, when he himself became what his image was; and he restored the likeness, making man like the invisible Father through the visible Word.

St Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses, 5.1.3, 6.1, 16.2; tr. Pluscarden.

Tuesday of the First Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(The creation of man in Paradise: Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-25)

In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up – for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground – then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

A READING FROM THE WRITINGS OF ST HILARY OF POITIERS

In Adam’s sleep and the creation of Eve we should see a revelation of the mystery hidden in Christ and the Church, since it contains an analogy pointing to faith in the resurrection of the body. For in the creation of woman dust is not taken from the ground as before; a body is not formed from earth; inanimate matter is not transformed by the breath of God into a living soul. Instead flesh grows upon bone, a complete body is given to the flesh, and the power of the spirit is added to the complete body. That this is the way the resurrection will take place God proclaimed through the Prophet Ezekiel to teach us what his power would accomplish in time to come. Then everything will happen at once: the body will be there, the spirit will fly towards it, and none of his works will be lost to God.

Now this, according to the Apostle, is the mystery hidden for long ages in God, namely, that the Gentiles are joint heirs with the Jews, part of the same body, having a share in his promise in Christ, who is able, as the same Apostle says, to transform our humble bodies into the likeness of his own glorious body. Therefore when the heavenly Adam rose again after the sleep of his passion, he recognised the Church as his bone, its flesh not now created from dust or given life by breath, but growing upon bone it became a body made from a body and was perfected by the coming of the Spirit.

For those who are in Christ will rise again like Christ, in whom the resurrection of all flesh has already taken place, since he himself was born in our flesh with the power of God by which the Father begot him before the world began. And since Jew and Greek, barbarian and Scythian, the slave and the free, men and women, are all one in Christ, since flesh is recognized as proceeding from flesh, and the Church is the body of Christ, and the mystery which is in Adam and Eve is a prophecy concerning Christ and the Church, all that has been prepared by Christ and the Church for the end of time was already accomplished in Adam and Eve at the beginning of time.

St Hilary of Poitiers, Tractatus Mysteriorum, (SC19 b i s:83-85); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(The sin of Adam: Genesis 3:1-24)

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." To the woman he said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it', cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them.

Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever" – therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

A READING FROM ON REBUKE AND GRACE BY ST AUGUSTINE

The Lord of all things created all things very good, he foreknew that evils would arise from good, and he knew that it pertains to his omnipotent goodness to make good use of evils rather than not to allow evils to exist. He made man with free choice and, though ignorant of his future fall, man was still happy because he knew that it was in his power both not to die and not to become miserable. If through free choice he had willed to remain in this upright state without defect, he would, without any experience of death and unhappiness, certainly have received that fullness of beatitude enjoyed by the holy angels. But because Adam abandoned God through free choice, he experienced the just judgement of God to the point that he was condemned along with all his offspring which in its entirety had sinned in him and along with him.

What then? Did Adam not have the grace of God? On the contrary, he had a great grace, but a different grace from ours. He existed amid goods which he had received from the goodness of his Creator, but in this life the Saints who have the grace of deliverance exist amid the evils from which they cry out to God, *Deliver us from evil*. In those goods Adam did not need the death of Christ, whereas the blood of that Lamb washes these Saints from inherited and personal sin. For in them *the flesh has desires opposed to the spirit and the spirit has desires opposed to the flesh*, and in this struggle they ask that the grace of Christ give them the power to fight and to conquer. What grace is more powerful than the only-begotten Son of God, equal to and coeternal with the Father, who became man for them and, without any sin of his own, either original or personal, was crucified by human sinners? God, therefore, assumed our nature, that is, the rational soul and the flesh of Christ the man, and he assumed it in a singularly marvellous manner. For, without any preceding merits of his own righteousness, Christ was the Son of God from the first moment he began to be a man in such a way that he and the Word, which is without beginning, was one person. Good works followed his birth; good works did not merit it. For there was no reason to fear that the human nature assumed in this ineffable way into the unity of the person by God the Word would sin by free choice of the will.

The first man did not have this grace with which he would never have willed to be evil, but even in his free choice God did not leave Adam without grace. For free choice is sufficient for evil, but not sufficient for good, unless it is helped by the Omnipotent Good. But that man abandoned this help through free choice, he abandoned it and was in turn abandoned. This is the first grace which was given to the first Adam, but there is a more powerful grace than this in the second Adam. For the first grace brought it about that the man had righteousness if he willed to; but the second even makes one to will, and to will so strongly and to love with such ardour that by the will of the Spirit one conquers the contrary desires of the flesh.

St Augustine, On Rebuke and Grace, 27-31; WSA (1999) tr. Teske.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(The consequences of sin: Genesis 4:1-24)

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."

Cain said to Abel his brother, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground; and from thy face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me." Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! If any one slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him. Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Me-huja-el, and Me-huja-el the father of Me-thusha-el, and Me-thusha-el the father of Lamech. And Lamech took two wives; the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

Lamech said to his wives: "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, hearken to what I say: I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold."

And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, "God has appointed for me another child instead of Abel, for Cain slew him." To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time men began to call upon the name of the LORD.

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON PSALM 39 BY ST AMBROSE

At the beginning of the book Scripture speaks of me. In the opening chapters of Genesis it was foretold that Christ would come to fulfil his Father's will for the redemption of mankind. This was when the sacred writer described how in creating Eve to be man's helpmate God made her a type of the Church. Where indeed can we find help for our bodily weakness and protection against the upheavals of the world around us, except in the grace of salvation which comes to us through the Church and the faith by which we live?

In the first pages of the Bible we read: Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh! Because of this a man will leave father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they will be two in one flesh. If you wish to know the real speaker of these words, listen to the following: this is a great mystery; I tell you it refers to Christ and the Church. The meaning is that the love that should exist between man and wife can be compared with Christ's love for his Church. We are members of Christ's body, sharers of his flesh and bone. What greater well-being can we have than to be so close to Christ, to cleave to him in a kind of bodily oneness, in a union with that body of his which is without blemish or stain of sin?

We are told in the early pages of the same book that righteous Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God while his murderous brother's was rejected. This, surely, is a clear sign that the Lord Jesus was to offer himself up for us, and that in and through his passion he would hallow a new sacrifice to supersede a rite proper to a parricidal people. It is even more clearly expressed in the holy Patriarch Abraham's offering of his son Isaac, in whose stead a ram was ultimately immolated. And this showed that it was man's flesh, the flesh he has in common with the animals and not the divinity of the only Son of God, that was destined to endure the rigours of the passion.

At the beginning of the book it is written that in due time there would come a man who held command over the powers of heaven. This prophecy was fulfilled when the Lord Jesus arrived on earth and angels ministered to him, according to his own prediction: *You will see the heavens opened and God's angels ascending and descending around the Son of Man.*

Again at the beginning of the book it is said that you must choose out for yourselves a full-grown yearling lamb, a male without blemish, which the whole assembly shall then ceremonially slay. The identity of that lamb you know already: Behold the Lamb of God who is to bear away the sin of all the world! He is the one that was slain by the entire Jewish people. It was indeed necessary that he should die for all men, so that through his cross every sin might find forgiveness and in his blood the stains of all the world be washed away.

St Ambrose, In Ps. 39, 11-14 (PL14:1061-1062); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(God's judgement by the Flood: Genesis 6:5-22; 7:17-24)

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found favour in the eyes of the LORD.

These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. 10 And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and set the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks. For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you, to keep them alive. Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them." Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

The flood continued forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. The waters prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; the waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm upon the earth, and every man; everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark. And the waters prevailed upon the earth a hundred and fifty days.

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON GENESIS BY ORIGEN

As we begin to speak about the ark which was constructed by Noah at God's command, we can ascend from the historical account to the mystical and allegorical understanding of the spiritual meaning and, if these contain anything secret, we can explain it as the Lord reveals knowledge of his word to us.

Just as at that time Noah made an ark, so also our Noah, who is Christ Jesus, is told by the Father to make himself an ark of squared planks and give it dimensions filled with heavenly mysteries. The people, therefore, who are saved in the Church, are compared to all those, whether men or animals, who are saved in the ark. But since all are not equal in merit or progress in faith, therefore, this ark does not offer one abode for all. There are two lower decks and three upper decks to show that in the Church, although all are contained within the one faith and are washed in the one baptism, progress is not one and the same for all, *but each one in his own order*.

Since God orders that the ark be constructed not only with two decks but also with three, let us also make sure we join to our twofold exposition of the Scriptures also a third meaning. For the literal meaning which comes first is a kind of foundation at the lower level. The mystical interpretation comes second, being higher and loftier. Let us attempt, if we can, to add a moral exposition as the third level.

If there is anyone who, while evils are increasing, can turn from the things which are in flux, and can hear the word of God, this man is building an ark of salvation within his own heart and is dedicating a library, so to speak, of the divine word within himself. He does not construct this library from planks which are unhewn and rough, but from planks which have been squared and arranged in a uniform line, that is, not from the volumes of secular authors, but from the prophetic and apostolic volumes and from the works of those who have followed them in the right lines of faith. You shall make it *with two decks* and *with three decks*. From this library learn the historical narratives; from it recognise *the great mystery* which is fulfilled in Christ and in the Church. From it also learn how to correct habits and to curtail vices. You ought also to bring in animals of every kind, the unclean as well as the clean. I think that concupiscence and wrath, which are in every soul, are necessarily said to be unclean in the sense that they serve to make man sin. But because the human race is not renewed without concupiscence nor can any correction or discipline exist without anger, they are said to be necessary and must be preserved.

Let us pray, however, the mercy of the omnipotent God to make us not only hearers of his word, but also doers and to bring upon our souls also a flood of his water and destroy in us what he knows should be destroyed and quicken what he knows should be quickened, through Christ our Lord and through his Holy Spirit. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Origen, Homilies on Genesis, 2.1, 3, 6; FoC 71 (1981) tr. Heine.

Saturday of the First Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(The end of the Flood: Genesis 8:1-22)

But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided; the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, and the waters receded from the earth continually. At the end of a hundred and fifty days the waters had abated; and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest upon the mountains of Ararat. And the waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.

At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made, and sent forth a raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; but the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put forth his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; and the dove came back to him in the evening, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. Then he waited another seven days, and sent forth the dove; and she did not return to him any more.

In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.

Then God said to Noah, "Go forth from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. Bring forth with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh –birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply upon the earth." So Noah went forth, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. And every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves upon the earth, went forth by families out of the ark.

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odour, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

Watch yourselves: this world is passing away. Remember how the Lord foretells in the Gospel that it will be the same on the last day as it was in the days of Noah: *People ate and drank, bought and sold and married right up to the day when Noah entered the ark; then the flood came and destroyed them all.*

The reason the ark took so long to build was to make unbelievers wake up. Noah worked on it for a hundred years, yet people were not awake enough to say: 'The man of God must have good reason for building this ark: it must mean that the human race will soon be destroyed.'

Once again the ark is being built, and those hundred years represent the days in which we live: this whole period of time was prefigured by that number of years. If those, then, who paid no heed when Noah was building the ark deserved to die, what do they deserve who are careless about their salvation while Christ is building his Church? There is as much difference between Noah and Christ as between servant and lord, or rather as between men and God, for the servant and his master are both men. And yet the people of those days have become a fearful example for their descendants because they did not believe the man who was building the ark.

Christ, who is God become man for us, is building his Church, the ark of which he has made himself the foundation. Every day incorruptible timber, that is, believers renouncing this world, is added to the structure of this ark, and still people say: *Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.* Answer them back, then, and say: 'Let us fast and pray for tomorrow we shall die.' Those who say *Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die* have no hope of rising again, but we who, thanks to the words of the Prophets and the preaching of Christ and the Apostles, believe in and proclaim the resurrection, we who hope for a life after death, must not lose courage or let our minds be dulled by dissipation and drunkenness. Let us rather be dressed for action with our lamps alight as we await the Lord's coming with all sobriety; let us fast and pray, not because tomorrow we shall die, but so that we may die without fear.

St Augustine, Sermon 361, 20-22 (PL 39:1610-1611); Word in Season VII.

Season of the Year / Week 02

Sunday of the Second Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(God's covenant with Noah and his offspring: Genesis 9:1-17)

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image. And you, be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it."

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth."

A READING FROM HOLY PAGANS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT BY JEAN CARDINAL DANIÉLOU

It is in connection with Noah that the momentous notion of a covenant appears for the first time in holy Scripture. The covenant is one of the essential characteristics, the most characteristic quality perhaps, of the God of the Bible. It signifies that God communicates certain good things to mankind and that this is in the nature of an irrevocable settlement. Thus it allows us to depend upon these benefits, not in virtue of any right we have to them but by reason of God's fidelity to his word.

The covenant made with Noah is connected with the cosmic religion and bears essentially upon God's fidelity in the order of the world. It is first of all a question of a covenant not with a particular people but with humanity as a whole and even with the whole cosmos. By this covenant God pledges himself not to destroy life upon the earth, whatever may be the sins of the human race. God's fidelity will be expressed particularly in the regularity of the laws of the cosmos, in the recurrent seasons: *All the days of the*

earth seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, night and day, shall not cease. This text is of prime importance. It establishes the right to see in the recurrent seasons the revelation of the fidelity of the living God. And this revelation, says Saint Paul, is given to all people among whom God has not left himself without testimony, giving them rain and fruitful seasons. This revelation constitutes the authentic basis of the pagan religions for which the recurrent seasons are the foundations of their worship.

By this covenant, God gives, as it were, an official document which bears witness to his pledge for all the generations to come. This document is the rainbow: as the paschal lamb is to be the memorial of the Mosaic covenant, as the holy Eucharist is the sacrament of the new eternal covenant replacing the ancient, so the rainbow is the memorial and sacred sign of the cosmic covenant which persists throughout the establishment of new and more perfect covenants.

The order of the world is no longer at the mercy of human sin. In the economy now beginning God will give temporal goods to sinners as well as to saints. The God of the covenant is not a God who will rain upon the just and will refuse rain to the unjust, but, in line with the very words of Christ, *he makes the sun to rise upon the good and bad, and rains upon the just and unjust.*

By the covenant with Noah a break is made in the connection between sin and punishment whereby salvation can be brought in. Thus the covenant is a manifestation of love. It reveals something new about God, for it is the first manifestation of redemptive love, while the former divine economy showed only creative love. What now appears is that long-suffering mercy with which God endures in order to save the sinner.

Jean Cardinal Daniélou, Holy Pagans of the Old Testament, 78-80.83; Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(The scattering of the human race: Genesis 11:1-26)

Now the whole earth had one language and few words. And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

These are the descendants of Shem. When Shem was a hundred years old, he became the father of Arpachshad two years after the flood; and Shem lived after the birth of Arpachshad five hundred years, and had other sons and daughters.

When Arpachshad had lived thirty-five years, he became the father of Shelah; and Arpachshad lived after the birth of Shelah four hundred and three years, and had other sons and daughters.

When Shelah had lived thirty years, he became the father of Eber; and Shelah lived after the birth of Eber four hundred and three years, and had other sons and daughters.

When Eber had lived thirty-four years, he became the father of Peleg; and Eber lived after the birth of Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and had other sons and daughters.

When Peleg had lived thirty years, he became the father of Reu; and Peleg lived after the birth of Reu two hundred and nine years, and had other sons and daughters.

When Reu had lived thirty-two years, he became the father of Serug; and Reu lived after the birth of Serug two hundred and seven years, and had other sons and daughters.

When Serug had lived thirty years, he became the father of Nahor; and Serug lived after the birth of Nahor two hundred years, and had other sons and daughters.

When Nahor had lived twenty-nine years, he became the father of Terah; and Nahor lived after the birth of Terah a hundred and nineteen years, and had other sons and daughters.

When Terah had lived seventy years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

A READING FROM A HOMILY BY ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

When the Apostles had heard the Lord's words, *Go and make disciples of all nations*, and were perplexed, not knowing where each of them should go or in what part of the world they should preach the word, the Holy Spirit came upon them in the form of tongues and assigned to each of them the place where he was to teach. By means of the language given to each, he made known, as though by a letter of credence, the boundaries of the region in which he was to have authority and give instruction.

That was one reason for the Spirit's coming in the form of tongues, but not the only one. It was also to remind us of something that happened in ancient times. When long ago men fell into such madness that they decided to build a tower reaching the sky, God thwarted their evil design by confusing their language. By alighting on them now in the form of tongues of fire the Holy Spirit united the divided world. Something happened that was new and contrary to all expectation: for as in the past languages had divided the world and frustrated an evil plan, so now languages unite the world and bring discord into harmony.

This then is why the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of tongues; but the reason they were tongues of fire was to destroy the thorns of sin running riot within us. For just as rich and fertile land that is not cultivated produces an abundant crop of thistles, so was it also with human nature. Created good by God, it was capable of producing the fruits of virtue, but because it had not been ploughed by faith or sown with the knowledge of God it brought forth thistles and the other weeds of wickedness. And as the ground is often completely overgrown by thistles and other weeds, so also the nobility and purity of our souls was quite invisible until the cultivator of human nature came and poured out on it the fire of the Spirit to cleanse it and make it capable of receiving the heavenly seed.

St John Chrysostom, Deuxième homilie sur Pentecôte 2 (Bereille 5.123-124); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(The call and blessing of Abraham: Genesis 12:1-9; 13:2-18)

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves."

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions which they had gathered, and the persons that they had gotten in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. Thence he removed to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

Now Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place where he had made an altar at the first; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD. And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together, and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites dwelt in the land.

Then Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen; for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left." And Lot lifted up his eyes, and saw that the Jordan valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar; this was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan valley, and Lot journeyed east; thus they separated from each other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, while Lot dwelt among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD.

The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see I will give to you and to your descendants for ever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the

earth, your descendants also can be counted. Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you." So Abram moved his tent, and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron; and there he built an altar to the LORD.

A READING FROM AGAINST EUNOMIUS BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

Let us, if we may, interpret the meaning of the sacred history, according to the profound insight of the Apostle, by transposing the story of Abraham to an allegorical level, even though we allow the validity of the literal meaning. Abraham at the divine command went forth from his own country and from his own kin, but his migration was such as befitted a Prophet in quest of the knowledge of God. Indeed, there is no physical migration, I think, that can prepare us for the knowledge of those things which are discovered by the spirit. But by going out of his native land, that is, out of himself, out of the realm of base and earthly thoughts, Abraham raised his mind as far as possible above the common limits of our human nature and abandoned the association which the soul has with the senses. Thus, unhindered by sense data, his mind was clear for the apprehension of the invisible, and neither the operation of his sight nor hearing could cause his mind to err because of appearances. And so, as the Apostle says, *walking by faith and not by sight*, Abraham was so raised in the grandeur of his knowledge that he understood the limitation of human perfection; he knew God insofar as it was possible for his weak and mortal faculties to attain him when strained to their capacity.

Hence the Lord of all creation is called the God of Abraham, almost as though he had been discovered by the Patriarch himself. And yet, what does the text say of him? That *he went out, not knowing whither he went*. He was not even allowed to know the name of him whom he loved; yet he was not ashamed or disturbed by this ignorance. Here, at any rate, was the sure path to his goal, in that he was not guided in his knowledge of God by anything merely on the surface; nor was his mind ever overwhelmed by what he had already learned so as to stop in its progress towards that which transcends all knowledge.

Abraham surpassed in understanding his native wisdom, that is, the philosophy of Chaldea, which rested merely in appearances; he went far beyond that which can be perceived by the senses, and from the beauty that he saw around him and from the harmony of the heavenly phenomena he gained a yearning to gaze upon the archetypal Beauty. So too, all the other qualities which are attributed to the divine nature, such as goodness, omnipresence, necessity, infinity and the like, Abraham understood them all as he advanced in thought; and he took all these as his provisions on his journey to heaven, using them as steps; and relying on what he had already found he stretched himself forth to the things that were ahead.

Abraham passed through all the reasoning that is possible to human nature about the divine attributes, and after he had purified his mind of all such concepts, he took hold of a faith that was unmixed and pure of any concept. Thus in his life we are taught that, for those who are advancing in the divine paths, it is only through faith that the questing soul can unite itself with the incomprehensible Godhead.

St Gregory of Nyssa, Contra Eunomium 3.2 (Jaeger 2.67-70); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(Abraham fights against the kings and is blessed by Melchisedech: Genesis 14:1-24)

In the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Ched-or-laomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, these kings made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). And all these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). Twelve years they had served Ched-or-laomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. In the fourteenth year Ched-or-laomer and the kings who were with him came and subdued the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, and the Horites in their Mount Seir as far as El-paran on the border of the wilderness; then they turned back and came to Enmishpat (that is, Kadesh), and subdued all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who dwelt in Hazazon-tamar. Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out, and they joined battle in the Valley of Siddim with Ched-or-laomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar, four kings against five. Now the Valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits; and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to the mountain. So the enemy took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way; they also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

Then one who had escaped came, and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner; these were allies of Abram. When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and routed them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. Then he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his goods, and the women and the people.

After his return from the defeat of Ched-or-laomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. And the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself." But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.' I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me; let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share."

A READING FROM ON THE SACRAMENTS BY ST AMBROSE

You have come to the altar; you have seen the sacraments placed on the altar. Perhaps someone may say: 'God gave the Jews so much grace; manna rained upon them from heaven; what more has he given his faithful; what more has he allotted to those he promised more?'

Accept what I say: that the mysteries of the Christians are earlier than those of the Jews and the sacraments of the Christians are more divine than those of the Jews. How? Accept this. When did the Jews begin? Surely from Judah, the great-grandson of Abraham, or, if you prefer, when they merited to receive the Law of God. Therefore, from the name of the great-grandson of Abraham they were called Jews in the time of holy Moses. Then God rained manna from heaven on the Jews when they murmured. But for you a figure of these sacraments came first: when Abraham gathered three hundred and eighteen servants born in his house and went to deliver his great-grandson from captivity. Then, when he returned as a victor, Melchisedech the priest met him and offered bread and wine. Who had the bread and wine? Abraham did not have it. But who had it? Melchisedech. He himself then is the author of the sacraments. Who is 'Melchisedech'? Who is this 'king of justice, king of peace'? Who, then, can be the king of justice other than the justice of God? Who is the peace of God, the wisdom of God? Only him who was able to say: *My peace I give to you, my peace I leave with you.*

Thus Melchisedech offered bread and wine. Who is Melchisedech? *Without father*, it says, *without mother*, it says, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life. The Epistle to the Hebrews has this. The Son of God was born by heavenly generation *without mother*, because he was born of the only God the Father; and again he was born *without father*, since he was born of a virgin. Melchisedech, also, was a priest in all respects *likened unto the Son of God*, to whom it is said: *You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech.*

Therefore, who is the author of the sacraments but the Lord Jesus? You perhaps say: 'My bread looks ordinary.' But that bread is only bread before the words of the sacraments; when consecration has been added, from bread it becomes the flesh of Christ. So let us confirm this, how it is possible that what is bread is the body of Christ. By whose words, then, does the consecration come about? By those of the Lord Jesus. For all the rest that come before are said by the priest: praise to God, prayer is offered, that is a petition for the people, for kings, and for all the others. When it comes to performing the venerable sacrament, though, the priest uses not his own words, but the words of Christ. Thus the words of Christ performs this sacrament.

Therefore, to reply to you, there was no body of Christ before the consecration, but after the consecration I say to you that now there is the body of Christ. He himself spoke and it was made; he himself commanded and it was created.

St Ambrose, de Sacramentis 4.3-4 FoC 44 (1963), tr. Deferrari.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(God's covenant with Abraham who believed: Genesis 15:1-21)

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, thou hast given me no offspring; and a slave born in my house will be my heir." And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; your own son shall be your heir." And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.

And he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a she-goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." And he brought him all these, cut them in two, and laid each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon him. Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON GENESIS OF DIDYMUS THE BLIND

As he contemplated the wonderful things of God, Abraham was struck with fear, the fear that belongs to the perfect. It will be noted that the ecstasy came upon him *towards sunset*. The text suggests by this a progression, because the present day has passed by for Abraham so that further progress might follow. Thus Abraham was given a blessing in the words, *I will fill you with the length of days*, a blessing that promised him not longevity but, as is quite clear, further advances in illumination.

An ecstasy then fell upon him, not the ecstasy that resembles a loss of reason but that of wonder, the thrill of passing from visible to invisible things. When Abraham then had been transported out of himself, a *dark fear* fell upon him, dark not by participation in darkness but in the sense of obscurity, of something whose meaning is not immediately evident. Being a great fear, it is not the kind that happens to average men. It is indeed true that the contemplation and grasp of supernatural truths produce, even among great people, a divine vertigo and fear, and it is with some trepidation that they apply themselves to such things.

What is clearly stated in the text can be expounded as follows. When the sun was already near setting, a flame emerged, and there appeared a smoking oven and fiery torches *that passed between the two parts of the divided animals*, burning and lighting up the place, to allow the Patriarch to see what was happening and to reveal in a more divine manner the mysteries to be searched out. It should be noted that fire did not appear only after the covenant had been made. The gift of the Law through Moses also took place itself in the midst of a fire. What is suggested here is perhaps something like that. As the Law contains rewards and punishments, it was given in the midst of fire to indicate that it brings burning to some and illumination to others. So too here, torches and smoke appeared; now smoke is the consequence of a fire that has been lit. Moreover, the flame had appeared first. We conclude, then, that one who is defining what is to be done and what is not to be done in a matter this difficult requires the light of God and also fear, symbolised by the furnace, so as to accomplish everything in accordance with right reason.

When the torches had passed over the divided animals, the covenant was made. God said to Abraham, *To your descendants I will give this land*, and he described in detail how far the land extended in each direction. But, through an anagogical transposition, we must understand that this land is given to the holy man's spiritual posterity. The Saviour too promises it to those who practise gentleness. This is a promise that applies to the true children and not to all who descend from Abraham, for *it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, for the children of the promise of reckoned as descendants*. It is *the one who does the works of Abraham* who is in fact his child.

Didymus the Blind, In Gen. 230, 233-4 (SC 244:188-90, 196-200); ACC 2 (2002) tr. Sheridan.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(Ishmael is born: Genesis 16:1-16)

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar; and Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my maid; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. So, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my maid to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.

The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, maid of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai." The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her." The angel of the LORD also said to her, "I will so greatly multiply your descendants that they cannot be numbered for multitude." And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Behold, you are with child, and shall bear a son; you shall call his name Ishmael; because the LORD has given heed to your affliction. He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against every man and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen." So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "Thou art a God of seeing"; for she said, "Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?" Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered.

And Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

A READING FROM THE GLAPHYRA ON GENESIS BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

As in a concrete image, we see here foreshadowed the fact that once the Emmanuel has appeared and his mystery has been shown to the world, the types of the Mosaic cult necessarily disappear. They give way to the evangelical teachings, to the better and more perfect commandments.

What is the image of which I am speaking? It is this: Sarah had not had children, and because of this Hagar, after having given birth to Ishmael, began to show arrogant contempt for her owner, the free woman. Sarah was unable to bear that arrogance and began to mistreat the Egyptian woman. The latter fled from the house and lost her way in the desert. An angel from heaven asked her where she was going and where she had come from. She replied, *I am fleeing from a mistress, Sarah*. And the holy angel replied,

Return to your mistress, and humble yourself under her hands. She was ordered then, by the voice of the angel, not to depart from the free woman – from instruction, that is, which summons us to the dignity of free persons. She was ordered to humble herself instead under the free woman’s hands.

Worship according to the Law, which takes place through images and types, is as it were the servant of the teachings of the Gospel. In it, in an obscure manner, the beauty of the truth is revealed. At this point in time, the Law, which was once established by Moses through the ministry of angels, receives an order from the voice of an angel to bend the neck to the evangelical oracles and to bow and yield, even if unwillingly, to the free woman. This, I maintain, is the spiritual interpretation of Hagar’s imposed submission to the rule of Sarah. We should remember, moreover, that even the venerable Paul sees Hagar and Sarah as prefiguring the two Testaments: *The one, who bears children for slavery, corresponds to the present Jerusalem, and the other – Sarah – bears children who are destined for the dignity of the free.*

St Cyril of Alexandria, Glaphyrorum in Genesim, 3.79.9 (PG 69: 132-33); ACC 2 (2002) tr. Sheridan.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(The covenant between God and Abraham with the sign of circumcision: Genesis 17:1-17)

When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. And I will give to you, and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He that is eight days old among you shall be circumcised; every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house, or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he that is born in your house and he that is bought with your money, shall be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her; I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" And Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live in thy sight!" God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year."

When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all the slaves born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was

circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised; and all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON GENESIS BY ORIGEN

Many responses are given to Abraham by God, but they are not all delivered to one and the same man. For some are given to Abram and some to Abraham, that is, some are expressed after the change of name and others while he was still known by his name given at birth. First of all, before the change of name, that oracle is delivered to Abram by God which says: *Go out from your country and your kindred and from your father's house*, and the rest. But no order is given in this about the covenant of God, no order about circumcision. For it was not possible while he was still Abram and was bearing the name of his physical birth to receive the covenant of God and the mark of circumcision. But when *he went out from his country and his kindred* then responses of a more sacred kind are delivered to him. First God says to him: *You shall no longer be called Abram, but Abraham shall be your name*. Then at once he both received the covenant of God and accepted circumcision as a sign of faith, something he could not accept while he was still in his father's house, still in the relationship of flesh and while he was still called Abram.

Since, therefore, we have reached these passages I wish to enquire if the omnipotent God, who holds dominion of heaven and earth, when he wished to make a covenant with a holy man put the main point of such an important matter in this, that the foreskin of his flesh and of his future progeny should be circumcised. *For my covenant*, the text says, *shall be upon your flesh*. Was this what *the Lord of heaven and earth* was conferring in the gift of the eternal covenant to him whom alone he had chosen from all men?

We, therefore, instructed by the Apostle Paul, say that just as many other things were made in the figure and image of future truth, so also that circumcision of flesh was bearing the form of spiritual circumcision. Hear, therefore, how Paul, *a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth* teaches the Church of Christ about the mystery of circumcision. *Behold*, he says, *the mutilation* – speaking about the Jews who are mutilated in the flesh – *for we*, he says, *are the circumcision, who serve God in spirit and have no confidence in the flesh*. This is one opinion of Paul about circumcision. Hear also another: *For he is not a Jew who is so outwardly; nor is that circumcision which is outwardly in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly with circumcision of the heart in the spirit, not in the letter*. Does it not seem more appropriate to you to speak of a circumcision like this among the saints and friends of God than to speak of a pruning of the flesh?

But also each of our members must be said to be circumcised if they are devoted to the service of God's commands. This is truly the *mark of faith* which contains the agreement of the eternal covenant between God and man.

Origen, Homilies on Genesis, 3.3-4, 6; FoC 71 (1981) tr. Heine.

Season of the Year | Week 03

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(The promise of Isaac's birth and Abraham's intercession for Sodom: Genesis 18:1-33)

And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth, and said, "My lord, if I have found favour in your sight, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, while I fetch a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on – since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes." And Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds, and milk, and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent." The LORD said, "I will surely return to you in the spring, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, in the spring, and Sarah shall have a son." But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "No, but you did laugh."

Then the men set out from there, and they looked toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to set them on their way. The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him? No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." Then the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know."

So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom; but Abraham still stood before the LORD. Then Abraham drew near, and said, "Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake." Abraham answered, "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Wilt thou

destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." Again he spoke to him, and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." He said, "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

A READING FROM THE SERMONS OF ST CAESARIUS OF ARLES

God appeared to Abraham, it said, as he sat at the entrance of his tent near the oak of Mamre. Behold three men stood at a distance from him, and he went to meet them, and so forth. Notice, brethren, how God appeared to Abraham, and how he appeared to Lot. The three men came to Abraham and stood over him; two came to Lot and stayed in the street. Consider, brethren, whether these things did not happen through the dispensation of the Holy Spirit according to their merits. Indeed, Lot was far inferior to Abraham; if he had not been, he would not have merited to be separated from Abraham, nor would the dwelling of Sodom have pleased him. Now the three men came to Abraham at noon, while the other two came to Lot in the evening for this reason: Lot was unable to endure the power of the noonday sun, but Abraham could stand its full brightness.

Three men came to Abraham, and stood over him. Observe how it is that they come upon him, but not against him. He had subjected himself to God's will, and for this reason God is said to stand over him. *They stood over him*; not against him to repulse him, but over him for protection. He received the three men and served them loaves out of three measures. Why is this, brethren, unless it means the mystery of the Trinity? He also served a bullock; not a tough one, but a *good, tender one*. Now what is so good and tender as he who humbled himself even unto death? He himself is that fatted calf which the father killed upon receiving his repentant son. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son*. For this reason Abraham went to meet the three men and adored them as one. In the fact that he saw three, as was already said, he understood the mystery of the Trinity; but since he adored them as one, he recognized that there is one God in the three persons.

Now where did this happen? *Near the oak of Mamre*, which in Latin is interpreted as 'vision' or 'discernment'. The vision and discernment of Abraham delighted the Lord; Abraham was clean of heart, so he could see God. Therefore, in such a place and in such a heart the Lord can have his feast. Of this vision our Lord spoke to the Jews in the Gospel when he said: *Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day, he saw it and was glad*. He saw my day, he says, because he recognised the mystery of the Trinity. He saw the Father as day, the Son as day, the Holy Spirit as day, and in these three, one day. Thus, the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God, and these three are one God. For individually

each person is complete God. Moreover, because of the unity of substance, in those three measures of flour the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is not unfittingly understood. However, this can also be taken in another way by understanding Sarah as the Church; the three measures of flour then are faith, hope, and charity. In these three virtues all the fruits of the Church are contained, so that if a man merits to possess the three within himself, he can with security receive the entire Trinity at the banquet of his heart.

St Caesarius of Arles, Sermon 83.2, 4-5; FoC (1963) tr. Mueller.

Monday of the Third Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(The destruction of Sodom: Genesis 19:1-17, 23-29)

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening; and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed himself with his face to the earth, and said, "My lords, turn aside, I pray you, to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the street." But he urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Behold, I have two daughters who have not known man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." But they said, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came to sojourn, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door. But the men put forth their hands and brought Lot into the house to them, and shut the door. And they struck with blindness the men who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves groping for the door.

Then the men said to Lot, "Have you any one else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or any one you have in the city, bring them out of the place; for we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it." So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, "Up, get out of this place; for the LORD is about to destroy the city." But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city." But he lingered; so the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him forth and set him outside the city. And when they had brought them forth, they said, "Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley; flee to the hills, lest you be consumed." The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar.

Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. But Lot's wife behind him looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD; and he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley, and beheld, and lo, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace.

So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt.

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST CLEMENT OF ROME TO THE CORINTHIANS

Dear friends, let us obey the sovereign, glorious will of God. Let us cast ourselves in entreaty upon his mercy and kindness, and turn back once more to his compassion. Let us have done with our vain struggles, our discords and the jealousy which leads to death, and direct our gaze instead towards the men who perfectly served his glorious majesty.

Look at Enoch, for example: he was found righteous in his obedience and was taken away by God, so that no trace was ever found of his death. Noah too was found faithful. His ministry was to be the herald of rebirth, for through him the Lord saved all the living creatures which agreed to enter the ark together. Abraham, whom God called his 'friend', proved his loyalty by his obedience to God's orders. He forsook his country, his kindred and his father's house out of obedience, so that leaving behind a restricted homeland, an obscure family and a little house he might inherit the promises of God. For God had said to him, *Come away from your land, your kindred and your father's house into a land which I am going to show you. I will make you into a mighty nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, and you shall be blessed. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you, and all the races of the earth will be blessed in you.* And again at the time of his separation from Lot God said to him: *Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are standing toward the north and the south, to the sunrise and to the sea, for I am going to give all the land you can see to you and to your descendants forever. I will make your descendants as many as the earth's grains of sand; if anyone is able to number the grains of sand on the ground, then he will be able to count your descendants too.* Elsewhere Scripture tells us, *God took Abraham outside and said to him, 'Look up to heaven and count the stars, if it is in your power to reckon them. That is what your posterity will be like.'* Abraham believed God, and this was accounted to him as righteousness. In view of his faith and his hospitality a son was granted to him in his old age, and in obedience he offered the boy as a sacrifice to God on one of the mountains that he had shown him.

Lot was rescued from Sodom because of his hospitality and his piety, when the whole surrounding countryside was punished by fire and brimstone. In this way the Lord made it dear that he does not abandon those who hope in him. But he does consign the rebellious to chastisement and torment; a sign of this was given when Lot's wife, who had indeed left Sodom with her husband but was inconstant in mind and out of harmony with him, was turned into a pillar of salt. So she remains to this day, as a reminder to all of us that wavers who doubt God's power are condemned to stand as a warning sign for all generations.

St Clement of Rome, Corinthians, 9.1-4; 10.1-7; 11.1-2 (SC 167:114-118); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(Isaac is born: Genesis 21:1-21)

The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. 2 And Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; every one who hears will laugh over me." And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

And the child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac." And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the lad and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your descendants be named. And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring." So Abraham rose early in the morning, and 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. And she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went, and sat down over against him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Let me not look upon the death of the child." And as she sat over against him, the child lifted up his voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not; for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him fast with your hand; for I will make him a great nation." Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink. And God was with the lad, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON GENESIS BY ORIGEN

Abraham rejoiced and *gave a great banquet on the day that Isaac was weaned*. Sometime later Isaac was playing, playing with Ishmael. Sarah was indignant at the son of a slave playing with the son of a free woman. Thinking that these games would be her ruin, she gave Abraham this advice: *Throw out the slave and her son, she said. The son of a slave shall not share the inheritance with my son Isaac.*

There is no need for me to explain how this is to be understood, for this was done by the Apostle when he said: You who read the Law, do you not hear the Law? For it is written

that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and the other by a free woman. The son of the slave was born in the ordinary course of nature; the son of the free woman was born as the result of a promise. What do I mean? Was Isaac not born in the ordinary course of nature? Did Sarah not give birth to him? Was he not circumcised? When he played with Ishmael, did he not play like any other boy? Indeed, this is what is marvellous in the Apostle's interpretation. Events which undoubtedly took place in the ordinary way he called allegories, in order to teach us how to understand other passages, especially those in which the historical narrative seems to reveal nothing worthy of the divine Law.

Ishmael, then, was born the son of a slave, in the ordinary course of nature, but Isaac's birth of the free woman was not an ordinary birth, but the result of a promise. The Apostle says of the two women that *Hagar bore children into slavery*, a carnal people, but Sarah, who was free, brought forth a people which is not carnal but which has been called in freedom, the freedom whereby Christ has made it free.

But let us see what the Apostle adds to this by way of explanation. *But as the son who was born according to nature persecuted the son born through the Spirit, so it is now.* For you also, if you live a worldly life, are a child of Hagar and therefore an enemy of those who live by the promptings of the Spirit. If you have within you the fruits of the Spirit, which are joy, love, peace, and patience, you can be Isaac, the child of the free woman, born not in the course of nature but in fulfilment of the promise. If the words of the Apostle, *but you are not carnal but spiritual, if the Spirit of God dwells in you*, can fittingly be applied to you, then you also have been born not in the ordinary way but in a spiritual way in fulfilment of the promise, and you will be heir to the promises according to the text: *heirs indeed of God and co-heirs of Christ.* You will not be the co-heir of the son born in the course of nature, but the co-heir of Christ, for *even if we once knew Christ in the flesh, that is not how we know him now.*

Origen, Homilies on Genesis, 7.2 (SC 7 b i s:196-202); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(The sacrifice of Isaac; Genesis 22:1-19)

After these things God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; and he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the ass; I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you."

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. 10 Then Abraham put forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place The LORD will provide; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice." So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beer-sheba.

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON GENESIS BY ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. What love for God he had! What strength of mind! What intense devotion that enabled him to overcome his

natural human feelings! *He took the knife to kill his son.* Which should amaze me, astonish me more – the steadfastness of the father or the obedience of the son? For the boy made no resistance or objection, but submitting to whatever his father did, he lay like a lamb on the altar, silently waiting for his father to strike.

However, once the interior sacrifice had been made, without any omission, the good Lord showed that his command was given not from any desire for the boy's death, but only to reveal the holy Patriarch's virtue. Therefore, accepting the Patriarch's intention of making the complete sacrifice, he rewarded the holy man for his resolve by showing his own goodness.

The angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said: 'Abraham, Abraham! Do not lay your hand on the boy or do him any harm.' Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by his horns in a thicket. He went and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of Isaac his son.

All this was a foreshadowing of the cross, which is why Christ said to the Jews: *Your father Abraham rejoiced to think that he would see my day, he saw it and was glad.* How did he see it when he lived so long before? Through a symbol and foreshadowing. As the sheep was then offered for Isaac, so the spiritual lamb was offered for the whole world. It was only fitting for the reality to be portrayed beforehand by a symbol – see how faithfully everything was prefigured. Then there was an only son; now there is an only Son. Then there was a beloved and legitimate son; now too there is a beloved and legitimate Son, for God says in the Gospel: *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.* Isaac was delivered up by his father as a burnt offering; Jesus too was delivered up by his Father, as Paul declares when he says: *He did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all. How then can he fail to give us every other gift as well?*

So much for the foreshadowing: the reality far surpasses it. For this spiritual lamb that was offered for the whole world has cleansed the whole world. He has freed us from error and brought us back to the truth. He has made earth heaven, not by changing its physical composition, but simply by showing us how to lead a heavenly life here on earth. Thanks to him the worship of demons has come to an end. Men no longer adore sticks and stones; creatures endowed with reason do not bow down before senseless objects. On the contrary, all error has taken flight, and the light of truth has illumined the whole world.

St John Chrysostom, Hom. in Gen., 47.3-4 (PG 54:432-434); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(Abraham sends a servant to find a wife for Isaac: Genesis 24:1-270)

Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac." The servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land; must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?" Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there. The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your descendants I will give this land,' he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there." So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.

Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water. And he said, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, grant me success today, I pray thee, and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Let the maiden to whom I shall say, 'Pray let down your jar that I may drink', and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels – let her be the one whom thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac. By this I shall know that thou hast shown steadfast love to my master.'"

Before he had done speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her water jar upon her shoulder. The maiden was very fair to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, and filled her jar, and came up. Then the servant ran to meet her, and said, "Pray give me a little water to drink from your jar." She said, "Drink, my lord"; and she quickly let down her jar upon her hand, and gave him a drink. When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw for your camels also, until they have done drinking." So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the LORD had prospered his journey or not.

When the camels had done drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels, and said, "Tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to lodge in?" She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." She added, "We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in." The man

bowed his head and worshiped the LORD, and said, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the LORD has led me in the way to the house of my master’s kinsmen.”

A READING FROM A HOMILY BY BISHOP JACOB OF SARUGH

There are symbols hidden in the Scriptures for those who know how to interpret them, and great wealth to be found by those who immerse themselves in these texts. The inspired Prophets were artists who drew portraits of the Son of God, and they used symbolism to veil his beauty in their writings. Let those who would see the Son spiritually open the Bible: there, in his splendour, they will find him.

Thus the fiancée, whom the old servant Eliezer presented to Isaac as his bride, represents the church of the nations. Isaac himself is a symbol of the Son of God, our Lord, the incorruptible Victim. For anyone who seeks to understand, Eliezer symbolises John the Baptist, who also brought about the wedding of his Master through water. Rebecca’s wells represent and foretell the baptism that prepares the bride for her marriage with the Son of God. Abraham is the symbol of the true Father who gave his Son a mysterious bride, chosen from far off among the nations, to make her heir of his wealth.

You who have understanding, take the book, study it, and recognise the image of the Son hidden in these texts. When one goes over the broad outlines of this history, it is the path of our Lord that stands out. When you listen to the Bible being read, open your ears to the two ways of understanding it; develop the art of distinguishing the two levels of meaning. When the history of Isaac is related literally, learn how to see in it another figurative meaning.

Thus the Son of God used water to celebrate his marriage. By water he wedded the Church and made her his own. By baptism the Bridegroom and the bride were united; they were two and they became only one in the one Spirit, as it is written. It is toward these symbols that Eliezer speeds when he unites the daughter of pagans to the son of promise. The way he travels is a foreshadowing of the true and definitive way opened by John the Baptist. The wedding of Rebecca, a virgin of dazzling beauty, prefigures the spiritual wedding of the Church.

Bishop Jacob of Sarugh, Hom. sur les fiancailles de Rebecca (L’Orient Syrien 3.324-326); Word in Season VII)

Friday of the Third Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(Abraham's servant finds a wife and leads her back to Isaac: Genesis 24:32-41, 49-67)

So the man came into the house; and Laban ungirded the camels, and gave him straw and provender for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him.

Then food was set before him to eat; but he said, "I will not eat until I have told my errand." He said, "Speak on."

So he said, "'I am Abraham's servant. The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, menservants and maidservants, camels and asses. And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and to him he has given all that he has. My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell; but you shall go to my father's house and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son.' I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me.' But he said to me, 'The LORD, before whom I walk, will send his angel with you and prosper your way; and you shall take a wife for my son from my kindred and from my father's house; then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my kindred; and if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.'

"Now then, if you will deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand or to the left."

Then Laban and Bethuel answered, "The thing comes from the LORD; we cannot speak to you bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before you, take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has spoken."

When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the LORD. And the servant brought forth jewellery of silver and of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. And he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they arose in the morning, he said, "Send me back to my master." Her brother and her mother said, "Let the maiden remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go." But he said to them, "Do not delay me, since the LORD has prospered my way; let me go that I may go to my master." They said, "We will call the maiden, and ask her." And they called Rebekah, and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will go." So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men. And they blessed Rebekah, and said to her, "Our sister, be the mother of thousands of ten thousands; and may your descendants possess the gate of those who hate them!" Then Rebekah and her maids arose, and rode upon the camels and followed the man; thus the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.

Now Isaac had come from Beer-lahai-roi, and was dwelling in the Negeb. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and

behold, there were camels coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she alighted from the camel, and said to the servant, "Who is the man yonder, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "'It is my master.'" So she took her veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Then Isaac brought her into the tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST CAESARIUS OF ARLES

Now, dearly beloved, let us briefly see, as far as we can, what this story means. When blessed Abraham directed his servant to take a wife for his son, he was an image of God the Father, just as he had been when he offered the boy as a holocaust. His servant signified the words of prophecy and so Abraham sent him into a distant land to take a wife for his son, because God the Father intended to send his prophetic word throughout the world to search for the Catholic Church as a spouse for his only-begotten Son. Just as through Abraham's servant a bride is brought for blessed Isaac, so by his prophetic word the Church of the Gentiles is invited to Christ the true bridegroom from distant lands. But where is found that spouse who was to be joined to Christ? Where, unless near the water? It is true, dearly beloved: If the Church had not come to the waters of Baptism, she would not have been joined to Christ. For this reason Rebecca found Abraham's servant at the well, and the Church finds Christ at the sacrament of Baptism.

As the Scriptures say: *Toward evening blessed Isaac went out in the field to meditate.* That field contained a figure of the world. Isaac went out into the field because Christ was to come into the world; Isaac toward the evening of the day, Christ at the end of the world. *He went out, it says, to meditate.* Isaac went to meditate in the field because Christ came into the world to fight against the devil, that he might justly conquer him while being unjustly killed by him, so that by dying he might destroy death, and by rising again bring life to all who believe. Moreover, just as Rebecca was bodily joined to Isaac, so the Church was spiritually joined to Christ, receiving at present the Blood of her Spouse as a precious dowry, and later to receive the dowry of his kingdom.

Therefore, Isaac took Rebecca *and led her into the tent of his mother.* Christ also took the Church and established it in place of the synagogue. As by infidelity the synagogue became separated from God and died, so by faith the Church was joined to Christ and received life. As the Apostle says, by pride *the branches of the olive tree have been broken off*, in order that the lowly wild olive may be engrafted. For this reason Isaac took Rebecca, *and because he loved her he was consoled for the loss of his mother.* Christ took the Church and loved her so much that by this very love he tempered the grief which was occasioned by the death of his mother, the synagogue. Moreover, dearly beloved, because from us Christ the Lord prepared for himself a spiritual spouse which, as I said, he redeemed with his precious Blood, therefore, with his help, each one of us should not only guard the benefits conferred upon him by divine gift, but should strive to increase them. Truly, it is right that our spouse, *fairer in beauty than the sons of men*, should find in us no sins to offend the eyes of his majesty. To him, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is honour and might forever. Amen.

St Caesarius of Arles, Sermon 85.3-5; FoC 47 (1963) tr. Mueller.

Saturday of the Third Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(The death of Abraham. Esau and Jacob are born: Genesis 25:7-11, 19-34)

These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, a hundred and seventy-five years. Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. Isaac and Ishmael his sons buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre, the field which Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with Sarah his wife. After the death of Abraham God blessed Isaac his son. And Isaac dwelt at Beer-lahai-roi.

These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean. And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. The children struggled together within her; and she said, "It is thus, why do I live?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples, born of you, shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger." When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. The first came forth red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came forth, and his hand had taken hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

When the boys grew up, Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he ate of his game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Once when Jacob was boiling pottage, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red pottage, for I am famished!" (Therefore his name was called Edom.) Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?"

Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

All who have ever been saints belong to the same Church. You can't say that our father Abraham doesn't belong to us, just because he lived before Christ was born of the virgin; after all, the Apostle says that we are *the children of Abraham* by imitating Abraham's faith. If then we are admitted to the Church by imitating him, are we going to exclude the man himself from the Church? It is this Church that was represented by Rebecca the wife of Isaac. It is this Church that was also to be found in the holy Prophets who understood the Old Testament, realising that its material promises signified something

spiritual. If it was spiritual, then all spiritual people belong to Isaac's younger son, because first comes the material one and afterward the spiritual.

The reason why the elder son is called Esau is that no one becomes spiritual without first having been 'of the flesh' or materialistic. But if they persist in *the wisdom of the flesh*, they will always be Esau. If, however, they become spiritual, they will then be the younger son. Well before Isaac blessed his sons, Esau had longed to have the lentils Jacob had cooked. And Jacob said to him, *Give me your birthright, and I will give you the lentils I have cooked*. He sold his right as firstborn to his younger brother. He went off with a temporary satisfaction, the other went off with a permanent honour. So those in the Church who are slaves to temporary pleasures and satisfactions eat lentils; lentils which Jacob certainly cooked, but which Jacob did not eat. Idols, you see, flourished more than anywhere else in Egypt; lentils are the food of Egypt; so lentils represent all the errors of the Gentiles.

Now apply this. You have a Christian people. But among this Christian people it is the ones who belong to Jacob that have the birthright or right of the firstborn. Those, however, who are materialistic in life, materialistic in faith, materialistic in hope, materialistic in love, still belong to the Old Testament, not yet to the new. They still share the lot of Esau, not yet in the blessing of Jacob. The mother, you see, gave birth to both sons; she bore one hairy, the other smooth. Hairiness stands for sins, smoothness for mildness, that is, for cleanness from sins. Just as Rebecca bore two sons, so two are begotten in the Church's womb, one hairy, the other smooth. There are people, after all, who even after baptism are unwilling to give up their sins, and want to do the same things as they used to do before. For instance, if they used to swear to lies, they want to perjure themselves still; if they used to cheat the simple, they want to go on cheating still; if they used to fornicate, to get drunk, they are doing the same things as much as ever. There is Esau for you, born hairy. But what does Jacob do? He is told by his mother: *Go and let your father bless you*. And he says, *I'm afraid, I won't go*. There are people in the Church today who are afraid to mix with sinners, in case they are contaminated by consorting with sinners within the communion of the Church - and so they perish through heresies and schisms.

St Augustine, Sermon 4.11-12, 14; WSA (1990) tr. Hill.

Season of the Year | Week 04

Sunday of the Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(Jacob is blessed by Isaac: Genesis 27:1-29)

When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau his older son, and said to him, "My son"; and he answered, "Here I am." He said, "Behold, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me, and prepare for me savoury food, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat; that I may bless you before I die."

Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. "I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, 'Bring me game, and prepare for me savoury food, that I may eat it, and bless you before the LORD before I die.' Now therefore, my son, obey my word as I command you. Go to the flock, and fetch me two good kids, that I may prepare from them savoury food for your father, such as he loves; and you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies." But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing." His mother said to him, "Upon me be your curse, my son; only obey my word, and go, fetch them to me." So he went and took them and brought them to his mother; and his mother prepared savoury food, such as his father loved. Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her older son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son; and the skins of the kids she put upon his hands and upon the smooth part of his neck; and she gave the savoury food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.

So he went in to his father, and said, "My father"; and he said, "Here I am; who are you, my son?" Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your first-born. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that you may bless me." But Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" He answered, "Because the LORD your God granted me success." Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not." So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, who felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him.

He said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He answered, "I am." Then he said, "Bring it to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you." So he brought it to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank. Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near and kiss me, my son." So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said, "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed! May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be every one who curses you, and blessed be every one who blesses you!"

A READING FROM THE GLAPHYRA ON GENESIS BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

Isaac's words were not completely fulfilled in Jacob, they are fulfilled in Christ and in those who are justified through faith, who are also made sons according to the promise in Isaac. The words of the blessing, I believe, signify the sweetness of the spiritual perfume in Christ, like that of a garden or a plentiful field spreading a sweet and beautiful perfume from its spring flowers. And so Christ described himself to us in the Song of Songs: *I am a flower of the field, the lily of the valleys*. He was actually a lily and a rose born of the earth for the sake of humanity. Since he did not know sin, he was the most divine of all those who inhabited the whole world and produced a perfume through his works. For this reason Scripture compares Christ with a field blessed by God, and with very good reason, because he is the perfume of the knowledge of God the Father. As the divine Paul says, *But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him*.

These things therefore fit with Christ and also fit quite reasonably with the new people: *May God give you of the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine*. The dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth is the Word, was given to us by the Father, together with the participation through the Spirit, and therefore we were made sharers in the divine nature through him. And we also received plenty of grain and wine, that is, strength and happiness. In fact, it is said truly, *Bread strengthens the heart of man, and wine makes glad his heart*. Bread is the symbol of spiritual strength, wine of the physical. They are given to those who are in Christ through him. How else are we made stable and firm in piety and immovable and aware to think the right things?

Afterward the power of blessing is transferred again to the Emmanuel himself. *And let nations serve you, and princes bow down to you, and be lord of your brother*. The Emmanuel was called *the firstborn* when he became so with reference to us, *among many brothers*. But for this reason we must not forget that he is God and Lord of the universe. We worship him as God, and he has reigned as God over those who were called from the brothers through grace. *Who in the heavens shall be compared to the Lord among the sons of God?* Therefore the Emmanuel has reigned as God over those who were received into the brotherhood, and to him *every knee should bow in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*. This is the blessing of Jacob, whose strength refers to the Emmanuel himself and to those who are justified in the faith.

St Cyril of Alexandria, Glaphyrorum in Genesim, 3.5 (PG 69.172-173); ACC 2 (2002) tr. Sheridan.

Monday of the Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(Esau is supplanted: Genesis 27:30-45)

As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from his hunting. He also prepared savoury food, and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, "Let my father arise, and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me." His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am your son, your first-born, Esau." Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, "Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him? – yes, and he shall be blessed." When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!" But he said, "Your brother came with guile, and he has taken away your blessing." Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright; and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." Then he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" Isaac answered Esau, "Behold, I have made him your lord, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?" Esau said to his father, "Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.

Then Isaac his father answered him: "Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be, and away from the dew of heaven on high. By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you break loose you shall break his yoke from your neck."

Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob." But the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah; so she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said to him, "Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself by planning to kill you. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; arise, flee to Laban my brother in Haran, and stay with him a while, until your brother's fury turns away; until your brother's anger turns away, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send, and fetch you from there. Why should I be bereft of you both in one day?"

A READING FROM ON JACOB AND THE BLESSED LIFE BY ST AMBROSE

After Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, the elder brother arrived. By this it is revealed that the Kingdom was predestined to be bestowed on the Church rather than on the synagogue, but had secretly entered the synagogue so that sin might abound and, when sin had abounded, that grace might also abound. At the same time, it makes it clear that the candidate for the kingdom of heaven must be quick to carry off the blessing for which he has been recommended. On this account the younger son was not blamed by his father but praised, for Isaac says, *Your brother came deceitfully and received your blessing*. For deceit is good when the plunder is without reproach. Now the plunder of

piety is without reproach, because *from the days of John the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent bear it away*. Our fathers celebrated the Pasch in haste and ate the Lamb in haste with no delay, and the holy Joseph summoned his brother Benjamin by a holy fabrication and deceit.

Nevertheless, Esau brought it about by his demands and entreaties that he did receive a blessing, but such a blessing as was in agreement with the earlier one, namely that he should serve his brother. Indeed, the one who could not command the other ought to have served him, in order to be ruled by the one who was more wise. It was not the role of the holy Patriarch to deliver his own son to the ignoble state of slavery. But since he had two sons, one without moderation and the other moderate and wise, in order to take care for both like a good father, he placed the moderate son over the son without moderation, and he ordered the foolish one to obey the one who was wise. For the foolish man cannot of his own accord be a disciple of virtue or persevere in his intent, because the fool changes like the moon. Isaac was right to deny Esau freedom to make his own choices; else he might drift like a ship in the waves without a helmsman. But Isaac made him subject to his brother according to that which is written, *The unwise man is the slave of the wise man*. Therefore the Patriarch was right to make him subject, so that he might amend his dispositions under rule and guidance. And so Isaac says, *By your sword shall you live; you shall serve your brother*, for holiness has mastery over cruelty and kindness excels over emotions that are harsh.

Every man who does not possess the authority conferred by a clear conscience is a slave; whoever is ensnared by pleasure or seduced by desires or provoked by wrath or felled by grief is a slave. In fact, every passion is servile, because *everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin*, and, what is worse, he is the slave of many sins. The man who is subject to vices has sold himself to many masters, so that he is scarcely permitted to go out of servitude. But the man who is the master over his own will, judge over his counsels, and who restrains the longing of his bodily passions, is assuredly a free man. For the man who does all things wisely and in complete accord with his will is the only truly free man.

St Ambrose, On Jacob and the Blessed Life, 3.10-12; FoC 65 (1971) tr. McHugh.

Tuesday of the Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(Jacob's flight and his dream: Genesis 28:10 – 29:14)

Jacob left Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place, and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants; and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you." Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place; and I did not know it." And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone which he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that thou givest me I will give the tenth to thee."

Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east. As he looked, he saw a well in the field, and lo, three flocks of sheep lying beside it; for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large, and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well, and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place upon the mouth of the well.

Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where do you come from?" They said, "We are from Haran." He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" They said, "We know him." He said to them, "Is it well with him?" They said, "'It is well; and see, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep!" He said, "Behold, it is still high day, it is not time for the animals to be gathered together; water the sheep, and go, pasture them." But they said, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep."

While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep; for she kept them. Now when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. Then Jacob kissed Rachel,

and wept aloud. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son; and she ran and told her father.

When Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month.

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON PSALM 44 BY ST AUGUSTINE

Jacob the Patriarch set a stone under his head and while he slept he saw the heavens open and a ladder stretching from heaven to earth, and angels ascending and descending. After seeing this, he woke up, anointed the stone, and departed. In this stone he understood Christ, that is why he anointed it. And this was done symbolically, and then he left. For he did not anoint the stone, and keep going back there to worship, and to offer sacrifices there. What happened was this: expression was given to a mystery. Take a look at the stone: *The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.* And it is because Christ is the head of man that the stone is placed at the head. Take note of this great symbol: the stone is Christ. *A living stone, says Peter, rejected by mankind, but chosen by God.* And the stone is at the head, because Christ is the head of the man. And the stone is anointed because the name Christ derives from anointing.

And as Christ unfolds this picture, a ladder is seen, from earth to heaven, or from heaven to earth, and angels ascending and descending. What this is all about we shall see better when we have look at the Lord's words in the Gospel. You know that Jacob himself is Israel. When the Lord saw Nathaniel in the Gospel, he said: *Behold, here is a true Israelite, in whom there is no guile.* This is the sort of language that was used about Jacob himself: *And Jacob was free from guile and he lived at home.* The Lord called Nathaniel an *Israelite in whom there was no guile* because of Jacob. And Nathaniel said: *How do you know me?* And the Lord said: *When you were beneath the fig tree I saw you.* This means, when you were within the Jewish people and under the Law, which covered over that people with a bodily shadow, that is where I saw you. And Nathaniel made his confession and said: *You are the Son of God, you are the king of Israel.* And the Lord said: *It is because I saw you under the fig tree that you have believed. You shall see things greater than these.* He is speaking with Israel, with Jacob, with the one who placed a stone under his head. What greater things? The fact that already that stone is by the head: *Truly I tell you, you shall see the heavens open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.* Let God's angels ascend and descend on that ladder. Let this happen in the Church. God's angels are heralds of the truth, let them ascend and see: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word.* Let the angels descend and see that, *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*

This is happening in the Church: God's angels ascend and descend on the Son of Man. This is because the Son of Man is above. They ascend to him in their heart, that is, his head. And the Son of Man is below, that is, his body. His limbs are here, his head is up above. One rises up to the head, comes down to the limbs. It is the same Christ here and

there. For were he there only, and not here, what would be the point of saying: *Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*

St Augustine, Enarr. In Ps. 44.20 (CCL 38:508-509); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(Jacob flees from Mesopotamia; Genesis 31:1-180)

Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, "Jacob has taken all that was our fathers; and from what was our father's he has gained all this wealth." And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him with favour as before. Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you." So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was, and said to them, "I see that your father does not regard me with favour as he did before. But the God of my father has been with me. You know that I have served your father with all my strength; yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not permit him to harm me. If he said, 'The spotted shall be your wages', then all the flock bore spotted; and if he said, 'The striped shall be your wages', then all the flock bore striped. Thus God has taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me. In the mating season of the flock I lifted up my eyes, and saw in a dream that the he-goats which leaped upon the flock were striped, spotted, and mottled. Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob', and I said, 'Here I am!' And he said, 'Lift up your eyes and see, all the goats that leap upon the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go forth from this land, and return to the land of your birth.'" Then Rachel and Leah answered him, "Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has been using up the money given for us. All the property which God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children; now then, whatever God has said to you, do."

So Jacob arose, and set his sons and his wives on camels; and he drove away all his cattle, all his livestock which he had gained, the cattle in his possession which he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac.

A READING FROM THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT BY ST JOHN CLIMACUS

There is such a thing as exile, an irrevocable renunciation of everything in one's familiar surroundings that hinders one from attaining the ideal of holiness. Exile is a disciplined heart, unheralded wisdom, an unpublicised understanding, a hidden life, masked ideals. It is unseen meditation, the striving to be humble, a wish for poverty, the longing for what is divine. It is an outpouring of love, a denial of vainglory, a depth of silence.

For followers of the Lord, this manner of thinking operates abundantly at the beginning and they are greatly disturbed by it, as though by some holy fire. I mean separation from their relations for the sake of hardship and simplicity which drives on the lovers of this good. Yet for all that it is praiseworthy, it requires discretion, since not every kind of exile is good if taken to extremes. Detachment is good and its mother is exile. Someone withdrawing from the world for the sake of the Lord is no longer attached to

possessions, that he should not appear to be deceived by the passions. If you have left the world, then do not begin to reach out for it. Otherwise your passions will come back to you. Eve had no wish to be driven from paradise, whereas a monk will abandon his homeland willingly.

Let us say we manage for some time to live away from our relatives. We practise a little piety, compunction, self-control. And then the empty thoughts come tramping toward us, seeking to turn its back to the places we knew. They tell us what an example we are, what a help to those who witnessed our former wicked deeds. If we happen to be articulate and well informed, they assure us that we could be rescuers of souls and teachers to the world. They tell us all this so that we might scatter at sea the treasures we have assembled while in port. So we had better imitate Lot, and certainly not his wife. The soul turning back to the regions from which it came will be like the salt that has lost savour, indeed like that famous pillar. Run from Egypt, run and do not turn back. The heart yearning for the land there will never see Jerusalem, the land of dispassion.

There is no greater example of renunciation than that great man who heard the command, *Leave your country and your family and the house of your father*. Obediently he went to a foreign country where the language was different. And so it is that anyone following this model of renunciation is glorified all the more by the Lord.

But even though this glory is given by God, it is still good to deflect it with the protective shield of humility. When demons or men lavish praise on us for our exile as if it were a great achievement, let us remind ourselves at once of him who came down from heaven for our benefit and exiled himself to earth. Nothing we could ever do would match that.

St John Climacus, The Ladder of Divine Ascent, 85-87; Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(Jacob meet Esau and wrestles with God: Genesis 32:3-30)

And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, 'I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now; and I have oxen, asses, flocks, menservants, and maidservants; and I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favour in your sight.'"

And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men with him." Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies, thinking, "If Esau comes to the one company and destroys it, then the company which is left will escape."

And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who didst say to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will do you good', I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness which thou hast shown to thy servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan; and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, lest he come and slay us all, the mothers with the children. But thou didst say, 'I will do you good, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'"

So he lodged there that night, and took from what he had with him a present for his brother Esau, two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milch camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty she-asses and ten he-asses. These he delivered into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass on before me, and put a space between drove and drove." He instructed the foremost, "When Esau my brother meets you, and asks you, 'To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these before you?' then you shall say, 'They belong to your servant Jacob; they are a present sent to my lord Esau; and moreover he is behind us.'" He likewise instructed the second and the third and all who followed the droves, "You shall say the same thing to Esau when you meet him, and you shall say, 'Moreover your servant Jacob is behind us.'" For he thought, "I may appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterwards I shall see his face; perhaps he will accept me." So the present passed on before him; and he himself lodged that night in the camp.

The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. And Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob's thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let

you go, unless you bless me.” And he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” Then he said, “Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.” Then Jacob asked him, “Tell me, I pray, your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.”

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON EZEKIEL BY ST GREGORY THE GREAT

The pursuit of the contemplative life is something for which a great and sustained effort on the part of the powers of the soul is required, an effort to rise from earthly to heavenly things, an effort to keep one's attention fixed on spiritual things, an effort to pass beyond and above the sphere of things visible to the eyes of flesh, an effort finally to hem oneself in, so to speak, in order to gain access to spaces that are broad and open.

There are times indeed when one succeeds, overcoming the opposing obscurity of one's blindness and catching at least a glimpse, be it ever so fleeting and superficial, of boundless light. But the experience is momentary only, so that all too quickly the soul must again return to itself. From that light which is approached with bated breath, it must now, sighing and mournful, go back once more to the obscurity of its blindness.

We have a beautiful illustration of all this in the sacred history of the Scriptures where the story is told of Jacob's encounter with the angel, while on his return journey to the home of his parents. On the way he met an angel with whom he engaged in a great struggle and, like anyone involved in such a contest, Jacob found his opponent, now stronger, now weaker than himself.

Let us understand the angel of this story as representing the Lord, and Jacob who contended with the angel as representing the soul of the perfect individual who in contemplation has come face to face with God. This soul, as it exerts every effort to behold God as he is in himself, is like one engaged with another in a contest of strength. At one moment it prevails so to speak, as it gains access to that boundless light and briefly experiences in mind and heart the sweet savour of the divine presence. The next moment, however, it succumbs, overcome and drained of its strength by the very sweetness of the taste it has experienced. The angel, therefore, is, as it were, overcome when in the innermost recesses of the intellect the divine presence is directly experienced and seen.

Here, however, it is to be noted that the angel, when he could not prevail over Jacob, touched the sciatic muscle of Jacob's hip, so that it forthwith withered and shrank. From that time on Jacob became lame in one leg and walked with a limp. Thus also does the all-powerful God cause all carnal affections to dry up and wither away in us, once we have come to experience in our mind and hear the knowledge of him as he is in himself.

Previously we walked about on two feet, as it were, when we thought, so it seemed, that we could seek after God while remaining at the same time attached to the world. But having once come to the knowledge and experience of the sweetness of God, only one of

these two feet retains its life and vigour, the other becoming lame and useless. For it necessarily follows that the stronger we grow in our love for God alone, the weaker becomes our love for the world.

St Gregory the Great, Hom. in Ez., 1.12 (PL 76:955); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(Jacob comes to Bethel and Mamre: Genesis 35:1-29)

God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make there an altar to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments; then let us arise and go up to Bethel, that I may make there an altar to the God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone." So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem.

And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were round about them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, and there he built an altar, and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother. And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel; so the name of it was called Allon-bacuth.

God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So his name was called Israel. And God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you. The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you." Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him. And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured out a drink offering on it, and poured oil on it. So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him, Bethel.

Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour. And when she was in her hard labour, the midwife said to her, "Fear not; for now you will have another son." And as her soul was departing (for she died), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called his name Benjamin. So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), and Jacob set up a pillar upon her grave; it is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day. Israel journeyed on, and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder.

While Israel dwelt in that land Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard of it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve. The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob's first-born), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maid: Dan and Naphtali. The sons of Zilpah, Leah's maid: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.

And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. Now the days of Isaac were a hundred and eighty years. And Isaac breathed his last; and he died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

A READING FROM THE GLAPHYRA ON GENESIS BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

After he was called by God, Jacob ascends to Bethel, that is, to the house of God which is what Bethel means, there he offers sacrifices to God and is declared chief and master of the sacred rites. He teaches his successors and descendants how they must enter the house of God. He orders the foreign gods to be rejected like dung and filth and he commands a change of garments. It is fitting for us to do likewise when we are called before God, or to enter the divine Temple, especially in the time of the holy baptism. We, as if we drive away the foreign gods and part from such error, must assert, 'I refuse you, Satan, and all your pomp and all your worship.' We also must change completely our garment by stripping off *the old man that is corrupt through deceitful lusts* and by clothing ourselves with *the new man, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its Creator*. The women who were with Jacob took off their earrings. And in fact women by entering the house of God without wearing any carnal ornament and with loose hair remove from their head any accusation of pride. That is why, I believe, those women took off the precious stones they wore in their ears.

When we ascend to Bethel, that is, to the house of God, we will know the stone, I mean, the chosen stone, which was made into a cornerstone. By this I mean Christ. We will see the one who is anointed by the Father in joy and exultation for all the creatures that live under the sky. As I said, the Son is anointed by God the Father: he is the *Joy of us all, the universal exultation*, according to the words of the psalmist. And you see how this is prefigured in the words that were just said to us: *And Jacob set up a stone and poured oil upon it*. That action as a symbol of the mystery of Christ, through whom and with whom the glory to God the Father and the Holy Spirit, world without end. Amen.

St Cyril of Alexandria, Glaphyrorum in Genesim, 5.4-5 (PG 69.284); ACC 2 (2002) tr. Sheridan.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(Joseph is handed over by his brothers: Genesis 37:2-4, 12-36)

This is the history of the family of Jacob.

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a lad with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought an ill report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I am." So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers, and with the flock; and bring me word again." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. And a man found him wandering in the fields; and the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" "I am seeking my brothers," he said, "tell me, I pray you, where they are pasturing the flock." And the man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. They saw him afar off, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild beast has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; cast him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand upon him – that he might rescue him out of their hand, to restore him to his father. So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; and they took him and cast him into a pit. The pit was empty, there was no water in it.

Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we slay our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers heeded him. Then Midianite traders passed by; and they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver; and they took Joseph to Egypt.

When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he rent his clothes and returned to his brothers, and said, "The lad is gone; and I, where shall I go?" Then they took Joseph's robe, and killed a goat, and dipped the robe in the blood; and they sent the long robe with sleeves and brought it to their father, and said, "This we have found; see now whether it is your son's robe or not." And he recognized it, and said, "It is my son's robe; a wild beast has devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn to

pieces.” Then Jacob rent his garments, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and said, “No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.” Thus his father wept for him. Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

A READING FROM GLAPHYRA ON GENESIS BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

The devout Joseph obeyed his father’s command to go to Shechem to see if his brothers were well, and where and how they were feeding their flocks. But when they saw him coming they smiled a cruel and fateful smile, saying: *Here comes that dreamer!* And they cast him into a pit. But a little later they drew the boy out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites who were going to Egypt. And so Joseph was led away into Egypt.

In the same way our Lord Jesus Christ was sent by God the Father to see if the Israelites continued to be well, obviously in a spiritual sense, and if the sheep in their care were still in a good state, and the shepherds not lacking in gentleness towards them. But people were aware that the beloved Son, the spiritual Joseph, was among them in person. For the blessed evangelist John said: *Yet many even of the people in authority believed in him, but they kept it to themselves because of the Pharisees.* So the fact that they recognised him did not prevent them from insulting him. Indeed they killed him and the cowards threw him into a kind of pit, the deep and dark pit of death, that is, Hades. For that is just how the inspired David showed him to us, speaking as if addressing his words to God the Father in heaven, as if in the person of Christ: *Lord, you brought my soul out of Hades, you saved me from the fate of those who go down to the pit.*

We are told: *The pit was empty, there was no water in it,* to show us distinctly and clearly that this was meant to represent Hades. And I shall tell you why: water is a symbol of life, as something life-giving. It is said there was no water in the pit, naturally, for Hades was thought of as the home and dwelling-place of those deprived of life. However, the boy was raised from the pit. Christ too came back to life from the dead. For just as Joseph was not kept down in the pit, so neither did Christ remain in Hades, and what is more he left it empty. *For he said to the prisoners: Come out!*

It was not long after he had been raised from the pit that the devout Joseph went away to Egypt, when the Ishmaelites bought him. Christ too came back to life and rose from the pit. Then leaving Judea he went to the land of the Gentiles, taken there by the spiritual Ishmaelites, those in obedience to God, for that is the literal meaning of their name. Who would such people be? Again they were the blessed disciples, who had listened to Christ's teaching and were the first-fruits of those distinguished in their obedience, their faith and glorious achievements above the Law. It was these who in a way bought Jesus, giving up all the treasure they possessed in the Law to buy that *single pearl of great value*, in the words of our Saviour’s own parable. It was they who conveyed Christ to the gentiles as ministers of the Gospel. Throughout every land under the sun they proclaimed him as God and Lord, and as the chosen stone, rejected by those who clung to

the Law, the spiritual builders, but chosen and precious in God's sight, and laid as the cornerstone of the building.

St Cyril of Alexandria, Glaphyrorum in Genesim, 6 (PG 69:3-4-5); Word in Season VII.

Season of the Year | Week 05

Sunday of the Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(Joseph in Egypt; Genesis: 39:1-23)

Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian, and his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. So Joseph found favour in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had, in house and field. So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and having him he had no concern for anything but the food which he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph, and said, "Lie with me." But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Lo, having me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand; he is not greater in this house than I am; nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife; how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" And although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie with her or to be with her. But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and got out of the house. And when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and had fled out of the house, she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice; and when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment with me, and fled and got out of the house." Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to insult me; but as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment with me, and fled out of the house."

When his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, "This is the way your servant treated me", his anger was kindled. And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's care all the prisoners who were in the prison; and whatever was done there, he was the doer of it; the keeper of the prison paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST CHROMATIUS OF AQUILEIA

As you have just heard in the reading, the saintly Joseph was of good appearance but even better in mind, because he was both physically and mentally chaste. He shone in outward appearance but even more so in the excellence of his mind. And though for many people good looks are usually a hindrance to a good life, they could not harm this saintly man because his handsome appearance was governed by the excellence of his mind. So the soul must rule the body, not the body the soul, because the soul is mistress of the body; the body is really a servant to the soul. Hence the unhappiness of the soul which is ruled by the body, and after being mistress becomes servant, because it breaks faith with the Lord and submits to the slavery of sin.

But the soul of the Patriarch Joseph was faithful to its dominion, and there was no question of the body usurping its power. In fact when his master's wife, an unchaste woman, asked him to lie with her he refused to do so, because even in his state of slavery he had not lost command of his soul. As a result he was falsely accused and put into prison. But the saintly man regarded that prison as a palace, or rather was himself a palace in the prison, because where there is faith, chastity and modesty, there is the palace of Christ, the Temple of God, the abode of the Holy Spirit. So if any man prides himself on his good looks, or any woman boasts of the beauty of her body, let the man follow Joseph's example and the woman Susanna's: let them be chaste in body and mind; then they will also be beautiful not only to their fellow human beings but to God. For there are three examples of chastity in the Church, so that all have someone to copy: Joseph, Susanna, and Mary; Joseph for men to copy, Susanna for women, and Mary for virgins.

St Chromatius of Aquileia, Sermon 24.2 (SC 64:70-72); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(Pharaoh's Dream: Genesis 41:1-17, 25-43)

After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, and behold, there came up out of the Nile seven cows sleek and fat, and they fed in the reed grass. And behold, seven other cows, gaunt and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. And the gaunt and thin cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. And Pharaoh awoke. And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. And behold, after them sprouted seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind. And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. So in the morning his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men; and Pharaoh told them his dream, but there was none who could interpret it to Pharaoh.

Then the chief butler said to Pharaoh, "I remember my faults today. When Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, we dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own meaning. A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard; and when we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each man according to his dream. And as he interpreted to us, so it came to pass; I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged."

Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it; and I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favourable answer." Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Behold, in my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile."

Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dream of Pharaoh is one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dream is one. The seven lean and gaunt cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind are also seven years of famine. It is as I told Pharaoh, God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt, but after them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; the famine will consume the land, and the plenty will be unknown in the land by reason of that famine which will follow, for it will be very grievous. And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass. Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land, and take the fifth part of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plenteous years. And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and lay up grain under the

authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine which are to befall the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine.”

This proposal seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find such a man as this, in whom is the Spirit of God?” So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discreet and wise as you are; you shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only as regards the throne will I be greater than you.” And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Behold, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand, and arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; and he made him to ride in his second chariot; and they cried before him, “Bow the knee!” Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON GENESIS BY ST PROCOPIUS OF GAZA

Not only does God pour out his gifts upon us, he also draws good out of evil. Had Joseph remained in his father’s house, Egypt would have had no one to act in advance to prevent the full effects of the impending famine. In the same way, had the only Son of God remained hidden from us in the glory of the Father, the whole world would still be unredeemed.

Joseph was born in his father’s old age, and for this reason Jacob loved him all the more. There is a foreshadowing here of the events of these last days. With immeasurable love God looked upon his Son as he came into the world in the fullness of time, at the end of a long line of Prophets and saintly men and women. This Son of his encountered the hate of the Pharisees because the Father had clothed him with a garment of many glorious attributes – rather as Jacob had clothed Joseph with a tunic of many colours. Christ was the light, and he was the life. He cleansed those dead in sin, commanded the sea and walked on the water. The fire of envy, however, smouldered in the hearts of the Pharisees when they considered that the time would come when the whole world, and not merely the Jews, would worship this man. Here is the heir. Let us kill him and take his inheritance.

Joseph was handed over to the Ishmaelites and went down into Egypt. Christ, too, was delivered to the Gentiles: *Behold we go to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the Gentiles*. When Joseph first arrived in Egypt, he was deeply afflicted. Christ, too, suffered persecution at the hands of both Jews and Gentiles. Both men were falsely accused. Joseph was thrown into prison, Christ was consigned to the grave. Joseph rose to a position of eminence and ruled over his captors. Christ’s rule extends to the living and the dead.

Think, however, with what constancy of mind Joseph was endowed. Though oppressed by servitude and imprisonment, he possessed true freedom of mind. He languished in prison, but one day he would be clothed with royal dignity. Doubts never violated his faith. What was the source of his watchfulness and self-control? If he had no faith in the

divinely inspired gift of interpretation, why did he interpret the dreams of Pharaoh's servants in prison with him? Why did he not rather persuade them that nothing was to be gained by self-discipline?

When the time came, not one of his brothers was able to recognise Joseph. Envy obscures the truth, and too much cunning can lead to a form of slavery. It was Joseph's father who paid him the highest tribute of all when he wept for the son whom he loved. The envy of the Jews obscured the truth concerning the Christ, and so does the hate of the Greeks. Christ is not truly recognized either by those bogged down in heresy. But if you desire to attain true knowledge of Christ, you must hear God saying to you: *This is my beloved Son; listen to him.*

St Procopius of Gaza, In Gen. (PG 87/1:468-469, 475-478); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(Joseph's brothers go into Egypt: Genesis 41:56- 42:26)

So when the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth.

When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?" And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live, and not die." So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might befall him. Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

Now Joseph was governor over the land; he it was who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came, and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. Joseph saw his brothers, and knew them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. "Where do you come from?" he said. They said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." Thus Joseph knew his brothers, but they did not know him. And Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed of them; and he said to them, "You are spies, you have come to see the weakness of the land." They said to him, "No, my lord, but to buy food have your servants come. We are all sons of one man, we are honest men, your servants are not spies." He said to them, "No, it is the weakness of the land that you have come to see." And they said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more." But Joseph said to them, "It is as I said to you, you are spies. By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain in prison, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you; or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies." And he put them all together in prison for three days.

On the third day Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God: if you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined in your prison, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households, and bring your youngest brother to me; so your words will be verified, and you shall not die." And they did so. Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he besought us and we would not listen; therefore is this distress come upon us." And Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to sin against the lad? But you would not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood." They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. Then he turned away from them and wept; and he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. And Joseph gave orders

to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them.

Then they loaded their asses with their grain, and departed.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF PROMISES BY QUODVULTDEUS OF CARTHAGE

Impelled by the famine, Joseph's brethren came to Egypt to buy corn from their brother, whom they had sold. Those who had crucified our Joseph, that is Christ our Lord, came to him to be revived by his bread, and so take away the hunger which was distressing their souls. The former, Joseph's brethren, do him reverence; the latter, Christ's brethren, likewise do him reverence. On seeing his brothers, Joseph recognised them; but they did not know who he was. This applies to us also: for his brethren knew him not. *For if they had known who he was, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory.* Joseph was estranged from his brethren and said to them, through an interpreter, *you are spies, you have come to spy out the roads and the tracks of this country.* So also our Joseph, Christ our Lord, said to his persecutors through his interpreter Peter, *you have denied what is holy and just and you have killed the prince of eternal life.*

Joseph's brethren are sorry for what they did. To those others also, Christ's persecutors, the word is: *Repent.* They, of the olden times, say, *we are at fault over our brother.* So also the Jews who had told Pilate, *his blood be upon us and our children,* now say to the Apostles, *what are we to do, brethren? Show us.* So as not to be thought spies, Joseph's brethren state that they are the sons, twelve in all, of one father; and they say that one of them is no more (since it was he to whom they telling this), while the youngest is at home with their father.

On hearing mention of his younger brother, Joseph, ardently longing for him, says, *I will test your claim not to be spies by seeing whether your younger brother will come with you.* And he took Simeon apart from them, had him fettered in their presence, and put him under guard. Surely our latter day Benjamin and youngest brother, sought after by the Joseph who is Christ our Lord, is none other than Paul, formerly Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, as he himself says, calling himself the least of the Apostles. Simeon, bound by the three bonds of his denial, he whom fear held bound and love released, this Simeon we may take as Peter. That said, we had better acknowledge that it is by him that sins are bound and loosed; him indeed to whom it was said that *What you hold bound on earth will be bound in heaven; and what you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*

Quodvultdeus of Carthage, Liber Promissionum, 1.30, 42 (SC 101:242-246); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(Joseph's brothers go down to Egypt again: Genesis 43:1-11, 13-17, 26-34)

Now the famine was severe in the land. And when they had eaten the grain which they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again, buy us a little food." But Judah said to him, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.' If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food; but if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.'" Israel said, "Why did you treat me so ill as to tell the man that you had another brother?" They replied, "The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?' What we told him was in answer to these questions; could we in any way know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down?'" And Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. I will be surety for him; of my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame for ever; for if we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice."

Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry down to the man a present, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man; may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, that he may send back your other brother and Benjamin. If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." So the men took the present, and they took double the money with them, and Benjamin; and they arose and went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph.

When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon." The man did as Joseph bade him, and brought the men to Joseph's house.

When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present which they had with them, and bowed down to him to the ground. And he inquired about their welfare, and said, "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?" They said, "Your servant our father is well, he is still alive." And they bowed their heads and made obeisance. And he lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!" Then Joseph made haste, for his heart yearned for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there. Then he washed his face and came out; and controlling himself he said, "Let food be served." They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. And they sat before him, the first-born according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth; and the men looked at one another

in amazement. Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they drank and were merry with him.

A READING FROM THE GLAPHYRA ON GENESIS BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

When the sons of Jacob arrived with Benjamin, Joseph called them to the feast, and after they had washed with water he fed them to the full with food and wine. For at the right moment the Jews, distressed and as if overwhelmed by unbearable hunger, obviously in a spiritual sense, will abandon their haughty and arrogant pride and come to Christ. They will long to be fed by him, I mean with holy, spiritual and life-giving food. But he will not receive them without the new people, of whom Benjamin is the symbol. And when they come as it were in concord and unanimity he will receive them cheerfully, and welcome them as if to his own house, that is, the Church. Then after he has washed them with pure water, the baptismal water of spiritual rebirth, he will feed them with bread and wine.

This is the spiritual interpretation. But we may take it further. For Joseph made himself known to his brothers when they arrived with Benjamin, and even thought them worthy to eat at his table, as I said just now. But he gave them no inheritance, and actually ordered them to return home and fetch their father, Jacob. But when Jacob went down and Joseph now saw him there with his children, then and only then he assigned them the best of all his land. This too is a clear indication that Christ will receive the Israelites converted in the last days of this age, since the new people are obviously united with them in unity of soul. The new people, as I said, are foreshadowed in Benjamin. But the inheritance we hope for will not be given to us without the holy Fathers. For just as they, although they died in faith, in the words of the wise Paul, *did not obtain what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for ourselves, that they should not attain perfection without us*, so we too shall wait for the Fathers, so as not to attain perfection without them. Therefore with the holy Fathers, the first, middle, and last people, we shall receive the best and inalienable inheritance of the kingdom of heaven in Christ, through whom and with whom be glory to God the Father with the Holy Spirit for ever. Amen.

St Cyril of Alexandria, Glaphyrorum in Genesim 4 (PG 69:324-5); Word in Season VII.

Thursday of the Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(Joseph and Benjamin; Genesis 44:1-20, 30-34)

Then he commanded the steward of his house, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack, and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph told him. As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their asses. When they had gone but a short distance from the city, Joseph said to his steward, "Up, follow after the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you returned evil for good? Why have you stolen my silver cup? Is it not from this that my lord drinks, and by this that he divines? You have done wrong in so doing.'"

When he overtook them, he spoke to them these words. They said to him, "Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants that they should do such a thing! Behold, the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan; how then should we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? With whomever of your servants it be found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves." He said, "Let it be as you say: he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and the rest of you shall be blameless." Then every man quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and every man opened his sack. And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Then they rent their clothes, and every man loaded his ass, and they returned to the city.

When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there; and they fell before him to the ground. He said to them, "What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed divine?" And Judah said, "What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord's slaves, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found." But he said, "Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father."

Then Judah went up to him and said, "O my lord, let your servant, I pray you, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant; for you are like Pharaoh himself. My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father, or a brother?' And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children; and his father loves him.'

"Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the lad's life, when he sees that the lad is not with us, he will die; and your servants will bring down the grey hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame in the sight of my father all my life.' Now therefore, let your servant, I pray you, remain instead of the lad as a slave to my

lord; and let the lad go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the lad is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would come upon my father.”

A READING FROM ON JOSEPH BY ST AMBROSE

Now *by raising his eyes he saw Benjamin, the son of his mother*. The moral sense is, that we see those we love before others and the gaze of our eyes lights first on those whom we consider first in our mind's eye. In the mystical sense, however, the Lord Jesus saw Paul – *for the eyes of the Lord are upon the just* – and said, *is this your youngest brother?*

The greater prerogative is given to Paul for the beginning of his faith; of him it is said to Ananias, *Go, because he is to me a vessel of election to carry my name amongst the Gentiles*. And the silver cup is put in his sack alone. Benjamin did not know this; Paul was in error, but he was called. The sacks of the brothers are first examined according to the order of age of each brother. Joseph indeed practiced deception, and sent the cup so that he might by a holy trick recall the brother whom he loved; yet the light of God's mysterious plans is clearly reflected.

Christ finds this money in us, which he has himself given us. We possess the money of nature, we also possess the money of grace. Nature is the work of the Creator, grace the gift of the Redeemer. Even though we are unable to see Christ's gifts, nevertheless he is giving them; he is working in a hidden way and is giving them to all men, but there are few who are able to keep them and not lose them. Yet he does not give all things to all men. Wheat is given to many, but the cup to one, who is presented with the prophetic and priestly function. For it is not everyone but only the Prophet who says, *The cup of salvation I will take up and I will call upon the name of the Lord*. Therefore the word of heavenly teaching already shone in Paul's body, since he was instructed in the Law. But because he was still not subject to the justice of God, the cup was within the sack, the teaching within the Law, the lamp within the bushel. Nevertheless, Ananias was sent to give a blessing and to lay on his hand and open the sack. When the sack was opened, the money shone forth, and when the scales fell, in a way like fastenings on the sack, Paul saw straightway. Free of the bond, he obtained the grace of liberty and said, *But we all, beholding the glory of God with faces unveiled, are transformed into the same image*.

Those who lose Christ do return back. Indeed, in the Gospel too, when they were seizing the Lord Jesus for death, they drew back and fell upon the ground. It was appropriate that they went back, for they fell from heavenly grace to earthly defilement. And so, by an interpretation in the moral sense, they did not wish to return without their brother; in the mystical sense, they were unwilling to return without Paul. With the loss of him, they claimed that the old age of the father of the people would be brought down into sorrow. And so Judah desired to remain with Joseph so as not to see the evils which came upon his father; that is, he foresaw and desired to guard against the evils which were going to come to the people of the Jews.

St Ambrose, On Joseph, 10.56, 58, 60-66; FoC 65 (1972) tr. McHugh.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(The reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers: Genesis 45:1-15, 21 – 46:7)

Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him; and he cried, "Make every one go out from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph; is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.

So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, I pray you." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are yet five years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; and he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Make haste and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry; you shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have; and there I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come; lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty.' And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father of all my splendour in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Make haste and bring my father down here." Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. 'And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

The sons of Israel did so; and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. To each and all of them he gave festal garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five festal garments. To his father he sent as follows: ten asses loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten she-asses loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey. Then he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, "Do not quarrel on the way." So they went up out of Egypt, and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. And they told him, "Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt." And his heart fainted, for he did not believe them. But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived; and Israel said, "It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive; I will go and see him before I die."

So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here am I." Then he said, "I am God, the God of

your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt; for I will there make of you a great nation. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again; and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes." Then Jacob set out from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. They also took their cattle and their goods, which they had gained in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, his sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters; all his offspring he brought with him into Egypt.

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON GENESIS BY ORIGEN

It appears fitting indeed to contemplate what God says to Israel through the vision and how he sends him to Egypt strengthening and encouraging him as if he were setting out to engage in some struggles. For he says, *Fear not to descend into Egypt*, this is to say: You shall contend against principalities and powers and against the rulers of this world of darkness, – which is figuratively called Egypt – fear not, be not afraid. But if you wish to know the reason why you ought not to fear, hear my promise: *For I will make a great nation of you there, and I will go down with you into Egypt, and I will recall you from there in the end*. He, therefore, with whom God shall go down into the struggles, is not afraid to go down into Egypt; he is not afraid to approach the struggles of this world and the battles with those demons who resist.

But I think a still greater mystery lies hidden in this passage. For this statement disturbs me: I will make a great nation of you, and I will go down with you into Egypt, and I will recall you from there in the end. Who is it who is made into a great nation in Egypt and is recalled in the end? If it is that Jacob to whom it seems to refer, it does not appear true. For he was not recalled from Egypt in the end, since he died in Egypt. But it will be absurd if someone says Jacob was recalled by God because his body was carried back. If you believe this, it will be false to say that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. These words apply not to a dead body but to a living and vigorous man.

Are these words, then, a figure of the Lord who descends into this world and is made *into a great nation*, that is, the Church of the Gentiles, and who, after all was completed, returned to the Father. Or is it a figure of *the first-formed man* who descends to the struggles of this world after he was cast out of the delights of paradise? God does not desert those placed in this struggle, but is always with them. He is pleased with Abel; he reproaches Cain; he is present with Enoch, when he is invoked; he commands Noah to construct an ark of salvation in the flood; he leads Abraham *from the house of his father and from his kinsmen*; he blesses Isaac and Jacob; he leads the sons of Israel out of Egypt; he writes the Law of the letter through Moses; he completes what was lacking through the Prophets. This is what it means to be with them in Egypt.

But as regards the statement, *I will recall you from there in the end*, I think this means, as we said above, that at the end of the ages his only begotten Son descended even into the underworld for the salvation of the world and recalled *the first-formed man* from there. For what he said to the thief, *This day you shall be with me in paradise*, you should understand not to have been said to him alone, but also to all the saints for whom he had

descended into the underworld. In this man, therefore, more truly than in Jacob, the words *I will recall you from there in the end*, will be fulfilled.

Origen, Hom. in Gen. 15.5-6; FoC 71 (1982) tr. Heine.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

(Jacob blesses his sons and dies; Genesis 49:1-33)

Then Jacob called his sons, and said, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in days to come. Assemble and hear, O sons of Jacob, and hearken to Israel your father. Reuben, you are my first-born, my might, and the first fruits of my strength, pre-eminent in pride and pre-eminent in power. Unstable as water, you shall not have pre-eminence because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it – you went up to my couch! Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. O my soul, come not into their council; O my spirit, be not joined to their company; for in their anger they slay men, and in their wantonness they hamstring oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel. Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as a lioness; who dares rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Binding his foal to the vine and his ass's colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes; his eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk. Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea; he shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon. Issachar is a strong ass, crouching between the sheepfolds; he saw that a resting place was good, and that the land was pleasant; so he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a slave at forced labour. Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that his rider falls backward. I wait for thy salvation, O LORD. Raiders shall raid Gad, but he shall raid at their heels. Asher's food shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties. Naphtali is a hind let loose, that bears comely fawns. Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall. The archers fiercely attacked him, shot at him, and harassed him sorely; yet his bow remained unmoved, his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (by the name of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel), by the God of your father who will help you, by God Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that couches beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father are mighty beyond the blessings of the eternal mountains, the bounties of the everlasting hills; may they be on the head of Joseph, and on the brow of him who was separate from his brothers. Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey, and at even dividing the spoil."

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel; and this is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him. Then he charged them, and said to them, "I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field at Mach-pelah, to

the east of Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah – the field and the cave that is in it were purchased from the Hittites.” When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed, and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

A READING FROM ON THE PATRIARCHS BY ST AMBROSE

This blessing appears to be directed to the Patriarch Judah, but in reality that later Judah is meant, Jesus Christ, the true Confessor who was born of that tribe and who alone is praised by his brothers; of them it is said, *I will declare your name to my brothers*. He is the Lord by nature, but a brother by grace; his hands, which he stretched out to an unbelieving people, are on the back of his enemies. For with those same hands and by that same passion he protected his own, subjugated hostile powers, and made subject to himself all men who were without faith.

A lion's whelp is Judah. Isn't it clear that he both represented the Father and manifested the Son? Is there any clearer way to teach that God the Son is of one nature with the Father? The one is the lion, the other the lion's whelp. By this paltry comparison, their unity in the same nature and power is perceived. King proceeds from king, a strong one from one who is strong. Because Jacob foresaw that there would be those to claim that the Son was younger in age, he replied to them by adding, *From my seed you have come up to me. Resting you have slept like a lion and like a whelp*. And in a different passage you find that the whelp is himself *the lion of the tribe of Judah*. Therefore, seeing that he had said *whelp*, it was good that Jacob at once put *lion*; this is to say: 'Do not to let your ears be deceived, because they heard 'whelp'; I described that Son, I did not say he was younger. He also is a lion just as the Father is. Jacob, who confesses the Son, also esteems him equal.

Moreover, he represented the Son's incarnation in a wonderful fashion when he said, *From my seed you have come up to me*. For Christ sprouted in the womb of the virgin like a shrub upon the earth; like a flower of good fragrance. He was sent forth in the splendour of new light and came up from his mother's womb for the redemption of the entire world. Just as Isaiah says, *There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse and a flower shall come up out of the root*. The root is the household of the Jews, the rod is Mary, the flower of Mary is Christ. She is rightly called a rod, for she is of royal lineage, of the house and family of David. Her flower is Christ, who destroyed the stench of worldly pollution and poured out the fragrance of eternal life.

Therefore you have become acquainted with the incarnation; learn of the passion. *Resting, you have slept like a lion*. When Christ lay at rest in the tomb as if in a kind of bodily sleep, as he himself says, *I have slept and have taken my rest and have risen up, because the Lord will sustain me*. On this account also Jacob says, *Who will arouse him?* Who else is there to rouse him again, unless he rouses himself by his own power and the power of the Father? Therefore he is the Author of his own resurrection, he is the Judge of his death, he is expected by the nations. *And he is the expectation of the nations*. Jacob

spoke more meaningfully than if he had said, 'The nations are expecting him', for in Christ lies the entire hope of the Church.

St Ambrose, On the Patriarchs, 4.17-24; FoC 65 (1972) tr. McHugh.

Season of the Year | Week 06

Sunday of the Sixth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE FIRST LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

(Paul's obligation to the Church in Thessalonica: 1 Thessalonians 1:1 – 2:12)

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the Church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace.

We give thanks to God always for you all, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brethren beloved by God, that he has chosen you; for our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit; so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us what a welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

For you yourselves know, brethren, that our visit to you was not in vain; but though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the face of great opposition. For our appeal does not spring from error or uncleanness, nor is it made with guile; but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never used either words of flattery, as you know, or a cloak for greed, as God is witness; nor did we seek glory from men, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

For you remember our labour and toil, brethren; we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you, while we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our behaviour to you believers; for you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

A READING FROM A HOMILY ON 1 THESSALONIANS BY ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

You have become imitators of the Lord, says the Apostle, by receiving the word amidst much oppression, with the joy of the Holy Spirit. Oppression in what pertains to the body, but joy in the spirit. You wonder, perhaps, how that can be. Well, what happened was distressing for you, but not so what came of it: the Holy Spirit does not allow it to be. On the one hand, you cannot be joyful while suffering for your sins; but on the other, you can find joy even in being scourged, when you suffer for Christ.

For that is how the joy of the Spirit shows itself: it brings gladness in place of what seemed like affliction. They have oppressed you, he says, and persecuted you, but the Spirit has not forsaken you all the while. Just as the three young men were refreshed in the fiery furnace, so it has been with you in your oppression. Whereas it is not in the nature of fire to refresh, but of the revivifying Spirit, it is likewise not in the nature of oppression to beget joy and gladness: that comes of suffering for Christ, and of the revivifying Spirit bringing relief even through the furnace of trials and temptations.

With joy, St Paul says, but, more than that, with great joy: for it comes from the Holy Spirit. *This has made you an example to all the faithful in Macedonia and Achaia.* Indeed, he tells them that they have shone so brightly that they have become teachers of those who preceded them. That is what it means to be apostolic. He did not say, 'So as to set an example in believing', but 'to set an example to those who already believe'. That is to say, 'You have taught them how to have faith in God, by enduring hardships from the very first days.' And when he says Achaia, he means the whole of Greece.

Do you see what zeal can do? No need for time, no procrastination or delay; it only has to show itself and everything is accomplished. For thus it was that people who had only later heard the teaching of the Gospel became teachers of the first to do so. Let no one despair, then. Even those who have spent a good deal of time unprofitably may nevertheless do as much in a short time as they previously failed to do. For if people who did not believe could become such shining lights once they did believe, how much more could those do so who already believed?

On the other hand, let no one pondering all this slacken off, on learning that everything can be put right in a short while; for the future is always unclear, and the day of the Lord is like a thief that comes upon us suddenly as we sleep. But if we are not asleep, it will not come upon us like a thief, or take us all unaware. For if we stay awake and keep watch, it will arrive not like a thief, but like a royal messenger calling us to the good things prepared for us.

St John Chrysostom, Première Epître aux Thessaloniens (Bareille 19.184-6); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE FIRST LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

(The friendship between Paul and the Thessalonians: 1 Thessalonians 2:13 – 3:13)

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea; for you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all men by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they may be saved – so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God's wrath has come upon them at last!

But since we were bereft of you, brethren, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavoured the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face; because we wanted to come to you – I, Paul, again and again – but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.

Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's servant in the gospel of Christ, to establish you in your faith and to exhort you, that no one be moved by these afflictions. You yourselves know that this is to be our lot. For when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction; just as it has come to pass, and as you know. For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent that I might know your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labour would be in vain.

But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you – for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith; for now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. For what thanksgiving can we render to God for you, for all the joy which we feel for your sake before our God, praying earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you; and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men, as we do to you, so that he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

A READING FROM THE DISCOURSES ON THE PSALMS BY ST HILARY OF POITIERS

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity. It is good and pleasant for brothers to dwell in unity because when they dwell in unity they are gathered in the

community of the Church; when they are called brothers it is because they are of one heart in the charity of a single will.

At the first preaching of the Apostles we read that this was the great precept, summed up in the words, *The company of those who believed were of one heart and soul*. It is fitting then, for the people of God to be brothers under one Father, to be one under one Spirit, to enter with one mind under the same roof, under one head to be members of one body.

It is good and pleasant when brothers dwell in unity. And the Prophet uses a simile to illustrate that goodness and pleasantness, *It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down upon the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes*. By that oil, made up of perfumes, Aaron was anointed to the priesthood. It was God's pleasure that this be the anointing of his first priest. And we know that our Lord, too, was invisibly anointed when it is said, *Your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness*. That anointing is not a material thing, he was anointed not with a horn of oil as kings are, but with the oil of gladness. Furthermore, after this anointing Aaron was called according to Law, the Christ, which means the anointed one.

And since wherever it is poured out, this oil quenches the unclean spirits of the heart, so through the anointing of charity we breathe forth to God a sweet odour, as the Apostle says, *we are the aroma of Christ*. Just as this oil was pleasing to God in his first priest, so it is good and pleasant for brothers to dwell in unity.

The oil ran down from the head into the beard. Now, a beard is an ornament of adult manhood. For we must not be little children in Christ except, as it is written, we should *be babes in evil not in thinking*. The Apostle calls all who have not faith 'babes' since they are not strong enough for solid food and still need milk, as he says, *I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready*.

St Hilary of Poitiers, On Psalm 132; The Divine Office I.

A READING FROM THE FIRST LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

(A holy life and the hope of resurrection: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18)

Finally, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from unchastity; that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God; that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we solemnly forewarned you. For God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

But concerning love of the brethren you have no need to have any one write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do love all the brethren throughout Macedonia. But we exhort you, brethren, to do so more and more, to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we charged you; so that you may command the respect of outsiders, and be dependent on nobody.

But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangels call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

A READING FROM AGAINST HERESIES BY ST IRENAEUS

For this reason, the Word of God became man and the Son of God became the son of man in order that man, being mingled with the Word of God, and being granted adoption should become the son of God.

In no other way could we have received incorruptibility and immortality, without ourselves first being united to them. How could we be made one with incorruptibility and immortality unless these two had first become what we are? Only in this way could corruptibility be absorbed by incorruptibility and mortality by immortality and so enable us to receive adoption as sons.

This same Son of God, therefore, who is our Lord and the existing Word of the Father is also son of man. He was born, like other men, born of Mary, who was herself of human stock and a member of the human race, and so he became the Son of Man.

It was for this reason that the Lord gave a sign here below and in heaven above that man had not asked for. Man had neither hoped that a virgin could be with child and bear a son, although she was a virgin; nor that this child would be God with us, coming down to the earth below in search of the sheep that was lost (which he himself had made) and once again ascending on high and offering in trust to the Father the man he had found. This same Lord himself became the first-fruits of the resurrection of man, so that the resurrection of the head should mean the resurrection of the rest of the body, and that every man alive should rise again on completion of the time of the punishment, which his disobedience had earned. For the body in its varied joints and ligaments grows up and is strengthened by God's aid, and each of the members has its appropriate place in the body. The Father has many mansions in the same way as there are many members in the body.

When, therefore, man fell, God was generous in mercy, since he foresaw the victory which would be his through the agency of the Word. For because his power was made perfect in weakness, he displayed the kindness of God and the greatness of his power.

St Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses, 3.19.1, 3 - 3.20.1; The Divine Office I.

A READING FROM THE FIRST LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

(The way of life of the sons of light: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-28)

But as to the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When people say, "There is peace and security", then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape. But you are not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

Brethren, pray for us.

Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.

I adjure you by the Lord that this letter be read to all the brethren.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

A READING FROM A HOMILY ON PSALM 37 BY ST AUGUSTINE

There is another, inner prayer which is without ceasing. It is the desire which consists in longing. Whatever else you do, if you long for that Sabbath, you never cease praying. If you do not want to cease praying, do not cease longing. Your unending stream of longing is your unending stream of speech. If you cease loving, you will cease speaking. Who are those who have ceased speaking? Those of whom it is said: *Because there is an abundance of iniquity, the love of many shall grow cold.* The cooling-off of love is the silence of the heart. The leaping flames of love are the shouting of the heart. If love lasts for ever, then you are always shouting. If you are always shouting, you are always longing. If you are

longing, then you are recollecting the future rest. And you ought to understand before whom the roaring of your heart takes place.

Consider now what sort of longing it ought to be which is before the eyes of God. Should it really be a longing for the death of our enemy? This is the sort of thing people think they are right to ask for. Indeed sometimes we do pray for the thing we ought not to. Let us have a look at what people think they are entitled to pray for. For they pray for the death of someone, and for an inheritance to come their way. But let even those who pray for their enemies to die listen to the Lord when he says: *Pray for your enemies*. Let them not, therefore, pray for the death of their enemies, but let them pray for their improvement. Indeed their enemies will in a very real sense be dead, for once they have been corrected, they will no longer be enemies.

And before you is all my longing. What if their longing is before God, and their groaning is not before God? How can this possibly be, when the voice of that longing is groaning? That is why the psalm says: *And my groaning is not hidden from you*. For you it is not hidden, but it is hidden from many people. Sometimes God's humble servant is seen to be saying: *And my groaning is not hidden from you*. Sometimes God's servant is seen also to laugh. You could hardly say that the longing for God was dead and buried in his heart, could you? And if there is longing within it, there is also groaning. It does not always filter through to the ears of people like you and me, but it never escapes the attention of God's ears.

St Augustine, Enarr. In Ps. 37.14 (CCL 38.391-2); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

(Greeting and thanksgiving: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12)

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the Church of the Thessalonians in God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren, as is fitting, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. 4 Therefore we ourselves boast of you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions which you are enduring.

This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be made worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering – since indeed God deems it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, to grant rest with us to you who are afflicted, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at in all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his call, and may fulfil every good resolve and work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A READING FROM THE LETTER TO DIOGNETUS

The distinction between Christians and other men, is neither in country nor language nor customs. For they do not dwell in cities in some separate place of their own, nor do they use any strange variety of dialect, nor practise an extraordinary kind of life. This teaching of theirs has not been discovered by the intellect or thought of busy men, nor are they the advocates of any human doctrine as some men are. Yet while living in Greek and barbarian cities and following the local customs, both in clothing and food and in the rest of life, they show forth the wonderful and paradoxical character of their own citizenship.

They dwell in their own fatherlands, but as if strangers in them; they share all things as citizens, and suffer all things as foreigners. Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is a foreign country. They marry as all men, they bear children, but they do not expose their offspring. They offer free hospitality, but guard their purity. Their lot is cast *in the flesh*, but they do not live *according to the flesh*. They pass their time upon the earth, but they have their citizenship in heaven. They obey the appointed laws, and they surpass the laws in their own lives. They love all men and are persecuted by all

men. They are unknown and they are condemned. They are put to death and they gain life. *They are poor and make many rich*; they lack all things and have all things in abundance. They are dishonoured, and are glorified in their dishonour, they are spoken evil of and are justified. *They are abused and give blessing*, they are insulted and render honour. When they do good they are reviled as evil-doers, when they are reviled they rejoice as men who receive life. Those who hate them cannot state the cause of their enmity.

To put it shortly what the soul is in the body, that is what the Christians are in the world. The soul is spread through all the members of the body, and Christians are spread throughout the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, but is not of the body, and Christians dwell in the world, but are not of the world. The soul is invisible, and is guarded in a visible body, and Christians are recognised when they are in the world, but their religion remains invisible. The flesh hates the soul, and wages war upon it, though it has suffered no evil, because it is prevented from gratifying its pleasures, and the world hates the Christians though it has suffered no evil, because they are opposed to its pleasures. The soul loves the flesh which hates it, and Christians love those that hate them. The soul has been shut up in the body, but itself sustains the body; and Christians are confined in the world as in a prison, but themselves sustain the world. The soul dwells immortal in a mortal tabernacle, and Christians sojourn among corruptible things, waiting for the incorruptibility which is in heaven. The soul when treated badly in food and drink becomes better, and Christians when buffeted day by day increase more. God has appointed them to so great a post in the battle line and it is not right for them to decline it.

The Letter to Diognetus, 4.4 – 5.5; Loeb (1913) tr. Lake.

Friday of the Sixth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

(The Day of the Lord: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17)

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him, we beg you, brethren, not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word, or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming. The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

A READING FROM THE CITY OF GOD BY ST AUGUSTINE

No one can doubt that Paul is here speaking of Antichrist, telling us that the day of judgement (which he calls the Day of the Lord) will not come without the prior coming of a figure whom he calls the Apostate, meaning, of course, an apostate from the Lord God. There is, however, some uncertainty about the 'temple' in which he is to take his seat. Is it in the ruins of the Temple built by King Solomon, or actually in a Church? For the Apostle would not say *the temple of God* if he meant the temple of some idol or demon. For that reason some people would have it that Antichrist means here not the leader himself but what we may call his whole body, those who belong to him, together with himself, their leader. And they suppose that then it would be more correct to say, following the original Greek, that *he takes his seat as the temple of God*, instead of *in the temple of God*, claiming that he himself is God's temple, that is, the Church.

As for the statement, *and you know what now restrains him so that he will be revealed only at the right time*, Paul did not choose to speak explicitly, because, as he says, they knew it. And that is why we who have not their knowledge, are anxious to arrive at the Apostle's meaning; but we find ourselves unable to do so, for all our efforts. Some people suppose those words to refer to the Roman imperial power, and they think that the reason for Paul's reluctance to write more explicitly was the fear of slandering the Roman Empire when many hoped that it would last forever. On this assumption *the secret power of wickedness already at work* would be intended as a reference to Nero, whose actions already seemed like those of Antichrist. Hence there are people who suggest that Nero is to rise again and become Antichrist.

However, there are others who think that *you know what restrains* and *the secret power of wickedness* refer only to the evil people and the pretended Christians who are in the Church, until they reach such a number as to constitute a great people for Antichrist. Thus there are different interpretations of the obscure words of the Apostle, put forward by different commentators. But the general meaning of what he said is not doubtful. Christ will not come to judge the living and the dead without the prior coming of his adversary, Antichrist, to seduce those who are dead in soul. It is, in fact, at that time that Satan will be unloosed, and by the agency of the Antichrist he will carry on his work with every kind of lying miracle.

Those led astray by these signs and wonders will be those who deserve to be led astray, *because*, in the Apostle's words, *they did not welcome the love of truth so that they might be saved*. And the Apostle had no hesitation in adding, *for this reason God will subject them to the influence of delusion, so that they may believe a lie*. Thus they will be led astray after being judged, and after being led astray they will be judged by that last and open judgement administered by Jesus Christ, who is to judge with perfect justice, though it was with utter injustice that he himself was judged.

St Augustine, De Civitate Dei, 20.19; tr. Bettenson.

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

(Exhortations and counsels: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-18)

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph, as it did among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men; for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from evil. And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things which we command. May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, we did not eat any one's bread without paying, but with toil and labour we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you. It was not because we have not that right, but to give you in our conduct an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: If any one will not work, let him not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living. Brethren, do not be weary in well-doing.

If any one refuses to obey what we say in this letter, note that man, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not look on him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with you all.

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

A READING FROM THE CONFERENCES OF ST JOHN CASSIAN

Although some people are in the habit of speaking of monasteries instead of *cenobia*, without drawing a distinction, nonetheless the difference is that monastery is the name of a dwelling and means nothing more than a place for monks, whereas *cenobium* indicates the character and discipline of the monastic profession itself. The dwelling of even one monk can be called a monastery, but something cannot be called a *cenobium* unless a united community with several inhabitants lives there. Indeed, even where groups of sarabaites live are said to be monasteries.

Therefore, since I see that you have learned the principles of this profession from the best kind of monks – that is, from the praiseworthy school of the *cenobia* – and that you are heading toward the highest reaches of anchorite discipline, toward the virtue of humility and patience which I do not doubt that you learned there, you should pursue

this with a sincerely disposed heart, not feigning it, as some do, by false humility in speech and certain bodily practices.

Abba Serapion once cleverly mocked this feigned humility. When someone came to him displaying the greatest abjection in dress and speech and the old man encouraged him, as was the custom, to say the prayer, the man would not agree. He demeaned himself and said that he had been involved in such wicked behaviour that he did not deserve to breathe the same air as everyone else; he even refused to sit on a mat but sat on the ground instead. But when he refused to have his feet washed, Abba Serapion, having finished the meal and having been given the opportunity by the customary conference, began to warn him kindly and gently not to wander about everywhere like a lazy vagrant, especially since he was young and strong; he encouraged him to sit in his cell in keeping with the rule of the elders and, following the example of the Apostle Paul, to prefer being supported by his own toil rather than by others' generosity.

At this the man was filled with such annoyance that he was unable to conceal on his face the bitterness that he had conceived in his heart. The old man said to him: 'Up until now, my son, you have burdened yourself with the full weight of your misdeeds, not fearing to incur a notorious reputation by confessing such atrocious crimes. Why, I ask you now in reference to our simple little admonition, which contained no reproach at all but rather edification and love, do I see you moved with such indignation that you are unable to hide it on your face? Were you perhaps, in humiliating yourself, hoping for praise from our mouth?'

Hence, a humility of heart must be maintained which is genuine and which does not come from an affected humbleness of body and speech. It will glow with the clearest indications of patience precisely when a person does not boast to others about crimes of his that are not to be believed but, rather disregards what is insolently said against him by someone else and endures insults inflicted upon him with a gentle and placid spirit.

St John Cassian, The Conferences, 18.10-11; ACW 57 (1997) tr. Ramsey.

Season of the Year | Week 07

Sunday of the Seventh Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

(Thanksgiving amid tribulations: 2 Corinthians 1:1-14)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother.

To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Why, we felt that we had received the sentence of death; but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead; he delivered us from so deadly a peril, and he will deliver us; on him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us in answer to many prayers.

For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience that we have behaved in the world, and still more toward you, with holiness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God. For we write you nothing but what you can read and understand; I hope you will understand fully, as you have understood in part, that you can be proud of us as we can be of you, on the day of the Lord Jesus.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON THE PAULINE EPISTLES BY AMBROSIAS

Freed from all anxiety about the Corinthians, Paul now confidently declares that he is an Apostle of the Lord. In the first letter, when he heard some had been lured away from his teaching, he simply said that he was *called an Apostle*. In order to affirm that his Apostleship has been ratified, he adds here that he has been made an Apostle by the will of God. He writes in association with Timothy, from whom he has heard the good news of the changes which have taken place at Corinth, and he associates the people there with believers in other Churches, in order to confirm to them that they have made progress.

Since the gift of God and of Christ is one and the same, Paul wants them to be partakers in the grace of God, that is, in the grace of Jesus Christ. Paul always speaks in this way, indicating the personhood of the Father and of the Son, even though they are of one substance. By these words he is giving much relief to those who had been saddened by his rebuke, for when they hear that God is not just the Father of creation but the Father of mercies as well, they will have hope and be assured that they have been rebuked so that they may find the mercy of God, once they have mended their ways. Through repentance they are born again and made anew, and this is not just a pardon but a restoration of their previous state of existence.

Paul mentions two kinds of consolation. One is the sort by which people who are suffering distress unjustly on account of the name of Christ find consolation in being set free. The other is the consolation of those who, when they are grieved because of sins, receive consolation from the fact that hope of forgiveness is promised to them when they mend their ways. This happens in a community of those who have received consolation from God and have been rescued from distress. It is thus clear that Christ himself, for whose sake we are suffering, is present with us, consoling us and rescuing us from trouble by his divine intervention.

Paul also wanted the Corinthians to know what evils he was enduring for the sake of their salvation. That way, they would not take it too badly if their own errors were admonished by people who were enduring such harsh treatment for their sake. The boast of Paul's conscience was simplicity and sincerity, qualities which belong to God's teaching. In his first letter Paul had criticised teaching based on earthly wisdom, and he alludes to that again here. He accused preachers of that kind both because they preached according to the wisdom of the world and because they were doing it in order to make money. For that reason, Paul was unwilling to receive any payment from the Corinthians. What Paul says is backed up by his actions, and it is through their actions that we learn what a person really thinks.

Ambrosiaster, On the Pauline Epistles (CSEL 81:3.3.195-201); ACC 7 (1999) tr. Bray.

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

(Why the Apostle altered his journey: 2 Corinthians 1:15 – 2:11)

Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a double pleasure; I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea. Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans like a worldly man, ready to say Yes and No at once? As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we preached among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No; but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God. But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has commissioned us; he has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

But I call God to witness against me – it was to spare you that I refrained from coming to Corinth. Not that we lord it over your faith; we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.

For I made up my mind not to make you another painful visit. For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. For I wrote you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.

But if any one has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely – to you all. For such a one this punishment by the majority is enough; so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. Any one whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, to keep Satan from gaining the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON 2 CORINTHIANS BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

God the Father makes us firm in Christ and establishes in all souls a faith that is correct and unshakable in holding that Christ is God by nature and in truth. That is so even if he was visibly in a form like ours, being born from a woman according to human nature and yet being above every created thing. At any rate, when Peter confessed his faith, saying clearly that, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*, Jesus Christ our Lord replied himself, saying, *Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood did not reveal*

this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. For since the mystery is a great one, it is reasonable that it has need of the revelation which is from above, from the Father.

It is God, therefore, who makes us firm in Christ, God who seals and anoints us and gives the Spirit as the guarantee, so that we might know that the Son is not 'yes' and 'no' but, rather, is truly God and that the 'yes' to all good things is in him. God is said to seal and to anoint us, giving the guarantee of the Spirit, so that Christ might be the one who fulfils these things in us, not in a servile way nor as one anointing and sealing us with an alien spirit, but with the Spirit which is his own and the Father's. For the Holy Spirit is in both Father and Son by means of the identity of nature, not as something shared between them but rather as coming forth from the Father through the Son to the created universe. Christ breathed on the holy Apostles and said *Receive the Holy Spirit*, and it is through him and in him that we have received the impress of the divine and intelligible image. For the divine Apostle himself said in his letter to the Galatians, *My children, with whom I am again suffering labour pains until such time as Christ is formed in you.* Now if we are conformed to Christ, and if we are enriched by the divine image within us, then Christ himself is the image of God the Father, and his exact resemblance, and we are called to his likeness, not by means of a participation in holiness but rather in nature and essence.

For it is not unreasonable that the one who, by nature, is related to him who is true God by nature and who is generated from his substance should himself be God. He has been sealed by God the Father, as John the wise says, *He who receives his witness has put his seal to the fact that God is true.* But he has not been sealed in the same way as we have, for the Father reveals that he himself is wholly in the nature of the Son, which is not true for us. Thus Christ says, *He who has seen me has seen the Father.*

St Cyril of Alexandria, In Ep II ad Corinthios, (PG 74:921-3); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

(Paul, the minister of a New Covenant: 2 Corinthians 2:12 – 3:6)

When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord; but my mind could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word; but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on your hearts, to be known and read by all men; and you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life.

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON LEVITICUS BY ORIGEN

The Word of God, who was clothed with the flesh of Mary, proceeded into this world as in the Last Days. What was seen in him was one thing; what was understood was something else. For the sight of his flesh was open for all to see, but the knowledge of his divinity was given to the few who were chosen. So also when the Word of God was brought to men through the Prophets and the Lawgiver, it was not brought without proper clothing. For just as in the incarnation the Word was covered with a veil of flesh, so here it was covered with the veil of the letter, and this letter is seen as flesh but the spiritual sense hiding within is perceived as divinity.

Such, therefore, is what we now find as we go through the book of Leviticus, in which the sacrificial rites, the diversity of offerings, and even the ministries of the priests are described. Both the worthy and the unworthy see and hear these things according to the letter, which is, as it were, the flesh of the Word of God and the clothing of its divinity. But *blessed are those eyes* which inwardly see the divine spirit that is concealed in the veil of the letter; and blessed are they who bring the ears of the inner man to hear these things. Otherwise, they will only perceive *the letter which kills*, in these words.

If I also should follow the literal understanding, as some among us do, without using what they ridicule as a confusing cloud of allegory, I would only arrive at the voice of the

Lawgiver. From this I, a man of the Church, living under the faith of Christ and placed in the midst of the Church, would then be compelled by the authority of the divine precept to sacrifice calves and lambs and to offer fine wheat flour with incense and oil. This is what happens when we are forced to be subservient to the historical sense and to keep to the letter of the Law.

We are happy to be attacked for the way we read the Holy Scriptures so long as the Church, which has already turned to Christ the Lord, may know the truth of the Word which is completely covered under the veil of the letter. For thus the Apostle said, *if anyone turns to the Lord, the veil will be removed; for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom*. Thus, the Lord himself, the Holy Spirit himself must be entreated by us to remove every cloud and all darkness which obscures the vision of our hearts hardened with the stains of sin, in order that we may be able to behold the spiritual and wonderful knowledge of his Law, according to him who said: *Take the veil from my eyes and I shall observe the wonders of your Law*.

Origen, Hom. in Lev. 1.1-4; FoC 83 (1990) tr. Barkley.

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

(The glory of the ministers of the New Covenant: 2 Corinthians 3:7 – 4:4)

Now if the dispensation of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such splendour that the Israelites could not look at Moses face because of its brightness, fading as this was, will not the dispensation of the Spirit be attended with greater splendour? For if there was splendour in the dispensation of condemnation, the dispensation of righteousness must far exceed it in splendour. Indeed, in this case, what once had splendour has come to have no splendour at all, because of the splendour that surpasses it. For if what faded away came with splendour, what is permanent must have much more splendour.

Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not see the end of the fading splendour. But their minds were hardened; for to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds; but when a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with Gods word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every mans conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

In changeable human nature, good and evil exist by turns because we have the capacity to choose either one of two contraries. As a result, the good in us alternates with the evil, and the evil becomes a limit on the good. All the activities of our souls, insofar as they are opposed, define and limit one another. On the other hand, the divine nature is simple, pure, of one kind, unmoved, unchangeable, always the same, and always self-contained. Because it is incapable of fellowship with evil, it remains unlimited in the good. It recognises no limits because it contains no opposites in itself. So then, when God draws a human soul to participate in himself, he always remains in equal measure superior to the participating soul because of his superabundant goodness. On the one hand, the soul continually grows through participation in what is beyond it and never stops growing. On the other hand, the good in which the soul shares remains unlimited so that the more

the soul participates in it, the more she recognises that it transcends her as much as before.

We now see the bride being led by the Word up a rising staircase by the steps of virtue to the heights of perfection. First the Word sends her a ray of light through the windows of the Prophets and the lattices of the Law. He exhorts her to draw near to the light and to become beautiful by being transformed into a dove's image in the light. The bride at this point partakes in the good as much as she can. Then he starts again to draw her to participate in a higher beauty, as if she had never tasted it. Thus, as she progresses, her desire grows with each step. And, because there is always an unlimited good beyond what the bride has attained, she always seems to be just beginning her ascent.

Therefore the Word says once again to the bride whom he has awakened: *Arise*. And when she has come to him, he says, *Come*. For one who has been called to rise in this way can always rise further, and one who runs to the Lord will always have wide open spaces before him. And so we must constantly rise and never cease drawing closer. As often as the bridegroom says *Arise* and *Come*, he gives the power to ascend to what is better. Thus you must understand what follows in the Song of Songs. When the bridegroom exhorts the bride who is already beautiful to become beautiful, he clearly recalls the words of the Apostle who bids the same image to be transformed *from glory to glory*. By glory he means what we have grasped and found at any given moment. No matter how great and exalted that glory may be, we believe that it is less than that for which we still hope. Although she is a dove by what she had achieved, nevertheless, the bride is bidden to become a dove once again by being transformed into something better.

St Gregory of Nyssa, In Cant. 5.158-160; (1987) tr. McCambley.

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

(The frailty and confidence of the Apostle: 2 Corinthians 4:5-18)

For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus sake. For it is the God who said, Let light shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Since we have the same spirit of faith as he had who wrote, I believed, and so I spoke, we too believe, and so we speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

A READING FROM THE DISCOURSES ON THE PSALMS BY ST AMBROSE

Why do you turn away your face? We think that God turns his face away from us when we are suffering, so that darkness is poured out on our heart and we are so hindered by the darkness that we are unable to look upon the radiance of the truth. But if God touches our intellect and deigns to visit our mind we are sure that nothing is able to bring darkness upon us. The countenance of a man shines out more than the other parts of his body, and whenever we see someone either we come to know him if he is a stranger, or recognise him as one we know. How much more then does the countenance of God illuminate him on whom he looks!

As in his other teaching so here the Apostle has something notable to say about this. He is truly an interpreter of Christ, bringing him to our understanding with apt ideas and words. He says: *The God who said, 'Out of darkness the light shall shine', is the same God who made his light shine in our hearts, to bring us the light of the knowledge of God's glory, shining in the face of Christ.* We have heard then where Christ shines in us: he is the eternal brightness of soul whom the Father sent into the world that we might be

illuminated by his face and so be able to look upon eternal and heavenly truths – we who before were imprisoned in earthly darkness.

Why am I speaking about Christ when even Peter the Apostle said to the cripple, lame from birth: *Look on us?* He then looked at Peter, and found light by the grace of faith; nor would he have been restored to health unless he had believed in faith.

Now, when there was so much glory to be seen among the Apostles, Zacchaeus, hearing that the Lord Jesus was passing by, climbed up into a tree, because he was himself a small slight man and could not see Jesus in the crowd. He saw Christ and he found light, he saw him and he who had been robbing others of their goods now was happy to give away his own!

Why do you turn away your face? Even if you do turn your face from us, O Lord, yet the light of your countenances is imprinted upon us. We keep this in our hearts and it glows in our inmost will, nor can anyone survive if you turn away your face.

St Ambrose, In Ps. 43.89-90; The Divine Office III.

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

(Hope for the heavenly home. The ministry of reconciliation: 2 Corinthians 5:1-21)

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling, so that by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

So we are always of good courage; we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body.

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men; but what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to be proud of us, so that you may be able to answer those who pride themselves on a man's position and not on his heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer.

Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

A READING FROM THE CONFESSIONS OF ST AUGUSTINE

The true mediator, whom in the secret of your mercy you have shown to men and sent to men, that by his example they may learn humility – the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, appeared between sinful mortals and the immortal Just One: for like men he was mortal, like God he was just. The wages of justice being life and peace,

through the union of his own justice with God he was able to make void the death of those sinners whom he justified by choosing to undergo death as they do.

How much you have loved us, O good Father, who spared not even your own Son, but delivered him up for us wicked men! How you have loved us, for whom he thought it not robbery to be equal with you became obedient even unto the death of the cross, he who alone was free among the dead, having power to lay down his life and power to take it up again: for us he was to you both victor and victim, and victor because victim; for us he was to you both priest and sacrifice, and priest because sacrifice: turning us from slaves into your sons, by being your Son and becoming a slave. Rightly is my hope strong in him, who sits at your right hand and intercedes for us; otherwise I should despair. For many and great are my infirmities, many and great; but your medicine is of more power. We might well have thought your Word remote from union with man and so have despaired of ourselves, if he had not been made flesh and dwelt among us.

Terrified by my sins and the mass of my misery, I had pondered in my heart and thought of flight to the desert, but you forbade me and strengthened me, saying: *Christ died for all: that they also who live, may now not live to themselves but with him who died for them.* See, Lord, I cast my care upon you, that I may live; and I will consider the wondrous things of your Law. You know my unskilfulness and my infirmity: teach me and heal me. He your only One, *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, has redeemed me with his blood. Let not the proud speak evil of me, for I think upon the price of my redemption, I eat it and drink it and give it to others to eat and drink; and being poor I desire to be filled with it amongst those that eat and are filled: *those who seek the Lord shall praise him.*

St Augustine, Confessions 10.43, 68-70; The Divine Office III.

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

(Paul's tribulations and his exhortation to holiness; 2 Corinthians 6:1 – 7:1)

Working together with him, then, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, "At the acceptable time I have listened to you, and helped you on the day of salvation." Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in any one's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Our mouth is open to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return – I speak as to children – widen your hearts also.

Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God.

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON THE LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS BY ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Just as what brings heat makes things expand, so it is the gift of love to stretch hearts wide open; it is a warm and glowing virtue. Love caused Paul to open his mouth and expand his heart. 'I do not love only by words,' he says, 'my heart itself joins in the song of love and so I speak with confidence with my whole mouth and with my whole heart.' Nothing was wider than the heart of Paul which embraced all the saints, just like the individual lover, in close bonds of love. And yet his love did not stretch to breaking point, not become weak, but remained whole in every case. What wonder that he had such feeling for the saints when even in the case of unbelievers his heart embraced the whole world?

And so he did not say, 'I love you', but – and this is more emphatic – *We have spoken frankly to you, we have opened wide our hearts*. We have all men in our heart; and not merely that alone, but with ample room. For he who is loved wanders in the inmost heart of the lover without any fear: accordingly Paul says: *On our part there is no constraint; any constraint there may be is in yourselves*. Notice that the reproach is uttered with restraint, which is the mark of lovers. He did not say, 'You people do not love me', but, 'Not in an equal measure', nor does he wish them to be too bitterly reproached.

It is evident in all his writings how he burns with love for the faithful. Choose quotations out of every epistle. Writing to the Romans, the Apostle says: *I long to see you, and, I have often made it my object to come to you, and If in any way at all I may have a prosperous journey to you*. To the Galatians he speaks as follows: *My little children, with whom I am again in travail*; to the Ephesians again: *For this reason I kneel in prayer on your behalf*; to the Thessalonians: *What is our hope or joy or crown of boasting? Is it not you?* For he said that he carried them round both in his heart and in his chains.

Furthermore, he writes to the Colossians: I wish you to see how great a conflict I have on your behalf and on behalf of those who have not seen my face in the flesh so that your hearts can have comfort and to the Thessalonians: Like a nurse who cherishes her charges, thus we yearn for you, and we wanted to give you not only the Gospel but even our lives. On our part there is no constraint, he says. He does not say only that he loves them, but that he is loved by them, that in this way too he may draw them to him. And about them he bears this witness: Titus has come bringing us your longing, your tears, and your eagerness.

St John Chrysostom, Hom in Ep. ad Cor. 13.1-2; The Divine Office III.

Season of the Year | Week 08

Sunday of the Eighth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

(The Apostle receives comfort from the Corinthians' penitence: 2 Corinthians 7:2-16)

Open your hearts to us; we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. I have great confidence in you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. With all our affliction, I am overjoyed.

For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it (though I did regret it), for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting; for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves guiltless in the matter. So although I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong, nor on account of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your zeal for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God. Therefore we are comforted.

And besides our own comfort we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his mind has been set at rest by you all. For if I have expressed to him some pride in you, I was not put to shame; but just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting before Titus has proved true. And his heart goes out all the more to you, as he remembers the obedience of you all, and the fear and trembling with which you received him. I rejoice, because I have perfect confidence in you.

A READING FROM THE LADDER OF ST JOHN CLIMACUS

Mourning which is according to God is a melancholy of the soul, a disposition of an anguished heart that passionately seeks what it thirsts for, and when it fails to attain it, pursues it diligently and follows behind it lamenting bitterly. Those making some progress in blessed mourning are usually temperate and untalkative. Those who have succeeded in making real progress do not become angry and do not bear grudges. As for the perfect – these are humble, they long for dishonour, they look out for involuntary sufferings, they do not condemn sinners and they are inordinately compassionate. The first kind are acceptable, the second praiseworthy, but blessed surely are those who hunger for suffering and thirst for dishonour, for they will be filled to abundance with the food that cannot satiate them.

If you are endowed with mourning, hold fast to it with all your strength, for it can easily be lost if it is not well secured. Like wax melting near fire, it can easily be dissolved by noise, worldly cares, and luxury, but, in particular, by talkativeness and frivolity.

A man misses the true beauty of mourning if he can mourn at will, rather than because he genuinely wants to, or, more accurately, because God wishes him to. The ugly tears of vainglory mingle frequently with mourning which is pleasing to God, as we shall discover by experience whenever we find ourselves mourning and yet doing wrong.

True compunction is pain of soul without any distraction. It offers itself no rest and thinks hourly of death. It stands in wait for the God who brings comfort, like cool waters, to humble monks. God does not demand or desire that someone should mourn out of sorrow of heart, but rather that out of love for him he should rejoice with the laughter of the soul. Take away sin and then the sorrowful tears that flow from bodily eyes will be superfluous. Why look for a bandage when you are not cut? Adam did not weep before the fall, and there will be no tears after the resurrection when sin will be abolished, when pain, sorrow, and lamentation will have taken flight.

As I ponder the true nature of compunction, I find myself amazed by the way in which inward joy and gladness mingle with what we call mourning and grief, like honey in a comb. There must be a lesson here, and it surely is that compunction is properly a gift from God, so that that there is a real pleasure in the soul, since God secretly brings consolation to those who in their heart of hearts are repentant. When we die, we will not be criticised for having failed to work miracles. We will not be accused of having failed to be theologians or contemplatives. But we will certainly have some explanation to offer to God for not having mourned unceasingly.

St John Climacus, The Ladder of Divine Ascent, 7; CWS (1982) tr. Luibheid & Russell.

Monday of the Eighth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

(Paul asks for a contribution for Jerusalem: 2 Corinthians 8:1-24)

We want you to know, brethren, about the grace of God which has been shown in the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favour of taking part in the relief of the saints – and this, not as we expected, but first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. Accordingly we have urged Titus that as he had already made a beginning, he should also complete among you this gracious work. Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in utterance, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in your love for us – see that you excel in this gracious work also.

I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. And in this matter I give my advice: it is best for you now to complete what a year ago you began not only to do but to desire, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he has not. I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality. As it is written, “He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack.”

But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord. With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel; and not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work which we are carrying on, for the glory of the Lord and to show our good will. We intend that no one should blame us about this liberal gift which we are administering, for we aim at what is honourable not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of men. And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you. As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker in your service; and as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. So give proof, before the churches, of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

A READING FROM THE SERMONS OF ST CAESARIUS OF ARLES

Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. Sweet is the name of mercy, dearest brethren, and if the name is sweet, how much sweeter is the quality itself? Yet though all

men would wish to receive it, alas, their own conduct is not such as to deserve it. All wish to receive mercy, few are ready to show mercy to others. What effrontery to want to receive what you neglect to give! You must show mercy in this life if you hope to receive it in the next. And so, dearest brethren, since we all wish for mercy, let us make her our patroness in this age that she may free us in the future. For there is mercy in heaven, and we attain it through the acts of mercy that we perform on earth. This is what Scripture says: *O Lord, your mercy is in heaven.*

There are two kinds of mercy then, mercy on earth and mercy in heaven, human mercy and divine mercy. What is human mercy like? It makes you concerned for the hardship of the poor. What is divine mercy like? It forgives sinners. Whatever generosity human mercy shows during our life on earth divine mercy repays when we reach our fatherland. In this world God is cold and hungry in all the poor, as he himself said: *As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.* God then is pleased to give from heaven, but he desires to receive on earth.

What sort of people are we – when God gives, we want to receive, when he asks, we refuse to give? When a poor man is hungry, Christ is in need, as he said himself: *I was hungry and you gave me no food.* Take care not to despise the hardship of the poor, if you would hope, without fear, to have your sins forgiven. My dear brethren, Christ is now hungry, he is hungry and thirsty in all the poor; and what he receives on earth he returns in heaven.

I put to you this question, dearly beloved: what is it you want, what is it you are looking for, when you come to Church? What indeed if not mercy? Show mercy on earth, and you will receive mercy in heaven. A poor man is begging from you, and you are begging from God; he asks for a scrap, you ask for eternal life. Give to the beggar, so that you may deserve to receive from Christ. Listen to his words: *Give and it shall be given you.* What effrontery it is for you to want to receive what you refuse to give! And so when you come to Church give whatever alms you can to the poor in accordance with your means.

St Caesarius of Arles, Sermon 25.1; The Divine Office III.

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

(The spiritual fruits of giving: 2 Corinthians 9:1-15)

Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the offering for the saints, for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them. But I am sending the brethren so that our boasting about you may not prove vain in this case, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be; lest if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we be humiliated – to say nothing of you – for being so confident. So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren to go on to you before me, and arrange in advance for this gift you have promised, so that it may be ready not as an exaction but as a willing gift.

The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work. As it is written, “He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever.”

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your resources and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God; for the rendering of this service not only supplies the wants of the saints but also overflows in many thanksgivings to God. Under the test of this service, you will glorify God by your obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ, and by the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others; while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

A READING FROM THE SERMONS OF ST LEO THE GREAT

The sublime nature of God’s grace lies in this, my dear friends, that daily in our Christian hearts all our desires are transferred from what is earthbound to what is heavenly. Yet it is still true that our present life is lived with the Creator’s aid and is supported by his providence. It is the one and same Lord who bestows temporal blessings and who promises the eternal blessings. There is a correspondence between two duties which we have of giving thanks to God. First of all for the fact that we are carried along by the hope of future happiness to the fulfilment of this great preparation. It is faith which gives us speed. And secondly, we are to honour and praise God for the goods which we receive annually. It is he who from the creation has granted the earth’s fruitfulness and who has established the cycles of fruit production in the various plants and seeds. He never abandons his decrees so that his kindly providence as Creator remains throughout the creation.

Whatever benefit the harvests, the vines and olives have brought to man's use, all of it flows from the generosity of God's goodness. In his delicate way he helps on the hesitant labours of the farmers by the varied nature of the elements. Thus it is that wind and rain, cold and heat, day and night, serve our needs. If the Lord did not grant increase with his habitual planting and watering, human reason by itself would not be able to carry through its tasks to the end. Consequently it is perfectly right and just that we should help others from the things which our heavenly Father has mercifully bestowed on us.

There are many who have no share in fields, vines, or olives. It is worthwhile remembering the poverty of these people so that, out of the plentifulness which God has given, they too may bless God with us for the fruitfulness of the earth. With the landowners they can also rejoice at having been given what is the common part of the poor and of the pilgrims; that barn is a truly happy one and worthy to have all its products multiplied from which the hunger of the poor and weak is satisfied, from which the pilgrim's need is satisfied and from which the sick man's desire is cared for. God's justice allows these people to labour under various disabilities so that he may reward the lowly for their patience and the merciful for their kindness.

The most effective form of intercession for sin is in almsdeeds and fasting; and prayer which is offered with such good works is quickly heard by God. As it is written, *The merciful man does good to his own soul*, and nothing is more personal than what we bestow on our neighbour. For the share of earthly commodities which is given to those in need becomes eternal wealth. The riches which are born of this kindness will not be diminished by use, nor subjected to any corruption. *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall have mercy shown to them by God*. God is the highest reward and the form of the commandment.

St Leo the Great, Sermons, 16.1-2 (CCL 138:61-62); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

(The Apostle's apologia: 2 Corinthians 10:1 – 11:6)

I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ – I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold to you when I am away! – I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of acting in worldly fashion. For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

Look at what is before your eyes. If any one is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that as he is Christ's, so are we. For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I shall not be put to shame. I would not seem to be frightening you with letters. For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account." Let such people understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present. Not that we venture to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.

But we will not boast beyond limit, but will keep to the limits God has apportioned us, to reach even to you. For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you; we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. We do not boast beyond limit, in other men's labours; but our hope is that as your faith increases, our field among you may be greatly enlarged, so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's field. Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord. For it is not the man who commends himself that is accepted, but the man whom the Lord commends.

I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if some one comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. I think that I am not in the least inferior to these superlative apostles. Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not in knowledge; in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.

A READING FROM ON JUDGEMENT BY ST BASIL OF CAESAREA

When I turn to the New Testament I find our Lord Jesus Christ, while not absolving from punishment sins committed in ignorance, yet extending his warning more sternly against those who possess knowledge, when he says: *that servant who knew his master's will, but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating. But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating.*

When I find such declarations on the part of the only-begotten Son of God, and also the indignation of the holy Apostles against sinners, then I learn the severity of Christ's judgement. For *everyone to whom much is given, of him will much be required.* Note also what the blessed Paul says, showing at once the dignity of our calling and God's anger against every sin, *For the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.* In this passage, if one examines carefully each word of what is said, he may perceive accurately the intention of the divine Scripture: that we may not go astray with erroneous notions, thinking that some sins are punished and others left unpunished. But what does it say? *We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God,* so that every sin because it despises the divine commandment is called a high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God.

Then it says: *take every thought captive to obey Christ.* – every thought, not this or that one – and *being ready to punish every disobedience* – here again not this or that one, but **every** *disobedience.* Truly bad custom has led us astray; great evils have been wrought upon us by the perverted tradition of men, which indeed avoids some sins, but chooses others freely. It feigns violent indignation against some, such as murder and adultery and so forth; but judges others not deserving even bare rebuke – I mean anger or slander or drunkenness, and many similar sins, against all of which in other passages Paul, speaking in Christ, pronounced the same sentence: *those who do such things deserve to die.* But where every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God is brought down, and every thought is taken captive to obey Christ, and every disobedience in similar fashion is punished, then nothing remains not brought down, nothing is left unpunished nothing remains outside the obedience of Christ.

St Basil of Caesarea, De Iudicio 84-86; tr. Clarke.

Thursday of the Eighth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

(Against false apostles: 2 Corinthians 11:7-29)

Did I commit a sin in abasing myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached Gods gospel without cost to you? I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. And when I was with you and was in want, I did not burden any one, for my needs were supplied by the brethren who came from Macedonia. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way. As the truth of Christ is in me, this boast of mine shall not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

And what I do I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

I repeat, let no one think me foolish; but even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. (What I am saying I say not with the Lords authority but as a fool, in this boastful confidence; since many boast of worldly things, I too will boast.) For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! For you bear it if a man makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!

But whatever any one dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool – I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one – I am talking like a madman – with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

A READING FROM THE SERMONS OF ST AUGUSTINE

When the Lord sent Ananias to baptise Paul, Ananias said, *Lord, I have heard of this man, that he is everywhere persecuting your servants.* As though to say, ‘Why are you sending a sheep to a wolf?’ Ananias, you see, is a Hebrew word, which in English means ‘sheep’.

About Saul, on the other hand, the future Paul, about the persecutor who was the future preacher, the Prophet had given advance notice: *Benjamin is a ravenous wolf*. What's Benjamin got to do with it? Listen to Paul himself: *For I too am an Israelite, of the race of Abraham, the tribe of Benjamin. A ravenous wolf; in the morning he will ravage, in the evening he will divide the food*.

You see, he was dividing the food now that he was a preacher; he knew what to give to whom; what nourishment to administer to the sick and the weak, or what food to feed the strong. But when the sheep Ananias heard the name of this wolf, he started trembling. What answer did the Lord give Ananias as he trembled at the notoriety of Paul? *Let it be so now; this man is a chosen vessel for me, to carry my name before nations and kings. I myself will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake*. I'll show him; it sounds like a threat, but it's the preparation for a crown. Anyway, once turned preacher from persecutor, what did he have to endure? *Dangers at sea, dangers from rivers, dangers in the town, dangers in the countryside, dangers among false brethren; in toil and hardship, in many vigils, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, often at the point of death; besides these outward things, the daily assault on me of my anxiety for all the Churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is tripped up, and I am not hot with indignation?*

Here is this persecutor for you. Suffer, endure; you'll suffer more than you inflicted on others; but don't resent it, you have received a good rate of interest. But what was he expecting, when he was enduring such things? Listen to him in another place: *Indeed*, he says, *this light affliction of ours*. Does he seriously mean all these things are just light? Why? *Is working to an incredible degree an eternal weight of glory for us, as we keep our gaze fixed, not on the things that can be seen but on those that cannot be seen? For the things that can be seen are temporary, while the things that cannot be seen are eternal*. So he was aflame with love for eternal things, while he was bravely enduring evils which, even if harsh and extreme, were still only temporary. All punishment that comes to an end is light, when it is promised a reward that has no end.

And yet wasn't it rather the one who couldn't fall away that was enduring it all in him and with him? I've not the slightest hesitation in saying that it wasn't Paul who was enduring it. Yes, he was the one enduring it, because he was faithfully willing to do so; and he wasn't the one enduring it, because the strength of Christ was dwelling in him. Christ was controlling him, Christ was providing him with power, Christ was not abandoning him, Christ was running in the runner, Christ was guiding him through to the winning post.

St Augustine, Sermon 299C.1-4; WSA (1994) tr. Hill.

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

(The Apostle glories in his infirmities: 2 Corinthians 11:30 – 12:13)

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed for ever, knows that I do not lie. At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped his hands.

I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows – and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. Though if I wish to boast, I shall not be a fool, for I shall be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these superlative apostles, even though I am nothing. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. For in what were you less favoured than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!

A READING FROM ISAAC, OR THE SOUL BY ST AMBROSE

The king brought me to his inner apartment. Blessed the soul that enters the inner chambers. For, rising up from the body, she becomes more distant from all, and she searches and seeks within herself, if in any way she can pursue the divine. And when she can obtain it, having passed beyond intelligible things, she is strengthened in it and fed by it. Such was Paul, who knew that he had been caught up into paradise but did not know whether he had been caught up in the body or out of the body. For his soul had risen up from the body, had withdrawn from the bonds of the flesh, and had lifted herself up. And he was made alien to himself and held within his very self the secret words which he heard and could not reveal, because, as he remarked, *it was not permitted a man to speak such thoughts.*

And so the good soul scorns visible and material things and does not linger over them or delay or tarry or despising them. Rather, she rises to things eternal and immaterial and filled with wonders, for she rises with pure thought from a pious mind. Intent on perfection, she strives only for the good that is God's and considers none other necessary, because she possesses that which is supreme. And so a man of this kind, in whom there is beauty of soul, has more than enough for himself, though he is alone, for he is himself sufficient for himself. And yet the man is never alone who has the Lord with him as his protector. Indeed, when she was brought into the secret place of divinity, the soul said, *Let us rejoice and be gladdened in you. Let us love your breasts more than wine.* For the just man rejoices, not in riches and in treasures of gold and silver, not in the proceeds of his property, not in power or in feasts, but in God alone.

Therefore know yourself and the beauty of your nature, and go forth as if your foot had been freed of bonds and were visible in its bare step, so that you may not feel the fleshly coverings, that the bonds of the body may not entangle the footstep of your mind, that your foot may appear beautiful. For such are they who are chosen by the Lord to announce the kingdom of heaven, and of them it was said, *How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace!* Such was Moses, to whom it is said, *Remove the sandals from your feet,* so that when he was about to call the people to the kingdom of God he might first put aside the garments of the flesh and might walk with his spirit and the footstep of the mind naked.

St Ambrose, Isaac, or the Soul 4.11-12, 16; FoC 65 (1972) tr. McHugh.

Saturday of the Eighth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

(The Apostle's next visit for the correction of the Corinthians: 2 Corinthians 12:14 – 13:13)

Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you; for children ought not to lay up for their parents, but parents for their children. I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less? But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by guile. Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?

Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves before you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. For I fear that perhaps I may come and find you not what I wish, and that you may find me not what you wish; that perhaps there may be quarrelling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned before and have not repented of the impurity, immorality, and licentiousness which they have practised.

This is the third time I am coming to you. Any charge must be sustained by the evidence of two or three witnesses. I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them – since you desire proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful in you. For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we are weak in him, but in dealing with you we shall live with him by the power of God.

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you fail to meet the test! I hope you will find out that we have not failed. But we pray God that you may not do wrong – not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. What we pray for is your improvement. I write this while I am away from you, in order that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority which the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

Finally, brethren, farewell. Mend your ways, heed my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST CLEMENT OF ROME TO THE CORINTHIANS

The Church of God dwelling in Rome to the Church of God dwelling in Corinth, to those who are called and sanctified by the will of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace from God Almighty be multiplied to you through Jesus Christ.

Owing to the sudden and repeated misfortunes and calamities which have befallen us, we consider that our attention has been somewhat delayed in turning to the questions disputed among you, beloved, and especially the abominable and unholy sedition, alien and foreign to the elect of God, which a few rash and self-willed persons have made blaze up to such a frenzy that your name, venerable and famous, and worthy as it is of all men's love, has been much slandered. For who has stayed with you without making proof of the virtue and steadfastness of your faith? For you did all things without respect of persons, and walked in the Laws of God, obedient to your rulers, and paying all fitting honour to the older among you.

And you were all humble-minded and not at all arrogant, yielding subjection rather than demanding it, *giving more glory than receiving*, satisfied with the provision of Christ. You paid attention to his words and stored them up carefully in your hearts, and kept his sufferings before your eyes. Thus a profound and rich peace was given to all, you had an insatiable desire to do good, and the Holy Spirit was poured out in abundance on you all. You were full of holy plans, and with pious confidence you stretched out your hands to Almighty God in a passion of goodness, beseeching him to be merciful towards any unwilling sin. Day and night you strove on behalf of the whole brotherhood that the number of his elect should be saved with mercy and compassion. You were sincere and innocent, and bore no malice to one another. All sedition and all schism was abominable to you. You were adorned by your virtuous and honourable citizenship and did all things in the fear of God. The commandments and ordinances of the Lord were *written on the tables of your heart*.

All glory and enlargement was given to you, but then that which was written was fulfilled: *My Beloved ate and drank, and he was enlarged and waxed fat and kicked*. From this arose jealousy and envy, strife and sedition, persecution and disorder, war and captivity. Thus *the worthless* rose up *against those who were in honour*, those of no reputation against the renowned, the foolish against the prudent, *the young against the old*. For this cause righteousness and peace are far removed from you, while each deserts the fear of God. The eye of faith has grown dim, and men walk neither in the ordinances of God's commandments nor use their citizenship worthily of Christ, but each goes according to the lusts of his wicked heart, and has revived the unrighteousness and impious envy, by which *death came into the world*.

St Clement of Rome, Letter to the Corinthians, I-III; Loeb (1912) tr. Lake.

Season of the Year | Week 09

Sunday of the Ninth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE GALATIANS

(Paul's Gospel: Galatians 1:1-12)

Paul an apostle – not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead – and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel – not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, If any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.

Am I now seeking the favour of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ.

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON GALATIANS BY ST AUGUSTINE

The purpose of the Apostle's letter to the Galatians was to make them realise that God's grace, once implanted in them had effectively freed them from subjection to the Law. Now, at the time when the grace of the Gospel was first announced to them, there remained some Jews among them who, though now professing Christianity, did not yet fully appreciate the value of the grace they had received, and wished to be under the burden of the Law. This Law had been imposed by God on men who had given themselves over not to righteousness but to sin; it was a Law, in itself just, that had been given to wicked men to show up rather than to take away their sins. For it is only by the grace of faith, working through love, that sin can be removed. They wished to bring back under the burden of the Law the Galatians who were already under the grace of faith. They asserted that the Gospel was of no profit to them unless they had first been circumcised and obeyed the other fleshly ceremonies of the Jewish rite.

This caused them to start suspecting Paul, by whom the Gospel had been preached to them, of not holding the same teaching as the rest of the Apostles, who at that time were compelling their Gentile converts to conform to Jewish customs. It would even seem that that the Apostle Peter had yielded to the scandal of such agitators and had been led to the hypocrisy of agreeing that Gentiles would not benefit from the Gospel unless they shouldered the burdens of the Law. Paul in this same letter tells us how he recalled Peter

from that hypocrisy. A similar question is raised in his letter to the Romans; but with this difference that he seems to have been able to resolve their problem and amicably to settle the dispute that had arisen in Rome between the Gentile converts and those who had come to the faith from Judaism.

By contrast, in this present letter he is writing to who had already been unsettled by the authority of those who had come over from Judaism and were forcing on them the observance of the Law. Many had already started to believe them and to suspect Paul, who had not wished to allow them to be circumcised, of not having preached the truth. That is why his first words are: *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different Gospel.* In that brief opening sentence he sums up the whole matter. Also, in his introductory greeting, by declaring that his apostolic commission came to him *not from men nor through man* – a statement quite unparalleled in any of his other letters – he makes two things clear beyond all doubt. First, that those who were promoting such ideas were certainly not authorised by God but spoke on human authority alone; and secondly, that he must be regarded and accepted as of equal standing with the rest of the Apostles so far as concerned the authority of his Gospel witness, since he was conscious that his commission as an Apostle had come to him, not from any man nor through the medium of any human agency, but straight from Jesus Christ and God.

St Augustine, In Gal., Preface; The Divine Office I.

Monday of the Ninth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE GALATIANS

(The vocation and apostolate of Paul: Galatians 1:13 – 2:10)

For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus.

Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was still not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea; they only heard it said, He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy. And they glorified God because of me.

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up by revelation; and I laid before them (but privately before those who were of repute) the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain. But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. But because of false brethren secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage – to them we did not yield submission even for a moment, that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. And from those who were reputed to be something (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) – those, I say, who were of repute added nothing to me; but on the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised worked through me also for the Gentiles), and when they perceived the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised; only they would have us remember the poor, which very thing I was eager to do.

A READING FROM ON THE PRESCRIPTION OF HERETICS BY TERTULLIAN

When classifying things, we must of necessity consider their origins. Now, if we examine the many great Churches that there are, we see that they all stem from the original Church, which was founded by the Apostles, and that they therefore constitute but one Church. Moreover, the reality of their writing is affected by three characteristics: by the peaceful relations which exist between the Churches, by the mutual hospitality which Christians offer one another, and by the fraternal charity they all display. These

are duties which no other society enjoins, but which are characteristic of the one faith all Christians have.

This being the case, we put forward the following argument. If our Lord Jesus Christ entrusted the mission of preaching to the Apostles, then no one should be received as a preacher, unless Christ has ordained him. After all, no one knows the Father but the Son and those to whom the Son has revealed him. However, the Son does not seem to have revealed the Father to anyone except his Apostles, whom he sent out with the command that they should preach what he had made known to them. The Apostles, then, preached exactly what Christ had revealed to them and so the only way in which we can determine the content of that revelation – and this is the crux of the matter – is by consulting the Churches which the Apostles themselves established by their preaching, whether it was by word of mouth, as we say, or by letter as happened later on.

So then, it is perfectly obvious that any doctrine which accords with the teaching of the apostolic Churches, which are the original wellsprings of the faith, must be held to be true, since it must contain the teaching which the Churches received from the Apostles, and which the Apostles received from Christ and which Christ received from God. But, on the other hand, any doctrine which is at variance with the truth as taught by the Churches and therefore by the Apostles and by Christ and by God must be condemned out of hand as being false. All we have to do is to show whether our doctrine derives from the apostolic tradition; then anything different must ipso facto proceed from falsehood. Well, we have already outlined the text: because none of our teachings is at variance with the teaching of the Churches founded by the Apostles. We are in communion with them, and that is proof that we teach the truth.

This test is so simple that, if we applied it straightaway, there would be nothing further to discuss. So let us suppose that we cannot prove our position and so give our opponents the chance of invalidating our argument, if they can. They are crazy enough to say that the Apostles did not know everything, they did not hand on all they knew to everyone. Either way they put the blame on Christ, for choosing to send out Apostles who were ignorant or else over-sophisticated.

Tertullian, De Praes. Haeret. 20.7-22.9 (CCL 1:202-4); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE GALATIANS

(The just man lives by faith: Galatians 2:11 – 3:14)

But when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?” We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified. But if, in our endeavour to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not! But if I build up again those things which I tore down, then I prove myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose.

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so many things in vain? – if it really is in vain. Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?

Thus Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith.

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them.” Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law; for He who through faith is righteous shall live; but the law does not rest on faith, for He who does them shall live by them. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, “Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree” – that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON GALATIANS BY ST JEROME

A Jew by nature is one of Abraham's stock, who has been circumcised by his parents on the eighth day. One who is a Jew *not by nature* is one of Gentile origin who has been subsequently made so. That I may embrace the whole argument in a brief discourse, the sense of the text is as follows: We are Jews by nature, doing those things that were precepts of the Law. We are not sinners who come from the Gentiles – even in the sense of those who are sinners generically because they worship idols or those whom Jews now regard as unclean. Yet we know that we cannot be saved by the works of the Law but rather by faith in Christ. We have believed in Christ so that what the Law had not given us, our faith would guarantee to us. Seceding from the Law in which we could not be saved, we have gone over to faith, in which not the circumcision of the flesh but the devotion of a pure heart is demanded. But what if we now belatedly declare by seceding from the Gentiles that whoever is uncircumcised is unclean? In that case faith in Christ – and which we previously thought we were saved – would rather become a minister of sin than of righteousness. For by this argument faith would take away the circumcision without which one is unclean.

Some say that if Paul is right in asserting that no one is justified by the works of the Law but only by faith in Christ, the Patriarchs and Prophets and Saints who lived before Christ were imperfect. We should tell such people that those who were said not to have obtained righteousness are those who believe that they can be justified by works alone. The Saints who lived long ago, however, were justified from faith in Christ, seeing that Abraham saw in advance Christ's day.

We must expand what follows – *Who has bewitched you?* – in a way worthy of Paul, who even if rough in his speech is not so in his understanding. It must not be interpreted in such a way as to make Paul legitimise the witchcraft that is popularly supposed to do harm. Rather he has used a colloquial expression, and as elsewhere so here he has adopted a word from everyday speech. In the same way as tender infants are said to be harmed by witchcraft, so too the Galatians, recently born in the faith of Christ and nourished with milk, not solid food, have been injured as though someone has cast a spell on them.

Christ is rightly said to be portrayed before us, since the whole chorus of Old Testament Prophets spoke of his gallows and passion, his blows and whippings. Nor was it a small number of Galatians who believed in the crucifixion as it has previously been portrayed for them. It was of course by this means that, reading the Prophets continually and knowing all the ordinances of the Law, they were led in due course to belief.

St Jerome, Commentary on Galatians, 1.2.15-16, 1.3.1; ACC⁸ (1999) tr. Edwards.

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE GALATIANS

(On the purpose of the Law: Galatians 3:15 – 4:7)

To give a human example, brethren: no one annuls even a man's will, or adds to it, once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings", referring to many; but, referring to one, "And to your offspring", which is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came four hundred and thirty years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance is by the law, it is no longer by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained by angels through an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one; but God is one.

Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not; for if a law had been given which could make alive, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the scripture consigned all things to sin, that what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no better than a slave, though he is the owner of all the estate; but he is under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe. But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.

A READING FROM THE LETTERS OF ST AMBROSE

The Apostle says that he who by the spirit puts to death the deeds of the body will live. Small wonder that he should live, since he who has the Spirit of God becomes a son of God. Being a son of God means that he is not received the spirit of slavery but the spirit of adopted sonship, so much so that the Holy Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are sons of God. And this is the witness of the Holy Spirit, he himself cries out in our hearts, *Abba! Father!*, as Paul writes to the Galatians. Then there is that great witness to our being sons of God, the fact that we are *heirs of God and fellow heirs of Christ*. To be a

fellow heir of Christ means to be glorified with him; but he will be glorified with him who by suffering for him suffers with him.

In order to encourage us to suffer, Paul adds that everything we suffer is of no account and not worth comparing to the future good things, the immense reward for our labours, that is to be revealed in us. For then we shall be reformed in the image of God and be graced to see his glory face to face.

In praise of the greatness of this future revelation he goes on to say that *creation waits for this revealing of the sons of God* – creation which is now subjected to futility not of its own will but in hope, because it takes hope in Christ through the ministry of Paul. Or else because creation itself will be liberated from the slavery of corruption to be taken up into the liberty of the sons of God, so that when their future glory is revealed there will be but one liberty for both creation and the sons of God. But now, in truth, whilst that revelation is in daily expectation, the whole creation groans as it awaits the glory of our adoption and redemption, giving birth to that spirit of salvation, yearning to be freed from slavery to what is devoid of meaning.

But the meaning is plain enough – they who have the first-fruits of the Spirit groan in expectation of their adoption as sons. Now, that adoption is the redemption of the whole body. That will come about when he sees face to face, as an adopted son of God, the divine and eternal goodness. Even so is the adoption of sons in the Church of the Lord, when the Spirit cries out, *Abba! Father!* as you have it in Galatians. But that redemption will be perfected when all, who are graced to see the face of God, rise again in incorruptibility, honour and glory. Then indeed our human nature will judge that it is redeemed. That is why the Apostle makes his boast when he says, *In this hope we are saved*. Hope saves as does faith, of which it is said, *Your faith has saved you*.

St Ambrose, Letter 35, 4-6, 13; The Divine Office I.

Thursday of the Ninth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE GALATIANS

(Divine inheritance and the freedom of the New Covenant: Galatians 4:8-31)

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years! I am afraid I have laboured over you in vain.

Brethren, I beseech you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong; you know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first; and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. What has become of the satisfaction you felt? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? They make much of you, but for no good purpose; they want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. For a good purpose it is always good to be made much of, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you! I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

Tell me, you who desire to be under law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise. Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one that dost not bear; break forth and shout, thou who art not in travail; for the desolate hath more children than she who hath a husband." Now we, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now. But what does the scripture say? Cast out the slave and her son; for the son of the slave shall not inherit with the son of the free woman. So, brethren, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

We must give a response to those members of the Church who think it always right only to follow the letter of holy Scripture and do not take into account the symbolic and allegorical meanings. It is indeed necessary to search the divinely inspired Scriptures with every means at our disposal, and so if the literal sense is of any use, we will readily have the object of our search. But if anything in the hidden, symbolic sense cannot be understood literally, we will, as the Word teaches and as Proverbs says, understand the passage either as a parable, a dark saying, or an utterance of wise men such as a riddle.

The great Apostle Paul says that the Law is spiritual. He includes under the name of Law the historical narratives, since all the inspired Scriptures is Law for those who read them. They teach not only through precepts but through the historical narratives: both lead to knowledge of the mysteries and to a pure way of life for those who have diligent minds. Paul uses exegesis with an eye to what is useful and best for him, and he calls his consideration of the two children of Abraham – one born of a slave woman and the other from a free woman – an allegory. In another place, after having related certain details of a story, he says, *These things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction*. And again, after using the expression *You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain*, he added, *God does not care about oxen, but clearly it has been written for our benefit*. Yet Paul somewhere calls the shift from the corporeal to the spiritual *a turning to the Lord and the removal of a veil*.

In all these different expressions and names of contemplation Paul is teaching us an important lesson: we must pass to a spiritual and intelligent investigation of Scripture so that considerations of the merely human element might be changed into something perceived by the mind once the more fleshly sense of the words has been shaken off like dust. For this reason Paul says, *the letter kills, but the spirit gives life*. If we stay only with the mere facts of the text, the historical narratives of Scripture do not offer us examples of a good life. For what benefit to virtuous living can we obtain from the Prophet Hosea, or from Isaiah having intercourse with a prophetess, unless something else lies beyond the mere letter? Or how did the stories regarding David, his terrible act of adultery and murder, pertain to virtuous living? If anyone argues that these stories are reprehensible, then the saying of the Apostle will certainly be true – *the letter kills*, for its examples of evil conduct, but *the spirit gives life*. For the apparent, reprehensible sense is changed into something having a divine meaning.

St Gregory of Nyssa, Commentary on the Song of Songs, Prologue 3-7; (1987) tr. McCambley.

Friday of the Ninth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE GALATIANS

(Freedom in the life of Faith: Galatians 5:1-25)

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Now I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is bound to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love. You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine; and he who is troubling you will bear his judgment, whoever he is. But if I, brethren, still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? In that case the stumbling block of the cross has been removed. I wish those who unsettle you would mutilate themselves!

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

Just now, when the Apostle's letter was read, we heard, Walk by the Spirit, and do not carry through the lusts of the flesh. For these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you would. He was talking to people who had been baptized; but he was still building the temple of God, not yet dedicating it. Notice, my dear brethren, how when these material buildings are being converted to better use, some things are destroyed and broken up, others are just changed and put to better use; it's the same with us. The works of the flesh used to be in us. You heard the list of them: But the works of the flesh,

he said, are manifest; such as fornication, impurities, worship of idols, sorceries, quarrels, enmities, heresies, jealousies, drunkenness, and things like them; he says, I am warning you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not possess the kingdom of God. These things in us, like idols, are to be smashed. But the actual members of our bodies are to be turned to better use, so that what used to serve the impurity of greed may henceforth serve the grace of love.

But observe what he has been saying, and take careful note of it. God's Temple is still being built. In its Head it has already been dedicated, since the Lord has risen from the dead, conquering death, and swallowing mortality has ascended into heaven. But you are still being built, you see, you are not yet being dedicated. What would you like? That there should be absolutely no lusts at all for evil and unlawful delights? Which of the saints wouldn't like that? But none achieve it; as long as you are living here, this is not fulfilled. *For the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. For these are opposed to each other, so that what you would like to do - that there should be absolutely no lusts whatever in you for unlawful things - you cannot.* So what's left for you to do? *Walk by the Spirit*, and, because you cannot manage to annihilate the lusts of the flesh, *do not carry through the lusts of the flesh*. You ought indeed to want to annihilate them and finish them off and totally eradicate them in every possible way; but as long as they are in you, and there is another law in your members fighting back *against the law of your mind*, *do not carry through the lusts of the flesh*.

What is it, after all, that you want? That there should simply not be any lusts of the flesh. They don't allow you to achieve what you want; don't allow them to achieve what they want. First you must square up to the battle, in order eventually to gain the victory. So when you begin to find the going hard in your fight against the lusts of the flesh, walk by the Spirit, call upon the Spirit, start seeking the gift of God. And if the law of your members is fighting back against the law of your mind from the lower part, that is from the flesh, even that will be corrected, even that will be changed into the rights of victory. All you have to do is cry out, all you have to do is call upon him. *It is necessary to pray always and not lose heart.*

St Augustine, Sermon 163.2-3, 6, 12; WSA (1992) tr. Hill.

Saturday of the Ninth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE GALATIANS

(Advice about charity and zeal: Galatians 5:25 – 6:18)

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another.

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if any one thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbour. For each man will have to bear his own load.

Let him who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches.

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that would compel you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God. Henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

Far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. He could have said, in the wisdom of our Lord Jesus Christ: and he would have spoken the truth. Or he could have said, in the majesty - and again spoken the truth. But in fact he said: in the cross. Where the worldly-wise philosopher is abashed, there the Apostle finds his treasure: by not despising the unprepossessing outer husk he gets through to the precious centre. Not for me, he says, to boast, save in the cross of Christ. You have borne a fine burden; and there is everything you sought: what there was of significance hidden there, that you have now revealed. What help did he get? Through whom, he says, the world is crucified to me and I to the world. When could the world have been crucified to you, except when he through whom the world was made was crucified for you? He who boasts, then, let him make his boast in the Lord. What Lord? Christ crucified. Where there is humility, there

also is majesty; where there is weakness, there also is strength; where there is death, there is life. If you wish to arrive at the latter, do not despise the former.

You have heard about the sons of Zebedee, in the Gospel. They sought the high places of preferment, asking that one of them might sit at the right hand of the great leader, and the other on his left. They were asking for great rank indeed: but because they relented, Christ called them from where they wished to go to that place whither they must go.

What does he say, to those who sought such eminence? *Can you drink of the chalice that I am to drink?*

What chalice is that, unless it be that of humility and suffering? As he is about to drink it and change our infirmity in his own person, he says to the Father: *Father, if it might be so, grant that this cup might pass from me.* Changing those people into his own likeness who refused to drink his cup and instead sought the high places, ignoring the path of humility, he says this: *Can you indeed drink the cup which I am to drink?* You who seek Christ exalted and glorified, go back to Christ crucified. You wish to reign and to be glorified in Christ's resting place. But first learn to say: *It is not for me to glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

This is the Christian teaching, the precept of humility, the commendation of humility: that we should not glory, save in the cross of Christ. For it is not saying much if you glory in Christ's wisdom: but it is if you glory in Christ's cross. Where the impious revile you, there the pious soul makes his boast; where the proud man reviles him, there the Christian makes his boast. Do not be ashamed of Christ's cross: you have taken the mark of it on your brow, in an embarrassing place. Remember what you have on your brow, for all to see, and be not in fear of idle tongues.

St Augustine, Sermon 160.4-5 (PL 38:875-6); Word in Season VII.

Season of the Year | Week 10

Sunday of the Tenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE PHILIPPIANS

(Greeting & thanksgiving: Philippians 1-11)

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, thankful for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel thus about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON PHILIPPIANS BY ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

I am sure of this, Paul says, that he who began a good work in you will continue it till the day of Jesus Christ. Notice how he also teaches them to be humble. For after bearing witness to their great achievement, to prevent them from feeling humanly proud of themselves, he immediately tells them to attribute both past and future achievements to Christ. How did he do this? By not saying: 'I am sure that you will finish what you have begun', but: *He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion.* He did not deny them their success, for he said: *I am glad of your partnership*, that is, because they were good workers. But he denied that such success was theirs alone, saying it belonged principally to God. For he is speaking of God when he says: *I am confident that he who has begun a good work in you will continue it till the day of Jesus Christ.* He says: *I am convinced of this not only with regard to you but to your descendants.* And this indeed is no small praise, to tell people that God works in them.

For if God is no respecter of persons, which is certainly true, but looks at our aims before taking part in our achievements, it is clear that we ourselves are responsible for drawing him to us. So in that way too Paul has not denied them praise, since if God worked in us indiscriminately nothing would have prevented him working in the Gentiles and the whole of humanity as well, if he moved us like lumps of wood or stone and desired no cooperation from ourselves. So when Paul says: *God will bring it to completion*, this too is to their praise, since they had attracted the grace of God to work with them in their efforts to transcend human nature. And this is also praise in another way, due to the very fact that their achievements were beyond human capacity but needed the help of

God. Then if God is going to complete the work, their labour will still be great, but we must be confident as we shall easily accomplish everything with God to help us.

St John Chrysostom, Phil. 1.3 (Bareille XVIII:459-460); Word in Season VII.

Monday of the Tenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE PHILIPPIANS

(Paul called for the defence: Philippians 1:12-26)

I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ; and most of the brethren have been made confident in the Lord because of my imprisonment, and are much more bold to speak the word of God without fear.

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of partisanship, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in that I rejoice.

Yes, and I shall rejoice. For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST COLUMBANUS

It is natural for travellers to hasten toward their native land, and natural too that they should have trouble on the way and safety at home. So let us who are on the way to it hasten toward our native land; for our whole life is like a single day's journey.

And therefore let us devote ourselves to divine rather than human affairs, and like exiles be always sighing for our native land and longing for it. For the journey's end must always be wished and longed for by travellers, and so because we ourselves are travellers and exiles in the world we should always be thinking of the journey's end, that is, the end of our life, for our journey brings us to our native land. But, there, all who have been travelling the world get different lots according to their merits. The good travellers come home because they love the journey. Let us not love the journey to our native land, so that we do not lose our eternal home, for that is the kind of home we have, and which we must love. Let this, then, be our constant aim: to live our way like travellers, exiles, visitors to the world, without clinging to any worldly ambitions or longing to fulfil any worldly desires, but to fill our minds entirely with heavenly and spiritual images, singing in thought and deed: *When shall I come and appear before the face of my God?* For,

my soul thirsts for the strong and living God. And saying with Paul: I long to die and be with Christ.

Let us realise that although *We are exiles from the Lord as long as we are in the body*, we are present in the sight of God. Therefore spurning all laziness, putting away all lukewarmness, let us do our best to please him who is present everywhere. Then, with a good conscience, we may pass happily from our journey in this world to the holy and eternal home of our eternal Father, from the present to the absent, from sorrow to joy, from transitory to eternal, from earth to heaven, from the region of the dead to that of the living. And then we shall see, face to face, the world of heaven and the king of kings, our Lord Jesus Christ, ruling his kingdom with right government, to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

St Columbanus, Instructio VIII.1-2 (PL 80:244-246); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE PHILIPPIANS

(Exhortation to imitate Christ: Philippians 1:27 – 2:11)

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear omen to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

The Apostle said to his brethren, *Have this mind among yourselves which is also in Christ Jesus*. Be willing, he is saying, to imitate the Son of God by being compassionate to the little ones. The Son of God *who, though he was in the form of God*, that is, equal to God, *did not think it robbery to be equal to God*.

What, my dearest brethren, what is it that the Apostle is saying, *did not think it robbery*? Because he was equal by nature. So for whom was equality with God a kind of robbery? For the first man, to whom it was said, *Taste, and you will be like gods*. He wished by an act of robbery to stretch himself up to equality, and as a punishment he lost his immortality. The one, you see, for whom it was not robbery, *did not think it robbery to be equal to God*. But what did he do? *He emptied himself*, he says, *taking the form of a servant; being made into the likeness of men, and found in condition as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on the cross*.

It wasn't enough to say death, he even indicated the kind of death, he chose the worst kind, one that was abominable to all Jews. He wasn't afraid to die, you see, through false witnesses and the sentence of a judge, though he is going to come to judge the living and the dead. He wasn't afraid to die disgracefully on the cross, in order to deliver all believers from all kinds of disgrace. So *he became obedient to the death, even death on the*

cross; yet by nature he is equal to God; strong in the power of his greatness, weak in the compassion of his humanity; strong, in order to make all things; weak, in order to remake all things.

The next thing that happened was that the flesh, that is the head, went before us into heaven. The other members will follow. Why? Because it's right that these members should get some sleep for a while, and that they should all rise again in their time. If the Lord had also wanted to rise then, at the end, there would be no one for us to believe in. The reason he wished to deliver *the first fruits of them that sleep* to God in his own person, was so that you could see in him what has been restored, and hope in yourself for what is to be granted. The whole people of God will be equated and associated with the angels.

And so, my brethren, hold on to the true, genuine, Catholic faith. The Son is equal to the Father; the gift of God the Holy Spirit is equal to the Father; and that's why Father and Son and Holy Spirit are one God, not three gods; they are not attached to each other in grades, but united in majesty, and one God. But all the same, for our sakes the Son, *the Word, became flesh and dwelt among us. He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and humbled himself, becoming obedient to the death, even death on the cross.*

St Augustine, Sermon 264.1, 3, 6-7; WSA (1993) tr. Hill.

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE PHILIPPIANS

(*"Work out your salvation": Philippians 2:12-30*)

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labour in vain. Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you. I have no one like him, who will be genuinely anxious for your welfare. They all look after their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But Timothy's worth you know, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me; and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself shall come also.

I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for you all, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy; and honour such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete your service to me.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

Serve the Lord in fear, and exalt him with trembling. Exalt him, it says, not yourself, him from whom you are what you are, both because you are a man and because you are made just, if indeed you already are. If you think that your being man comes from him but your being just comes from yourself, you are not serving the Lord in fear, nor exalting him with trembling: you are exalting yourself in presumption. And what else should then befall you than the logical consequence? *Lest the Lord's anger be kindled and you stray*, he says, *from the way of righteousness.*

These are the Apostle's words: *Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.* Why, then, with fear and trembling, if it is within my power to work out my salvation at all? The reason is this: *For it is God working within you even so.* So with fear and trembling let it be: for what the humble man secures with his petition, the proud man loses with his. If, then, it really is God working within us, why those words *Work out your salvation – your own salvation?* Because he so works in us that we also work: *Be my helper*, the

psalmist says. The man who summons up a helper is calling himself a worker. But the good will, he says, is mine. That is true: but what of the will that grants all that and stirs it up? Do not take my word for it, but refer to St Paul. *For it is God, he says, whose effect on you is that you resolve on and perform the acts of a good will.* What, then, were you claiming as your own? Why should you want to walk proudly and go astray? Return to your first resolve, and realise your lack of virtue; and that you may become good yourself, call upon him who is that already. For what pleases God in you is that alone which you have received from God – and not anything you have from yourself, for that is displeasing to him. If you consider your assets, what are they but what you have received? And if you have received all that, why brag about it as though you had not? He stands alone, only able to give. For him who has no superior, there can be no donor, no benefactor. Granted that you are his inferior, for that very reason you should give thanks for having been made in his image even so, that you may yet be found in him, you who have gone astray inside yourself. For there you could only lose yourself and you do not know how to find yourself, unless he who made you seeks you out.

St Augustine, Sermon 13.2-3 (CCL 41:177-179); Word in Season VII.

Thursday of the Tenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE PHILIPPIANS

(Paul's example: Philippians 3:1-16)

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not irksome to me, and is safe for you.

Look out for the dogs, look out for the evil-workers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh. Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

A READING FROM THE CONFERENCES OF ST JOHN CASSIAN

In every art and discipline a certain *scopos* or goal takes precedence. This is the soul's goal and the mind's constant intention, which cannot be maintained, nor the final end of the longed for fruit arrived at, except by diligence and perseverance. For, as I have said, the farmer who has as his end a secure and comfortable life, thanks to his fruitful lands, pursues his *scopos* or goal by clearing his field of all the briars and emptying it of every unfruitful weed, and he does not believe that he will achieve his end of peaceful affluence in any other way than as it were by first possessing by toil and hope what he desires to have the actual use of. Hence, too, the end of our journey is the kingdom of God. But we should inquire carefully into the nature of our goal. If we have not in similar fashion grasped this we shall be wearied fruitlessly by our toil, because if the road is uncharted, then those who undertake the hardships of the journey will have nothing to show for it.

The end of our profession, as we have said, is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven; but the goal or *scopos* is purity of heart, without which it is impossible for anyone to reach that end. Fixing our gaze on this goal, then, as on a definite mark, we shall take the most direct route. Thus, indeed, the end of our vocation is eternal life, according to the very words of the Apostle: *Having your reward, indeed, in holiness, but your end in the eternal life*. But the *scopos* is purity of heart, which is called holiness. Without this the aforesaid end will not be able to be seized. It is as if he had said in other words: Having your *scopos*, indeed, in purity of heart, but your end in eternal life. When he was teaching us about our immediate goal the same blessed Apostle significantly used the very term ‘*scopos*’ when he said: *Forgetting what is behind, but reaching out to what is ahead, I press on to the goal* (in Greek the *scopos*), *to the prize of the heavenly calling of the Lord*. It is just as if he had said: By way of this goal I forget what is behind – namely, the vices of my earlier life – and I strive to attain to the end, which is the heavenly prize. Whatever therefore can direct us to this *scopos*, which is purity of heart, is to be pursued with all our strength, but whatever deters us from this is to be avoided as dangerous and harmful. For it is for its sake that we do and endure everything, for its sake that family, homeland, honours, wealth, the pleasures of this world, and every enjoyment are disdained – so that perpetual purity of heart may be kept. With this goal always set before us, therefore, our actions and thoughts are ordered to attaining it in the most direct way.

For the sake of this, then, everything is to be done and desired. For its sake solitude is to be pursued; for its sake we know that we must undertake fasts, vigils, labours, bodily deprivation, readings, and other virtuous things, so that by them we may be able to acquire and keep a heart untouched by any harmful passion, and so that by taking these steps we may be able to ascend to the perfection of love.

St John Cassian, Conferences 1.4-5, 7.1; ACW 57 (1997) tr. Ramsey.

Friday of the Tenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE PHILIPPIANS

(“Stand firm in the Lord”: Philippians 3:17 – 4:9)

Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Therefore, my brethren, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. And I ask you also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they have laboured side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.

A READING FROM THE CONFERENCES OF ST JOHN CASSIAN

Something must be said about the renunciations which the tradition of the fathers and the authority of Holy Scripture show to be three and which each one of us ought to pursue with all our zeal. The first is that by which in bodily fashion we despise all the wealth and resources of the world. The second is that by which we reject our former behaviour, vices, and affections of soul and body. The third is that by which we call our mind away from everything that is present and visible and contemplate only what is to come and desire those things that are invisible.

This third renunciation is the case when we have died with Christ to the elements of this world and, in the words of the Apostle, we contemplate *not those things that are seen but those that are unseen, for the things that are seen are temporal, but those that are unseen are eternal*, and, departing in heart from this temporal and visible house, we direct our eyes and our mind to the one in which we shall abide forever. We shall accomplish this when, walking in the flesh but not according to the flesh, we have begun to soldier for the Lord and are crying out in deed and virtue that phrase of the blessed Apostle: *Our citizenship is in the heavens*.

The three books of Solomon refer to these three renunciations. For Proverbs is related to the first renunciation; by it the desire for fleshly things and the earthly vices are cut off. Ecclesiastes, wherein all that is accomplished under the sun is declared vain, is related to the second renunciation. The Canticle of Canticles, in which the mind transcends everything that is visible and is already joined to the Word of God by the contemplation of heavenly things, is related to the third.

Therefore it will not be of much value for us to have embraced the first renunciation with a very devout faith if we do not seize upon the second with the same zeal and the same fervour. When we have attained this, we shall also be able to reach the third. Here, having left the house of our former parent, who we remember has been our father from the time of our birth according to the old man, when *we were by nature children of wrath like the rest*, we shall turn our mind's gaze completely to heavenly things. Of this father it is said to Jerusalem, who had disdained God her true father: *Your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite*. And in the Gospel: *You are of your father the devil, and you wish to fulfil your father's desires*.

When you have left him and have gone from visible to invisible realities you will be able to say with the Apostle: We know that if our earthly dwelling-place is destroyed we shall have a dwelling from God, an eternal home in heaven, not made by hand. And what we mentioned a little bit before: Our citizenship is in the heavens, whence we also await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus, who will change our lowly body in conformity to his glorious body.

St John Cassian, Conferences 3.6.1-7.2; ACW 57 (1997) tr. Ramsey.

Saturday of the Tenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE PHILIPPIANS

(The generosity of the Philippians to Paul: Philippians 4:10-23)

I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me; you were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me.

Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only; for even in Thessalonica you sent me help once and again. Not that I seek the gift; but I seek the fruit which increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more; I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesars household.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST POLYCARP TO THE PHILIPPIANS

Polycarp and the Elders with him to the Church of God sojourning in Philippi; mercy and peace from God Almighty and Jesus Christ our Saviour be multiplied in you.

I rejoice greatly with you in our Lord Jesus Christ that you have followed the pattern of true love, and have helped on their way, as opportunity was given you, those who were bound in chains, which are the diadems of those who have been truly chosen by God and our Lord. I rejoice also that your firmly rooted faith, which was famous in past years, still flourishes and bears fruit unto our Lord Jesus Christ, who endured for our sins, even to the suffering of death, *whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of Hades, in whom, though you did not see him, you believed in unspeakable and glorified joy, - into which joy many desire to come, knowing that by grace you are saved, not by works but by the will of God through Jesus Christ.*

These things, brothers, I write to you concerning righteousness, not at my own instance, but because you first invited me. For neither am I, nor is any other like me, able to follow the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul, whom when he was among you in the presence of the men of that time taught accurately and steadfastly the word of truth, and also when he was absent wrote letters to you, from the study of which you will be able to build yourselves up into the faith.

Now I beseech you all to obey the word of righteousness, and to endure with all the endurance which you also saw before your eyes, not only in the blessed Ignatius, and Zosimus, and Rufus, but also in others among yourselves, and in Paul himself, and in the other Apostles; being persuaded that all of these *did not run in vain*, but in faith and righteousness, and that they are with the Lord in the *place which is their due*, with whom they also suffered. For *they did not love this present world* but him who died on our behalf, and was raised by God for our sakes. Stand fast therefore in these things and follow the example of the Lord, *firm and unchangeable in faith, loving the brotherhood, affectionate to one another*, joined together in the truth, forestalling one another in the gentleness of the Lord, despising no man.

I am deeply sorry for Valens, who was once made a presbyter among you, that he so little understands the place which was given to him. Keep yourself from all evil. For how may he who cannot attain self control in these matters enjoin it on another? If any man does not abstain from avarice he will be defiled by idolatry, and to be judged as if he were among the Gentiles *who know not the judgement of God*. Or do we *not know that the saints shall judge the world*, as Paul teaches? But I have neither perceived nor heard any such thing among you, among whom the blessed Paul laboured, who are praised in the beginning of his Epistle. For concerning you he boasts in all the Churches who then alone had known the Lord, for we had not yet known him.

St Polycarp, Ad Phil. 1, 3, 9-11; Loeb (1912) tr. Lake.

Season of the Year / Week 11

Sunday of the Eleventh Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(Cyrus, Israel's liberator: Isaiah 44:21 – 45:3)

Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I formed you, you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me. I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you.

Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it; shout, O depths of the earth; break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel.

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: "I am the LORD, who made all things, who stretched out the heavens alone, who spread out the earth – Who was with me? – who frustrates the omens of liars, and makes fools of diviners; who turns wise men back, and makes their knowledge foolish; who confirms the word of his servant, and performs the counsel of his messengers; who says of Jerusalem, 'She shall be inhabited', and of the cities of Judah, 'They shall be built, and I will raise up their ruins'; who says to the deep, 'Be dry, I will dry up your rivers,; who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfil all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built', and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'"

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and ungird the loins of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: "I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut asunder the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name."

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON PSALM 125 BY ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

When the Lord returned the captives to Zion, we were like people who are comforted. If it was a comfort for them to be released from a barbaric nation, how much more should we not be glad and leap for joy at being set free from sin, and preserve that joy always, never destroying or disturbing it by falling again into the same faults?

Then our mouths were filled with joy and our tongues with gladness. Then they will say among the nations: the Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us. To rejoice at deliverance from captivity helps not a little to inspire people with nobler sentiments. But who, you may ask, would not rejoice at this? The ancestors of these people did not. When they were released from Egypt and set free from slavery, they were so ungrateful that in the midst of all their benefits they did nothing but grumble, and were angry and embittered and perpetually distraught. But we are not like that, says the psalmist; we leap for joy.

Let us learn the reason for their joy. We do not only rejoice, they say, because of our deliverance from terrible suffering, but because it will make the whole world know God's care for us. For as the psalmist says: *Then they will say among the nations: The Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us.* There is no repetition here; the words are meant to describe their joy. The first saying is that of the nations, the second is their own. Notice this too: they did not say 'He saved us', or 'He delivered us', but 'He did great things for us', for they wanted to show the incredible event in all its wonder.

Can you not see that this people gave a lesson to the whole world when they were carried off into captivity as well as when they returned? For their return preached its own message. News

of them went round everywhere and made God's love for humankind known to everyone, because the wonderful things he had done for them were truly great and incredible. Cyrus himself, who had them in his power, set them free without anyone asking him because God made him relent.

St John Chrysostom, In Ps. 125.1 (Bareille IX:491-493); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EZRA

(The people's liberation and return from captivity. Restoration of worship: Ezra 1:1-8; 2:68-3:8)

In the first year of Cyrus King of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing:

“Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel – he is the God who is in Jerusalem; and let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.

Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, every one whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem; and all who were about them aided them with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, with beasts, and with costly wares, besides all that was freely offered. Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the LORD which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods. Cyrus king of Persia brought these out in charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Shesh-bazzar the prince of Judah.

Some of the heads of families, when they came to the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, made freewill offerings for the house of God, to erect it on its site; according to their ability they gave to the treasury of the work sixty-one thousand darics of gold, five thousand minas of silver, and one hundred priests' garments.

The priests, the Levites, and some of the people lived in Jerusalem and its vicinity; and the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants lived in their towns, and all Israel in their towns.

When the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel were in the towns, the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem. Then arose Jeshua the son of Jozadak, with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel the son of She-alti-el with his kinsmen, and they built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings upon it, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. They set the altar in its place, for fear was upon them because of the peoples of the lands, and they offered burnt offerings upon it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening. And they kept the feast of booths, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the ordinance, as each day required, and after that the continual burnt offerings, the offerings at the new moon and at all the appointed feasts of the LORD, and the offerings of every one who made a freewill offering to the LORD. From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid. So they gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the

Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant which they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

Now in the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of She-alti-el and Jeshua the son of Jozadak made a beginning, together with the rest of their brethren, the priests and the Levites and all who had come to Jerusalem from the captivity. They appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to have the oversight of the work of the house of the LORD.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON EZRA AND NEHEMIAH BY ST BEDE

Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the Lord.

A great faith shines out in these words of King Cyrus, and a great love. He understood that the people of Israel, above all other nations, was the people of God, and he gave leave to all without exception who wished to return to their native land to do so as free men. He acknowledged that the Lord God who dwelt in heaven dwelt also in Jerusalem and could go up with each one of those returning from Babylon to Jerusalem. Is it not clearer than daylight that he believed this God to be non-corporeal, unrestricted by place, a spirit, present everywhere; whom he acknowledged dwelt in Jerusalem and its Temple yet without doubting that he held sway simultaneously in the kingdom of heaven; whom he believed reigned in heaven yet was with his faithful on earth, guiding their hands and hearts to accomplish what was good and salutary? For the rest, all the words of this text are full of spiritual significance.

For who does not easily recognise that it is only those whom God is with who can pass from sinfulness to sanctity – from captivity in Babylon to freedom in Jerusalem? *Without me*, Christ says, *you can do nothing*. Can anyone fail to see here a reference to the spiritual ascent, the ‘going-up’ to Jerusalem? Those who really desire to please God must necessarily lift up their hands to higher things, long for what is divine and transcend the display of this world and its attractions through their love of eternal reality. We are reminded that Jerusalem is in Judah, so that we who through disregard of God were once held captive by the Chaldeans and thereafter freed from malign spirits, may return to the vision of peace and light by our recognition of God’s love. And there let us build a house to the Lord God of Israel – in the unity of Catholic peace, in the acknowledgment of our sinfulness and God’s loving-kindness and grace. Let us prepare our hearts so that he himself may deign to dwell in them and enlighten them by his presence. But let us also take care to set the hearts of our neighbours alight, so that they too may praise their Creator and engage in the works of love. Indeed, either way we build a house to the Lord: whether we commit ourselves to the pursuit of holiness or, by our words and example, inspire those whom we can to walk in the way of holiness.

St Bede, In Esdram et Nehemiam (PL 91:812-813); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EZRA

(Assaults against the rebuilding of the Temple: Ezra 4:1-5, 24 – 5:5)

Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the LORD, the God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' houses and said to them, "Let us build with you; for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assyria who brought us here. But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers' houses in Israel said to them, You have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us."

Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and made them afraid to build, and hired counsellors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Then the work on the house of God which is in Jerusalem stopped; and it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. Then Zerubbabel the son of She-alti-el and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and with them were the prophets of God, helping them.

At the same time Tattenai the governor of the province Beyond the River and Shethar-bozenai and their associates came to them and spoke to them thus, "Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?" They also asked them this, "What are the names of the men who are building this building?" But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them till a report should reach Darius and then answer be returned by letter concerning it.

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON PSALM 126 BY ST HILARY OF POITIERS

Unless the Lord build the house for himself, they labour in vain who build it. The hearing of the psalm, then, is not restricted to the days of Solomon, but is to be understood also as appropriate to those of Haggai. Either labour, whether Solomon's building or Haggai's, is in vain, it says. For of the city built by Zerubbabel, today there remain only the ashes from the conflagration and the ugly sight of ruin and devastation. These seats of kings, where the builders thought to restore the glory of the eternal kingdom, have undergone further destruction as the seat of every other kingdom, one after another, has been overthrown. For it to endure, then, a house ought to be built by God; for unless it be built by the Lord, it will not last.

As to which house is God's we are to understand that this can be ascertained from how long it is built to last. So it is that houses, in the sense of buildings, do not bespeak an

infinite God as their owner; neither can his unlimited power be confined in some place, the omnipotence that made all things. As the Apostle bears witness: *The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made by the hands of men.*

Is there, then, no repose in God, no dwelling place for him? Some people might suppose that he who is nowhere ought to be non-existent. So let us hear his own testimony about his rest and his dwelling place. This is what he says: *This is my resting place for ever; here will I live, for I have chosen it.* Now it is Zion that he chose: but is that the place about which the lament in this prophecy is being made? *Unless the Lord build the house (it says) they labour in vain who build it.* Zion, where the Temple stood, has been turned upside down. So where is the Lord's seat and eternal dwelling place now? What precisely is that temple which is fit for his habitation? It is the one of which it was said: *You are a temple of God; and the Spirit of God dwells in you.* To this, the same Prophet bears testimony: *your holy temple, wonderful in its proportions.* The holiness of men, their judiciousness and self-restraint – *that is the temple of God.*

The house, then, must be built by God. Any house made by the works of men will not endure; neither can any based on the maxims of this world stand its ground; neither can our vain labours and useless worry have any lasting effect. The construction and the maintenance must be otherwise. The beginnings must not be made on water and shifting sands, but foundations laid on the Prophets and the Apostles. Then living stones must serve to build it up; the cornerstone to keep it in place and hold it together; the interlocking pieces making up the whole man, built on the scale of Christ's body, to be adorned by the beauty and elegance of spiritual graces. What is built by God, that is to say his teachings, will not fall down. Israel, once made captive after the abundance and prosperity of the nations, will now secure the building of this house. This house is itself growing, into more houses, so as to build up the faithful at every turn and to beautify and extend that blessed city in each one of us.

St Hilary of Poitiers, In Ps. 126.3-8 (CSEL 22:615-619); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET HAGGAI

(Exhortation to rebuild the Temple. The glory of the future Temple; Haggai 1:1-2:9)

In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of She-alti-el, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: This people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD." Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your panelled houses, while this house lies in ruins? Now therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider how you have fared. You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages earns wages to put them into a bag with holes.

"Thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider how you have fared. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may appear in my glory, says the LORD. You have looked for much, and lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says the LORD of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while you busy yourselves each with his own house. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I have called for a drought upon the land and the hills, upon the grain, the new wine, the oil, upon what the ground brings forth, upon men and cattle, and upon all their labours."

Then Zerubbabel the son of She-alti-el, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him; and the people feared before the LORD. Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, "I am with you, says the LORD." And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of She-alti-el, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month.

In the second year of Darius the king, In the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of She-alti-el, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to all the remnant of the people, and say, 'Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the LORD; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the LORD; work, for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit abides among you; fear not. For thus says the LORD of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with splendour, says the LORD of hosts. The silver

is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of hosts. The latter splendour of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts; and in this place I will give peace, says the LORD of hosts.”

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON HAGGAI BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

With the coming of the Saviour there appeared a far more glorious Temple, one that was divine. It was as much more excellent and noble than that old one as worship in Christ in accordance with the Gospel might be judged to differ from worship in accordance with the Law or truth to differ from shadows.

I think that I should add this: there was only one Temple and that was in Jerusalem, and only the Jewish people were allowed to offer sacrifice there; but now that the only-begotten Son has become like us (although he was Lord and God, *he has appeared to us*, as the Scriptures say), the world is full of sacred places and countless worshippers, who adore God with spiritual sacrifices and acceptable offerings. This is what I think Malachi meant when, acting as God’s mouthpiece, he prophesied: *I am a great king, says the Lord, and my name is glorified among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure sacrifice.*

Therefore, it is true that the glory of this latest Temple, by which you must understand the Church, will be even greater. And those who are involved in its construction will be given Christ, the source of peace for all men, as a reward from God our Saviour and a gift from heaven, through whom we have access in one Spirit to the Father. This is clearly what is meant when the Prophet says: *In this place I will give peace ... and peace of soul, to save all those who laid the foundation for the rebuilding of this Temple.* Christ also says somewhere: *My peace I give to you.* And Paul will explain how this will benefit those who love God. *The peace of Christ, he says, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds.* In the same way the wise Prophet Isaiah prayed in these words: *O Lord our God, give us peace, for you have given us everything.* For, once men have received the peace of Christ, they will find it easy to save their souls and to devote themselves completely to the pursuit of virtue.

That is why it is said that peace will be given to everyone helping with the building. Whether a man is building the Church because he is set over God’s house as a spiritual teacher, that is to say an interpreter of the sacred mysteries, or whether he is acting for the good of his own soul in proving himself a living and spiritual stone, fit to be built into a holy temple, a spiritual house of God, such a man will certainly be given the gift of saving his soul without any great difficulty.

St Cyril of Alexandria, In Hag., 14; The Divine Office III.

Thursday of the Eleventh Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE PROPHET HAGGAI

(Future blessings, and the promises made by Zerubbabel: Haggai 2:10-23)

On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: Ask the priests to decide this question, 'If one carries holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and touches with his skirt bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any kind of food, does it become holy?'" The priests answered, "No." Then said Haggai, "If one who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?" The priests answered, "It does become unclean." Then Haggai said, "So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, says the LORD; and so with every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean. Pray now, consider what will come to pass from this day onward. Before a stone was placed upon a stone in the temple of the LORD, how did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty. I smote you and all the products of your toil with blight and mildew and hail; yet you did not return to me, says the LORD. Consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Since the day that the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid, consider: Is the seed yet in the barn? Do the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree still yield nothing? From this day on I will bless you."

The word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, "Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders; and the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his fellow. On that day, says the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of She-alti-el, says the LORD, and make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you, says the LORD of hosts."

A READING FROM THE CITY OF GOD BY ST AUGUSTINE

This House of God which is the Church of Christ is of greater glory than was that former house built of wood and precious stones and other costly materials and metals. Thus the prophecy of Haggai was not fulfilled in the restoration of that earlier Temple, for at no time after the restoration can it be shown to have had as great a glory as the Temple had in Solomon's time. The truth is rather that the diminished glory of that house is demonstrated first in the cessation of prophecy, and then by great disasters of the nation itself down to the final destruction at the hands of the Romans. In contrast, this house of ours, which belongs to the new covenant, has assuredly a greater glory in that its stones are of more worth; for they are *living stones*, and the building is constructed of those men who believe and who have themselves been created anew. And yet this new house was symbolised in the restoration of that Temple, just because the very renewing of the Temple symbolises in a prophetic message the second covenant, *the new covenant*, as it is

called. Thus, when God said, through the mouth of the Prophet just mentioned, *And in that place I shall give peace*, the word 'place' is symbolic, and by it we are to understand the person whom it symbolises. And so the rebuilding 'in that place' stands for the Church which was destined to be built by Christ; and the only acceptable meaning of the saying, 'in that place I shall give peace' is, 'I shall grant peace in the place which this place symbolises.

The fact is that all things with symbolic meaning are seen as in some way acting the part of the things they symbolise; for instance, the Apostle says, *That rock was Christ*, because the rock in question undoubtedly symbolised Christ. And so the glory of this house, the new covenant, is greater than the glory of the former house, the old covenant, and it will be seen to be even greater when it is dedicated. For then *will come the one who is longed for by all nations*, as the Hebrew reads. Now his first coming was not yet longed for by all nations, for they did not know of him whom they were destined to long for, in whom they had not yet believed. Then too, in the version of the seventy translators (and their rendering is also prophetic), *will come the chosen of the Lord from all nations*. For then, in truth, none but the elect will come, and it is of them that the Apostle says, *Just as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world*. Then, we may be sure, the master builder himself, who said, *Many are called, but few are chosen*, is going to show us a house, built not of those who were called but came in such a way that they were thrown out of the feast, but of those who have been truly chosen. And that house will thereafter dread no downfall, whereas at the present time the Churches are made up of those who will later be separated out as by a winnowing from on the threshing floor. Thus the glory of this house is not yet shown in the splendour which will be seen when only the righteous remain.

St Augustine, De Civitate Dei 18.48; (1972) tr. Bettenson.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH

(A vision of Jerusalem rebuilt: Zechariah 1:1-21)

In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, the prophet, saying, “The LORD was very angry with your fathers. Therefore say to them, Thus says the LORD of hosts: Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. Be not like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.’ But they did not hear or heed me, says the LORD. Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live for ever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? So they repented and said, As the LORD of hosts purposed to deal with us for our ways and deeds, so has he dealt with us.”

On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month which is the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, the prophet; and Zechariah said, “I saw in the night, and behold, a man riding upon a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen; and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses. Then I said, ‘What are these, my lord?’ The angel who talked with me said to me, ‘I will show you what they are.’ So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, ‘These are they whom the LORD has sent to patrol the earth.’ And they answered the angel of the LORD who was standing among the myrtle trees, ‘We have patrolled the earth, and behold, all the earth remains at rest.’ Then the angel of the LORD said, ‘O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou have no mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these seventy years?’ And the LORD answered gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. So the angel who talked with me said to me, ‘Cry out, Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion. And I am very angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was angry but a little they furthered the disaster. Therefore, thus says the LORD, I have returned to Jerusalem with compassion; my house shall be built in it, says the LORD of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem. Cry again, Thus says the LORD of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.’”

And I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four horns! And I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these?” And he answered me, “These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.” Then the LORD showed me four smiths. And I said, “What are these coming to do?” He answered, “These are the horns which scattered Judah, so that no man raised his head; and these have come to terrify them, to cast down the horns of the nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter it.”

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON EZEKIEL BY ST GREGORY THE GREAT

It is precisely because the vision of inward peace is made up of a community of saints as its citizens that the heavenly Jerusalem is built as a city. Even while, in this earthly life, its citizens are lashed by whips and subjected to oppression, its stones are being quarried every day.

It is also the city, namely, the holy Church, which is to reign in heaven but is still toiling on earth. It is to its citizens that Peter says: *And you are being built up like living stones*. Paul also says: *You are God's land, God's building*. Clearly the city already has its great building here on earth in the lives of the saints. In a building, of course, one stone supports another, since they are placed one on top of another, and one supporting another is itself supported by another. So in the same way, in the holy Church, every member both supports and is supported by the other. For neighbours give each other mutual support, so that the building of love may rise through them. Hence too Paul's instruction to us: *Bear each other's burdens, and in that way you will fulfil the law of Christ*; and he claims the virtue of this law, saying: *It is love which fulfils the law*.

For if I neglect to support you in the way you live, and you pay little attention to supporting me in mine, how will the building of love rise among us? He alone who supports the whole fabric of the holy Church supports us in our good ways and our faults as well. But in a building, as we have said, the supporting stone is itself supported. For just as I already support the ways of those whose behaviour in the matter of good works is still unformed, so I too am supported by those who have surpassed me in the fear of the Lord, and yet have supported me, so that I myself should learn to support through being supported. But they have also been supported by their predecessors.

However the stones placed at the top of the building to finish it off, though supported of course by others, have no one to support in turn. For those, too, who are born at the Church's end, that is, at the end of the world, will certainly be supported by their predecessors, to dispose them to behave in a way that leads to good works; but when they have none to follow them who could profit by them, they have no more stones to support for the building of the faithful above them. So for the time being they are supported by us, and we are supported by others. However it is the foundation that carries the entire weight of the building, because our Redeemer alone supports the lives of all of us together. As Paul says of him: *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid, which is Christ Jesus*. The foundation supports the stones and is not supported by the stones, because our Redeemer supports us in all our troubles, but in himself there was no evil demanding support.

St Gregory the Great, Hom. in Ez., 2.1.5 (CCL 142:210-212); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH

(Visions; exhortations to the exiles: Zechariah 2:5-17)

And I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand! Then I said, "Where are you going?" And he said to me, "To measure Jerusalem, to see what is

its breadth and what is its length.” And behold, the angel who talked with me came forward, and another angel came forward to meet him, and said to him, “Run, say to that young man, ‘Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of men and cattle in it.’” For I will be to her a wall of fire round about, says the LORD, and I will be the glory within her.”

Ho! ho! Flee from the land of the north, says the LORD; for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens, says the LORD. Ho! Escape to Zion, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon. For thus said the LORD of hosts, after his glory sent me to the nations who plundered you, for he who touches you touches the apple of his eye: “Behold, I will shake my hand over them, and they shall become plunder for those who served them. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me. Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for lo, I come and I will dwell in the midst of you, says the LORD. And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in the midst of you, and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. And the LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem.”

Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD; for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ZECHARIAH BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

Be delighted and rejoice, daughter of Zion, because I am coming and shall dwell among you, says the Lord. And many nations will flee for refuge to the Lord in that day and become his people, and they will dwell in your midst.

Even from this you may understand that the Saviour's coming will be the occasion of the sublimest joy for those on earth. For of necessity he commanded the spiritual Zion to be delighted and glad, since she is the Church of the living God, or rather she is the holiest multitude of those saved through faith. And he promised he would come, and would certainly live among her people.

For Saint John tells us: *He was in the world, and the Word who was God did not hold aloof from his created beings. But it was he who gave life to those partaking of life, and who also sustains all things for their own well-being in life. But the world refused to recognise him, for it 'worshiped created things'. Yet he came among us when, assuming our own likeness, he was born of the Holy Virgin. When too he appeared on earth and lived among men. And holy David will also bear witness, saying: God, our God, will come visibly, and will not keep silence.* Then too he became visible to the Gentiles.

For it was no longer only the Israelites who were being taught by the old commandment. But rather the whole world was made splendid by the preaching of the Gospel, and the Lord's name became great among all the nations and in every land. For he was *the expectation* of the nations, as the Prophet says. And *every knee will bow to him in heaven, on earth and in hell, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* For the nations ran together in faith toward him, and dwelt with him in the holy spiritual Zion, coming from the ends of the earth. And they understood clearly that *God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that all who believed in him should not perish but have eternal life.* For the Father sent his Son to us from heaven, as Saviour and Redeemer, so that we should believe in him and see in him the Father. And so that looking at him, the exact image of the Father from whom he was born according to nature, we should think of the original.

St Cyril of Alexandria, In Zachariam Prophetam (PG 72:40); Word in Season VII.

Season of the Year / Week 12

Sunday of the Twelfth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH

(Prophecies spoken to Zerubbabel and to Joshua the High Priest: Zechariah 3:1 – 4:14)

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?” Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, “Remove the filthy garments from him.” And to him he said, “Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with rich apparel.” And I said, “Let them put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments; and the angel of the LORD was standing by.

And the angel of the LORD enjoined Joshua, “Thus says the LORD of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here. Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men of good omen: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch. For behold, upon the stone which I have set before Joshua, upon a single stone with seven facets, I will engrave its inscription, says the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day. In that day, says the LORD of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbour under his vine and under his fig tree.”

And the angel who talked with me came again, and waked me, like a man that is wakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, “What do you see?” I said, “I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps which are on the top of it. And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.” And I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” Then the angel who talked with me answered me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.” Then he said to me, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’” Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel.

“These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth.” Then I said to him, “What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?” And a second time I said to him, “What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the oil is poured out?” He said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.” Then he said, “These are the two anointed who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.”

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ZECHARIAH BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

This is the word of the Lord concerning Zerubbabel: Not by great power, nor by force, but by my Spirit, says the Almighty Lord. This is the same as saying that all that Zechariah had just seen would come to completion at the appointed time, not as the achievement of human power, nor by physical force, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, and as at a sign from God.

For the Only Son was made a man like ourselves. However, he did not engage in physical combat to set up the Church as a light to the world. Nor did he wield arms in a literal sense, drawing up the two nations in warlike battle-lines around him. He did not even provide the lamp-stand with spiritual lamps, but by the force of the Holy Spirit he first appointed Apostles in the Churches, next Prophets and Evangelists and the rest of the holy assembly, filling them full of God's gifts and enriching them with the Spirit in abundant profusion.

So it was neither by great power nor by the physical strength of Christ but by the power of the Spirit that Satan was despoiled, and the whole horde of hostile powers fell with him, and that the Israelites and those who formerly *worshiped created things rather than the Creator* were called through faith to knowledge of God. Lamps were revealed in the Churches too, the saints who shone out together with the lantern, that is, Christ. For they became, as Paul writes in his great wisdom, *stars in the universe, holding fast to the word of life.*

Again, the fact that it was not by human hand but by his own power as God that Emmanuel saved the world he solemnly affirmed through the mouth of Hosea. These are his words: *but I shall have mercy on the children of Judah, and I shall save them – not by bow and arrow, sword, war, chariots, horses or horsemen, but by the Lord their God.* But he gave the clearest message to Zerubbabel, of the tribe of Judah, who was at that time placed in the position of king of Jerusalem. For in case he thought that the splendid and marvellous achievements foretold for him meant wars, and it was fighting that would begin at the appointed time, the Lord had to drive such unsound human thoughts out of his mind, and instead commanded him to understand that it was by activity worthy of God and not by human power that Christ would bring such things to a conclusion. And then we remember saying that in himself Zerubbabel signified Christ, since he was of the tribe of Judah and a king, but he was also this in conjunction with Jesus the son of Jehozadak, so that Emmanuel might be understood as both king and high priest at once in the same person.

St Cyril of Alexandria, In Zachariam Prophetam (PG 72:64-65); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH

(Promises of salvation in Zion: Zechariah 8:1-17, 20-23)

And the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath. Thus says the LORD: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain. Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. Thus says the LORD of hosts: If it is marvellous in the sight of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in my sight, says the LORD of hosts? Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country; and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and they shall be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness."

Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Let your hands be strong, you who in these days have been hearing these words from the mouth of the prophets, since the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built. Before those days there was no wage for man or any wage for beast, neither was there any safety from the foe for him who went out or came in; for I set every man against his fellow. But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, says the LORD of hosts. For there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, and the ground shall give its increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. And as you have been a byword of cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you and you shall be a blessing. Fear not, but let your hands be strong."

For thus says the LORD of hosts: "As I purposed to do evil to you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the LORD of hosts, so again have I purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear not. These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace, do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, says the LORD."

"Thus says the LORD of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities; the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, 'Let us go at once to entreat the favour of the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts; I am going.' Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favour of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"

A READING FROM THE LADDER OF PERFECTION BY WALTER HILTON

There was a man that would go to Jerusalem, and because he did not know the way, he asked another man, who he believed knew the way better than him. When he asked him whether he would come to Jerusalem or not, the man answered that he could go no further without great pains and hardships, saying the way is long and perilous, and full of great thieves and robbers, and many other hindrances that come to pass to a man along the way. Nevertheless, there is one way, if one takes and sticks to it, that I am sure one will come to that city of Jerusalem, and never lose one's life, nor be slain, nor die by default. Though he would often be robbed and beaten, and suffer much pain along the way, his life will be safe.

Then said the pilgrim, 'So I may have my life saved, and come to the place that I covet, I care not what mischief I suffer in going.'

That other man answered and said, 'Lo, I set you in the right way. This is the way, and see that you bear in mind all that I tell you. Whatsoever you see, hear, or feel, that would hinder you in the way, stick not at it, willingly consent not to it, abide not with it, behold it not, like it not, fear it not, but still go forward holding on your way, and ever think and say with yourself that you would rather be at Jerusalem. Jerusalem is, as much as to say, a sight of peace, and beholds contemplation in perfect love of God, for contemplation is nothing else but a sight of God, which is very peace.

The beginning of the highway, in which you shall go, is reforming in faith, and grounded humbly on the faith and on the laws of holy Church as I have said before. For trust assuredly, though you have sinned up to now, if you are now reformed by the sacrament of penance, after the law of holy Church, you are on the right way. Now then, since you are in the safe way, if you hurry along in your going and make a good journey, it behoves you to hold these two things often in mind: *Humility and Love*; and often say to yourself, *I am nothing, I have nothing, I covet nothing, but one*. Humility says, *I am nothing, I have nothing*; Love says, *I covet nothing, but one*, and that is Jesus.

And if you do all this, then you shall resolve in your heart fully and wholly that you will be at Jerusalem, and at no other place but there; that is, your heart shall have wholly and fully nothing but the love of Jesus and the spiritual sight of him in such manner as he shall please to show himself; for to that end only are you made and redeemed, and he it is that is your beginning and your end, your joy and your bliss.

Walter Hilton, *The Ladder of Perfection*, II.3; Word in Season VII.

Tuesday of the Twelfth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EZRA

(The building of the Temple and the celebration of the Passover: Ezra 6:1-5, 14-22)

Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in Babylonia, in the house of the archives where the documents were stored. And in Ecbatana, the capital which is in the province of Media, a scroll was found on which this was written: "A record. In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king issued a decree: Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be rebuilt, the place where sacrifices are offered and burnt offerings are brought; its height shall be sixty cubits and its breadth sixty cubits, with three courses of great stones and one course of timber; let the cost be paid from the royal treasury. And also let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that is in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and brought back to the temple which is in Jerusalem, each to its place; you shall put them in the house of God."

And the elders of the Jews built and prospered, through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They finished their building by command of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia; and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. They offered at the dedication of this house of God one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve he-goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. And they set the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God at Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses.

On the fourteenth day of the first month the returned exiles kept the passover. For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were clean. So they killed the passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for their fellow priests, and for themselves; it was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile, and also by every one who had joined them and separated himself from the pollutions of the peoples of the land to worship the LORD, the God of Israel. And they kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy; for the LORD had made them joyful, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON EZRA AND NEHEMIAH BY ST BEDE

And they celebrated the feast of unleavened bread. Now the Apostle teaches us how we must celebrate the feast in spirit, when he says: Let us therefore keep the feast, not in the old leaven, nor in the leaven of malice and iniquity, but in the fresh leaven of sincerity and truth. Seven days of celebrating go into that: for throughout our time in this world,

however many days it may run, we are to live our lives in sincerity and truth, and indeed in every kind of sacrifice and offering. For our blessed Lord himself tasted death for a time at Eastertide, only to vanquish it by the eternal power of his resurrection. And our celebration of Easter here and now can be taken to represent symbolically our resurrection. Hence just as the building of the Temple stands for the present condition of Holy Church, so the dedication of it symbolises the life that is to come, consisting in the rejoicing of the holy souls who have left the life of the body behind.

The sacrifice of the passover hints at the glory of the resurrection, when no longer will all the elect need to be refreshed by the flesh of the spotless Lamb - that is, our Lord and our God - in the sacrament, as believers; for they will be refreshed indeed by seeing him as he is in very truth. Wherefore in this passover all priests and Levites, all the congregations of the people, all those who had joined them from among the Gentiles, are held to have been of the world, all brought into one, as it were; for truly then will the Lamb of God have taken away the sins of the world. And as Saint John the Apostle said: *The blood of Jesus the Son of God cleanses us of all sin.* Then there will be true unity, *for God will be all in all.* Then the true feast of unleavened bread will be celebrated with rejoicing with no leaven of malice or wickedness remaining among the elect, but all clinging in truth and in sincerity of heart, to the vision of God. And all this will come to pass, not in seven days of this changing world, but in that one day of eternal life within the courts of the Lord which is better than thousands, and in the light of the Holy Spirit whose sevenfold grace the Prophet commends to us.

St Bede, In Esdram et Nehemiam Allegorica expositio, II.7 (PL 91:858); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EZRA

(The mission of Ezra the Priest: Ezra 7:6-28)

Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses which the LORD the God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was upon him.

And there went up also to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king, some of the people of Israel, and some of the priests and Levites, the singers and gatekeepers, and the temple servants. And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king; for on the first day of the first month he began to go up from Babylonia, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, for the good hand of his God was upon him. For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel.

This is a copy of the letter which King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, learned in matters of the commandments of the LORD and his statutes for Israel: Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven. And now I make a decree that any one of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom, who freely offers to go to Jerusalem, may go with you. For you are sent by the king and his seven counsellors to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God, which is in your hand, and also to convey the silver and gold which the king and his counsellors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, with all the silver and gold which you shall find in the whole province of Babylonia, and with the freewill offerings of the people and the priests, vowed willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem. With this money, then, you shall with all diligence buy bulls, rams, and lambs, with their cereal offerings and their drink offerings, and you shall offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. Whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do, according to the will of your God. The vessels that have been given you for the service of the house of your God, you shall deliver before the God of Jerusalem. And whatever else is required for the house of your God, which you have occasion to provide, you may provide it out of the king's treasury.

And I, Artaxerxes the king, make a decree to all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River: Whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, requires of you, be it done with all diligence, up to a hundred talents of silver, a hundred cors of wheat, a hundred baths of wine, a hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done in full for the house of the God of heaven, lest his wrath be against the realm of the king and his sons. We also notify you that it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll upon any one of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or other servants of this house of God.

And you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God which is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and those who do not know them, you shall teach. Whoever will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed upon him, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of his goods or for imprisonment.

Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, and who extended to me his steadfast love before the king and his counsellors, and before all the kings mighty officers. I took courage, for the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON EZRA AND NEHEMIAH BY ST BEDE

Just as Zerubbabel and Jesus stand for our Lord and Saviour, who releases our race from captivity by his grace and himself makes his dwelling in us, building himself up there by sanctifying us and taking possession of us; so also Ezra the priest and nimble scribe openly claims the same Lord, *who has not come to abolish the law but to bring it to perfection*. For he, the Lord, could truly be called a scribe of God's Law or a nimble scribe in the Law of Moses, having given Moses the Law himself through an angel. He it was who taught the holy Prophets all truth, by the grace of his Spirit, he who was soon to touch with his love the minds of all his chosen ones, kindling in them the understanding of his Father's will and the urge to accomplish it.

Wherefore promising the grace of the New Covenant the Prophet says: And this is the covenant I have made with the house of Israel since those days, says the Lord; I shall make my laws in their minds, and on their hearts shall I write them. The psalmist touchingly recalls the man who wrote that, when he says: My tongue is the pen for a scribe nimbly writing. The Prophet's tongue indeed was the scribe's busy pen; for whatever the Lord taught by inwardly enlightening him without any delay in time, that he himself revealed in time to men, outwardly, by means of the spoken ministry. Ezra, whose name means 'helper', clearly shows this in his own person. For it is through him alone that the congregation of the faithful can be released from their tribulations and is to be (as it were) conducted from the Babylonian captivity to the liberty of Jerusalem, from the confusion of vice to the peace and serenity of virtue, step by step according to their merits.

The resemblance to Ezra was kept up even in his deeds. For it was not the least part of the people that he led back from captivity to Jerusalem, bringing at the same time both the money and the vessels consecrated to God, for the glory of his Temple, while purging the same people of their alien wives by his authority as mediator. All of which reveals to the thoughtful reader what deeds the Lord has wrought in his holy Church and what is to be done. We too shall take pains to make clear the message, so that it may be understood by those even less thoughtful than we. For Ezra's going up from Babylon, the children of Israel and the sons of the priests and Levites with him, represents the merciful

dispensation of our Redeemer, whereby he appeared in the flesh, and his entering into the confusion of this world, being free himself from the confusion brought by vice, so that when returning he might bring us with him, freed from all confusion, to the tranquillity of eternal peace. We have received a pledge of that eternal peace in the Church as it now is: for as the Lord says, *My peace I leave you; my peace I give unto you.*

St Bede, In Esdram et Nehemiam Allegorica expositio, II.9 (PL 91:860-861); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF EZRA

(On marriages with gentiles: Ezra 9:1-9, 15 – 10:5)

After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, “The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons; so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost.”

When I heard this, I rent my garments and my mantle, and pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat appalled. Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered round me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice. And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garments and my mantle rent, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God, saying:

“O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to thee, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. From the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt; and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and to utter shame, as at this day. But now for a brief moment favour has been shown by the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant, and to give us a secure hold within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage. For we are bondmen; yet our God has not forsaken us in our bondage, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem.

“O LORD the God of Israel, thou art just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as at this day. Behold, we are before thee in our guilt, for none can stand before thee because of this.”

While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children, gathered to him out of Israel; for the people wept bitterly. And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam, addressed Ezra: “We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. Therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it.” Then Ezra arose and made the leading priests and Levites and all Israel take oath that they would do as had been said. So they took the oath.

A READING FROM A HOMILY BY ST LEO THE GREAT

The Apostle exhorts us to *put off the old man with its actions and to be renewed day by day* through a holy way of life, for he says, *you are the temple of God*. If we are the temple of God then, and the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts, we must be very watchful to see that our hearts are not an unworthy dwelling for so great a guest.

When dealing with houses made by hands, people exercise a praiseworthy diligence and make sure to repair quickly any damage done by the rain or wind or the simple passage of time. So we too must constantly take care not to let anything disordered or unclean be found in our souls. For although our edifice will not last without the help of its builder, and the structure cannot remain intact without the watchful care of its maker, yet we are living matter and spiritual stones, and therefore the author of our being works in such a way that the person being renewed must collaborate with him. We must not, then, be disobedient to the grace of nor separate ourselves from that Good without which we are unable to be good. If we find anything impossible or extremely difficult in what we are commanded, we must not only look to our own powers but have recourse to him who commands. God issues his commands with the intention of rousing our desire and giving us the help we need. Therefore, as the Prophet says, *Cast your cares upon the Lord, and he will sustain you*. Is there anyone so proud and arrogant, so sure of his own purity and integrity, as to think he needs no renovation? Such an attitude is mistaken, and the person who believes himself to be invulnerable amid the temptations of life has become excessively conceited.

The believer has no doubt that divine providence is at work always and everywhere. He knows that the outcome of human affairs does not depend on the power of the stars for that power is non-existent, and that everything is ordered by the utterly equitable and merciful judgement and will of the supreme King. Nonetheless, things do not always work out as we desire, and the cause of the wicked often triumphs over that of the just. It is only too likely, then, that even generous souls may be disturbed and driven to wrongful complaints. Therefore, since few have such solid strength as not to be shaken by any shifts of circumstance and since prosperity no less than adversity leads many believers astray, we must be diligent in healing the wounds we receive because of our human weakness.

St Leo the Great, Tract. 43.1-4 (CCL 138A:251-255); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

(Nehemiah is sent to the King in Judah: Nehemiah 1:1 – 2:8)

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.

Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the capital, that Hanani, one of my brethren, came with certain men out of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that survived, who had escaped exile, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, “The survivors there in the province who escaped exile are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.”

When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days; and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. And I said, “O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments; let thy ear be attentive, and thy eyes open, to hear the prayer of thy servant which I now pray before thee day and night for the people of Israel thy servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against thee. Yea, I and my father’s house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances which thou didst command thy servant Moses. Remember the word which thou didst command thy servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are under the farthest skies, I will gather them thence and bring them to the place which I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’ They are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power and by thy strong hand.

O Lord, let thy ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants who delight to fear thy name; and give success to thy servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”

Now I was cupbearer to the king.

In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. And the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing else but sadness of the heart.” Then I was very much afraid. I said to the king, “Let the king live for ever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my father’s sepulchres, lies waste, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” Then the king said to me, “For what do you make request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favour in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers sepulchres, that I may rebuild it.” And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah; and a letter to

Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house which I shall occupy." And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON PSALM 146 BY ST AUGUSTINE

The Lord is rebuilding Jerusalem, and calling the exiles from Israel back. So the Lord is rebuilding Jerusalem and recalling its exiled people; for the people of Jerusalem are the people of Israel. There is an eternal Jerusalem in heaven, where the citizens are also angels. What, then, does Israel mean? Seeing God. So all the citizens of that city rejoice at seeing God in that great and splendid heavenly city. God himself is their theatre. But we are exiles from that city: banished for our sins, to prevent us remaining there, and burdened with mortality, to prevent us returning there. God has noted our exile, and he who rebuilds Jerusalem has reinstated the sinners. How did he reinstate them? *By calling the exiles from Israel back.* For sin had made them exiles. God took pity on these and searched for them, since they were not seeking for him. Where did he look? Whom did he send to set us free from our captivity? He sent the Redeemer, as the Apostle tells us: *God shows his love for us, by the fact that when we were still sinners Christ died for us.*

So he sent his Son, our Redeemer, to set us free from our captivity. 'Take a purse with you,' he said, 'and put the price of the prisoners in it.' For he clothed himself in a mortal body, and there was the blood which was shed for our redemption. With that blood he called the exiles from Israel back. Yet if he called back exiles long ago, why should he want to call back exiles today? If the exiles were called back to be shaped into a building by the craftsman's hand, why should those be called back whose own turbulence caused them to fall out of the craftsman's hand? *He heals those who have a contrite heart.* That is why the exiles from Israel are called back: to be healed through a contrite heart. Those who have failed to mortify their heart are not healed. What does it mean: to mortify our heart? *If you had wanted a sacrifice, I should certainly have given you one; but you take no pleasure in burnt offerings.* What then? Are we to remain without the oblation of sacrifice? Listen to what he wants you to offer, as he goes on to say: *The sacrifice acceptable to God is a contrite spirit; God will not despise a contrite and humble heart. So he heals those who have a contrite heart;* for he comes near them to heal them; as it is said elsewhere: *The Lord is near to those who have a contrite heart.* Such are the people he heals; but their healing will only be perfect at the end of their mortal life, when this corruptible body will put on incorruptibility, and this mortal body will put on immortality.

St Augustine, Enarr. In Ps. 146.4-5 (CCL 40:2124-2125); Word in Season VII.

Saturday of the Twelfth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

(Nehemiah prepares for the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem: Nehemiah 2:9-20)

Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard this, it displeased them greatly that some one had come to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.

So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; and I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no beast with me but the beast on which I rode. I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Jackals Well and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which had been destroyed by fire. Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the Kings Pool; but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall; and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing; and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest that were to do the work.

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer disgrace." And I told them of the hand of my God which had been upon me for good, and also of the words which the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work. But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they derided us and despised us and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build; but you have no portion or right or memorial in Jerusalem."

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON MICAH BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

Behold I am laying a stone for the foundations in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone; and he who has faith in it will not be put to shame. The builders of Zion rejected the tested and precious stone, but now it is in place as the cornerstone. For Christ has become king of both the Gentiles and the Jews, whom he has created into a single new man, making peace through the cross, and joining them in spiritual union to form a cornerstone. For it is written: The whole multitude of believers were united in heart and soul.

Through sanctification and faith they have become similar in form to that most precious cornerstone, and so St Peter wrote well and wisely: *You yourselves, like living stones, must be built up into a spiritual house, to be a holy temple and a dwelling place for God in the Spirit.*

And in the last days the mountain of the Lord's house will be revealed. We can see in these prophetic words a clear reference to the future Church of the Gentiles. For Israel in the flesh had, as it were, ceased to exist, the sacrificial rites of the Law had come to an end, the priests of the house of Levi had abandoned their office, and lastly the famous temple itself had been destroyed by fire and Jerusalem demolished. This was the moment when Christ proclaimed the Church of the Gentiles, as if in the last days, that is, at the consummation of our age; for it was then that he became man. The Prophet speaks of the Church as a mountain, *which is the house of the living God*. It soars aloft, because there is nothing whatsoever earthbound in the Church. It is raised on high by the knowledge of the precepts of God; and the very mode of life of those justified by Christ and sanctified by the Spirit is made sublime.

Yet the Prophet shows that Israel could not entirely lose hope. The people were indeed crushed and rejected, or rather cast off, because of their utter disregard for God. They fought against him, with shameless and profane idolatry, and were liable in no small degree to charges of blood-guilt. For they had killed the Prophets, and in the end they crucified the very Saviour and Redeemer of the world. But, for the sake of their fathers, the remnant were pitied and saved, to become a great people.

For it is true and right to consider this holy multitude whom Christ has justified as a very great people. The things that distinguish them, and should make them a cause of wonder, are goodness of mind and nobility of heart, that is, sanctification, hope in Christ, faithful sonship, admirable virtues and marvellous endurance, submission to Christ's rule and devotion to his teaching. *For we have one teacher, Christ*. And the Prophet's Mount Zion is the heavenly Jerusalem, mother of the first-born, where we shall dwell in unity with Christ.

St Cyril of Alexandria, In Michaeam prophetam, 3.35-36 (PG 71:689-703); Word in Season VII.

Season of the Year / Week 13

Sunday of the Thirteenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

(The building of the wall; taunts and plots of the enemies: Nehemiah 4:1-23)

Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he ridiculed the Jews. And he said in the presence of his brethren and of the army of Samaria, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore things? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?" Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, "Yes, what they are building – if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!" Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn back their taunt upon their own heads, and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from thy sight; for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders.

So we built the wall; and all the wall was joined together to half its height. For the people had a mind to work.

But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry; and they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. And we prayed to our God, and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.

But Judah said, "The strength of the burden-bearers is failing, and there is much rubbish; we are not able to work on the wall." And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come into the midst of them and kill them and stop the work." When the Jews who lived by them came they said to us ten times, "From all the places where they live they will come up against us." So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I looked, and arose, and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail; and the leaders stood behind all the house of Judah, who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were laden in such a way that each with one hand laboured on the work and with the other held his weapon. And each of the builders had his sword girded at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."

So we laboured at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn till the stars came out. I also said to the people at that time, "Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labour by day." So neither I nor my brethren nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon in his hand.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY BLESSED GUERRIC OF IGNY

Keep awake, brethren, intent upon your prayers; keep awake, careful how you carry out your duties, all the more so since the morning of that unending day has dawned, which saw the doubly welcome, serene, eternal light, return to us from the dead, and the morning rising caused the sun to shine with a new brightness. *It is now time for you to wake out of sleep; it is far on in the night; day is near.* Keep awake, I say, that the morning light may rise upon you, no other than Christ, *who will reveal himself, sure as the dawn;* prepared to enable those who are on the watch for him, to relive once more the mystery of his resurrection in the morning. Then indeed you will sing with joyful heart: *The Lord is God; he has given light to us. This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it;* the day, that is, when he will allow the light which he has hidden with his hands to shine upon you, telling you, his friend, it is his to give, and that you may raise yourself up to receive it.

Sluggard, how much longer are you going to sleep? Yes, how much longer are you going to slumber on? Scripture says, *A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands in rest;* otherwise, while you are asleep, unaware of it, Christ will have risen from his tomb; and when, resplendent, he passes by, you will not deserve to see even his back. Then, when it is too late, you will utter lamentations of repentance, and say with the ungodly, *Because we have wandered from the way of truth, neither the light of righteousness has shone upon us, nor has the sun of understanding risen upon us.*

But, for you who fear my name, says the Prophet, the sun of righteousness shall rise. And the man who lives an upright life, his eyes shall see the king in his splendour.

This undoubtedly refers to happiness in the life to come; but, as Christ's resurrection clearly proves, it is also granted to us in due measure for our consolation in this life.

So let us all rouse up and requicken our spirits, whether to watch in prayer or to work with a will, so that our renewed and lively zest may show that, once again, we have received a share in Christ's resurrection. Indeed the chief sign of a man's return to life is vigorous and energetic action. Moreover, he will make a perfect return to life, if he dies to the body and opens his eyes to contemplation. However, his understanding will be undeserving of this until he increases his love by frequent longings and ardent desires, to render himself capable of something so sublime.

Life begins to return when prayer increases love; it reaches perfection when the understanding receives the light of contemplation. Strive, then, brethren, to mount ever higher on the ladder of the virtues, the means whereby we grow in holiness of life, so that, as the Apostle says, you may finally arrive at the resurrection of Christ from the dead: he who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

Bd Gueric of Igny, Sermo 3 de Resurrectione Domini, 3.5 (SC 202:250, 256-258); Word in Season VII.

Monday of the Thirteenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

(Nehemiah frees the poor from the oppression of the rich: Nehemiah 5:1-19)

Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brethren. For there were those who said, "With our sons and our daughters, we are many; let us get grain, that we may eat and keep alive." There were also those who said, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine." And there were those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax upon our fields and our vineyards. Now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children are as their children; yet we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have already been enslaved; but it is not in our power to help it, for other men have our fields and our vineyards."

I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. I took counsel with myself, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials. I said to them, "You are exacting interest, each from his brother." And I held a great assembly against them, and said to them, "We, as far as we are able, have bought back our Jewish brethren who have been sold to the nations; but you even sell your brethren that they may be sold to us!" They were silent, and could not find a word to say. So I said, "The thing that you are doing is not good. Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies? Moreover I and my brethren and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us leave off this interest. Return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the hundredth of money, grain, wine, and oil which you have been exacting of them." Then they said, "We will restore these and require nothing from them. We will do as you say." And I called the priests, and took an oath of them to do as they had promised. I also shook out my lap and said, "So may God shake out every man from his house and from his labour who does not perform this promise. So may he be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said "Amen" and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.

Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, twelve years, neither I nor my brethren ate the food allowance of the governor. The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens upon the people, and took from them food and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so, because of the fear of God. I also held to the work on this wall, and acquired no land; and all my servants were gathered there for the work. Moreover there were at my table a hundred and fifty men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations which were about us. Now that which was prepared for one day was one ox and six choice sheep; fowls likewise were prepared for me, and every ten days skins of wine in abundance; yet with all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the servitude was heavy upon this people. Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE

God's will is what Christ did and taught: it means humility in behaviour, steadfastness in faith, modesty in words, justice in deeds, mercy in good works, discipline in daily life; to be incapable of doing injury to anyone, but able to bear the injury done to rejoice at the prosperity of our neighbour as if we ourselves had deserved to prosper, to think of another's loss as our own loss, and another's gain as our own gain. It is to love a friend not for the world's sake but for God's, to put up with and even love an enemy, to do to nothing to anyone which you would not want to suffer yourself, to refuse no one what you rightly want given to you; to help your neighbour in time of trouble not only according to your means, but willing to be of use to him even beyond your means, and to keep the peace with your brothers. It is to love God with all your heart, to love him as Father but fear him as Lord; and to put nothing before Christ, for he has never put anything before us.

But all who love the name of the Lord will be glorified. Let us be unhappy here, so as to be happy afterwards. Let us follow the Lord Jesus Christ. *Those who say they believe in him must live in the same way as he lived.* Christ, the Son of God, came not to reign, but though king he shunned the kingdom; he came not to rule, but to serve. He became poor to make us rich; he took blows for us, so that we ourselves should feel no pain when scourged.

Let us imitate Christ. Christian is a name that stands for justice, kindness, and integrity. A Christian is one who imitates and follows Christ in everything, who is holy, innocent, undefiled, and chaste. There is no place in the heart of a Christian for malice, but only for devotion and goodness. A Christian is one who follows the life of Christ, who is merciful to all and ignorant of injustice. A Christian is one who forbids the poor to be disparaged in his presence, who helps the unfortunate, mourns with those who mourn, feels another's pain as if it was his own, and is moved to tears by the tears of others. A Christian's house is open to all, no one is ever shut out. The poor are always welcome at his table; everyone knows that Christians are really good, and no one is left with any sense of injustice. A Christian is one who serves God diligently day and night, whose soul is sincere and immaculate, whose conscience is faithful and pure, whose mind is wholly on God, and who despises worldly possessions so that he may acquire heavenly ones.

St Cyprian of Carthage, Sermon (attrib.), (PLS 1:51-52); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

(A solemn proclamation of the Law is made by Ezra: Nehemiah 7:73b – 8:18)

And when the seventh month had come, the children of Israel were in their towns. And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. 4 And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden pulpit which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah, and Ma-aseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Misha-el, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people; and when he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God; and all the people answered, Amen, Amen, lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Ma-aseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved. And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

On the second day the heads of fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to Ezra the scribe in order to study the words of the law. And they found it written in the law that the LORD had commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, and that they should publish and proclaim in all their towns and in Jerusalem, Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths, as it is written. So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and dwelt in the booths; for from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so.

And there was very great rejoicing. And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the book of the law of God. They kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the ordinance.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON EZRA AND NEHEMIAH BY ST BEDE

As Nehemiah was seeking to make plans and decide who should reside in the city which they had built, the seventh month arrived. The point to note here is the devotion and like-mindedness of the people who *as one man* (that is, with one and the same faith and love) came together at the Lord's Temple. They themselves asked their *pontifex* to bring the book and recount for them the commandments of the Law that they must observe, so that along with the rebuilt city, a structure of good works pleasing to God might spring up in case, just as before, neglect of religion should lead to the ruination of the city.

Even today too, according to the spiritual meaning, the construction of the holy city should be followed by divine reading and the frequent sounding of trumpets, no doubt because it is necessary that when a people has been initiated into the heavenly sacraments they should also, as occasion requires, be carefully instructed by divine discourses how they should live.

Solomon, being a king, made a bronze platform, whereas Ezra, as a man of lesser power, built a wooden step to speak upon, just as Solomon or Moses also made the altar of holocaust out of bronze and the descendants of the exiles replaced it with a stone one. But it should not be supposed that the wooden step walls are less perfect mystery than the bronze scaffold. For, as has often been said, just as bronze, for the length of time that it endures or for the sweetness of its sound, corresponds to the divine sacraments which fail with no passing of the ages and *their sound has gone out into all the earth*, in the same way wood too fits most aptly with these same sacraments on account of the trophy of the Lord's passion. The *pontifex*, therefore, stands out *above all the people* when he who receives the rank of teacher rises above the activity of the crowd by the merit of a more perfect life; but he stands *on a wooden step that he made to speak upon* when he makes himself higher than the rest through exceptional imitation of the Lord's passion.

So the people went out and brought back and made tabernacles for themselves, each man on his dwelling, and in his courtyards. 'on the dwelling' means 'on the roof of the houses', for in Palestine they do not have sloping roofs on the houses but the tops of all houses are flat and covered with beams and boards. This is why in the Law it is commanded that whoever builds a new home should make breast-works round the roof so that no one will fall from it and die. And so each one of us goes out and makes tabernacles *on his dwelling* when, rising by means of the mind above the abode of his body, he tramples down his harmful emotions with constant meditation on heavenly light and liberty. We do the same thing in our courtyards too when, with a mind burning for heavenly things, we stand as it were outside the world and desire to leave its dwelling-place as quickly as possible.

St Bede, In Esdram et Nehemiam, 3; (2006) tr. DeGregorio.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

(Penitential liturgy and prayer of the Levites: Nehemiah 9:1-2, 5-210)

Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth upon their heads. And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmi-el, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, "Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be thy glorious name which is exalted above all blessing and praise."

And Ezra said: "Thou art the LORD, thou alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and thou preservest all of them; and the host of heaven worships thee. Thou art the LORD, the God who didst choose Abram and bring him forth out of Ur of the Chaldeans and give him the name Abraham; and thou didst find his heart faithful before thee, and didst make with him the covenant to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite; and thou hast fulfilled thy promise, for thou art righteous.

"And thou didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and hear their cry at the Red Sea, and didst perform signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for thou knewest that they acted insolently against our fathers; and thou didst get thee a name, as it is to this day. And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land; and thou didst cast their pursuers into the depths, as a stone into mighty waters. By a pillar of cloud thou didst lead them in the day, and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go. Thou didst come down upon Mount Sinai, and speak with them from heaven and give them right ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments, and thou didst make known to them thy holy sabbath and command them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses thy servant. Thou didst give them bread from heaven for their hunger and bring forth water for them from the rock for their thirst, and thou didst tell them to go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them.

"But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey thy commandments; they refused to obey, and were not mindful of the wonders which thou didst perform among them; but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their bondage in Egypt. But thou art a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and didst not forsake them. Even when they had made for themselves a molten calf and said, 'This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt', and had committed great blasphemies, thou in thy great mercies didst not forsake them in the wilderness; the pillar of cloud which led them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night which lighted for them the way by which they should go. Thou gavest thy good Spirit to instruct them,

and didst not withhold thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst. Forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing; their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.”

A READING FROM THE CONFERENCES OF ST JOHN CASSIAN

We must explain one by one the different kinds of prayer that the Apostle divided in fourfold fashion when he said: *I urge first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made.* There is not the least doubt that the Apostle established these distinctions in this way for a good reason.

I urge first of all that supplications be made. A supplication is an imploring or a petition concerning sins, by which a person who has been struck by compunction begs for pardon for his present or past misdeeds.

Prayers are those acts by which we offer or vow something to God, which is called *euché* in Greek – that is, a vow. For where the Greek says *tas euchas*, the Latin has ‘vows’: *I will pay my vows to the Lord.* This will be fulfilled by each one of us in this way. We pray when we renounce this world and pledge that, dead to every earthly deed and to an earthly way of life, we will serve the Lord with utter earnestness of heart. We pray when we promise that, disdaining worldly honour and spurning earthly riches, we will cling to the Lord in complete contrition of heart and poverty of spirit. We pray when we promise that we will always keep the most pure chastity of body and unwavering patience, and when we vow that we will utterly eliminate from our heart the roots of death-dealing anger and sadness.

In the third place there are intercessions, which we are also accustomed to make for others when our spirits are fervent, beseeching on behalf of our dear ones and for the peace of

the whole world, praying with the Apostle, *for kings and for all who are in authority.*

Finally, in the fourth place there are thanksgivings, which the mind, whether recalling God’s past benefits, contemplating his present ones, or foreseeing what great things God has prepared for those who love him, offers to the Lord in unspeakable ecstasies. And with this intensity, too, more copious prayers are sometimes made, when our spirit gazes with most pure eyes upon the rewards of the holy ones that are stored up for the future and is moved to pour out wordless thanks to God with a boundless joy..

These four kinds sometimes offer opportunities for richer prayers, for from the class of supplication which is born of compunction for sin, and from the state of prayer which flows from faithfulness in our offerings and the keeping of our vows because of a pure conscience, and from intercession which proceeds from fervent charity, and from thanksgiving which is begotten from considering God’s benefits and his greatness and loving-kindness, we know that frequently very fervent and fiery prayers arise. Thus it is clear that all these kinds which we have spoken about appear helpful and necessary to everyone, so that in one and the same man a changing disposition will send forth pure and fervent prayers of supplication at one time, prayer at another, and intercession at another.

St John Cassian, Conferences, 9.9, 11-15; ACW (1997) tr. Ramsey.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

(The continuation of the Levites' prayer; Nehemiah 9:22-37)

“And thou didst give them kingdoms and peoples, and didst allot to them every corner; so they took possession of the land of Sihon king of Heshbon and the land of Og king of Bashan. Thou didst multiply their descendants as the stars of heaven, and thou didst bring them into the land which thou hadst told their fathers to enter and possess. So the descendants went in and possessed the land, and thou didst subdue before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and didst give them into their hands, with their kings and the peoples of the land, that they might do with them as they would. And they captured fortified cities and a rich land, and took possession of houses full of all good things, cisterns hewn out, vineyards, olive orchards and fruit trees in abundance; so they ate, and were filled and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness.

“Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against thee and cast thy law behind their back and killed thy prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to thee, and they committed great blasphemies. Therefore thou didst give them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer; and in the time of their suffering they cried to thee and thou didst hear them from heaven; and according to thy great mercies thou didst give them saviours who saved them from the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest they did evil again before thee, and thou didst abandon them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them; yet when they turned and cried to thee thou didst hear from heaven, and many times thou didst deliver them according to thy mercies. And thou didst warn them in order to turn them back to thy law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey thy commandments, but sinned against thy ordinances, by the observance of which a man shall live, and turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. Many years thou didst bear with them, and didst warn them by thy Spirit through thy prophets; yet they would not give ear. Therefore thou didst give them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless in thy great mercies thou didst not make an end of them or forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God.

“Now therefore, our God, the great and mighty and terrible God, who keepest covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to thee that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day. Yet thou hast been just in all that has come upon us, for thou hast dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly; our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept thy law or heeded thy commandments and thy warnings which thou didst give them. They did not serve thee in their kingdom, and in thy great goodness which thou gavest them, and in the large and rich land which thou didst set before them; and they did not turn from their wicked works. Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that thou gavest to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. And its rich yield goes to the kings

whom thou hast set over us because of our sins; they have power also over our bodies and over our cattle at their pleasure, and we are in great distress.”

A READING FROM THE STROMATEIS OF ST CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

We are commanded to worship and honour him whom we believe to be the Word, our Saviour and ruler, and through him the Father. Nor must we confine our worship to special days, but offer it perpetually throughout our lives and in every way. The chosen race, justified by the commandment, declared: *Seven times a day I praise you*. So he who possesses true knowledge honours God, that is, thanks him for his gifts of spiritual knowledge and right conduct, in no specific place or appropriate sanctuary, still less at certain feasts or on definite days, but everywhere and all his life, whether in solitude or with others of his own faith.

Now the presence of some good man, because it inspires respect and reverence, is always an influence for the better on those who chance to meet him. Then surely one who is always in the presence of God, through spiritual knowledge and a life of ceaseless thanksgiving, cannot help but become a better person in every way, in deed, word, and thought. Such is the man who is convinced of God’s presence everywhere, refusing to believe that he is enclosed in any specific place. Then because of this conviction of ours that God is present everywhere, our whole life becomes a celebration. We praise God as we till the fields or sail the seas, and in all the other ways of life in which we employ our skills. Thus he who possesses true knowledge draws closer to God, and is always serious and always happy. He is serious because his attention is concentrated on the divine being, and happy because of his continuous awareness of the blessings which God has given to mankind.

Yet petitionary prayer is not superfluous, even though we receive blessings without asking for them. Both thanksgiving and prayer for the conversion of his fellowmen are required of the true Christian. That is the very way in which our Lord prayed. First he gave thanks because he had fulfilled his earthly ministry. Then he prayed that as many as possible might receive true knowledge so that thanks to that knowledge they might set out on the road to salvation, and by their salvation glorify God, and so that he who alone is good, and alone is the Saviour, might be recognized through his Son for all eternity. And yet, the faith of one who believes that he will receive what he has need of is in itself a kind of prayer, stored up within the spirit.

But if prayer is an opportunity for communion with God, like any other opportunity of approach to God we must not neglect it. God is not compelled to do good, but chooses to reward those who of their own free will turn to him. So the true worshipers and servants of the divine being are those who offer him the most free and the most royal service, arising both from a devout mind and from spiritual knowledge.

St Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis, 7.7 (PG 9:450-1, 458-9); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

(Dedication of the wall of Jerusalem: Nehemiah 12:27-47)

And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres. And the sons of the singers gathered together from the circuit round Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites; also from Beth-gilgal and from the region of Geba and Azmaveth; for the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem. And the priests and the Levites purified themselves; and they purified the people and the gates and the wall.

Then I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall, and appointed two great companies which gave thanks and went in procession. One went to the right upon the wall to the Dung Gate; and after them went Hoshaiah and half of the princes of Judah, and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, and certain of the priests sons with trumpets: Zechariah the son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zaccur, son of Asaph; and his kinsmen, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God; and Ezra the scribe went before them. At the Fountain Gate they went up straight before them by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, to the Water Gate on the east.

The other company of those who gave thanks went to the left, and I followed them with half of the people, upon the wall, above the Tower of the Ovens, to the Broad Wall, and above the Gate of Ephraim, and by the Old Gate, and by the Fish Gate and the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, to the Sheep Gate; and they came to a halt at the Gate of the Guard. So both companies of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me; and the priests Eliakim, Ma-aseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Eli-o-enai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; and Ma-aseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader. And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.

On that day men were appointed over the chambers for the stores, the contributions, the first fruits, and the tithes, to gather into them the portions required by the law for the priests and for the Levites according to the fields of the towns; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and the Levites who ministered. And they performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did the singers and the gatekeepers, according to the command of David and his son Solomon. For in the days of David and Asaph of old there was a chief of the singers, and there were songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah gave the daily portions for the singers and the gatekeepers; and they set apart that which was for the Levites; and the Levites set apart that which was for the sons of Aaron.

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON MATTHEW BY ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Let us give thanks to God throughout our lives. For how wrong it would be, if every day we enjoyed his blessings in deed, and yet in word gave him no return, and that too when an offering of gratitude would but increase our advantage. For God needs nothing from us, but we need everything from him. So our thanks are of no profit to him, but they make us more worthy of him. For if the memory of their kindness towards us deepens our love for our fellow men, how much more will the perpetual memory of the Lord's goodness to us make us more eager to keep his commands.

For the best safeguard of a kindness is to remember it with everlasting gratitude. That is why that awe-inspiring and life-giving sacrament which we celebrate at every gathering is called the Eucharist. It is the commemoration of many blessings and the culmination of divine providence, and teaches us to give thanks always.

For if to be born of a Virgin was a great miracle, and the amazed evangelist wrote of it: *All this happened*, what can we say of the Lord's sacrifice? For if the Lord's birth was called *all this*, what should we call his crucifixion, the shedding of his blood, and his giving himself to us as a spiritual feast? Therefore we must give thanks to him continuously, and let thanksgiving be the motive of all we do and say. And let us give thanks not only for our own blessings, but for those of our neighbours too. Thus we shall be able to rid ourselves of envy, and increase our love and make it more sincere. For to continue to envy those on whose behalf we give thanks to the Lord will be impossible.

Therefore the priest too, when that sacrifice is set before him, bids us give thanks for the whole world, for the old dispensation and the new, for all that was done for us before and all that awaits us hereafter. For this sets us free from earth and turns us towards heaven, and makes angels out of men. Even the very angels, in heavenly choirs, give thanks to God for his goodness to us, as they sing: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men in whom he is well pleased*.

But what is this to us who are not on earth and are not men? It means a great deal, for it teaches us so to love our fellow-servants that we rejoice in their good fortune as if it were our own. It is for that reason that St Paul in all his letters gives thanks for the blessings of the whole world. So let us too give everlasting thanks for all the gifts, large or small, that are given both to ourselves and to others.

St John Chrysostom, In Matth., XXV.3 (Bareille XII:40-42); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(Repentance and Salvation: Isaiah 59:1-14)

Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you so that he does not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue mutters wickedness. No one enters suit justly, no one goes to law honestly; they rely on empty pleas, they speak lies, they conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity. They hatch adders' eggs, they weave the spider's web; he who eats their eggs dies, and from one which is crushed a viper is hatched. Their webs will not serve as clothing; men will not cover themselves with what they make. Their works are works of iniquity, and deeds of violence are in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity, desolation and destruction are in their highways. The way of peace they know not, and there is no justice in their paths; they have made their roads crooked, no one who goes in them knows peace.

Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not overtake us; we look for light, and behold, darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom. We grope for the wall like the blind, we grope like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight, among those in full vigour we are like dead men. We all growl like bears, we moan and moan like doves; we look for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us. For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities: transgressing, and denying the LORD, and turning away from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words. Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth has fallen in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter.

A READING FROM THE REVELATIONS OF DIVINE LOVE OF JULIAN OF NORWICH

In his merciful way our Lord shows us our sin and weakness by that light, lovely and gracious, which shines from himself. Our sin is so vile and horrible that in his courtesy he will not show it to us except under the light of his mercy and grace. It is his will that we should know four things: first, that he is the ground of our life and existence; second, that he protects us by his might and mercy all the time we are in sin among the enemies out to wreck us – we are in so much the greater danger since we give them the opportunity they want, being ignorant of our own need; third, how courteously he protects us, making us know when we are going astray; fourth, how loyally he waits for us, with unvarying affection; he wants us to turn to him, uniting with him in love, as he is with us.

So it is that with this gracious information we are able to view our sin positively and not despairingly. For, indeed, we must face it and by such sight be made ashamed of

ourselves, and humbled for our pride and presumption. We have got to see that of ourselves we are nothing but sin and wretchedness. We can estimate from the little our Lord shows us how great is the total we do not see. For in his courtesy he limits the amount we actually see: we could not stand the sight of what in fact it is, so vile and horrible it is. And by this humiliating knowledge, through our contrition and his grace we shall break with everything that is not our Lord. Then will our blessed Saviour heal us completely, and unite us to himself. This break and healing our Lord intends for mankind generally. The man who is highest and nearest to God sees himself as sinful and as needy as I am; and I who am the least and most lowly of all who are to be saved can be comforted along with the highest. So has our Lord made us one in his charity.

When he showed me that I would sin, I was so enjoying looking at him that I did not pay much attention to this revelation, so our Lord in his courtesy refrained from further teaching until he gave me the grace and will to attend. By this I was taught that though we may be raised to contemplation by our Lord's especial favour we still need to recognise our sin and weakness. Without such knowledge we cannot be truly humble, nor indeed can we be saved.

I saw afterwards, too, that we may not always have this knowledge of ourselves, or of our spiritual enemies – they do not wish us so much good! If they had their way we should not know it till our dying day. We are greatly indebted to God then that he himself, for love's sake, wills to show it to us in this time of mercy and grace.

Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love, 78; Word in Season VII.

Season of the Year / Week 14

Sunday of the Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

(Exhortation to choose wisdom: Proverbs 1:1-7, 20-33)

The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:

That men may know wisdom and instruction, understand words of insight, receive instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity; that prudence may be given to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth – the wise man also may hear and increase in learning, and the man of understanding acquire skill, to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Wisdom cries aloud in the street; in the markets she raises her voice; on the top of the walls she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: “How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? Give heed to my reproof; behold, I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you. Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, and you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes you, when panic strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, would have none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices. For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but he who listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of evil.”

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON THE DIATESSARON BY ST EPHREM

Lord, who can grasp all the wealth of just one of your words? What we understand is much less than what we leave behind, like thirsty people who drink from a fountain. For your word, Lord, has many shades of meaning just as those who study it have many different points of view. The Lord has coloured his words with many hues so that each person who studies it can see in it what he loves. He has hidden many treasures in his word so that each of us is enriched as we meditate on it.

The word of God is a tree of life that from all its parts offers you fruits that are blessed. It is like that rock opened in the desert that from all its parts gave forth a spiritual drink. As the Apostle says, *All ate the same supernatural food and all drank the same supernatural drink.*

He who comes into contact with some share of its treasure should not think that the only thing contained in the word is what he himself has found. He should realise that he

has only been able to find that one thing from among many others. Nor, because only that one part has become his, should he say that the word is void and empty and look down on it; but because he could not exhaust it he should give thanks for its riches. Be glad that you were overcome and do not be sad that it overcame you. The thirsty man rejoices when he drinks and he is not downcast because he cannot empty the fountain. Rather let the fountain quench your thirst than have your thirst quench the fountain. Because if your thirst is quenched and the fountain is not exhausted you can drink from it again whenever you are thirsty. But if when your thirst is quenched the fountain also is dried up your victory will bode evil for you.

Be grateful for what you have received and do not grumble about the abundance left behind. What you have received and what you have reached is your share, what remains is your heritage. What, at one time, you are not able to receive because of your weakness, you will be able to receive at other times if you persevere. Do not have the presumption to try and take in one draught what cannot be taken in one draught, and do not abandon out of laziness what you may only consume little by little.

St Ephrem, Commentary on the Diatessaron, 1.18-19; The Divine Office I.

Monday of the Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

(How Wisdom may be found: Proverbs 3:1-20)

My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life and abundant welfare will they give you. Let not loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them about your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favour and good repute in the sight of God and man.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

Honour the LORD with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine. My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gets understanding, for the gain from it is better than gain from silver and its profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy.

The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke forth, and the clouds drop down the dew.

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON EXODUS BY ORIGEN

After the crossing of the Red Sea and the secrets of the magnificent mystery, after dances and tambourines, after triumphant hymns, they come to Mara. The water of Mara, however, was bitter and the people could not drink it.

I think that the Law, if it be undertaken according to the letter, is sufficiently bitter and is itself Mara. For what is so bitter as for a child to receive the wound of circumcision on the eighth day and tender infancy suffer the hardness of the iron? A cup of this kind of Law is extremely bitter, so bitter in fact that the people of God – not that people who were *baptized in Moses in the sea and in the cloud*, but that people who were baptized *in spirit and in water* – cannot drink from that water. But indeed they cannot taste the bitterness of circumcision nor are they able to endure the bitterness of victims for the observance of the Sabbath.

But if *God shows a tree* which is thrown into this bitterness so that the *water* of the Law becomes *sweet*, they can drink from it. Solomon teaches us in his proverbs that that *tree* is the one which *the Lord showed*, when he says that wisdom is *a tree of life for all who embrace it*. If, therefore, the tree of the wisdom of Christ has been thrown into the Law

and has shown us how circumcision ought to be understood, how the Sabbath and the law of leprosy are to be observed, what sort of distinction should be held between clean and unclean, then the water of Mara is made sweet and the bitterness of the letter of the Law is changed into the sweetness of spiritual understanding and then the people of God can drink. Whence it is established that if anyone without *the tree of life*, that is without the mystery of the cross, without faith in Christ, without spiritual understanding should wish to drink from the letter of the Law, he will die from too much bitterness. Because the Apostle Paul knew this he said, *The letter kills*. This openly states that the water of Mara kills if it is drunk unchanged and not made sweet.

After this the text says that *they came to Elim and there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees there*. Do you suppose there is no reason why the people were not previously led to *Elim* where *there were twelve springs of water* in which there was no bitterness but rather exceptional pleasantness from the density of the palms, but first were led to the salty and bitter waters and come to the springs only after the bitter waters have been made sweet by the tree which was shown by the Lord? If we follow only the simple record of facts, it does not edify us much to know to what place they came first and to what place second. But if we pry into the mystery lying hidden in these matters we discover the order of faith. For first people are led to the letter of the Law. They cannot withdraw from this while they remain in its bitterness. But when the Law has been made sweet by *the tree of life* and has begun to be understood spiritually, then they pass over from the Old Testament to the New and come to the twelve apostolic springs.

Origen, In Ex., 7.1, 3; FoC 71 (1982) tr. Heine.

Tuesday of the Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

(The praise of eternal Wisdom: Proverbs 8:1-5, 12-36)

Does not wisdom call, does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights beside the way, in the paths she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud: "To you, O men, I call, and my cry is to the sons of men. O simple ones, learn prudence; O foolish men, pay attention. I, wisdom, dwell in prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion. The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate. I have counsel and sound wisdom, I have insight, I have strength. By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; by me princes rule, and nobles govern the earth.

I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me. Riches and honour are with me, enduring wealth and prosperity. My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, in the paths of justice, endowing with wealth those who love me, and filling their treasuries.

The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth; before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men.

And now, my sons, listen to me: happy are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. Happy is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. For he who finds me finds life and obtains favour from the LORD; but he who misses me injures himself; all who hate me love death."

A READING FROM THE DISCOURSES AGAINST THE ARIANS OF ST ATHANASIUS

The Only-begotten, the absolute Wisdom of God is the creator and maker of all things. *In wisdom you made all things* Scripture says, and again: *the earth is full of your creation*. In order that what was made might not only be, but might be good, God willed that his own Wisdom should come down to the level of created things and impress a sort of stamp and likeness of its image on all in common and on each individually, so that what was made would be seen to be wise, a worker worthy of God.

As our word is the image of the Son of God considered as Word, so too the wisdom which is impressed on us is an image of the same Son considered as Wisdom. In this wisdom we

have the power of knowledge and thought, and we become capable of receiving the creative Wisdom; and through this we are enabled to know its Father. As Scripture says: *He who has the Son has the Father also*; and again: *He who receives me receives him who sent me*. Because such an impress of Wisdom has been created in us and is found in all the works of creation, it is natural that the true, creative Wisdom would apply to itself what belongs to its impress, and say: *The Lord created to me for his works*.

But since, in the wisdom of God, as we have explained, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. God no longer wanted, as in former times, to be known through the image and shadow of wisdom that exists in created things. He made the true Wisdom itself take flesh, and become man, and suffer the death of the cross, so that for the future all who believe might be saved by faith in him.

The Wisdom of God formerly revealed itself through its own image impressed on created things (by reason of which it is said to be created) and through itself revealed its own Father. It is the same Wisdom of God which later, being the Word, became flesh, as John says, and after destroying death and saving our race revealed himself still more fully and through himself his Father. As so he said: *Grant that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*.

Hence the whole earth is filled with the knowledge of him. The knowledge of Father through Son and of Son from Father is one and the same; the Father rejoices in him, and with the same joy the Son delights in the Father. *It was I in whom he rejoiced*, he says, *every day I took delight in his presence*.

St Athanasius, Against the Arians, 2.78, 81-2; The Divine Office I.

Wednesday of the Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

(Wisdom and foolishness: Proverbs 9:1-18)

Wisdom has built her house, she has set up her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her beasts, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table. She has sent out her maids to call from the highest places in the town, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" To him who is without sense she says, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave simpleness, and live, and walk in the way of insight."

He who corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury. Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. For by me your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life. If you are wise, you are wise for yourself; if you scoff, you alone will bear it.

A foolish woman is noisy; she is wanton and knows no shame. She sits at the door of her house, she takes a seat on the high places of the town, calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" And to him who is without sense she says, "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS BY ST PROCOPIUS

Wisdom has built herself a house. The personal, subsistent power of God the Father has built as his dwelling place not only the whole universe in which he lives by his activity, but also man whom he has made in his own image and likeness, with a nature partly seen, partly unseen.

She has set up her seven pillars. To man thus created in Christ's image after his birth, Wisdom gives the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, in so far as he believes in Christ and keeps his commandments. If he lives by the Spirit, these gifts will bring him to perfection, if by their means his virtue is motivated by his knowledge, and this knowledge itself is embodied in virtue. He will be made perfect by participating in the divine nature of faith, and by his sharing in supernatural things. The gifts of the Spirit direct aright the enlightenment in the spirit according to nature: fortitude which prepares him eagerly to rush forward and be moved to the reasons for things that are, namely the will of God according to which all things have come into being; counsel which discriminates between the all holy will of God, as being uncreated and indestructible and allowing thought and speech and action, and what is opposite to that will; understanding which makes a man turn towards these and not to their opposites and to agree with them.

She has mixed her wine in her chalice; she has laid her table. Such a man is like a chalice in which a nature both spiritual and physical is mixed. In him God has united a recognition of himself as the cause of the universe, and a knowledge of his creatures. On the mind possessed of this knowledge it is natural for the things of God to have the inebriating effect of wine. So does he himself, the bread from heaven, become the nourishment of souls whereby they grow in virtue. He makes them drink in knowledge to their delight, and all this he has prepared as a heavenly banquet for the spiritual entertainment of - those who wish to share it.

She has sent out her servants with the sublime invitation to receive the chalice. Christ sent out the Apostles as the ministers of his divine will. They were to proclaim that spiritual Gospel which ranks above natural law and written codes, and to call men to himself. In him, as in a chalice, the mystery of the Incarnation effected without confusion that astounding hypostatic union of the divine and human natures. Through the Apostles he says: *He who is foolish let him turn aside to me.* It is the man who thinks in his heart *There is no God* who is foolish. Let him give up his disbelief and draw near to me through faith; then he will know that I am the Creator of all things and their Lord.

And to those who lack wisdom she says: Come, eat my bread, and drink the wine I have mixed for you. To those who are still deficient in the works of faith and in the more perfect knowledge of God that inspires them, he says 'Come, eat my body, the bread that makes you grow according to virtue, and drink my blood, the wine that delights you according to knowledge and intoxicates you to become divine - the blood which I miraculously mingled with my divine nature for your salvation.'

St Procopius of Gaza, On Proverbs 9; The Divine Office I.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

(Various counsels: Proverbs 10:6-32)

Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence. The memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot. The wise of heart will heed commandments, but a prating fool will come to ruin. He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out. He who winks the eye causes trouble, but he who boldly reproves makes peace. The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence. Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offences. On the lips of him who has understanding wisdom is found, but a rod is for the back of him who lacks sense. Wise men lay up knowledge, but the babbling of a fool brings ruin near. A rich man's wealth is his strong city; the poverty of the poor is their ruin. The wage of the righteous leads to life, the gain of the wicked to sin. He who heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof goes astray. He who conceals hatred has lying lips, and he who utters slander is a fool. When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is prudent. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the mind of the wicked is of little worth. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of sense. The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it. It is like sport to a fool to do wrong, but wise conduct is pleasure to a man of understanding. What the wicked dreads will come upon him, but the desire of the righteous will be granted. When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous is established for ever. Like vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him. The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short. The hope of the righteous ends in gladness, but the expectation of the wicked comes to nought. The LORD is a stronghold to him whose way is upright, but destruction to evildoers. The righteous will never be removed, but the wicked will not dwell in the land. The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut off. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked, what is perverse.

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON PSALM 36 BY ST AMBROSE

Let us be for ever pondering on wisdom in our hearts and discussing it with our lips; let your tongue speak only what is right, and let God's Law be constantly in your hearts. For that is what Scripture enjoins on us: *let your concern be only with such things as these when you sit in your house and walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise*. Let the Lord Jesus then be the sole object of your discourse, for he is Wisdom, even the Word, God's own word. For Scripture also commands, *Open your mouth to receive God's word*. That man manifests him who constantly repeats his sayings and meditates on his words. Let us always be speaking of him. Whenever we speak of wisdom it is of him we speak; when we speak of virtue it is of him; and when we speak of truth and life and redemption it is of him.

It is written, *Open your mouth to the word of God*. It is for you to open, but he speaks. Therefore David said, *I will hear what the Lord says within me*, and the Son of God himself says, *Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it*. But not all of us can receive, like Solomon and Daniel, the perfection of wisdom, but upon all will be poured out the Spirit of wisdom to each according to his capacity, provided that he is a man of faith. If you believe, you have the spirit of wisdom.

Therefore *when you sit in your house* meditate and speak always of the things of God. *House* we can take to mean the Church or our own interior house where we may speak within ourselves. Choose your words when you speak so that you avoid sin and do not fall through empty chatter. When you are seated speak to yourself as one who is a judge. When you are *by the way* speak lest you be idle. You speak *by the way* if you speak in Christ, for Christ is the way. Speak to yourself *by the way* and you speak to Christ. Hear then how you are to talk to him, *I desire*, he said, *that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarrelling*: Speak, O man, when you are falling asleep lest the sleep of death overtake you. Hear how you should speak as you go to sleep, *I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the mighty one of Jacob*.

In your rising or resurrection speak of him that you may carry out what you are commanded to do. Hear how Christ wakens you. Your soul says, *The voice of my brother sounds at the gate*, and Christ says, *Open to me, my sister, my spouse*. And hear how you are to awaken Christ. The soul says, *I have adjured you, O daughters of Jerusalem, to waken and to re-awaken love*. Love is Christ.

St Ambrose, In Ps. 36, 65-66; The Divine Office I.

Friday of the Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

(Man placed in the presence of the Lord: Proverbs: 15:8-9, 16-17, 25-26, 29, 33; 16:1-9; 17:5)

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is his delight. The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but he loves him who pursues righteousness. Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble with it. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fatted ox and hatred with it. The LORD tears down the house of the proud, but maintains the widow's boundaries. The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD, the words of the pure are pleasing to him. The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous. The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility goes before honour.

The plans of the mind belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD. All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirit. Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established. The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble. Every one who is arrogant is an abomination to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished. By loyalty and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD a man avoids evil. When a man's ways please the LORD, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice. A man's mind plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.

He who mocks the poor insults his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON THE FIRST LETTER OF ST JOHN BY ST AUGUSTINE

What have we been promised? *We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* The tongue has said all it can, the rest must come from the thoughtful heart. In comparison with HIM WHO IS, what are the words even of St John? And what can we men say who are so far from equalling John's merits?

Let us go back to that anointing of his, let us go back to that anointing that reaches from within what we cannot express in words, and since for the present you cannot see, let your efforts consist in desire.

The whole life of a good Christian is a holy desire. What you desire you cannot see yet. But the desire gives you the capacity, so that when it does see, you may be fulfilled.

Suppose you want to fill some sort of bag, and you know the bulk of what you will be given, you stretch the bag or the sack or the skin or whatever it is. You know how big the object that you want to put in and you see that the bag is narrow so you increase its capacity by stretching it. In the same way by delaying the fulfilment of desire God stretches it, by making us desire he expands the soul, and by this expansion he increases its capacity.

Then, brothers, let us desire because we are to be filled. Look at St Paul stretching wide his heart to make it big enough to receive what was to come. He says in effect, *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; brethren I do not consider that I have made it my own. What, then, Paul are you doing in life if you have not yet made it your own? But one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call.* He describes himself as *straining forward* and *pressing on*. He felt too small to encompass *what the eye has not seen nor the ear heard nor has entered into the heart of man*.

This is our life, to be exercised by desire. But we are exercised by holy desire only in so far as we have cut off our longings from the love of the world. I have already pointed out – empty that which is to be filled. You are to be filled with good, pour out the bad.

Consider that God wants to fill you up with honey, but if you are already full of vinegar where will you put the honey? What was in the vessel must be emptied out; the vessel itself must be washed out and made clean and scoured, hard work though it may be, so that it be made fit for something else, whatever it may be.

Let us say honey, or gold, or wine, whatever we say it cannot be named and whatever we want to say is in fact called ‘God’. And when we say ‘God’ what have we said? That one syllable contains all that we hope for. Whatever is in our power to say is less than he, let us stretch ourselves out towards him so that when he comes he may fill us. ‘We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

St Augustine, On 1 John, 4; The Divine Office I.

Saturday of the Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

(Praise of the worthy woman: Proverbs 31:10-31)

A good wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. She is like the ships of the merchant, she brings her food from afar. She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and tasks for her maidens. She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. She girds her loins with strength and makes her arms strong. She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet. She makes herself coverings; her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers girdles to the merchant. Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all." Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

A READING FROM THE SERMONS OF ST AUGUSTINE

The book of Scripture which I am holding in my hands commends a certain woman to us to be praised. She's a great woman and has a great husband, the husband who found her when she was lost and adorned her once she was found. About her I shall say a few things in the time available, as the Lord suggests to me, it's the feast day of the martyrs, after all, and that's all the more reason for praising the mother of martyrs.

You have already grasped who this woman is from these opening remarks of mine, you are saying to yourselves, 'She must be the Church.' Yes. Who else, after all, could be the mother of martyrs? The woman I want to say something about is the Church. Pay attention to whose members you are; observe carefully whose children you are. *A valiant woman who shall find?* The woman's valour fits the martyrs' feast day very well. If she hadn't been valiant, those members of hers would have broken down under their sufferings.

A valiant woman who shall find? She's difficult to find – or rather she's difficult to be ignorant of. Isn't she the city on the hill, which cannot be hidden? She is the city, but she is also that one sheep which the shepherd went looking for when it was lost, and when he found it brought it home on his shoulder rejoicing. So now, having heard the words *A valiant woman who shall find*, you mustn't think they are said about a Church that is hidden away, but about that Church which was found by one man, so that nobody now

can possibly miss her. So let her be described, then, let her be praised, let her be commended, to be loved by all of us as our mother, because she is the wife of one man.

The heart of her husband is confident about her. He certainly is confident, and he has taught us to be confident too. He commissioned the Church, you see, to the ends of the earth, among all nations, from sea to sea. If she wasn't going to persevere to the end, her husband's heart would not be confident about her. *The heart of her husband is confident about her.* With foreknowledge he is confident, he cannot be mistaken in his confidence.

If you are a child of this woman, notice what riches are promised you: *Her children have risen up and been enriched.* Get yourself ready to receive the riches of the resurrection. *And her husband has praised her.* We too praise her, but not from our own resources. When her children have risen up and been enriched, he has turned to her, and gazed at her, and praised her. Could anyone not want to hear how he has praised her? If you have listened so happily while she was being praised by me, how do you imagine we would listen if we could hear just how her husband has praised her? He has praised her in the resurrection. When we have risen, we shall hear. Or perhaps even now he hasn't kept this praise a secret, even now we can hear how her husband has praised her when he sees her finally with that stupendous blessing of children, rich in the resurrection of the dead.

St Augustine, Sermon 37.1-2, 4, 25-26; WSA (1990) tr. Hill.

Season of the Year / Week 15

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(Job is deprived of his goods: Job 1:1-22)

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God, and turned away from evil. There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she-asses, and very many servants; so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each on his day; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. The LORD said to Satan, "Whence have you come?" Satan answered the LORD, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nought? Hast thou not put a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse thee to thy face." And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only upon himself do not put forth your hand." So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.

Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house; and there came a messenger to Job, and said, "The oxen were ploughing and the asses feeding beside them; and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them, and slew the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was yet speaking, there came another, and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; and I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was yet speaking, there came another, and said, "The Chaldeans formed three companies, and made a raid upon the camels and took them, and slew the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was yet speaking, there came another, and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house; and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness, and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you."

Then Job arose, and rent his robe, and shaved his head, and fell upon the ground, and worshiped. And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."

In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

A READING FROM THE MORALIA IN JOB OF ST GREGORY THE GREAT

When Job lost everything, at Almighty's God decree, to preserve his peace of mind he remembered the time when he did not yet possess the things he had now lost; in that way, by realising more and more clearly that once he had not had them, he would the more easily moderate his grief over their loss. For indeed whenever we lose something it can be a great consolation to call to mind the days when we did not have it.

So, then, the blessed Job, wishing to cultivate patience as he bewails his losses, carefully considers to what state he is now reduced. To enhance his peace of mind he ponders yet more closely his origins, saying as he does so: *Naked I came from my mother's womb, naked I shall return whence I came.* In other words, the earth produced me naked, and naked will receive me back when I leave it. Since therefore the things I have lost were only what I had received and must leave behind, what have I lost that really belonged to me? But then, because consolation derives not only from thinking about one's condition but also about the Creator's uprightness, he is right to add: *The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away; as it has pleased the Lord, so has he wrought.*

He well says, *as it has pleased the Lord.* For since in this world we have to put up with things we do not like, it is necessary that we should accommodate our best endeavours to him who cannot will anything that is unjust. If therefore we know that what is just and equitable pleases the Lord, and that we can suffer nothing but what is pleasing to him, then all our sufferings must for that reason be justly and fairly imposed: and it would therefore be very unjust of us to grumble at them.

We should note that, having got all that right, Job ends by praising God. This was so that his adversary might realise, overcome by shame at seeing Job's plight, that his own attitude in his prosperity is one of contempt for God, the same God to whom even this man, now fallen on evil times, can nevertheless sing a hymn of praise. We should realise that the enemy of our race can smite us with as many of his darts as there are temptations for him to afflict us with. For we do battle daily; and daily his onslaught of temptations rains down on us. But we in turn can fire our darts against him if, while buried in our tribulations, we will but react in humility. Thus Job, although suffering in material things, is still a blessed and happy man.

We should not think that our champion merely receives wounds without inflicting any in return. Indeed, every prayer of patience offered by the sufferer in God's praise is a dart turned against the enemy's breast: and a much sharper blow is thereby struck than the one sustained. For the man in his afflictions loses only earthly goods, whereas in bearing humbly with his afflictions he has increased many times over his stock in heaven.

St Gregory the Great, Moralia in Job, 2.17.30-18.31 (SC 32 b i s:203-205); Word in Season VII.

Monday of the Fifteenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(Job, afflicted with sores, is visited by his friends: Job 2:1-13)

Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said to Satan, "Whence have you come?" Satan answered the LORD, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you moved me against him, to destroy him without cause." Then Satan answered the LORD, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But put forth thy hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face." And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power; only spare his life."

So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD, and afflicted Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God, and die." But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They made an appointment together to come to condole with him and comfort him. And when they saw him from afar, they did not recognize him; and they raised their voices and wept; and they rent their robes and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

A READING FROM A HOMILY BY ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

We can find ample consolation not only in the New Testament but in the Old Testament as well. Consider the story of Job, and how, after the loss of his wealth and the destruction of his herds, not one, two or even three of his children were taken from him, but all of them together in the very flower of their youth. When you hear of his great spiritual courage, even if you are the weakest of men, it is not so difficult to recover yourself and return to life.

For you, my friend, at least watched over your sick child as he lay on his bed, you heard his last words and attended him as his life came to an end, you shut his eyes and closed his mouth. But Job was not present at his children's death, nor saw them dying in the house where all were buried as in a single tomb. Yet after such overwhelming disasters he neither grieved nor despaired, but said: *The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; it has been done as the Lord willed. Blessed be the name of the Lord for ever.*

Let us too utter these words in every misfortune that life brings us, be it loss of wealth, bodily sickness, abuse, slander, or any other human ill. Let us say: *The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; it has been done as the Lord willed. Blessed be the name of the Lord for ever.*

If we make this our philosophy, no misfortune will ever cause us suffering, however many we endure. The gain will always be greater than the loss, and the good will outweigh the bad, since with these words you attract the favour of God and shake off the tyranny of the devil. For as soon as you utter them, the devil at once takes to flight, and when he has gone the cloud of dejection lifts too and oppressive thoughts disappear in the company of their master; and besides all this you will have as your reward all the blessings both of earth and of heaven. You have a steadfast example in Job and also in the Apostles, who scorned the terrors of this world for God's sake, and so gained the blessings of eternity. Let us then follow them, and in all that happens to us rejoice and give thanks to the benevolent God. So shall we pass this present life in contentment and gain the blessings to come, by the grace and kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory, honour and power at all times, now and forever and to endless ages. Amen.

St John Chrysostom, Hom. in paralyticum demissum per tecta (PG 51:62-63); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(The lament of Job: Job 3:1-26)

After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. And Job said: “Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night which said, ‘A man-child is conceived.’ Let that day be darkness! May God above not seek it, nor light shine upon it. Let gloom and deep darkness claim it. Let clouds dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it. That night – let thick darkness seize it! let it not rejoice among the days of the year, let it not come into the number of the months. Yea, let that night be barren; let no joyful cry be heard in it. Let those curse it who curse the day, who are skilled to rouse up Leviathan. Let the stars of its dawn be dark; let it hope for light, but have none, nor see the eyelids of the morning; because it did not shut the doors of my mother’s womb, nor hide trouble from my eyes.

“Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire? Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breasts, that I should suck? For then I should have lain down and been quiet; I should have slept; then I should have been at rest, with kings and counsellors of the earth who rebuilt ruins for themselves, or with princes who had gold, who filled their houses with silver. Or why was I not as a hidden untimely birth, as infants that never see the light? There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest. There the prisoners are at ease together; they hear not the voice of the taskmaster. The small and the great are there, and the slave is free from his master.

“Why is light given to him that is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul, who long for death, but it comes not, and dig for it more than for hid treasures; who rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they find the grave? Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, whom God has hedged in? For my sighing comes as my bread, and my groanings are poured out like water. For the thing that I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest; but trouble comes.”

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON JOB OF ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Do not be amazed when I tell you that Job did not say, *Why did I not die at birth?* These are words I lend him, words that seem contrary to his profound goodness. We know Job suffered righteously what he was suffering, and so he must have reasonably and wisely said that *It would have been better if I had not been born*; but this is exactly what Christ said about Judas: *It would have been better for that man if he had not been born*. And yet Job says much the same thing of himself: *Why was I born? It would have been better if I had not been born*.

It seems to me that Job is attempting to humble his friends and to persuade them not to attach a great importance to human affairs. Job has not introduced the dead kings into this passage without purpose when he speaks of *those who gloried in their swords*. Notice how even amidst his afflictions Job possesses words full of wisdom. Their wealth, in fact,

has granted the kings no protection; their power has been of no use; death has come at the end for everyone. After this Job goes on to say of himself, *why was I not as a stillborn child that never sees the light?* Notice how, in order that he may not appear to be arrogant, he even compares himself with a stillborn child, so absolutely wretched and pitiful is he.

Why is light given, Job asks, to those whose soul dwells in bitterness, and life to those souls who are in pain? Again this is not the language – God forbid – of someone who makes rebukes, but of someone who searches and suffers. From this we learn that not only life but also death is useful, when it is more desired than evil. In this way Job speaks of *those who long for death*, but, he says, *it does not come*. That is why the Preacher in Ecclesiastes says, *For everything there is a season* and, in another passage, *O death, how your memory is sweet*.

When you hear Job's wife suggesting to him, *Curse God, and die*, you should not suppose that he did not answer her because of his love of life but rather because of his piety. Indeed he who considered death to be very desirable and saw it as a real goodness when he was allowed to obtain it did not dare speak against God. Job declares, *Death is rest for man*. Now if death brings rest, why don't the majority of people rush to it? Because God has made life desirable in order to prevent us from running to death. Job goes on to say of death, *It's way is hidden*, and he adds, *they dig for it more than for hidden treasures*. By this Job is saying that our future is unknown. We ourselves do not uncover it, neither should we attempt to do so. Please do not speak to me about those who attempt to take their life in their own hands and who hang themselves; Job is here speaking about what conforms to nature and the commandments of God, not about an unnatural sin. He says of death, *God has surrounded it with a wall*, and the Gospel likewise states that *the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night*. Thus to respond to the question, *Why do you not choose death?* Job answers, *The Lord has surrounded it with a wall*: Its doors are closed.

St John Chrysostom, In Job, 3.11-16, 20-23; ACC 6 (2006) tr. Simonetti & Conti.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(The speech of Eliphaz: Job 4:1-21)

Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered: "If one ventures a word with you, will you be offended? Yet who can keep from speaking? Behold, you have instructed many, and you have strengthened the weak hands. Your words have upheld him who was stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees. But now it has come to you, and you are impatient; it touches you, and you are dismayed. Is not your fear of God your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope?"

"Think now, who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plough iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.

The roar of the lion, the voice of the fierce lion, the teeth of the young lions, are broken. The strong lion perishes for lack of prey, and the whelps of the lioness are scattered.

"Now a word was brought to me stealthily, my ear received the whisper of it. Amid thoughts from visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, dread came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones shake. A spirit glided past my face; the hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance. A form was before my eyes; there was silence, then I heard a voice: 'Can mortal man be righteous before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker? Even in his servants he puts no trust, and his angels he charges with error; how much more those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before the moth. Between morning and evening they are destroyed; they perish for ever without any regarding it. If their tent-cord is plucked up within them, do they not die, and that without wisdom?'"

A READING FROM THE CONFESSIONS OF ST AUGUSTINE

In what place then did I find you to learn of you? For you were not in my memory, before I learned of you. Where did I find you to learn of you, save in yourself, above myself? Place there is none, we go this way and that, and place there is none. You, who are Truth, reside everywhere to answer all who ask counsel of you, and in one act reply to all though all seek counsel upon different matters.

And you answer clearly, but all do not hear clearly. All ask what they wish, but do not always hear the answer that they wish. That man is your best servant who is not so much concerned to hear from you what he wills as to will what he hears from you.

Late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved you! For behold you were within and I outside; and I sought you outside and in my ugliness fell upon those lovely things that you have made. You were with me and I was not with you. I was kept from you by those things, yet had they not been in you, they would not have been at all. You called and cried to me and broke open my deafness: and you sent forth your beams and shone upon me and chased away my blindness: you breathed fragrance upon

me, and I drew in my breath and do now pant for you: I tasted you, and now hunger and thirst for you: you touched me, and I have burned for your peace.

When once I shall be united to you with all my being, there shall be no more grief and toil, and my life will be alive, filled wholly with you. You raise up him whom you fill; whereas being not yet filled with you I am a burden to myself. The pleasures of this life for which I should weep are in conflict with the sorrows of this life in which I should rejoice, and I know not on which side stands the victory.

Woe is me, Lord, have pity on me! For I have likewise sorrows which are evil and these are in conflict with joys that are good, and I know not on which side stands the victory. Woe is me, Lord have mercy upon me! Woe is me! See, I do not hide my wounds: you are the physician, I the sick man; you are merciful, I need mercy. Is not the life of man on earth a trial? Who would choose trouble and difficulty? You command us to endure them, not to love them. No one loves what he endures, though he may love to endure. For though he rejoices at his endurance, yet he would rather that there were nothing to endure. In adversity I desire prosperity, in prosperity I fear adversity. Yet what middle place is there between the two, where man's life may be other than trial? There is woe and woe again in the prosperity of this world, woe from the fear of adversity, woe from the corruption of joy. There is woe in the adversity of the world, and a second woe, and a third, from the longing for prosperity, and because adversity itself is hard, and for fear that endurance may break! Is not man's life upon earth trial without intermission? All my hope is naught save in your great mercy.

St Augustine, Confessions, 10.26.37-29.40; The Divine Office I.

Thursday of the Fifteenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(“Despise not the chastening of the Almighty”: Job 5:1-27)

“Call now; is there any one who will answer you? To which of the holy ones will you turn? Surely vexation kills the fool, and jealousy slays the simple. I have seen the fool taking root, but suddenly I cursed his dwelling. His sons are far from safety, they are crushed in the gate, and there is no one to deliver them. His harvest the hungry eat, and he takes it even out of thorns; and the thirsty pant after his wealth. For affliction does not come from the dust, nor does trouble sprout from the ground; but man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.

“As for me, I would seek God, and to God would I commit my cause; who does great things and unsearchable, marvellous things without number: he gives rain upon the earth and sends waters upon the fields; he sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety. He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success. He takes the wise in their own craftiness; and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end. They meet with darkness in the daytime, and grope at noonday as in the night. But he saves the fatherless from their mouth, the needy from the hand of the mighty. So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts her mouth.

“Behold, happy is the man whom God reproveth; therefore despise not the chastening of the Almighty. For he wounds, but he binds up; he smites, but his hands heal. He will deliver you from six troubles; in seven there shall no evil touch you. In famine he will redeem you from death, and in war from the power of the sword. You shall be hid from the scourge of the tongue, and shall not fear destruction when it comes. At destruction and famine you shall laugh, and shall not fear the beasts of the earth. For you shall be in league with the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with you. You shall know that your tent is safe, and you shall inspect your fold and miss nothing. You shall know also that your descendants shall be many, and your offspring as the grass of the earth. You shall come to your grave in ripe old age, as a shock of grain comes up to the threshing floor in its season. Lo, this we have searched out; it is true. Hear, and know it for your good.”

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON JOB BY DIDYMUS THE BLIND

Eliphaz acknowledges that God is the Ruler and Creator of all things. He is a man who possesses wisdom in human things. Eliphaz also has an understanding of the invisible and visible, since he speaks of the inexplorable, the great, the honourable, and also of water and rain. If he distinguishes that water from rain, he must have in mind water from wells, from creeks and from cracks in stone. One can find very wise thoughts of this kind in many places in Scripture, not least of all in Paul, who writes, *In him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible*. But it seems clear that Eliphaz became afraid in a very human way because of the things that it happened to holy Job, and so he turned from this to admire the works of providence. Regarding the *things without number*, one has to admit that Eliphaz speaks from a human perspective.

For God himself knows everything, there is no miracle in that. Doesn't Solomon say, *For it is he who gave me unerring knowledge of what exists, to know the structure of the world and the activity of the elements; the beginning and end and middle of times; the alternations of the solstices* and so on? This knowledge is also given to those who, like Solomon, are worthy of this benefit.

Again Eliphaz vigorously criticises the one who has been rebuked by the Lord, but too often it is righteous people who have been vilified. Among them are Joseph, whom the Egyptian woman charged with excess in spite of his modesty, and Susanna, who suffered as a hostage the humiliations from the *lawless elders*. Consequently, if he understands his words that the just man rebuked by the Lord will be *hidden from the scourge of the tongue* to mean that he is neither humiliated nor vilified, he is wrong. It is more accurate to say that the one who lives by the will of God cannot be harmed by humiliation or vilification, by *the scourge of the tongue*. Virtue protects him from being found guilty of the false allegations. Nor does such a person fear the coming destruction, since he says with St Paul, *Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword?* Over all this he prevails through virtue's abundance. Likewise, he is protected from the intrigues of false wisdom, since *God takes the wise in their own craftiness*.

The words of the Prophet, *The calamity will come from far away*, must be understood like this: the good comes from us. For it is said, *The kingdom of God is within you*, and so we have an inclination toward virtue that Christ called 'kingdom'. But the punishment and damage and disorder of sin come from the outside. For the man, who is created *after God's image*, carries the seed of the good within, but if he deviates from the right path, he encounters evil, without having received such an inclination from God.

Didymus the Blind, *In Job*, 5.9-10, 21; ACC 6 (2006) tr. Simonetti & Conti.

Friday of the Fifteenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(The response of the afflicted and abandoned Job: Job 6:1-30)

Then Job answered: "O that my vexation were weighed, and all my calamity laid in the balances! For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea; therefore my words have been rash. For the arrows of the Almighty are in me; my spirit drinks their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me. Does the wild ass bray when he has grass, or the ox low over his fodder? Can that which is tasteless be eaten without salt, or is there any taste in the slime of the purslane? My appetite refuses to touch them; they are as food that is loathsome to me.

"O that I might have my request, and that God would grant my desire; that it would please God to crush me, that he would let loose his hand and cut me off! This would be my consolation; I would even exult in pain unsparing; for I have not denied the words of the Holy One. What is my strength, that I should wait? And what is my end, that I should be patient? Is my strength the strength of stones, or is my flesh bronze? In truth I have no help in me, and any resource is driven from me.

"He who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty. My brethren are treacherous as a torrent-bed, as freshets that pass away, which are dark with ice, and where the snow hides itself. In time of heat they disappear; when it is hot, they vanish from their place. The caravans turn aside from their course; they go up into the waste, and perish. The caravans of Tema look, the travellers of Sheba hope. They are disappointed because they were confident; they come thither and are confounded. Such you have now become to me; you see my calamity, and are afraid. Have I said, 'Make me a gift?' Or, 'From your wealth offer a bribe for me?' Or, 'Deliver me from the adversary's hand?' Or, 'Ransom me from the hand of oppressors?'

"Teach me, and I will be silent; make me understand how I have erred. How forceful are honest words! But what does reproof from you reprove? Do you think that you can reprove words, when the speech of a despairing man is wind? You would even cast lots over the fatherless, and bargain over your friend.

"But now, be pleased to look at me; for I will not lie to your face. Turn, I pray, let no wrong be done. Turn now, my vindication is at stake. Is there any wrong on my tongue? Cannot my taste discern calamity?"

A READING FROM THE MORALIA ON JOB OF ST GREGORY THE GREAT

It is because the ancient Fathers resemble trees bearing abundant fruit, being not merely attractive figures in themselves but productive also of positive results, that their lives are so well worth considering. For in so doing, we realise, as we wonder at the freshness and originality of people in history, how much fecundity there is in allegory, and how the sweetness of fruit to the taste can be anticipated from the allurements of fragrant leaves. No one has ever had the grace of supernatural adoption except through his acknowledgment of the Only-begotten. And so it is fitting that he who enlightens men

that they may merit to shine forth should himself be manifest in their lives and their words. For when a lantern is lit in the darkness it is the lantern itself which is seen before all the rest, everything else that it lights up. Hence if we really wish to discern what has been made visible, we must try to open the eyes of our minds to the light itself. This lesson shines through the speeches of the blessed Job, like a fleeting twinkle, even when those involved allegories are edited out and forgotten, and the shadows of the darkest hours of night are as if they were removed. For he says: *I know that my Redeemer lives, and in my flesh I shall see God.*

Indeed Saint Paul had found this same light in the night of history, when he said: All were baptized in the power of Moses, in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink. But they drank of the spiritual rock which lay in their path: and the rock was Christ. If, then, the rock was a type or figure of the Redeemer, why should not the blessed Job apply and use a figure of him whom he foretold and marked, indeed identified, with suffering? Wherefore Job is not without reason said to be grieving precisely because he bears in himself the likeness of him whom Isaiah had long ago announced as taking our sorrows on himself. Moreover our Redeemer showed himself to be one and the same person identified with his Holy Church which he took up and manifested. For of him it is said: He is the head, Christ himself. And again, of his Church it is written: And the body of Christ, which is the Church. Hence the blessed Job, who presented the type and bore the mark of the Mediator all the more faithfully for having prefigured his passion not merely in speech but even in suffering, since in his words and deeds he finds support in the idea of a redeemer, has lighted in a flash on the very significance of the body itself. Believing Christ and his Church to be one person, let us view it in the light of one person and everything he does, the body and its every act.

St Gregory the Great, Moralia in Job, 23.2 (PL 76:251); Word in Season VII.

Saturday of the Fifteenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(Job cries out in protest to the Lord for the weariness of his life: Job 7:1-21)

“Has not man a hard service upon earth, and are not his days like the days of a hireling? Like a slave who longs for the shadow, and like a hireling who looks for his wages, so I am allotted months of emptiness, and nights of misery are apportioned to me. When I lie down I say, ‘When shall I arise?’ But the night is long, and I am full of tossing till the dawn. My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt; my skin hardens, then breaks out afresh. My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and come to their end without hope.

“Remember that my life is a breath; my eye will never again see good. The eye of him who sees me will behold me no more; while thy eyes are upon me, I shall be gone. As the cloud fades and vanishes, so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up; he returns no more to his house, nor does his place know him any more.

“Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Am I the sea, or a sea monster, that thou settest a guard over me? When I say, ‘My bed will comfort me, my couch will ease my complaint’, then thou dost scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions, so that I would choose strangling and death rather than my bones. I loathe my life; I would not live for ever. Let me alone, for my days are a breath. What is man, that thou dost make so much of him, and that thou dost set thy mind upon him, dost visit him every morning, and test him every moment? How long wilt thou not look away from me, nor let me alone till I swallow my spittle? If I sin, what do I do to thee, thou watcher of men? Why hast thou made me thy mark? Why have I become a burden to thee? Why dost thou not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity? For now I shall lie in the earth; thou wilt seek me, but I shall not be.”

A READING FROM THE MORALIA ON JOB BY ST GREGORY THE GREAT

My flesh is clothed with corruption and foulness of dust. If we take Job’s words as the voice of the holy Church universal, doubtless we find it at one time sunk to the earth by the *corruption* of the flesh, at another time by *the defilement of dust*. For the Church has many within it who, while devoted to the love of the flesh, become corrupted by the putrefaction of excess. In addition, there are some people who certainly keep from the gratification of the flesh, yet grovel with all their heart in earthly practices. So let holy Church speak through the words of one of its members, let it express what it endures from either sort of person. *My flesh is clothed with corruption and the defilement of dust.* It is as if the Church said in plain words, ‘There are many who are members of me in faith, yet these are not sound or pure members in practice. For they either are mastered by foul desires and run to and fro in corruption’s rottenness, or, being devoted to earthly practices, they are soiled with dust. For in those whom I have to endure, people filled with wantonness, I do plainly lament for the flesh turned corrupt. And in those from whom I suffer, those who are seeking the earth, what else is this but the defilement of dust that I bear?’

My days pass more swiftly than the weaving of cloth by the weaver. In a very suitable image, the time of the flesh is compared with a cloth web. As the web advances thread by thread, so this mortal life passes day by day; in proportion as the web increases, so it advances to its completion. Just as we said before, while the time in our hands passes, the time before us is shortened. Moreover, of the whole length of our lives, the days to come are proportionally fewer to those days that have gone by.

Job says that, *The eye of him who sees me will behold me no more; while your eyes are upon me, I shall be gone.* For the human eye is the pity of the Redeemer that softens the hardness of our insensibility when it looks upon us. Hence, as the Gospel witnesses, it is said, *And the Lord turned, looked upon Peter, and Peter remembered the word of the Lord. And he went out, and wept bitterly.* However, when the soul is divested of the flesh, the human eye henceforth does not see anything. The Redeemer's pity never delivers anyone after death whom it has not graciously restored to pardon before death.

St Gregory the Great, Moralia in Job, 8.23, 26, 30, 34; ACC 6 (2006) tr. Simonetti & Conti.

Season of the Year / Week 16

Sunday of the Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(The common attitude is outlined by Zophar: Job 11:1-20)

Then Zophar the Naamathite answered: “Should a multitude of words go unanswered, and a man full of talk be vindicated? Should your babble silence men, and when you mock, shall no one shame you? For you say, ‘My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in God’s eyes.’ But oh, that God would speak, and open his lips to you, and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom! For he is manifold in understanding. Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.

“Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven – what can you do? Deeper than Sheol – what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea. If he passes through, and imprisons, and calls to judgment, who can hinder him? For he knows worthless men; when he sees iniquity, will he not consider it? But a stupid man will get understanding, when a wild ass’s colt is born a man.

“If you set your heart aright, you will stretch out your hands toward him. If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in your tents. Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish; you will be secure, and will not fear. You will forget your misery; you will remember it as waters that have passed away. And your life will be brighter than the noonday; its darkness will be like the morning. And you will have confidence, because there is hope; you will be protected and take your rest in safety. You will lie down, and none will make you afraid; many will entreat your favour. But the eyes of the wicked will fail; all way of escape will be lost to them, and their hope is to breathe their last.”

A READING FROM THE MORALIA ON JOB BY ST GREGORY THE GREAT

As often as a mighty wrestler goes down into the arena, those who are no match for him present themselves in turn to be overthrown. When one is beaten another takes his place to try to overcome by a succession of adversaries him who cannot be beaten by their individual powers. Thus, in this theatre of men and angels, the blessed Job showed himself a mighty wrestler to whom first Eliphaz came forth, then Bildad, and now finally Zophar the Naamathite who begins with an insult: *Should a multitude of words go unanswered, and a man full of talk be vindicated?*

It is always the practice of the impertinent to answer the opposite of the truth that has been said to them lest, if they assent to the things asserted, they should seem inferior. To them the words of the righteous, however few, are always a multitude. The wicked cannot hear good words with patience and they answer back so that they do not have to amend their life, as Zophar plainly shows us when he adds: *Should your babble silence men, and when you mock, shall no one shame you?* The uninstructed mind is offended by the truth and reckons silence to be a punishment. When scorners cannot defend the evils that are reprov'd in them, they feel worse through shame and defend themselves

vigorously digging up bad things to say about the life of their reprover, thinking themselves not guilty if they can fasten guilty deeds upon the heads of others. When they can't find true ones, they make them up, so that they too can appear to rebuke with equal justice. Thus Zophar adds with lying lips, *For you say, 'My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in God's eyes.'* Whoever remembers the words of blessed Job knows how false this charge is; how could he call himself pure who said, *If I justify myself, my own mouth would condemn me.* Here is the wickedness of the unrighteous, it refuses to bewail the real evil in itself while inventing evil in others, for it gains comfort for its evil deeds if the life of the reprover can be stained with false accusation.

Zophar is not afraid to dare to instruct one better than himself, and so he exhorts Job and shows how unimportant punishment appears to the righteous man, by saying: *You will forget your misery; you will remember it as waters that have passed away.* The mind feels the ills of the present life all the more severely in proportion as it neglects the good of the next life. Now Zophar does well in likening the miseries of the present life to *waters that have passed away*; if a man raises himself up to things eternal and fixes the eye of his soul on those things which remain without change, he sees that everything here below that has an end is to be counted as almost nothing. Even when evil spirits also tempt the mind of a righteous man so that he is both saddened by affliction and chilled within by temptation, grace never leaves him and the more he is struck by the dispensation of providence, the more God watches over him in pity, for when it grows dark through temptation, the inner light is kindled again.

St Gregory the Great, Moralia in Job, 10.1-4, 32; tr C.M. (1844) amended.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(Job explains God's dominion over all human wisdom: Job 12:1-25)

Then Job answered: "No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you. But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you. Who does not know such things as these? I am a laughingstock to my friends; I, who called upon God and he answered me, a just and blameless man, am a laughingstock. In the thought of one who is at ease there is contempt for misfortune; it is ready for those whose feet slip. The tents of robbers are at peace, and those who provoke God are secure, who bring their god in their hand.

"But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind. Does not the ear try words as the palate tastes food? Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days.

"With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding. If he tears down, none can rebuild; if he shuts a man in, none can open. If he withholds the waters, they dry up; if he sends them out, they overwhelm the land. With him are strength and wisdom; the deceived and the deceiver are his. He leads counsellors away stripped, and judges he makes fools. He looses the bonds of kings, and binds a waistcloth on their loins. He leads priests away stripped, and overthrows the mighty. He deprives of speech those who are trusted, and takes away the discernment of the elders. He pours contempt on princes, and looses the belt of the strong. He uncovers the deeps out of darkness, and brings deep darkness to light. He makes nations great, and he destroys them: he enlarges nations, and leads them away. He takes away understanding from the chiefs of the people of the earth, and makes them wander in a pathless waste. They grope in the dark without light; and he makes them stagger like a drunken man."

A READING FROM THE MORALIA ON JOB BY ST GREGORY THE GREAT

He who is mocked by his neighbour, as I am, will call upon God and he will answer him.

Often, the frail mind, acclaimed for its good actions by the breath of human regard, dissipates itself in outward delights, so that it lays aside what it inwardly desires and is willing to lie loosely in the external things to which it directs its attention. It delights not so much in becoming, as in being called, blessed; and because it longs for the words of applause, it ceases to strive after what it had begun to be; and so, the very means through which it appeared to be commendable in God, sever it from God.

But sometimes it perseveres in good works with a constant heart, and yet is pushed hard by the scoffing of men; it does admirable deeds, and gets only abuse; and he who might have been encouraged to come out of himself by commendation, is repulsed by insults and returns back again into himself. He establishes himself the more firmly in God, as he

finds no place else where he may rest in peace: for all his hope is fixed in his Creator. Amidst ridicule and abuse, he implores only the interior witness. His soul in distress becomes God's neighbour, in proportion as he is a stranger to the favour of man's esteem. So he pours himself out in prayer and, hard-pressed from without, is refined with a more perfect purity to enter more deeply into all that is interior. Therefore, it is well said at this time, *He who is mocked by his neighbour as I am, will call upon God and he will answer him.* For though the wicked reproach the soul of the good, yet the good are showing them whom to seek as witness of their actions. And while the soul of the good strengthens itself, with compunction, in prayer, it is united within itself in the hearing of the Most High, in the very act that severs it from the approval of men outside itself.

But we should note how thoughtfully are inserted the words *as I am*. For there are some men who are downcast at the ridicule of their fellowmen; and yet they are not the kind of men to be heard by the ears of God. For when they are ridiculed because of their sin, surely they gain no virtuous merit from that mocking.

For the upright man's simplicity is laughed to scorn. It is the wisdom of this world to conceal one's feelings with pretence, to veil the sense with words, to show things that are false as true, and to make out as fallacious what is true. But on the other hand it is the wisdom of the righteous to pretend nothing in show, to discover the meaning by words, to love the truth as it is, to avoid falsehood, to set forth good deeds freely, to bear evil more gladly than to do it, to seek no revenge of a wrong, to count ill repute as a gain for the truth's sake. But this simplicity of the righteous is laughed to scorn, because the goodness of purity is taken for folly by the wise men of this world. For doubtless everything that is done from innocence is counted foolish by them, and whatever truth sanctions in practice sounds weak to carnal wisdom.

St Gregory the Great, Moralia in Job, 10.47-8; The Divine Office I.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(Job appeals to the judgement of God: Job 13:13 – 14:6)

“Let me have silence, and I will speak, and let come on me what may. I will take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in my hand. Behold, he will slay me; I have no hope; yet I will defend my ways to his face. This will be my salvation, that a godless man shall not come before him. Listen carefully to my words, and let my declaration be in your ears. Behold, I have prepared my case; I know that I shall be vindicated. Who is there that will contend with me? For then I would be silent and die. Only grant two things to me, then I will not hide myself from thy face: withdraw thy hand far from me, and let not dread of thee terrify me. Then call, and I will answer; or let me speak, and do thou reply to me. How many are my iniquities and my sins? Make me know my transgression and my sin. Why dost thou hide thy face, and count me as thy enemy? Wilt thou frighten a driven leaf and pursue dry chaff? For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me inherit the iniquities of my youth. Thou puttest my feet in the stocks, and watchest all my paths; thou settest a bound to the soles of my feet. Man wastes away like a rotten thing, like a garment that is moth-eaten.

“Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower, and withers; he flees like a shadow, and continues not. And dost thou open thy eyes upon such a one and bring him into judgment with thee? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one. Since his days are determined, and the number of his months is with thee, and thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass, look away from him, and desist, that he may enjoy, like a hireling, his day.”

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST ZENO OF VERONA

As far as can be understood, dear brothers, Job was a type of Christ, and a comparison between them shows the truth of this. God himself called Job a righteous man. And God is righteousness itself, the source whence all who are blessed drink, for of him it is said, *for you the sun of righteousness shall rise*. Job is called truthful. And the Lord is the very truth as he said in the Gospel, *I am the way and the truth*.

Job was a rich man. But who is richer than the Lord? All the rich are his slaves and to him belongs the whole world and every creature, as holy David says, *The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein*. The devil tempted Job three times. In the same way, as the evangelist tells us, he tried to tempt the Lord. Job lost everything that he owned. And the Lord left behind his heavenly goods for love of us and made himself poor that he might make us rich. The raging devil brought Job's sons to destruction. So, in their madness, the people of the Pharisees slew the Prophets, the sons of the Lord. Job was infected with ulcers. And the Lord, taking on our flesh, was befouled with the filth of the sins of the whole human race.

Job's wife urged him to sin. And the synagogue did its best to make the Lord follow the corrupt observances of their elders. It is told that Job's friends insulted him. So too, did

his priests and worshippers insult the Lord. Job sat upon a dunghill full of worms. The Lord also moved about on the real dunghill of the filth of this world amidst men seething with all manner of vices and lusts, which are the real worms.

Job recovered both his health and his possessions. But the Lord at his resurrection held out to those who believe in him not merely health but immortality, and took back to himself dominion over all nature as he himself bears witness when he says, *All things have been delivered to me by my Father*. Job begat new sons to replace those he had lost. The Lord too begat holy sons, the Apostles, in place of the Prophets. Job, blessed, rested in peace. But the Lord remains blessed forever before all ages, from all ages and throughout all ages.

St Zeno of Verona, Sermon 15.2; The Divine Office I.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(Baldad's speech: the light of the wicked is put out: Job 18:1-210

Then Bildad the Shuhite answered: "How long will you hunt for words? Consider, and then we will speak. Why are we counted as cattle? Why are we stupid in your sight? You who tear yourself in your anger, shall the earth be forsaken for you, or the rock be removed out of its place?

"Yea, the light of the wicked is put out, and the flame of his fire does not shine. The light is dark in his tent, and his lamp above him is put out. His strong steps are shortened and his own schemes throw him down. For he is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walks on a pitfall. A trap seizes him by the heel, a snare lays hold of him. A rope is hid for him in the ground, a trap for him in the path. Terrors frighten him on every side, and chase him at his heels. His strength is hunger-bitten, and calamity is ready for his stumbling. By disease his skin is consumed, the first-born of death consumes his limbs. He is torn from the tent in which he trusted, and is brought to the king of terrors. In his tent dwells that which is none of his; brimstone is scattered upon his habitation. His roots dry up beneath, and his branches wither above. His memory perishes from the earth, and he has no name in the street. He is thrust from light into darkness, and driven out of the world. He has no offspring or descendant among his people, and no survivor where he used to live. They of the west are appalled at his day, and horror seizes them of the east. Surely such are the dwellings of the ungodly, such is the place of him who knows not God."

A READING FROM A LETTER OF ST FULGENTIUS OF RUSPE

There are blessings in the temporal order which God may grant here, but withhold or withdraw there: for instance, the blessings of the married state, the procreation of children, abundance in worldly goods, bodily health, and so forth. Such things can make people happy – or make them miserable. The Lord bestows them on the good and the wicked alike: and sometimes they are removed by the same divine hand, whether from the good or the wicked.

Job was blessed, a happy man indeed, when living uprightly amidst all his wealth; and yet he was more blessed in his even more upright and irreproachable condition of poverty. He was blessed when surrounded by his ten children, but more blessed when, smitten with the loss of all of them at once, he nevertheless remained unshakable in his love for God. He was blessed in his bodily health, but rendered more so by the wounds and injuries, the ulcers and sores that he received: more blessed on his dung heap than in a palace adorned with marble.

We observe the difference, the contrast: one man is well endowed with riches and good health, yet miserable; another, destitute and plagued by ill-health, is a genuinely happy man even so. The rich man who dressed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day lived such a pointless life, for all his feasting. How impoverished he really was, despite the vast wealth! How naked despite the fine apparel, how sick for all his bodily

fitness, how famished for all the unstinted fare, how wretched in his merry-making, how lonely amidst the conversation of friends, how downcast for all the pampering by the menials! How different from Lazarus, made rich in his poverty, blessed in his wretchedness, happy in his misfortune, made sound again despite his sores, homeless indeed, yet making himself at home; without clothing but not without faith; without the strength of bodily health, yet strong in charity; without food yet not without Christ; exposed to dogs, but the companion of angels; not offered even the very crumbs from the rich man's table, yet regaled with the bread of heaven.

The good things of this life can be ours for good or evil; they are to be rated accordingly. Temporal blessings, then, it is sometimes good to enjoy, but sometimes not; sometimes it is good to despise them, but sometimes it is not. It is good indeed to have them when they conduce to the fear of God; but equally it can be good to despise them, when that is done for the sake of the glory that comes from Almighty God himself, and not from men.

St Fulgentius of Ruspe, Epistolae, 2.9, 15-18 (CCL 91:2-3); Word in Season VII.

Thursday of the Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(Despairing Job is roused to hope: Job 19:1-29)

Then Job answered: "How long will you torment me, and break me in pieces with words? These ten times you have cast reproach upon me; are you not ashamed to wrong me? And even if it be true that I have erred, my error remains with myself. If indeed you magnify yourselves against me, and make my humiliation an argument against me, know then that God has put me in the wrong, and closed his net about me. Behold, I cry out, 'Violence!' but I am not answered; I call aloud, but there is no justice. He has walled up my way, so that I cannot pass, and he has set darkness upon my paths. He has stripped from me my glory, and taken the crown from my head. He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone, and my hope has he pulled up like a tree. He has kindled his wrath against me, and counts me as his adversary. His troops come on together; they have cast up siege-works against me, and encamp round about my tent.

"He has put my brethren far from me, and my acquaintances are wholly estranged from me. My kinsfolk and my close friends have failed me; the guests in my house have forgotten me; my maidservants count me as a stranger; I have become an alien in their eyes. I call to my servant, but he gives me no answer; I must beseech him with my mouth. I am repulsive to my wife, loathsome to the sons of my own mother. Even young children despise me; when I rise they talk against me. All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me. My bones cleave to my skin and to my flesh, and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth. Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me! Why do you, like God, pursue me? Why are you not satisfied with my flesh?

"Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were graven in the rock for ever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me! If you say, 'How we will pursue him!' and, 'The root of the matter is found in him'; be afraid of the sword, for wrath brings the punishment of the sword, that you may know there is a judgement."

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST CLEMENT OF ROME TO THE CORINTHIANS

Think, my dear friends, how the Lord offers us proof after proof that there is going to be a resurrection, of which he has made Jesus Christ the first-fruits by raising him from the dead. My friends, look how regularly there are processes of resurrection going on at this very moment. The day and the night show us an example of it; for night sinks to rest, and day arises; day passes away, and night comes again. Or take the fruits of the earth; how, and in what way, does a crop come into being? When the sower goes out and drops each seed into the ground, it falls to the earth shrivelled and bare, and decays; but

presently the power of the Lord's providence raises it from decay, and from that single grain a host of others spring up and yield their fruit.

Look at that strange portent that occurs in the East (in the neighbourhood of Arabia, to be precise). There is a bird known as a Phoenix, which is the only specimen of its kind and has a life of five hundred years. When the hour of its dissolution and death approaches, it makes a nest for itself out of frankincense and myrrh and other fragrant spices, and in the fullness of time it enters into this and expires. Its decaying flesh breeds a small grub, which is nourished by the moisture of the dead bird and presently grows wings. This, on reaching full growth, takes up the nest containing the bones of its predecessor and carries them all the way from the land of Arabia into Egypt, to the city called Heliopolis. There, in the full light of day and before the eyes of all beholders, it flies to the Altar of the Sun, deposits them there, and speeds back to its homeland; and when the priests consult their time records, they find that its arrival has marked the completion of the five-hundredth year.

Now, when the Creator of all things has even made use of a bird to disclose the magnitude of his promises to us, need we find it such a great wonder that he has a resurrection in store for those who have served him in holiness and in the confidence of a sound faith? For in Scripture we read, *You will raise me up, and I will praise you*; and also, *After I had lain down and fallen asleep, I rose up again; for you are with me*. Job too, says, *You will raise up this flesh of mine which has had all these trials to endure*. Seeing then that we have this hope, let us knit fast our souls to him who is ever true to his word and righteous in his judgements.

St Clement of Rome, Letter to the Corinthians, 24.1-27.1; Penguin (1968) tr. Staniforth.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(Eliphaz urges Job to seek peace with God: Job 22:1-30)

Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered: “Can a man be profitable to God? Surely he who is wise is profitable to himself. Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are righteous, or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless? Is it for your fear of him that he reproves you, and enters into judgment with you? Is not your wickedness great? There is no end to your iniquities. For you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing, and stripped the naked of their clothing. You have given no water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry. The man with power possessed the land, and the favoured man dwelt in it. You have sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless were crushed. Therefore snares are round about you, and sudden terror overwhelms you; your light is darkened, so that you cannot see, and a flood of water covers you.

“Is not God high in the heavens? See the highest stars, how lofty they are! Therefore you say, ‘What does God know? Can he judge through the deep darkness? Thick clouds enwrap him, so that he does not see, and he walks on the vault of heaven.’ Will you keep to the old way which wicked men have trod? They were snatched away before their time; their foundation was washed away. They said to God, ‘Depart from us’, and ‘What can the Almighty do to us?’ Yet he filled their houses with good things – but the counsel of the wicked is far from me. The righteous see it and are glad; the innocent laugh them to scorn, saying, ‘Surely our adversaries are cut off, and what they left the fire has consumed.’

“Agree with God, and be at peace; thereby good will come to you. Receive instruction from his mouth, and lay up his words in your heart. If you return to the Almighty and humble yourself, if you remove unrighteousness far from your tents, if you lay gold in the dust, and gold of Ophir among the stones of the torrent bed, and if the Almighty is your gold, and your precious silver; then you will delight yourself in the Almighty, and lift up your face to God. You will make your prayer to him, and he will hear you; and you will pay your vows. You will decide on a matter, and it will be established for you, and light will shine on your ways. For God abases the proud, but he saves the lowly. He delivers the innocent man; you will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands.”

A READING FROM THE MORALIA ON JOB OF ST GREGORY THE GREAT

You will abound with delicacies in the Almighty means that one is to be entirely filled with the banquet of holy Scripture in the love of God. In those words surely we find as many delicacies for our profiting as we obtained diversities of meaning. The bare history should now be our food veiled under the text of the letter, the moral allegory should refresh us from our inmost soul, and, regarding the deeper things, contemplation should hold us, even in the darkness of the present life, suspended in the light of eternity.

You will pray to him, and he will hear you, for those who reject the precepts of the Lord make their prayer to God but never obtain a hearing. Hence it is written, He that turns away his ear from hearing the Law, even his prayer shall be an abomination. So long then as Eliphaz believed the blessed Job was not heard, he decided that he had lived badly. He goes on, You will decide on a matter, and it will be established for you. Weak people esteem a person righteous as they see him obtain all that he desires; whereas, in truth, we know that earthly goods are sometimes withheld from the righteous whilst they are bestowed with liberal bounty on the unrighteous. Now if Eliphaz had been talking about spiritual gifts, it is true that a thing is decreed and is established in a person when the virtue that is longed for in the desire, is, by God's granting it, happily put into practice.

The innocent will be saved, but he will be saved by the cleanness of his hands. This opinion of Eliphaz, if it is said concerning the reward of the kingdom of heaven, is supported by truth, in that it is written concerning God, *He renders to every man according to his deeds.* The justice of the eternal Judge saves that person in the last judgement, his mercy sets him free from impure deeds. But if the person we are talking about is supposed to be saved by the cleanness of his own hands, so that by his own powers he should be made innocent, then assuredly it is an error. For if grace from above does not come before the sinner, assuredly it will never find anyone faultless to reward for being without fault. It is said by the truthful voice of Moses, *And no man of himself is innocent in your sight.* So, heavenly pity first works something in us without our help, so that our own free will might follow as well, and it is by this means that the good which we now desire may be accomplished. Yet the good that is given us by grace is, in the last judgement, rewarded by God as if it had come only from ourselves.

St Gregory the Great, Moralia on Job, 16.24-30; ACC 6 (2006) tr. Simonetti & Conti.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(Job answers that the wicked go unpunished: Job 23:1 – 24:12)

Then Job answered: “Today also my complaint is bitter, his hand is heavy in spite of my groaning. Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would learn what he would answer me, and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; he would give heed to me. There an upright man could reason with him, and I should be acquitted for ever by my judge.

“Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand I seek him, but I cannot behold him; I turn to the right hand, but I cannot see him. But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot has held fast to his steps; I have kept his way and have not turned aside. I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured in my bosom the words of his mouth. But he is unchangeable and who can turn him? What he desires, that he does. For he will complete what he appoints for me; and many such things are in his mind. Therefore I am terrified at his presence; when I consider, I am in dread of him. God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me; for I am hemmed in by darkness, and thick darkness covers my face.

“Why are not times of judgment kept by the Almighty, and why do those who know him never see his days? Men remove landmarks; they seize flocks and pasture them. They drive away the ass of the fatherless; they take the widow’s ox for a pledge. They thrust the poor off the road; the poor of the earth all hide themselves. Behold, like wild asses in the desert they go forth to their toil, seeking prey in the wilderness as food for their children. They gather their fodder in the field and they glean the vineyard of the wicked man. They lie all night naked, without clothing, and have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the rain of the mountains, and cling to the rock for want of shelter. (There are those who snatch the fatherless child from the breast, and take in pledge the infant of the poor.) They go about naked, without clothing; hungry, they carry the sheaves; among the olive rows of the wicked they make oil; they tread the wine presses, but suffer thirst. From out of the city the dying groan, and the soul of the wounded cries for help; yet God pays no attention to their prayer.”

A READING FROM THE MORALIA ON JOB OF ST GREGORY THE GREAT

Who else except the Mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, is denoted by the title of ‘just judgement’? Concerning whom it is written, *Who became for us wisdom and righteousness from God*. This same righteousness came into this world against the ways of sinners, so that we might get the better of our old enemy by whom we were held captive. So let Job say, *I do not want him to contend with me with great power or oppress me with the weight of his mightiness. Let him judge me justly, and my judgement will come to victory*. In other words, for the correction of my ways let him send his

incarnate Son. Then by the sentence of my absolution, I will become a victor over the devious foe.

If the only-begotten Son of God had remained invisible in the strength of his divine nature and admitted nothing derived from our weakness, when could weak people ever have found the access of grace to him? For the weight of his greatness would have oppressed them. Yet he assumed our weakness, that he might elevate us to his own abiding strength.

It goes on, *And he will try me like gold that passes through fire*. Gold in the furnace is advanced to the brightness of its nature while it loses the dross. And so *like gold that passes through fire* the souls of the righteous are tried. Their defects are removed and their good points are increased by the fire of tribulation. The holy man Job compared himself with one who is being tested in fire as gold. This was not said out of pride. He who by the voice of God was pronounced righteous before his suffering was not out of pride being permitted to be tried in order that bad qualities might be cleared off and that excellences might be heightened. Gold is purified by fire. As he was being delivered over to suffer tribulation, he believed that he was being purified, although he had nothing in him to be purified.

The text continues, *I have treasured in my bosom the words of his mouth*. For we *treasure the words of his mouth in the bosom of our heart* when we hear his commandments not in a passing way but to fulfil them in practice. Thus, of the Virgin Mother herself it is written, *But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart*. Even when the same words come forth to be practised, they are still said to lie hidden in the recesses of the heart if by what is done outwardly the mind of the doer is not lifted up within. When the word conceived is carried on to the deed, human praise is aimed within, for the word of God is assuredly not *hidden in the bosom of the mind*. Why then, blessed man, do you examine yourself with so much earnestness, and why do you take yourself to task with so much anxiety?

St Gregory the Great, Moralia in Job, 16.36-37, 39-44; ACC 6 (2006) tr. Simonetti & Conti.

Season of the Year / Week 17

Sunday of the Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(Wisdom is found with God alone: Job 28:1-28)

“Surely there is a mine for silver, and a place for gold which they refine. Iron is taken out of the earth, and copper is smelted from the ore. Men put an end to darkness, and search out to the farthest bound the ore in gloom and deep darkness. They open shafts in a valley away from where men live; they are forgotten by travellers, they hang afar from men, they swing to and fro. As for the earth, out of it comes bread; but underneath it is turned up as by fire. Its stones are the place of sapphires, and it has dust of gold.

“That path no bird of prey knows, and the falcon’s eye has not seen it. The proud beasts have not trodden it; the lion has not passed over it.

“Man puts his hand to the flinty rock, and overturns mountains by the roots. He cuts out channels in the rocks, and his eye sees every precious thing. He binds up the streams so that they do not trickle, and the thing that is hid he brings forth to light.

“But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know the way to it, and it is not found in the land of the living. The deep says, ‘It is not in me’, and the sea says, ‘It is not with me.’ It cannot be gotten for gold, and silver cannot be weighed as its price. It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir, in precious onyx or sapphire. Gold and glass cannot equal it, nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal; the price of wisdom is above pearls. The topaz of Ethiopia cannot compare with it, nor can it be valued in pure gold.

“Whence then comes wisdom? And where is the place of understanding? It is hid from the eyes of all living, and concealed from the birds of the air. Abaddon and Death say, ‘We have heard a rumour of it with our ears.’

“God understands the way to it, and he knows its place. For he looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens. When he gave to the wind its weight, and meted out the waters by measure; when he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder; then he saw it and declared it; he established it, and searched it out. And he said to man, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.’”

A READING FROM THE CONFESSIONS OF ST AUGUSTINE

You are great, Lord, and highly to be praised: great is your power and your wisdom is immeasurable. Man, a little piece of your creation, desires to praise you, a human being bearing his mortality with him, carrying with him the witness of his sin and the witness that you resist the proud. Nevertheless, to praise you is the desire of man, a little piece of your creation. You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.

Grant me Lord to know and understand which comes first, to call upon you or to praise you, and whether knowing you precedes calling upon you. But who calls upon you when

he does not know you? For an ignorant person might call upon someone else instead of the right one. But surely you may be called upon in prayer that you may be known. Yet *how shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe without a preacher? They will praise the Lord who seek for him.*

In seeking him they find him, and in finding they will praise him. Lord, I would seek you, calling upon you—and calling upon you is an act of believing in you. You have been preached to us. My faith, Lord, calls upon you. It is your gift to me. You breathed it into me by the humanity of your Son, by the ministry of your preacher.

How shall I call upon my God, my God and Lord? Surely when I call on him, I am calling on him to come into me. But what place is there in me where my God can enter into me? *God made heaven and earth.* Where may he come to me? Lord my God, is there any room in me which can contain you? Can heaven and earth, which you have made and in which you have made me, contain you? Without you, whatever exists would not exist. Then can what exists contain you? I also have being. So why do I request you to come to me when, unless you were within me, I would have no being at all? I am not now possessed by Hades; yet even there are you: for *even if I were to go down to Hades, you would be present.* Accordingly, my God, I would have no being, I would not have any existence, unless you were in me. Or rather, I would have no being if I were not in you *of whom are all things, through whom are all things, in whom are all things.* Even so, Lord, even so. How can I call on you to come if I am already in you? Or where can you come from so as to be in me? Can I move outside heaven and earth so that my God may come to me from there? For God has said, *I fill heaven and earth.*

Who will enable me to find rest in you? Who will grant me that you come to my heart and intoxicate it, so that I forget my evils and embrace my one and only good, yourself? What are you to me? Have mercy so that I may find words. Speak to me so that I may hear. See the ears of my heart are before you, Lord. Open them and *say to my soul, I am your salvation.*

St Augustine, Confessions, 1.1-2.2, 5.5; The Divine Office I.

Monday of the Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(Job laments his affliction: Job 29:1-10; 30:1,9-23)

And Job again took up his discourse, and said: "Oh, that I were as in the months of old, as in the days when God watched over me; when his lamp shone upon my head, and by his light I walked through darkness; as I was in my autumn days, when the friendship of God was upon my tent; when the Almighty was yet with me, when my children were about me; when my steps were washed with milk, and the rock poured out for me streams of oil! When I went out to the gate of the city, when I prepared my seat in the square, the young men saw me and withdrew, and the aged rose and stood; the princes refrained from talking, and laid their hand on their mouth; the voice of the nobles was hushed, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth.

"But now they make sport of me, men who are younger than I, whose fathers I would have disdained to set with the dogs of my flock.

"And now I have become their song, I am a byword to them. They abhor me, they keep aloof from me; they do not hesitate to spit at the sight of me. Because God has loosed my cord and humbled me, they have cast off restraint in my presence. On my right hand the rabble rise, they drive me forth, they cast up against me their ways of destruction. They break up my path, they promote my calamity; no one restrains them. As through a wide breach they come; amid the crash they roll on. Terrors are turned upon me; my honour is pursued as by the wind, and my prosperity has passed away like a cloud.

"And now my soul is poured out within me; days of affliction have taken hold of me. The night racks my bones, and the pain that gnaws me takes no rest. With violence it seizes my garment; it binds me about like the collar of my tunic. God has cast me into the mire, and I have become like dust and ashes. I cry to thee and thou dost not answer me; I stand, and thou dost not heed me. Thou hast turned cruel to me; with the might of thy hand thou dost persecute me. Thou liftest me up on the wind, thou makest me ride on it, and thou tосsest me about in the roar of the storm. Yea, I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living."

A READING FROM THE INSTRUCTIONS OF ST DOROTHEUS OF GAZA

Let us see, my brothers, why it is that sometimes when a person hears words that hurt him he can let them pass by without any bother as if he had not heard them, whilst at other times, as soon as he hears them he is troubled and upset. My question is – what is the cause of this difference? Is there one reason for this or are there many? I think there are several, but there is one in particular which is the source of all the others, as the saying goes: it results from the state of mind the person is in at that particular time.

For example, when someone is caught as he comes from prayer or contemplation, he is then in the best of dispositions and is able to put up with his brother and remain undisturbed. It may be that he has great affection for the other and so, out of love, puts up patiently with everything. But it can also happen that he despises the one who wants

to upset him, regarding him as the lowest of men and not worth even a reply. Nor would he even consider mentioning his slights and insults to someone else.

Hence, as I said, it can be that a man is not disturbed or upset because he has only contempt for the things that are said to him and ignores them. The brother who insults us may upset us either because we are not at that moment in the right mood or because we dislike him intensely. There are many other reasons as well which are described in different ways. But, if we examine the matter closely, we can say that the reason for all disturbance is that no one blames himself.

This is the reason for every taking of offence and upset. This is why at times it is impossible to find peace of soul. Nor should we be surprised at this, since it is the teaching of spiritual men that there is no other way of peace for us. This we can see to be true in so many people. And yet we hope for peace but do not follow their teaching. Or, we believe that we are on the right path while we are irritated by everything and cannot bear to take any blame upon ourselves.

That is the way things are. A man may indeed accomplish innumerable good deeds, but if he does not master this he will never attain peace. Instead, he will always oppress himself and oppress others and his labours will go for nothing.

St Dorotheus of Gaza, Instructions, 7.1-2; The Divine Office I.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(Job's former integrity: Job 31:1-8, 13-23, 35-37)

"I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I look upon a virgin? What would be my portion from God above, and my heritage from the Almighty on high? Does not calamity befall the unrighteous, and disaster the workers of iniquity? Does not he see my ways, and number all my steps?

"If I have walked with falsehood, and my foot has hastened to deceit; (Let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity!) if my step has turned aside from the way, and my heart has gone after my eyes, and if any spot has cleaved to my hands; then let me sow, and another eat; and let what grows for me be rooted out.

"If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant, when they brought a complaint against me; what then shall I do when God rises up? When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him? Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?

"If I have withheld anything that the poor desired, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or have eaten my morsel alone, and the fatherless has not eaten of it (for from his youth I reared him as a father, and from his mother's womb I guided him); if I have seen any one perish for lack of clothing, or a poor man without covering; if his loins have not blessed me, and if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, because I saw help in the gate; then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder, and let my arm be broken from its socket. For I was in terror of calamity from God, and I could not have faced his majesty.

"Oh, that I had one to hear me! (Here is my signature! let the Almighty answer me!) Oh, that I had the indictment written by my adversary! Surely I would carry it on my shoulder; I would bind it on me as a crown; I would give him an account of all my steps; like a prince I would approach him."

A READING FROM THE MORALIA ON JOB OF ST GREGORY THE GREAT

After revealing his sublime feats of heroism the saintly Job seeks a helper, knowing as he does that his own merits are not enough for him to reach the highest peak. And on whom indeed does he rest his gaze but the only-begotten Son of God, who took a human nature, labouring in mortality, and in so doing brought nature his saving help? For he it was who, once he was made man, brought his help to us men so that, since the way back to God did not lie open to man left to himself, it might be opened through God-made-man. We are a long way from being just and immortal, unjust and mortal as we are. But between him who is immortal and just, and us who are neither the one nor the other, the Mediator of God and man has appeared: and he is both mortal and just, having death in common with men and justice with God. And because through our baseness we are far from the heights he occupies, he joins in his own person the lowest with the highest, to make a way for us back to God.

The blessed Job, then, seeks this Mediator, speaking as it were for the whole Church, when having said: *Who will grant me a helper?* he aptly goes on, *that the Almighty one may hear my petition.* For he knew that men's prayers for the repose of eternal freedom can only be heard through their advocate. Of him, we are told through John the Apostle that: *If anyone has sinned we have Christ the just man as advocate with the Father; and he is the propitiation for our sins, not for ours alone but also for those of the whole world.* And Paul the Apostle speaks of him as: *The Christ who died for us, and indeed who rose again, who is at the right hand of God, and who intercedes for us.* It is for the only-begotten Son of God to intercede with his co-eternal Father, presenting himself as man; and then his having made intercession on behalf of human nature amounts to taking up that nature to the level of his own divine nature.

The Lord intercedes for us not in words, but in mercy; for what he did not wish to see condemned or lost in his chosen ones, that he set free by taking it on himself. A helper is therefore sought, that our petition might be heard: for unless some mediator intercedes for us our prayers would undoubtedly remain as if unspoken, in the ears of Almighty God.

St Gregory the Great, Moralia in Job, 22.17 (PL 76:237-238); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(Elihu speaks of the Mystery of God: Job 32:1-6; 33:1-22)

So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. Then Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became angry. He was angry at Job because he justified himself rather than God; he was angry also at Job's three friends because they had found no answer, although they had declared Job to be in the wrong. Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job because they were older than he. And when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, he became angry.

And Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite answered: "I am young in years, and you are aged; therefore I was timid and afraid to declare my opinion to you.

"But now, hear my speech, O Job, and listen to all my words. Behold, I open my mouth; the tongue in my mouth speaks. My words declare the uprightness of my heart, and what my lips know they speak sincerely. The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life. Answer me, if you can; set your words in order before me; take your stand. Behold, I am toward God as you are; I too was formed from a piece of clay. Behold, no fear of me need terrify you; my pressure will not be heavy upon you.

"Surely, you have spoken in my hearing, and I have heard the sound of your words. You say, 'I am clean, without transgression; I am pure, and there is no iniquity in me. Behold, he finds occasions against me, he counts me as his enemy; he puts my feet in the stocks, and watches all my paths.'

"Behold, in this you are not right. I will answer you. God is greater than man. Why do you contend against him, saying, He will answer none of my words? For God speaks in one way, and in two, though man does not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, while they slumber on their beds, then he opens the ears of men, and terrifies them with warnings, that he may turn man aside from his deed, and cut off pride from man; he keeps back his soul from the Pit, his life from perishing by the sword.

"Man is also chastened with pain upon his bed, and with continual strife in his bones; so that his life loathes bread, and his appetite dainty food. His flesh is so wasted away that it cannot be seen; and his bones which were not seen stick out. His soul draws near the Pit, and his life to those who bring death."

A READING FROM THE MORALIA ON JOB OF ST GREGORY THE GREAT

Job, I ask you for a hearing; now it is my turn to tell you what I know. It is a characteristic of arrogant teachers that they are unable to present their teaching modestly, that they fail to serve as they should the truths which they hold. They make it plain by their words that when they are teaching they fancy themselves seated on some lofty place of eminence and they look down on their hearers standing far below them, on the lowest level, as persons who scarcely merit their domination, not to say their concern.

The words of the Lord through the Prophet are well directed at them: *With force and harshness you have ruled them.* For men rule with force and harshness when they are concerned not to correct those under them by calm reasoning but to bend them by harsh domination.

Sound teaching, on the other hand, measures its earnestness in avoiding this sin of pride in thought by its eagerness to attack with its words the teacher of pride himself. It takes care not to proclaim him by an arrogant manner while it attacks him with pious words in the hearts of the hearers. It strives to preach in what it says and manifest in what it does, humility, the mistress and mother of all virtues, in order to commend this more by conduct than by words to those who are seeking the truth.

This is why Paul speaks as if he had forgotten the dignity of his own apostleship in his words to the Thessalonians: *We were babes among you.* Similarly the Apostle Peter says: *Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you,* and he adds, to emphasise that our teaching must be presented in the proper way: *Yet do it with gentleness and reverence; and keep your conscience clear.*

When Paul says to Titus: *Command these things, teach them with all authority,* he is not recommending the domination of power but the force of his disciple's life. A man teaches with authority what he first practises himself before preaching to others, for when conscience is an obstacle to speech, what is taught is more difficult to accept. So then Paul is not recommending the power of haughty words but the trustworthiness which comes from good conduct. Our Lord too, we are told, taught as one who had authority, and not as the scribes and the Pharisees. He alone spoke with a unique authority because he had committed no sin from weakness. It was from the power of his divinity that he possessed that which he bestowed on us through the sinlessness of his humanity.

St Gregory the Great, Moralia in Job, 23.23-24; The Divine Office III.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(God confounds Job: Job 38:1-30; 39:31-35)

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

“Or who shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth from the womb; when I made clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed?’

“Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it? It is changed like clay under the seal, and it is dyed like a garment. From the wicked their light is withheld, and their uplifted arm is broken.

“Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this.

“Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness, that you may take it to its territory and that you may discern the paths to its home? You know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is great!

“Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail, which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war? What is the way to the place where the light is distributed, or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth? “Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt, to bring rain on a land where no man is, on the desert in which there is no man; to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground put forth grass?

Has the rain a father, or who has begotten the drops of dew? From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven? The waters become hard like stone, and the face of the deep is frozen.”

And the LORD said to Job: “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it.” Then Job answered the LORD: “Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer thee? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further.

A READING FROM THE MORALIA ON JOB OF ST GREGORY THE GREAT

After the loss of his goods, the death of his children, the wounds of his body, the words of his wife inciting him to evil, the insulting language of his comforters and the spear thrusts of so many sorrows bravely received, Job ought to have been praised by his judge for the strength of his constancy – but Job is not now going to be called out of this world. He is about to receive back twofold, he is about to be restored to his former health, to enjoy his restored possessions longer, so Almighty God is obliged to reprove him whom he preserves with strict justice in case Job's very victory should lay him low with the sword of pride.

There is nothing, is there, that so commonly slays people than consciousness of their own virtue. It puffs them up with self-satisfaction and at the same time empties them of the truth; it suggests that they are sufficient unto themselves to achieve their rewards and at the same time diverts them from the will to amend. Job, then, was just before his scourges, but he remained more so after them; before them he was praised by the mouth of God; after them and because of them he grew in stature. As a pipe of ductile metal is lengthened by hammering, so Job rose in God's esteem the more he was chastised. But he who stood so firm in virtue when struck down needed to be humbled. He needed to be humbled so that the arrows of pride should not pierce that sturdy breast which the wounds already received had certainly failed to pierce. It was necessary to search out someone who surpassed Job – but what about God's words: *Have you seen my servant Job, that there is no one like him in all the earth?* How then could Job be humbled by comparison with another when God himself had attested that there was no one like him? What, then, was left but for the Lord himself to describe his own accomplishments? So he asks: *Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion? And again: Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? Or: Have you commanded the morning ever since your days began and caused the dawn to know its place?*

Who can do these things but the Lord? Yet a human being is asked so that he may learn that he is unable to do these things, so that a man who has grown limitless in virtue and is surpassed by no other man may know he is surpassed by God and so avoid elation. But how highly is he exalted who is so sublimely humbled! How great is the victory of the man who has been brought low by comparison with God! How much greater than a man is he who is shown by the witness of creation to be less than God! He is very mighty who is proved by such questioning to be not at all mighty.

St Gregory the Great, Moralia in Job, 27 Praefatio (PL 76:445-6); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(Job subjects himself to the Divine Majesty: Job 40:6-24; 42:1-6)

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind: "Gird up your loins like a man; I will question you, and you declare to me. Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?"

"Deck yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendour. Pour forth the overflowings of your anger, and look on every one that is proud, and abase him. Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low; and tread down the wicked where they stand. Hide them all in the dust together; bind their faces in the world below. Then will I also acknowledge to you, that your own right hand can give you victory.

"Behold, Behemoth, which I made as I made you; he eats grass like an ox. Behold, his strength in his loins, and his power in the muscles of his belly. He makes his tail stiff like a cedar; the sinews of his thighs are knit together. His bones are tubes of bronze, his limbs like bars of iron.

"He is the first of the works of God; let him who made him bring near his sword! For the mountains yield food for him where all the wild beasts play. Under the lotus plants he lies, in the covert of the reeds and in the marsh. For his shade the lotus trees cover him; the willows of the brook surround him. Behold, if the river is turbulent he is not frightened; he is confident though Jordan rushes against his mouth. Can one take him with hooks, or pierce his nose with a snare?"

Then Job answered the LORD: "I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted. 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.' I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

A READING FROM ON THE TRINITY BY ST HILARY OF POITIERS

There are many instances from everyday life where the cause itself is unknown, but the effect decidedly not so. And there is need for faith truly in the religious, supernatural sense wherever there is the ignorance due to my nature itself. For when I raise to your heaven those weak eyes that are my light I believe myself to see nothing other than your heaven. When surveying those circles and spheres carrying the stars, the yearly returns and vigils, the north star, the morning star, all these being given their differing tasks to perform, I perceive you to be at work in matters of which my perception is even so very incomplete. When I see the wonderful rise and fall of the sea, it is not the origin of the waters alone nor yet the motion of this vast swirling mass that I pursue and ponder, but rather, on apprehending the ground for belief in the cause which I cannot even so observe, that I am mindful, in things my mind does not grasp, of you also.

When I turn my mind's eye to the earth, what is sown by hidden forces breaks free of what it had received, springs to life, multiplies and flourishes. There is really nothing here that I could understand properly by the light of nature; but then my ignorance itself contributes to my dim understanding of you, as long as I understand clearly that, being unfamiliar and baffled by the nature that serves me, I understand, as I say, that you alone can properly be of advantage or benefit to me. Not knowing or understanding myself either, I feel that all the more for that I am in awe of the fact that I am even a mystery to myself. For aware of, yet not comprehending, the movement of my mind in the act of passing judgement, or its way of functioning, or its life, I am in your debt for the awareness, for your communicating that awareness of nature delighting me, beyond the perception of natural origins.

And when I come to understand you, albeit in ignorance of myself, may I respect you with my understanding and not lose hold of my faith in your omnipotence at the thought of my ignorance of your ways: that my mind may be taken up with the origin of your only-begotten and so have something left over of itself, that I may further strive after my Creator and my God.

St Hilary of Poitiers, De Trinitate, 12 (PL 10:467-8); Word in Season VII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

(Job is justified by God over his enemies: Job 42:7-17)

After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.." So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them; and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.

And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends; and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house; and they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold. And the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she-asses. He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first Jemimah; and the name of the second Keziah; and the name of the third Keren-happuch. And in all the land there were no women so fair as Job's daughters; and their father gave them inheritance among their brothers. And after this Job lived a hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. And Job died, an old man, and full of days.

A READING FROM THE MORALIA ON JOB OF ST GREGORY THE GREAT

Among the wonderful works of divine dispensation it is pleasing to note how every star in turn appears on the face of heaven to illuminate the night of this present life, until at the end of that night there rises like a true morning star the Redeemer of the human race. For the interval of night, lit up by the rising and setting of the stars in their courses, is shot through with the great beauty of heaven. Then so that the light of the stars should shine out in turn, each in its own time, to pierce the darkness of our night, Abel came to represent innocence; Enoch, to teach moral purity; Noah, the patience to work in hope; Abraham, to show obedience; Isaac, chastity in marriage; Jacob, to teach us to endure toil; Joseph, to repay evil with good; Moses, to represent gentleness; Joshua, to teach us confidence in adversity; Job, to show us patience in the midst of misfortune. Those are the stars we see shining in the heavens, to light our steps on our laborious way through the darkness of our night. For the divine dispensation presented to the mind of man as many examples of righteousness as if sending so many stars into the dark sky above sinners, until the true morning star rose, to announce the eternal dawn to us, and because of his divine nature shining more brilliantly than the other stars.

All the elect who lived a holy life before the Lord foretold his coming in prophetic words and deeds. Not one of the righteous failed to announce him symbolically. It was obviously right that all should represent the good, by which all were good, and which they knew was useful to all. The Lord had to be foretold without cease, since he was given to us to be received without measure and possessed without end: so that all the ages might say together what the end of the ages showed in the universal redemption. That is why it was also inevitable that even blessed Job, who revealed so great a mystery as the Lord's incarnation, should symbolise in his own life the one whom he described in words, and through his own suffering show what the Lord would suffer, foretelling the sacrament of his passion all the more truly because he prophesied it not only in words but in actual suffering.

St Gregory the Great, Moralia in Job, Praefatio 13 (SC 32 b i s:135-6); Word in Season VII.

Season of the Year | Week 18

Sunday of the Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE PROPHET OBADIAH

(Prophecies against Edom; Obadiah 1:1-21)

The vision of Obadiah.

Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom: We have heard tidings from the LORD, and a messenger has been sent among the nations: "Rise up! let us rise against her for battle!" Behold, I will make you small among the nations, you shall be utterly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, whose dwelling is high, who say in your heart, "Who will bring me down to the ground?" Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, thence I will bring you down, says the LORD.

If thieves came to you, if plunderers by night – how you have been destroyed! – would they not steal only enough for themselves? If grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave gleanings? How Esau has been pillaged, his treasures sought out! All your allies have deceived you, they have driven you to the border; your confederates have prevailed against you; your trusted friends have set a trap under you – there is no understanding of it. Will I not on that day, says the LORD, destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of Mount Esau? And your mighty men shall be dismayed, O Teman, so that every man from Mount Esau will be cut off by slaughter. For the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off for ever. On the day that you stood aloof, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. But you should not have gloated over the day of your brother in the day of his misfortune; you should not have rejoiced over the people of Judah in the day of their ruin; you should not have boasted in the day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of my people in the day of his calamity; you should not have gloated over his disaster in the day of his calamity; you should not have looted his goods in the day of his calamity. You should not have stood at the parting of the ways to cut off his fugitives; you should not have delivered up his survivors in the day of distress.

For the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you, your deeds shall return on your own head. For as you have drunk upon my holy mountain, all the nations round about shall drink; they shall drink, and stagger, and shall be as though they had not been. But in Mount Zion there shall be those that escape, and it shall be holy; and the house of Jacob shall possess their own possessions. The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau stubble; they shall burn them and consume them, and there shall be no survivor to the house of Esau; for the LORD has spoken. Those of the Negeb shall possess Mount Esau, and those of the Shephelah the land of the Philistines; they shall possess the land of Ephraim and the land of Samaria and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. The exiles in Halah who are of the people of Israel shall possess Phoenicia as far as Zarephath; and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad shall possess the cities of the Negeb. Saviours shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD's.

A READING FROM THE Gnostic CHAPTERS OF ST MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR

The meaning of Holy Scripture reveals itself gradually to the higher senses of the more discerning mind when the mind has put off the complex bodily form of the words which are formed in it. This revelation is like a still small voice. Through a supreme abandonment of its natural activities, such a mind has been able to perceive the meaning only in a simplicity which reveals the divine Word. This is the way that the great Elijah was granted the vision in the cave at Horeb.

For 'Horeb' means 'newness', which is our virtuous condition in the new spirit of grace. The cave is the hiddenness of spiritual wisdom in which the one who enters will mystically experience the knowledge which goes beyond the senses. This is the knowledge in which God is found. Therefore anyone who truly seeks God, as did the great Elijah, will come upon him not only **on** Horeb; that is, as an ascetic in the practice of the virtues. He will also encounter him in the cave of Horeb, that is as a contemplative in the hidden place of wisdom which can exist only in the habit of the virtues.

When the mind shakes off the many distractions about things which are pressing on it, then the clear meaning of truth appears and gives it pledges of genuine knowledge. These are given after it has driven off its recent preoccupations which were like scales on the eyes, just as in the case of the great and holy Apostle Paul. For thoughts about the mere letter of Scripture and the consideration of those visible things that hinder understanding are indeed scales which cling to the clear-sighted part of the soul and hinder the passage to the pure meaning of truth

St Maximus the Confessor, Gnostic Chapters 74-75; CWS (1985) tr. Berthold.

A READING FROM THE CITY OF GOD BY ST AUGUSTINE

Obadiah is the shortest of all the Prophets in respect of his writings. He holds forth against Edom, that is the race of Esau, the elder of the twin sons of Isaac, grandsons of Abraham, the one who was rejected. Now if we take Edom as standing for the Gentiles, by the figure of speech called 'the part for the whole', we can recognise a prophecy of Christ in the place where Obadiah says, among other things, Now on Mount Sion there will be salvation and there will be a holy place. And a little later, at the end of this prophecy, he adds, And those who have been saved will go up from Mount Sion, to defend Mount Esau; and the kingdom will be the Lord's.

It is quite obvious that this was fulfilled when those saved from Mount Sion – that is, those from Judaea who believed in Christ, and in particular those recognised as Apostles – went up to defend Mount Esau. How were they to defend it, except by bringing salvation, through the preaching of the gospel, to those who became believers, so that they should be rescued from the power of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God? This is expressed by the addition of the next words: And the kingdom will be the Lord's. For Mount Sion signifies Judaea, where it was predicted that there would be salvation and a holy place, which is Christ Jesus. Whereas Mount Esau is Edom, by which is signified the Church of the Gentiles; and, as I have explained, the saved from Mount

Sion defended it, so that it should be a kingdom for the Lord. This was obscure before the event: but what believer could fail to recognise it after the event?

St Augustine, De Civitate Dei, 18.31; tr. Bettenson (1972).

Monday of the Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE PROPHET JOEL

(A plague of locusts, the sign of the coming of the day of the Lord God: Joel 1:1, 13 – 2:11)

The word of the LORD that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel: Gird on sackcloth and lament, O priests, wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in, pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! Because cereal offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God.

Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God; and cry to the LORD.

Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes. Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God?

The seed shrivels under the clods, the storehouses are desolate; the granaries are ruined because the grain has failed. How the beasts groan! The herds of cattle are perplexed because there is no pasture for them; even the flocks of sheep are dismayed.

Unto thee, O LORD, I cry. For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and flame has burned all the trees of the field. Even the wild beasts cry to thee because the water brooks are dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming, it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations.

Fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the garden of Eden before them, but after them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them.

Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like war horses they run. As with the rumbling of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble, like a powerful army drawn up for battle.

Before them peoples are in anguish, all faces grow pale. Like warriors they charge, like soldiers they scale the wall. They march each on his way, they do not swerve from their paths. They do not jostle one another, each marches in his path; they burst through the weapons and are not halted. They leap upon the city, they run upon the walls; they climb up into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief.

The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his host is exceedingly great; he that executes his word is powerful. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; who can endure it?

A READING FROM THE ORATIONS OF ST GREGORY NAZIANZEN

How terrible is an unfruitful season and the loss of the crops. It could not be otherwise, when men are already rejoicing in their hopes and counting on their all but harvested stores. Terrible again is an unseasonable harvest, when the farmers labour with heavy hearts, sitting as it were beside the grave of their crops, which the gentle rain nourished, but the wild storm has rooted up. Wretched indeed is the sight of the ground devastated, cleared, and shorn of its ornaments, over which the blessed Joel wails in his most tragic description of the desolation of the land and the scourge of famine; while another Prophet wails, as he contrasts with its former beauty its final disorder, and thus discourses on the anger of the Lord when he strikes the land: before him is the garden of Eden, behind him a desolate wilderness.

You are angry, and we have sinned, says one of old, making confession; and it is now time for me to say the opposite: We have sinned, and you are angry: therefore we have become a reproach to our neighbours. You turned your face from us, and we were filled with dishonour. But we are your people, O Lord, the rod of your inheritance; therefore correct us, but in goodness and not in your anger, lest you bring us to nothingness and contempt among all that dwell on the earth. With these words I invoke mercy: and if it were possible to propitiate his wrath with whole burnt offerings or sacrifices, I would not even have spared these. You yourselves also imitate your trembling priest, my beloved children. Possess your souls in tears, and stay his wrath by amending your way of life. Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, as blessed Joel with us charges you. I know also what he enjoins both upon me, the minister of God, and upon you, that we should enter his house in sackcloth and lament night and day between the porch and the altar, in piteous array, and with more piteous voices, crying aloud without ceasing on behalf of ourselves and the people, sparing nothing, either toil or word, which may propitiate God: saying, Spare, O Lord, Your people, and do not give Your heritage to reproach.

Come then, all of you, my brethren, let us worship and fall down, and weep before the Lord our Maker; let us appoint a public mourning, in our various ages and families, let us raise the voice of supplication; and let this, instead of the cry which he hates, enter into the ears of the Lord of Hosts. Let us anticipate his anger by confession; who knows if he will turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind him? This I know certainly, I the sponsor of the loving-kindness of God, that when he has laid aside that which is unnatural to him, his anger, he will turn to that which is natural, his mercy. To the one he is forced by us, to the other he is inclined. And if he is forced to strike, surely he will refrain, according to his nature. Only let us have mercy on ourselves, and open up a road for our Father's righteous affections.

St Gregory Nazianzen, Oration 16, 6.12-14; NPNF27 (1883) tr. Browne & Swallow.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET JOEL

(The conversion of a people preparing for perfect blessedness: Joel 2:12-27)

“Yet even now,” says the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil. Who knows whether he will not turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind him, a cereal offering and a drink offering for the LORD, your God?

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber.

Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep and say, “Spare thy people, O LORD, and make not thy heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’”

Then the LORD became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people. The LORD answered and said to his people, “Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations.

“I will remove the northerner far from you, and drive him into a parched and desolate land, his front into the eastern sea, and his rear into the western sea; the stench and foul smell of him will rise, for he has done great things.

“Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done great things! Fear not, you beasts of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness are green; the tree bears its fruit, the fig tree and vine give their full yield.

“Be glad, O sons of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD, your God; for he has given the early rain for your vindication, he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain, as before.

“The threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. I will restore to you the years which the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you.

“You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame. You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the LORD, am your God and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON JOEL BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

It is customary with the holy prophetic authors to give the text an overall and general meaning on the basis of its details. This happens in the light of the coming of Christ. Here in this passage the sense emerges before us in this way: when is the earth to have

confidence, and when likewise has the Lord increased productivity? Is it not when the Word, who is God, became man so as to shower the earth under heaven with good things from on high and prove to be for those who believe in him like a river of peace, like a torrent of enjoyment, like early and late rain, and a giver of complete spiritual fruitfulness? Then it was, in fact, that even for the most uncomprehending, who are called cattle of the countryside, a kind of spiritual fodder grew up, instruction by teachers; then it was that the countryside in the wilderness blossomed. By wilderness he refers to the Church according to the Prophet's words about the Church: Rejoice, thirsty wilderness, that the wilderness exult and blossom like a lily. Countryside, on the other hand, would be the leaders of peoples, skilled in guiding them, whose minds are, as it were, teeming and beautifully blooming with divine charisms from heaven, producing sweet odours from the flowers of teaching, and producing fresh fodder. They nourish the minds of those who have become like cattle so that they may advance to the state of mind proper to men.

He said also that a tree bore its fruit, and vine and fig tree showed their vigour. In my view this means the solid message of the teachers in which there is sweetness and, in addition, the means of making us glad, just as in the case of the fruit of fig and vine. Now, it would be very fitting to offer to people of a more materialistic attitude, those who share the sloth typical of cattle, an instruction that is more earthy, that is in form and content a natural fodder. To the mature, however, there should be given an understanding which has already received from on high, a fruit springing from lovely trees – namely, the doctrine of the holy and consubstantial Trinity, or moral teaching of an elevated level. The former people the Prophet refers to as cattle, but the more mature he calls children of Zion, whom he bids exalt in the Lord their God. Our total satisfaction is Christ and from him and through him comes complete fullness of good things and an abundant supply of heavenly graces to those who love him, which are understood as the early and late fruit and as the grain filling the threshing floors, vats of wine brimming over, and oil overflowing.

Now, it should be understood that the reality of this promise also comes in the form of sacramental fulfilment; the living water of holy baptism is given to us as rain, the bread of life as grain, and the blood as wine. The use of oil is also applied in bringing those justified in Christ to maturity through holy Baptism.

St Cyril of Alexandria, Comm. in Joelem 2; FoC 115 (2007) tr. Hill.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET JOEL

(The Last Judgement: Joel 3:1 – 4:8)

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

“And I will give portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. And it shall come to pass that all who call upon the name of the LORD shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

“For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will enter into judgment with them there, on account of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations, and have divided up my land, and have cast lots for my people, and have given a boy for a harlot, and have sold a girl for wine, and have drunk it.

“What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you paying me back for something? If you are paying me back, I will requite your deed upon your own head swiftly and speedily. For you have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried my rich treasures into your temples. You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, removing them far from their own border. But now I will stir them up from the place to which you have sold them, and I will requite your deed upon your own head. I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the sons of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a nation far off; for the LORD has spoken.”

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON JOEL BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

And it will be after this that I shall pour out my Spirit on all people. Here God clearly promises to give the grace of the Holy Spirit, that is, his abundant help, not to one or two perhaps chosen to be prophets, but to absolutely all who are worthy to receive the Spirit. We say that this was indeed fulfilled after Christ had risen from the dead and had destroyed the power of death.

For the Spirit was given to Adam originally but did not remain in human nature, because humanity turned towards error and slipped into sin. But when God's only Son, though rich, chose to become poor, and being among us as a man received his own Spirit as if acquired, the Spirit remained in him. As the evangelist John told us, this was so that the Spirit remained in him. As the evangelist John also told us, this was so that the Spirit

might dwell in us too from then on, since this time the Spirit remained in the second first-fruit of our human race, that is, Christ, who for that reason was also called the second Adam.

Therefore we must reform to become incomparably better, and to gain complete regeneration through the Spirit. This is not the same as our original birth, I mean by earthly descent, leading us to corruption and sin (for the mind ruled by the body is death), but a second birth from above, from God through the Spirit; since it is truly said: And they were born, not of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Therefore those ranked among the children of God had to possess the grace of the Holy Spirit in abundance. But Christ effected this also in us, as Peter's words were to confirm: Being therefore exalted at the right hand of the Father, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you see and hear.

For as man he receives from the Father what is in himself by nature. But he pours out the Spirit richly upon us, because he is God by nature, and became man. But he also pours out the Spirit on all people. And this means not only on the Jews but on absolutely everyone called by faith, whether small or great, slave or free, non-Greek or Scythian. For the grace of salvation in Christ is set before people all over the world, because he is the expectation of nations.

St Cyril of Alexandria, Comm. in Joelem 25 (PG 71:376-380); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET JOEL

(After judgement, eternal happiness: Joel 4:9-21)

Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare war, stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your ploughshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, "I am a warrior."

Hasten and come, all you nations round about, gather yourselves there. Bring down thy warriors, O LORD. Let the nations bestir themselves, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the nations round about.

Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the wine press is full. The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great.

Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

And the LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake. But the LORD is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.

"So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who dwell in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy and strangers shall never again pass through it.

"And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the valley of Shittim.

"Egypt shall become a desolation and Edom a desolate wilderness, for the violence done to the people of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land. But Judah shall be inhabited for ever, and Jerusalem to all generations. I will avenge their blood, and I will not clear the guilty, for the LORD dwells in Zion."

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON JOEL BY ABBOT RUPERT OF DEUTZ

And then there will be the heavenly Jerusalem, says St Paul, presented as a beautiful bride, free from blemish, unmarred by any defect. It is that bride of whom St John writes in the Apocalypse: I saw a new Jerusalem coming down from heaven, made ready by God, like a bride for her husband. In those days, Scripture says, the mountains will give forth fragrance and the hills flow with milk, and water -shall run through all the rivers of Judah.

The mountains of that country are the Prophets and the Apostles; the hills are the other Saints, whose teaching ordinary people have humbly taken in and for that reason received a share of their glory, drinking in at the sight of them the sweetness of the divine love with which they are imbued, and on which indeed they draw by their daily contact; for they will behold God's glory more fully in those people from whom they

have come to know God's teaching. The psalmist conveys this thought succinctly when he says: They will be taken aback – inebriated – by the largesse, the abundance, of your presence; and you will give them to drink of the overwhelming bountifulness of your good cheer; for you are the very source of life, and in your light they shall see the light. The mountains shall exude fragrance and the hills flow with milk; and through all the rivers of Judah – that is to say, through the hearts of the faithful confessing Christ – shall waters gush to life eternal; yet of the same fragrance, of the same milk, of the same waters the one spring shall lead forth through the mountains and the hills, and through all the rivers from the Lord's house. So Scripture says. The house is rightly understood to be Christ's body: for that in itself is the house which wisdom has built for itself, or for herself. And so we read that: the spring shall lead forth from the Lord's house, and shall water a bed thick with thorns: the source of all life and the torrent of joy welling up and leading forth from the Lord's house shall indeed swell a river, a torrent running over thorns: that really means, the realm of God's chosen ones. There shall be what before there was not, from East to West amongst the thorns of tribulation and sin; what is now a torrent of delights, abounding with the plenty of eternal good cheer.

Of this, we read in the Apocalypse: And he showed me a river of running water, clear as crystal, flowing from the seat of God and the Lamb, amidst a city plain. And from both sides of the river the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, each month yielding its own. We should note that this is the spring, the river, of the Holy Spirit, who says, speaking through the Prophet: Behold, I flow down and run through them like a river of peace and tranquillity, like a gushing torrent, for the glory of the people. This river of peace, I say, this torrent of glory, this river of rejoicing, this torrent of pleasure, this abundance of God's house – this is the Holy Spirit. For he is the love of bride and groom, whereby what was a mass of thorns is irrigated, enlivened, healed, and refreshed, to become a torrent of delights. That is our human condition: mortal and wretched as it was, now become immortal and blessed.

Abbot Rupert of Deutz, Comm. In Joelem (PL 168:254-255); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET MALACHI

(Prophecies about negligent priests and about rejection: Malachi 1:1-14; 2:13-16)

The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.

“I have loved you,” says the LORD. But you say, “How hast thou loved us?” “Is not Esau Jacob’s brother?” says the LORD. “Yet I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau; I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.” If Edom says, “We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins”, the LORD of hosts says, “They may build, but I will tear down, till they are called the wicked country, the people with whom the LORD is angry for ever.” Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, “Great is the LORD, beyond the border of Israel!”

“A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honour? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. You say, ‘How have we despised thy name?’ By offering polluted food upon my altar. And you say, ‘How have we polluted it?’ By thinking that the LORD’s table may be despised. When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that no evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that no evil? Present that to your governor; will he be pleased with you or show you favour? says the LORD of hosts. And now entreat the favour of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favour to any of you? says the LORD of hosts. Oh, that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire upon my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts. But you profane it when you say that the LORD’s table is polluted, and the food for it may be despised. ‘What a weariness this is’, you say, and you sniff at me, says the LORD of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD. Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished; for I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name is feared among the nations.”

A READING FROM THE ORTHODOX FAITH BY ST JOHN OF DAMASCUS

The bread and wine are not a figure of the body and blood of Christ – God forbid! – But the actual deified body of the Lord, because the Lord himself said: This is my body; not ‘a figure of my body’ but my body, and not ‘a figure of my blood’ but my blood. Even before this he had said to the Jews: except you eat of the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you. For my flesh is food indeed; and my blood is drink indeed. And again: He that eats me, shall live.

Therefore, in all fear and with a pure conscience and undoubting faith let us approach, and it will be to us just as we believe and do not doubt. And let us honour it with all

purity of body and soul, for it is twofold. Let us approach it with burning desire, and with our hands folded in the form of a cross let us receive the body of the Crucified.

It was with bread and wine that Melchisedech, the priest of the most high God, received from Abraham, when he was returning from the slaughter of the foreign tribes. That altar prefigured this mystical altar, even as that priest was a type and figure of the true Archpriest who is Christ. For you, he says, are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedech. This bread was prefigured by the loaves of proposition. This is quite plainly the pure and unbloody sacrifice which the Lord, through the mouth of the Prophet, said was to be offered to him from the rising of the sun even to its going down.

It is Christ's body and blood entering into the composition of our soul and body without being consumed, without being corrupted, - but into our substance for our sustenance, a bulwark against every sort of harm and a purifier from all uncleanness.

It is called participation because through it we participate in the divinity of Jesus. It is also called communion, and truly is so, because of our having communion through it with Christ and partaking both of his flesh and his divinity, and because through it we have communion with and are united to one another. For, since we partake of one bread, we all become one body of Christ and one blood and members of one another and are accounted of the same body with Christ.

St John of Damascus, The Orthodox Faith, 4.13; FoC 37 (1958) tr. Chase.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET MALACHI

(The Day of the Lord: Malachi 3:1 – 4:6)

“Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?”

“For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, till they present right offerings to the LORD. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

“Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How are we robbing thee?’ In your tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me; the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house; and thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil; and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts. Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.

“Your words have been stout against me, says the LORD. Yet you say, ‘How have we spoken against thee?’ You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God. What is the good of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts? Henceforth we deem the arrogant blessed; evildoers not only prosper but when they put God to the test they escape.’”

Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another; the LORD heeded and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and thought on his name. “They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, my special possession on the day when I act, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

“For behold, the day comes, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name the sun of

righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go forth leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.

“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse.”

A READING FROM THE CITY OF GOD BY ST AUGUSTINE

Look, I am going to send my messenger, and he will survey the road in front of me; and the Lord you are looking for will suddenly come into his temple, and the angel of the covenant whom you wish for. See, he is coming, says the Lord Almighty; and who will withstand the day of his coming in? And who will stand up to face his gaze?

In this passage the Prophet Malachi predicts both the first and the second coming of Christ: the first, obviously, when he says, He will suddenly come into his temple, that is, into his physical body, to which he referred in the Gospel when he said, Destroy this temple, and I shall raise it up again in three days; and the second in saying, See, he is coming, says the Lord Almighty; and who will withstand the day of his coming in? And who will stand up to face his gaze? While as for the words the Lord you are looking for, and the angel of the covenant, whom you wish for, the Prophet here undoubtedly indicates that even the Jews look for and wish for Christ – the Messiah – in accordance with the Scriptures which they read. But many of them have not recognized that he whom they looked for and wished for has come, because they are blinded in their hearts by their previous merits.

The Prophet is emphatic in his reference to a ‘covenant’. He says above, My covenant was with him, and again, in this passage, he calls Christ the angel of the covenant. Now we must undoubtedly take this to be the new covenant, in which eternal blessings are promised, not the old covenant which offered merely temporal rewards. Now the majority of mankind put a high value on such goods, and in their weakness they serve the true God for the sake of such temporal recompense; and so they are upset when they see the irreligious enjoying them in abundance. It is for this reason that the Prophet is concerned to distinguish the eternal blessedness of the new covenant, which will be bestowed only on the good, from the worldly felicity of the old, which is often granted to the wicked also; and with that aim in view he says:

You have spoken harsh words about me, says the Lord. You ask: ‘What have we said in your disparagement?’ You have said: ‘Anyone who serves God is wasting his time. What good have we got from observing his instructions, and from walking as suppliants before the face of Almighty God? And now we call the aliens happy, and all the evil-doers are restored; they have opposed God, and yet they have been preserved.’ Such were the reproaches uttered by those who feared the Lord, each one to his neighbour. And the

Lord noticed it and listened; and he wrote a book of remembrance in his presence for those who fear the Lord and reverence his name.

That 'book of remembrance' means the New Testament.

St Augustine, De Civitate Dei, 18.35; tr. Bettenson (1972).

Season of the Year / Week 19

Sunday of the Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE PROPHET JONAH

(The call of Jonah, his flight and shipwreck: Jonah 1: - 2:1-2, 11)

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.

But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god; and they threw the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down, and was fast asleep. So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call upon your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we do not perish."

And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. Then they said to him, "Tell us, on whose account this evil has come upon us? What is your occupation? And whence do you come? What is your country? And of what people are you?" And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. He said to them, "Take me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you; for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you." Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring the ship back to land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. Therefore they cried to the LORD, "We beseech thee, O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood; for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee." So they took up Jonah and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, saying, "I called to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and thou didst hear my voice." And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON PSALM 43 BY ST AMBROSE OF MILAN

See for yourselves the differences there are between the gospel narrative and what we read about Jonah; he lying asleep in the interior of the ship, in which he prefigured a type of the Lord in his passion. For just as Jonah was plunged into a deep sleep within the ship, without a thought of being woken up, so did our Lord Jesus Christ, who in the mystery of his death provided the antitype of that Old Testament figure, sleep soundly during his lifetime, as the gospel tells us, in a boat. And just as Jonah passed three days and nights in the belly of a whale, so did the Son of Man spend three days in the heart of the earth after his death. But after he had raised himself from the dead and roused his body from its sleep for the salvation of all, he visited his disciples.

Christ, then, is the true Jonah, who gave his life for our redemption. For this reason he was taken up on deck and cast overboard into the sea in order to be swallowed up by the whale. Job had this to say about the whale: He holds in captivity a huge sea monster. And what kind of beast is this meant to be? You will know when you read that our Lord Jesus Christ took captivity captive. Once our adversary and bitter enemy had been subdued, we, who had been under his dominion, began to enjoy our liberty, thanks to Christ.

The prayer itself of holy Jonah throws some light upon the mystery of the Lord's passion, for he said, I have cried out to the Lord in my affliction, and my voice has reached him from the depths of Sheol – not, you will notice, from the depths of the whale's belly. For it was into Hades that the Lord went down, not in any whale, so that he might loose those who were detained there from their everlasting bonds.

Now, who was it that offered to the Lord God his sacrifice with praise and thanksgiving if not our great High Priest himself, who made his vows and paid them on behalf of all of us? For he alone could make his sacrifice effective. Just as Jonah, by being cast into the sea, was able to allay its fury, so did our Lord Jesus Christ, by coming into the world, win it for himself, and through his blood he established it everywhere – in heaven and on earth. By his coming he redeemed all men and women, and by his deeds he brought them all to love and worship God; he raised the dead and healed the sick, implanting in people's souls a reverence for God. He it was who offered to the Father a sacrifice of atonement on our behalf, presenting God with an oblation capable of justifying us. He it was who slept and woke again.

St Ambrose, In Ps. 43, 83-85 (PL 14:1183-1184, 1129-1139); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET JONAH

(The conversion of the Ninevites and Jonah's debate with God: Jonah 3:1 – 4:11)

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he cried, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

Then tidings reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, and covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he made proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them cry mightily to God; yea, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may yet repent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we perish not?"

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God repented of the evil which he had said he would do to them; and he did not do it.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the LORD and said, "I pray thee, LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repentest of evil. Therefore now, O LORD, take my life from me, I beseech thee, for it is better for me to die than to live." And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?" Then Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city.

And the LORD God appointed a plant, and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm which attacked the plant, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God appointed a sultry east wind, and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah so that he was faint; and he asked that he might die, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "I do well to be angry, angry enough to die." And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labour, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON JONAH BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

And God saw what they did, and how they abandoned their wicked ways. The Lord is quick to show mercy and will save the penitent, immediately absolving them from their former guilt; so that if men give up their sinful habits God ceases to be angry, and His attitude toward them changes to one of kindness. Because he sees that they have turned their minds toward good, he is led to be gentle, and no longer thinks of destroying them. His own words show the truth of this: Why should you die, you men of Israel? said the Lord. I do not desire any man's death, but his repentance and life. Do not think that the Lord's reproaches are spoken with malevolence or in hurtful anger; for our God who loves virtue is no worker of evil.

What incomparable kindness, beyond our understanding! What words of ours could suffice to praise him? What thanksgiving can we sing to celebrate his compassion and goodness? For he separates our offences from us, as the psalmist says. See how, in the case of Jonah, God shows him plunged in grief at the wrong time and for the wrong reason, just when as a holy man he ought to have been loud in praise of the Lord. If you are sad, God said to him, or rather if you are in the depths of despair because you have lost the shade of your gourd, a plant that grew up in a single night and perished in the same way, am I to care nothing about a populous city, with more than a hundred and twenty thousand inhabitants not of an age to tell the difference between their right and left hands? By this he means they were still infants, and because they were innocent they above all naturally deserved mercy. For how should a babe who cannot yet tell right hand from left be involved in sin? But the Lord names even cattle as worthy of pity, and here too he shows his goodness of heart. For if a righteous man has a humane regard for his animals, and this too is considered praise-worthy, it is no wonder that the very God of all things should grant mercy and pity even to the beasts of the field.

So Christ saved all men, giving himself as a ransom for both small and great, wise and foolish, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile.

St Cyril of Alexandria, In Ionam 3.23; 4.29 (PG 71:631-638); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH

(The salvation of Zion is promised: Zechariah 9:1 – 10:2)

The word of the LORD is against the land of Hadrach and will rest upon Damascus. For to the LORD belong the cities of Aram, even as all the tribes of Israel; Hamath also, which borders thereon, Tyre and Sidon, though they are very wise. Tyre has built herself a rampart, and heaped up silver like dust, and gold like the dirt of the streets. But lo, the Lord will strip her of her possessions and hurl her wealth into the sea, and she shall be devoured by fire.

Ashkelon shall see it, and be afraid; Gaza too, and shall writhe in anguish; Ekron also, because its hopes are confounded. The king shall perish from Gaza; Ashkelon shall be uninhabited; a mongrel people shall dwell in Ashdod; and I will make an end of the pride of Philistia. I will take away its blood from its mouth, and its abominations from between its teeth; it too shall be a remnant for our God; it shall be like a clan in Judah, and Ekron shall be like the Jebusites. Then I will encamp at my house as a guard, so that none shall march to and fro; no oppressor shall again overrun them, for now I see with my own eyes.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your captives free from the waterless pit. Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double. For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will brandish your sons, O Zion, over your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior's sword.

Then the LORD will appear over them, and his arrow go forth like lightning; the Lord GOD will sound the trumpet, and march forth in the whirlwinds of the south. The LORD of hosts will protect them, and they shall devour and tread down the slingers; and they shall drink their blood like wine, and be full like a bowl, drenched like the corners of the altar.

On that day the LORD their God will save them for they are the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land. Yea, how good and how fair it shall be! Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the maidens.

Ask rain from the LORD in the season of the spring rain, from the LORD who makes the storm clouds, who gives men showers of rain, to every one the vegetation in the field. For the teraphim utter nonsense, and the diviners see lies; the dreamers tell false dreams, and give empty consolation. Therefore the people wander like sheep; they are afflicted for want of a shepherd.

A READING FROM THE SERMONS OF ST ANDREW OF CRETE

Let us join in the words of the gospel and say to Christ: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel. Let us wave before him like palm branches his dying words on the cross. Let us greet him, not with olive branches, but with the good deeds of mercy shown to one another. Let us strew beneath his feet like garments the desires of our hearts, that he may walk in us and dwell wholly in us, that he may reveal us whole in himself and himself in us. Let us greet Zion with the words of the Prophet: Rejoice O daughter of Zion, do not fear: Lo, your king comes to you, gentle, and riding on an ass, the foal of an ass.

He is coming, he who is present in every place and fills all things, that in you he may bring about the salvation of all men. He is coming, who came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance, that he may recall those wander-ing in sin. Therefore do not be afraid, God is in the midst of you, you will not be moved.

Receive in your upturned hands the God who adorned your walls and set them in his own hands. Receive him who laid your foundations in the palms of his hands. Receive him who took upon himself all our nature apart from sin to pay all our debts from his treasures. Rejoice, city of Zion, our mother, do not be afraid. Keep your feasts. Glorify for his mercy him who has come to us in you. Rejoice very greatly, daughter of Jerusalem, sing and dance. Arise, shine – we greet you with the sound of the sacred trumpet, as Isaiah said – for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

What is that light? Was it not the light which enlightens every man who comes into the world, the eternal light, I mean, the timeless light revealed in time, the light revealed in the flesh and hidden by nature, the light which shone around the shepherds and led the wise men on their way? It was the light which was in the world from the beginning, through which the world was made, and yet the world knew it not. It was the light that came to its own home and its own people received it not.

What does the glory of the Lord mean? For sure it is the cross on which Christ was glorified, Christ the brightness of the Father's glory, as he himself said when he came to his passion. Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified and God will glorify him at once, meaning here by 'glory' his being lifted up on the cross. The glory of Christ is the cross and his being lifted up, for he says: And I, when I am lifted up, will draw all men to myself.

St Andrew of Crete, Oratio 9 In Psalmos; The Divine Office III.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH

(The liberation and return of Israel: Zechariah 10:3 – 11:3)

“My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders; for the LORD of hosts cares for his flock, the house of Judah, and will make them like his proud steed in battle. 4 Out of them shall come the cornerstone, out of them the tent peg, out of them the battle bow, out of them every ruler. Together they shall be like mighty men in battle, trampling the foe in the mud of the streets; they shall fight because the LORD is with them, and they shall confound the riders on horses.

“I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back because I have compassion on them, and they shall be as though I had not rejected them; for I am the LORD their God and I will answer them. Then Ephraim shall become like a mighty warrior, and their hearts shall be glad as with wine. Their children shall see it and rejoice, their hearts shall exult in the LORD.

“I will signal for them and gather them in, for I have redeemed them, and they shall be as many as of old. Though I scattered them among the nations, yet in far countries they shall remember me, and with their children they shall live and return. I will bring them home from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria; and I will bring them to the land of Gilead and to Lebanon, till there is no room for them. They shall pass through the sea of Egypt, and the waves of the sea shall be smitten, and all the depths of the Nile dried up. The pride of Assyria shall be laid low, and the sceptre of Egypt shall depart. I will make them strong in the LORD and they shall glory in his name,” says the LORD.

Open your doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour your cedars! Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen, for the glorious trees are ruined! Wail, oaks of Bashan, for the thick forest has been felled! Hark, the wail of the shepherds, for their glory is despoiled! Hark, the roar of the lions, for the jungle of the Jordan is laid waste!

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ZECHARIAH BY DIDYMUS THE BLIND

After being angry, the Lord God, almighty as he is, will heal to their advantage those fallen victim to his wrath. The Lord God, almighty as he is, will attend to his flock; of him it is said also in Micah, He shall stand and see, and shall shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, who is Saviour. Now, the only-begotten Son of God is the Lord God almighty since the Trinity is of one being, and the one who is generated is of one being with the one who generated him, the Saviour is Lord God almighty from Lord God almighty. After all, how is the one who was in the beginning with God not Lord God? And just as it was through him that all things were made, so, too, he controls and reigns over them, and so is in this respect almighty.

This person, recognized as God, therefore, came on earth to find and save the human race, the one sheep that had gone astray from the hundred rational ones; as an excellent shepherd he laid down his life for the sheep he came to save, and thus attended to his

very own flock. They are the house of Judah, of whom it is said, Judah, your brothers will praise you. And since the transformation of those given this favour is swift, he will draw up those constituting his flock to be like a single handsome horse; this benefit occurred when those with a longing for his coming sent a delegation and said, Mount the horses, and your riding will be salvation.

From this house of Judah, from a flock turned into a handsome horse, he looked down and drew from it a bow, from which he discharges arrows, the words of punishment and threat. In reference to them the one who drew the bow said, I shall make my arrows drunk with blood, and again, My arrows will put paid to them. After these achievements the Lord their God will be on their side to fight for them, and so they will say in gratitude, The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our protector, and again, With God we shall exercise power, and he himself will reduce our oppressors to naught.

Having God with them, they will confidently be deployed against those on whom they wage battle and war, so that each of them says in thanksgiving, The Lord is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear? The Lord is the protector of my life: whom shall I dread? With the same boldness the singer of the third psalm also had the confidence to say, I shall not fear countless numbers of people encircling me. To those prepared for battle in this way Scripture says encouragingly, One of you will pursue thousands, and two will put to flight myriads, not only human adversaries but unseen ones as well; in their contest with them the soldiers of Christ are clad in his armour, and say, Our contest is not with flesh and blood, but with the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic forces of this present darkness, and the spiritual forces of evil.

Didymus the Blind, In Zach. 10; FoC 111 (2006) tr. Hill.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH

(The parable of the shepherds: Zechariah 11:4 – 12:8)

Thus said the LORD my God: “Become shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter. Those who buy them slay them and go unpunished; and those who sell them say, ‘Blessed be the LORD, I have become rich’; and their own shepherds have no pity on them. For I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of this land, says the LORD. Lo, I will cause men to fall each into the hand of his shepherd, and each into the hand of his king; and they shall crush the earth, and I will deliver none from their hand.”

So I became the shepherd of the flock doomed to be slain for those who trafficked in the sheep. And I took two staves; one I named Grace, the other I named Union. And I tended the sheep. In one month I destroyed the three shepherds. But I became impatient with them, and they also detested me. So I said, “I will not be your shepherd. What is to die, let it die; what is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed; and let those that are left devour the flesh of one another.”

And I took my staff Grace, and I broke it, annulling the covenant which I had made with all the peoples. So it was annulled on that day, and the traffickers in the sheep, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the LORD. Then I said to them, “If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.” And they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver. Then the LORD said to me, “Cast it into the treasury” – the lordly price at which I was paid off by them. So I took the thirty shekels of silver and cast them into the treasury in the house of the LORD. Then I broke my second staff Union, annulling the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

Then the LORD said to me, “Take once more the implements of a worthless shepherd. For lo, I am raising up in the land a shepherd who does not care for the perishing, or seek the wandering, or heal the maimed, or nourish the sound, but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs. Woe to my worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword smite his arm and his right eye! Let his arm be wholly withered, his right eye utterly blinded!”

The word of the LORD concerning Israel: Thus says the LORD, who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the spirit of man within him: “Lo, I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of reeling to all the peoples round about; it will be against Judah also in the siege against Jerusalem. On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it shall grievously hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth will come together against it. On that day, says the LORD, I will strike every horse with panic, and its rider with madness. But upon the house of Judah I will open my eyes, when I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness. Then the clans of Judah shall say to themselves, ‘The inhabitants of Jerusalem have strength through the LORD of hosts, their God.’

“On that day I will make the clans of Judah like a blazing pot in the midst of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves; and they shall devour to the right and to the left all the peoples round about, while Jerusalem shall still be inhabited in its place, in Jerusalem.

“And the LORD will give victory to the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem may not be exalted over that of Judah. On that day the LORD will put a shield about the inhabitants of Jerusalem so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the LORD, at their head.”

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

Where do you pasture your flock, O good shepherd, you -who take on your shoulders the whole flock, for the whole of human nature which you take on your shoulders forms one sheep? Show me the place of green pastures and the restful waters, lead me to the grass which nourishes, call -me by name, so that I who am your sheep may hear your voice. Give me by your voice eternal life. Speak to me, you whom my soul loves.

This is how I name you, for your name is above every -name and cannot be uttered or comprehended by any rational nature. Your name which reveals your goodness is the love my soul has for you. How can I not love you who loved me, even though I was black, so much that you laid down your life for the sheep whose shepherd you are? Greater love than this cannot be conceived, that you should purchase my salvation with your life.

Show me then, she says, where you pasture your flock that I may find the pasture of salvation and be satisfied with heavenly food, that food which a man must eat to enter into eternal life. I shall run to you, the fountain, I shall drink the heavenly draught which you pour forth for those who thirst, pouring water out of your side like a fountain when the veins were opened with the spear. If any man tastes of this he becomes a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

If you feed me with these things you will make me lie down at noon, when, sleeping in peace, I shall rest in light that knows no shade. For everywhere at noon there is no shade when the sun shines over the peak upon which you make to lie down those whom you pasture, when you take your children with you into bed. None is thought worthy of this noontime rest unless he has become the son of light and of the day. He who has placed himself at an equal distance from the shadows of the dawn and of nightfall, that is from the beginning and the conclusion of evil, that man is made to lie down to rest at midday by the sun of righteousness.

Show me then, she says, how I must sleep and what is the way to the noontime rest, that I may not lose your good and guiding hand and be brought by ignorance of truth to join the flock of sheep who are strangers to your flock.

This she said when she was anxious about the beauty which she had been given by God, when she wished to learn how her loveliness might remain for ever.

St Gregory of Nyssa, In Cant., 2; The Divine Office III.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH

(Salvation in Jerusalem: Zechariah 12:9 – 13: 9)

“And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land shall mourn, each family by itself; the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shime-ites by itself, and their wives by themselves; and all the families that are left, each by itself, and their wives by themselves.

“On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

“And on that day, says the LORD of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more; and also I will remove from the land the prophets and the unclean spirit. And if any one again appears as a prophet, his father and mother who bore him will say to him, ‘You shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of the LORD’; and his father and mother who bore him shall pierce him through when he prophesies. On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies; he will not put on a hairy mantle in order to deceive, but he will say, ‘I am no prophet, I am a tiller of the soil; for the land has been my possession since my youth.’ And if one asks him, ‘What are these wounds on your back?’ he will say, ‘The wounds I received in the house of my friends.’”

“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me,” says the LORD of hosts. “Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones. In the whole land, says the LORD, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive. And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’”

A READING FROM THE SERMONS OF BY ST AUGUSTINE

While our Lord Jesus Christ can be seen, as far as his divinity is concerned, by the eyes of the heart that are pure, perfect and full of God, he was, nonetheless, also seen in the body, according to what is written, After this she appeared on earth and spent time among men. So how do I know in what sense it said, All flesh shall see the salvation of God? That it will see Christ has been said, nobody should have any doubts about that.

But whether the Lord Christ in the body, or as he was in the beginning, the Word: and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, that's what we are enquiring about. Don't just press one piece of evidence on me; I'm quite ready to admit, All flesh shall see the salvation of God. They say this means, 'All flesh shall see the Christ of God.' But Christ was also seen in the flesh; that indeed the mortal flesh, if that spiritual transfiguration is still to be called flesh; because he did say himself after the resurrection, to those who could see and touch him, Feel and see that a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you can see that I have. He will be seen like that too; not only has been seen but also will be.

And perhaps it is then that the words all flesh will be more perfectly fulfilled. Now, I mean to say, flesh has seen him, but not all flesh. Then however, at the judgement, as he comes with his angels to judge the living and the dead, when all who are in the tombs hear his voice and come forth, some to the resurrection of life, others to the resurrection of the judgement, it is not only the just, but also the wicked who shall see him. Then both those on the right and these on the left will see that form which he was pleased to take on for us. Even those who killed him will look on the one whom they have pierced. So all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Body will be seen by body; because he will come to judge in his real body.

The just Simeon saw him with his heart, because he recognized the infant; and he saw him with his eyes, because he took the infant in his arms. Seeing him in both ways, recognising the Son of God, and holding the one begotten of the virgin, he said, Now, Lord, you are letting your servant go in peace, since my eyes have seen your salvation. Notice what he said. You see, he was being kept until he should see with his eyes what he already perceived with faith. How do you know that isn't the way in which all flesh is going to see the salvation of God?

When he was carried up to heaven before the very eyes of his disciples, and they were watching him, they heard the angels say, Men of Galilee, why are you standing, gazing up into heaven? This Jesus who has been taken from you, will come in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven. He will come, visible, to judgement, because he departed, visible, into heaven. If he departed visible and comes invisible, how will he come in the same way? But if he comes in the same way, he will come visible; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

St Augustine, Sermon 277.16-17; WSA (1994) tr. Hill.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH

(The tribulations and glory of Jerusalem in the last time: Zechariah 14:1-21)

Behold, a day of the LORD is coming, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in the midst of you. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women ravished; half of the city shall go into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward. And the valley of my mountains shall be stopped up, for the valley of the mountains shall touch the side of it; and you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD your God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

On that day there shall be neither cold nor frost. And there shall be continuous day (it is known to the LORD), not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light.

On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it shall continue in summer as in winter.

And the LORD will become king over all the earth; on that day the LORD will be one and his name one.

The whole land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem shall remain aloft upon its site from the Gate of Benjamin to the place of the former gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's wine presses. And it shall be inhabited, for there shall be no more curse; Jerusalem shall dwell in security.

And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will smite all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh shall rot while they are still on their feet, their eyes shall rot in their sockets, and their tongues shall rot in their mouths. And on that day a great panic from the LORD shall fall on them, so that each will lay hold on the hand of his fellow, and the hand of the one will be raised against the hand of the other; even Judah will fight against Jerusalem. And the wealth of all the nations round about shall be collected, gold, silver, and garments in great abundance. And a plague like this plague shall fall on the horses, the mules, the camels, the asses, and whatever beasts may be in those camps.

Then every one that survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of booths. And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain upon them. And if the family of Egypt do not go up and present themselves, then upon them shall come the plague with which the LORD afflicts the nations that do not go up to keep the feast of booths. This shall be the

punishment to Egypt and the punishment to all the nations that do not go up to keep the feast of booths.

And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "Holy to the LORD." And the pots in the house of the LORD shall be as the bowls before the altar; and every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be sacred to the LORD of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the flesh of the sacrifice in them. And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ZECHARIAH BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western, in summer as in winter. And the Lord will be king over the whole earth.

The Prophet again tells us symbolically that the most abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the faithful will be assigned to that time above all at which they are restored to holy and everlasting life, I mean, life as in the world to come. For now we are enriched by the first fruits of the Holy Spirit as by way of a pledge through faith in Christ. But after the resurrection of the dead, when sin has been altogether destroyed, we shall possess the divine Spirit within us no longer in the likeness and measure of a pledge but richly and abundantly, and then our delight in the gifts we receive through Christ will be complete.

So it is indeed the Spirit that the Prophet calls living water, when he tells us it will flow out even from the Jerusalem above. For since holy Scripture has said that the God of the universe dwells in heaven, though he is everywhere and fills the universe, it is in that way then that the Prophet says that the life-giving Spirit will flow even from heaven. But the divine Spirit is often compared to water in holy Scripture, as the giver of the Spirit, that is, the Son, will himself confirm, saying: Those who believe in me, as Scripture has said: streams of living water will flow from their hearts. And the holy evangelist goes on to interpret these words and make them clear, telling us: He said this about the Spirit, whom those who believe in him were going to receive. For since the Spirit is life-giving it is quite rightly compared in this way to water, which is life-giving to our bodies.

But to indicate how richly it is given to those considered worthy of holy life to share in the gift of the Holy Spirit and be filled as with life-giving water, the Prophet tells us: of the water expected to flow from Jerusalem at the appointed time, half will flow to the eastern sea and half to the western. But what exactly does this mean? Holy Scripture often likens the many nations of humanity and their countless multitudes to seas and waters. And through one of the holy Prophets we are told somewhere: For the whole earth is full of knowledge of the Lord, as much water will cover the seas. Then it is the fact that God will distribute the grace of the Spirit in equal measure to believers of both Jewish and Gentile origin that the Prophet indicates when he tells us about the life-giving water. And we are not saying by any means that the Holy Spirit is divided, and will be imperfect in both because of the word 'half'. Far from it. Instead we shall believe that the Prophet wishes to imply by this word that the distribution will be assigned with

equal grace to both. For the entire world will be full of the gifts that come through Christ, but the gift will dwell wholly in those who have received it. Then indeed, the Lord will be king over the whole earth.

St Cyril of Alexandria, Comm. In Zachariam (PG 72:252-256); Word in Season VIII.

Season of the Year | Week 20

Sunday of the Twentieth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

(The vanity of all things: Ecclesiastes 1:1-18)

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains for ever. The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises. The wind blows to the south, and goes round to the north; round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again. All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, "See, this is new"? It has been already, in the ages before us. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to happen among those who come after.

I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with. I have seen everything that is done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind. What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be numbered.

I said to myself, "I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge." And I applied my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

A READING FROM THE FOUR CENTURIES ON LOVE BY ST MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR

Love is a good disposition of the soul, according to which one prefers no creature to the knowledge of God. It is impossible to attain a lasting possession of this love if one has any attachment to earthly things.

He who loves God prefers knowledge of him to all things made by him; and by desire ceaselessly devotes himself to it.

If all things have been made by God and for God, he is nobler than all the things made by him; he who deserts God, the incomparably nobler, and devotes himself to inferior things shows that he prefers before God the things made by him.

He that loves me, says the Lord, will keep my commandments; and this is my commandment that you love one another. He therefore who does not love his neighbour does not keep the commandment. Nor is he that does not keep the commandment able to love the Lord.

Happy the man who is able to love all men equally.

He that loves God most certainly also loves his neighbour. Such a man cannot keep money, but, God-like, distributes it, giving to each one in need.

He that in imitation of God does almsdeeds knows no difference between evil and good, just and unjust, in regard to the needs of the body, but distributes equally to all according to their need, even though for his good intention he prefers the virtuous to the bad.

Not only by the distribution of money is a charitable intention made manifest; no, far rather by the distribution of the word of God and physical service of others.

He that genuinely renounces worldly affairs and unfeignedly serves his neighbour out of love, quickly is freed from every passion and is made partaker of divine love and knowledge.

He that has made divine love his possession has no labour in following after the Lord his God, as Jeremiah says; rather, he bears nobly every hardship, every rebuke and insult, thinking no evil at all of anyone.

Do not say – so Jeremiah – that you are the Lord's temple. Nor say: Mere faith in our lord Jesus Christ can save me. For this is ineffective unless you also possess love for him through good works. As to mere believing: the devils also believe and tremble. The work of love is the intentional doing of good to one's neighbour and long-suffering and patience; also the use of things in due measure.

St Maximus the Confessor, Centuries on Love 1.1, 4-5; 16-17; 23-24; 26-28; 39-40; The Divine Office I.

Monday of the Twentieth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

(The vanity of pleasure and of human wisdom: Ecclesiastes 2:1-3, 12-26)

I said to myself, "Come now, I will make a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself." But behold, this also was vanity. I said of laughter, "It is mad", and of pleasure, "What use is it?"

So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly; for what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what he has already done. Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. The wise man has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness; and yet I perceived that one fate comes to all of them. Then I said to myself, "What befalls the fool will befall me also; why then have I been so very wise?" And I said to myself that this also is vanity. For of the wise man as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise man dies just like the fool! So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me; for all is vanity and a striving after wind.

I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me; and who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labours under the sun, because sometimes a man who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by a man who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. What has a man from all the toil and strain with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of pain, and his work is a vexation; even in the night his mind does not rest. This also is vanity.

There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God; for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the man who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

Solomon condemns pleasures as futile. For he says, I said in my heart, 'Come hither, I will test you in pleasure and also in good, and this too is vanity. For he did not give himself to this kind of experience straight away or slide into partaking of pleasures without having tasted the austere and more devout life. Rather, after training himself in austerity and achieving in his character the severity and determination through which the lessons of wisdom come most readily, he then descends to things considered agreeable to the senses. He does this not because he is drawn down to them by passion but in order to investigate whether sensual experience makes any contribution to our knowledge of the Good.

That is why he makes his own what he had originally regarded as alien, laughter. He calls laughter dizziness, which is equivalent in meaning to 'frenzy' or 'madness': for what else would anyone properly call laughter? It is neither speech nor activity directed to any end but an unseemly loss of bodily control.

But I, he says, sought the true Good, which is equally good at any age and every time of life, and which never reaches fullness. Appetite for it and enjoying it are exactly matched, and longing flourishes together with enjoyment and is not limited by the attainment of what is desired. The more it delights in the Good, the more desire flames up with delight: the delight matches the desire, and at each stage of life it is always a delight to those who partake of it.

This, as I understand it, is the true Good, the thing Solomon sought to see, it is none other than the work of faith. This is the good work, which I pray may be done in us too, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Solomon therefore teaches what human wisdom is, which you also call counsel. But the real wisdom and counsel, on my reckoning, is none other than the Wisdom that is conceived of as before the universe. It is that wisdom by which God made all things, as the Prophet says, by wisdom you made all things and Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, by which all things came to be and were set in order.

St Gregory of Nyssa, In Eccles. 2, 5; ACC (2005) tr. Hall.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

(A diversity of seasons: Ecclesiastes 3:1-15)

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace. What gain has the worker from his toil?

I have seen the business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; also that it is God's gift to man that every one should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil. I know that whatever God does endures for ever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has made it so, in order that men should fear before him. That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.

Moreover I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work. I said in my heart with regard to the sons of men that God is testing them to show them that they are but beasts. For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth? So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should enjoy his work, for that is his lot; who can bring him to see what will be after him?

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON ECCLESIASTES OF ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

Ecclesiastes says: There is a time to be born and a time to die. Right from the beginning he fittingly compressed this necessary etymo-logical relation, bringing together death and procreation. For death necessarily follows upon birth and every birth ends in destruction.

There is a time, he says, to be born and a time to die. May we also receive the grace to be born at the right time and die at the opportune moment. For no one could assert that Ecclesiastes is here presenting this procreation as involuntary and death as

spontaneous, as if such were the ordinary process of virtue. Neither the act of giving birth takes place by the will of the woman, nor is death subject to the free choice of those who must die. What does not depend on us cannot be reckoned as virtue or vice by anyone. Hence, it is necessary to inquire about what is the birth that happens at a right time and what is the death that comes at an opportune moment.

I believe that a birth is right and not out of its time when – as Isaiah says – someone has conceived out of the fear of God and through the travails of the soul in birth generates his own salvation. For we are in a certain sense our own parents, when through the good disposition of our soul and complete freedom of our will we form and generate and bring ourselves to the light.

We do this by the fact that we bring God into ourselves, having become children of God, children of virtue, and children of the Most High. On the other hand, we bring ourselves into the world out of due time and form ourselves in an imperfect and immature manner when there has not been formed in us the image of Christ, to use the words of the Apostle. For it is necessary that the man of God be without reproach and perfect.

If the manner in which we are born at the right time is evident, equally clear to all is the way we die at the opportune moment and the way every moment was in the eyes of Saint Paul opportune for a good death. For he cries out in his writing, pronouncing in a certain way an oath when he says: For your sake we are being slain all the day long. And we bear within our very selves the sentence of death.

Furthermore, the manner in which Paul dies each day is not obscure; he never lives in sin; he always mortifies the members of the flesh and ever bears within him the mortification of the body of Christ, for he is always crucified with Christ and never lives for himself but ever has Christ living in him. This in my opinion was the favourable death which was leading to true life.

In fact, he says: I will put to death and give life; in order that he may persuade others that it is really a gift of God to be dead to sin and to be alive in the Spirit. The divine word – precisely because he has put to death – promises to give life.

St Gregory of Nyssa, In Eccl. 6 (PG 44:701-703); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

(The vanity of riches: Ecclesiastes 5:9 – 6:8)

In all, a king is an advantage to a land with cultivated fields.

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money; nor he who loves wealth, with gain: this also is vanity.

When goods increase, they increase who eat them; and what gain has their owner but to see them with his eyes?

Sweet is the sleep of a labourer, whether he eats little or much; but the surfeit of the rich will not let him sleep.

There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, and those riches were lost in a bad venture; and he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil, which he may carry away in his hand. This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go; and what gain has he that he toiled for the wind, and spent all his days in darkness and grief, in much vexation and sickness and resentment?

Behold, what I have seen to be good and to be fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life which God has given him, for this is his lot. Every man also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and find enjoyment in his toil – this is the gift of God. For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy upon men: a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honour, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them; this is vanity; it is a sore affliction. If a man begets a hundred children, and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but he does not enjoy life's good things, and also has no burial, I say that an untimely birth is better off than he. For it comes into vanity and goes into darkness, and in darkness its name is covered; moreover it has not seen the sun or known anything; yet it finds rest rather than he. Even though he should live a thousand years twice told, yet enjoy no good – do not all go to the one place?

All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied. For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living?

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES BY ST JEROME

Any man to whom God gives riches and property, and grants power to partake of them, so that he receives his lot and finds joy in the fruits of his toil, has a gift from God. For he

will hardly dwell on the shortness of his life, because God lets him busy himself with the joy of his heart. In comparison with the man who feeds himself on a diet of dark preoccupations and with notable tedium for life brings with him wherever he goes things which will lead to ruin, Ecclesiastes affirms that that man is better who uses the things before him. For the use of the latter will impart a little delight; whereas there is only great anguish in the concern for the former. And he lists the reasons for which it is a gift of God to be able to enjoy riches. For he will hardly dwell on the shortness of his life.

God will certainly distract him in the joy of his heart: he will not be in sadness, he will not be tormented by apprehension, distracted as he is by present joy and pleasure. But according to the Apostle it is better to understand the spiritual food and drink given by God to discern the good in every work of one's own, because it is by means of a very great labour and application that we can contemplate the true goods. And our reward is to be able to rejoice in our study and our work. That which can also be good is not completely good, however, until Christ has been manifested in our life.

All man's toil is for his mouth, yet his desire is not fulfilled. For what advantage has a wise man over the fool, or what advantage has the poor man in knowing how to conduct himself in life? Everything that men produce by working in this world is consumed by the mouth and, after being chewed by the teeth, is consigned to the stomach to be digested. And after giving delight to the throat for a while, it appears to give greater pleasure to the extent that it is held in the jaws.

And after all this, the soul of the person who eats is not satisfied: either because he desires once again what he has eaten, and with-out food neither the wise man nor the fool can live, and the poor man does not seek anything else but how he can feed his little stomach so that he may not die of starvation; or because the soul receives nothing useful from the restoration of the body, since food is common both to the wise man and to the fool, and the poor man goes wherever he sees resources.

It is better instead to take this as the thought of Ecclesiastes, namely, that the person who is learned in the heavenly Scriptures does every work for his mouth, yet his desire is not fulfilled insofar as he continuously seeks to learn. And in this the wise man has an advantage over the fool: because when he discovers that he is poor - that poor man who is declared blest by the gospel - he hastens to acquire those goods that form part of life and to tread the straight and narrow path that leads to life, and he is poor in evil deeds, and knows where Christ, who is life, resides.

St Jerome, In Eccl. (PL 23:1057-1059); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

(“Do not make yourself over wise” : Ecclesiastes 7:1 – 8:1)

A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death, than the day of birth. It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting; for this is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of countenance the heart is made glad. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools; this also is vanity. Surely oppression makes the wise man foolish, and a bribe corrupts the mind. Better is the end of a thing than its beginning; and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Be not quick to anger, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools. Say not, “Why were the former days better than these?” For it is not from wisdom that you ask this. Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun. For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money; and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it. Consider the work of God; who can make straight what he has made crooked?

In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

In my vain life I have seen everything; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evil-doing. Be not righteous overmuch, and do not make yourself over wise; why should you destroy yourself? Be not wicked overmuch, neither be a fool; why should you die before your time? It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand; for he who fears God shall come forth from them all.

Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers that are in a city.

Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

Do not give heed to all the things that men say, lest you hear your servant cursing you; your heart knows that many times you have yourself cursed others.

All this I have tested by wisdom; I said, “I will be wise”; but it was far from me. That which is, is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out? I turned my mind to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the sum of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness which is madness. And I found more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters; he who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her. Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, adding one thing to another to find the sum, which my mind has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found. Behold, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many devices.

Who is like the wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his countenance is changed.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES BY DIDYMUS THE BLIND

Whoever does not focus attention on perishable goods and does not think highly of them but knows that it is better to be with Christ after death thinks that the day of death is better than the day of birth. The latter is the beginning of many evils; the former, however, the end and termination of evil.

Where there is mourning, there is no moral superficiality. Happiness and laughter are avoided; the calamity prohibits it. Sometimes we refrain from appearing happy out of regard for those who mourn and for those who experience harm. In the house of feasting, however, the opposite happens: Dances and songs bring reproof, since they indicate a disorderly life. The 'house', however, signifies a condition or an attitude, not a location. The one who goes to the house of mourning knows that everyone dies in the end. Once he knows that he has to die, he will not think about and dedicate his effort to owning something if it is a possession that is lost in death such as wealth, reputation and honour.

One can understand 'the living' in the following way: one who lives according to God's will. Those people are Abraham and his descendants. God has created human beings straightforward, that is, morally perfect without anything crooked or oblique. But they themselves produce many thoughts. Evil, thus, is manifold. There is only one single human form that makes a person like God, but there are many into which he can transform himself. If he is cunning, he has the face of a fox; if he shows a poisonous, dangerous face, he has the face of a snake; if he looks wild, he has the face of a lion; if his face is ungovernable, flattering and desiring pleasures, he has the face of a dog. Generally out of one human being and one form emerge a whole plurality of characters and forms. Thus it is the goal to get rid of all forms – even if some people do not share this opinion – in order to show that he has the face that God created.

God knows the reasons for everything that came into being, and he knows why they are hidden. In no way do you have sufficient knowledge of God's creations. If you take offence at them, this is because you are not reasonable. Watch God's creatures! What for others is a reason for offence will be for you knowledge of the Creator and of the created.

Didymus the Blind, In Eccl. 197.14 – 198.22, 209.26, 231.13; ACC (2005) tr. Wright.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

(The consolation of wisdom: Ecclesiastes 8:5 – 9:10)

He who obeys a command will meet no harm, and the mind of a wise man will know the time and way. For every matter has its time and way, although man's trouble lies heavy upon him. For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be? No man has power to retain the spirit, or authority over the day of death; there is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it. All this I observed while applying my mind to all that is done under the sun, while man lords it over man to his hurt.

Then I saw the wicked buried; they used to go in and out of the holy place, and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity. Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil. Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him; but it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

There is a vanity which takes place on earth, that there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity. And I commend enjoyment, for man has no good thing under the sun but to eat and drink, and enjoy himself, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of life which God gives him under the sun.

When I applied my mind to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night one's eyes see sleep; then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out; even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.

But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God; whether it is love or hate man does not know. Everything before them is vanity, since one fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good man, so is the sinner; and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that one fate comes to all; also the hearts of men are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward; but the memory of them is lost. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and they have no more for ever any share in all that is done under the sun.

Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already approved what you do.

Let your garments be always white; let not oil be lacking on your head.

Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life which he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES BY ST GREGORY OF AGRIGENTO

Go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart, because it is now that God favours your works.

If we want to explain this sentence in an obvious and ordinary way, we rightly assert that it appears as a just exhortation by which the Preacher admonishes us to embrace a simple rule of life dedicated to sincere faith in God and joyfully eat bread and drink wine in peace of mind; not to slip into evil conversations, nor wander into roundabout paths; but rather to dwell always on good things and, insofar as we can, benevolently and kindly come to the aid of the poor and needy. We must abandon ourselves precisely to those sentiments and actions in which God himself takes delight.

However, the anagogical explanation brings us to a higher knowledge and teaches us to consider the celestial and mystical bread which has come down from heaven and brought life to the world; and with a right heart to drink the spiritual wine, namely, that which issued from the side of the true vine immediately at the moment of his saving passion. Concerning these, the gospel of our salvation says: Taking bread and giving thanks, Jesus said to his disciples and Apostles: Take this and eat it: this is my body, which is sacrificed for you in remission of sins. Similarly, he took the cup and said: All of you must drink from it, for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins. Hence, those who eat this bread and drink this mystical wine really rejoice and exult and can exclaim in a loud voice: You put gladness into my heart.

Furthermore, I believe that even in the Book of Proverbs the Wisdom of God subsisting in himself, namely, Christ our Saviour, referred to this bread and wine when he said: Come, eat of my food, and drink of the wine I have mixed, indicating the mystical participation in the Word. Indeed, those to whom these words are to be applied, because of their merits, at all times present their vestments as works of light no less resplendent than the light itself, as the Lord says in the gospels: Your light must shine before all so that they may see goodness in your acts and give praise to your heavenly Father. In this way, oil may perpetually be poured out over their heads, that is, the Spirit of truth, who protects and preserves them from any sinful offence.

St Gregory of Agrigento, In Eccles. VIII, 6 (PG 98:1071-1074); Word in Season VIII.

Saturday of the Twentieth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

(Advice about old age: Ecclesiastes 11:7 – 12:14)

Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you know not what evil may happen on earth. If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth; and if a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie. He who observes the wind will not sow; and he who regards the clouds will not reap.

As you do not know how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun.

For if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.

Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

Remove vexation from your mind, and put away pain from your body; for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"; before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain; in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look through the windows are dimmed, and the doors on the street are shut; when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the voice of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low; they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails; because man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets; before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. 8 Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.

Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find pleasing words, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

The sayings of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings which are given by one Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.

For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES BY ST GREGORY AGRIGENTO

Light, says the Preacher, is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun. For if the light were taken away the world would be unadorned and life would be lifeless. Which is why Moses, who saw God, said, And God saw the light and said it was good. Here it is fitting for us to think of that great, true, eternal light that enlightens every man coming into this world, namely Christ our Saviour, the Redeemer of the world, who was made man and came to the last extremity of the human condition. Of him the Prophet David says, Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds; his name is the Lord, exult before him.

He, too, called the light sweet and foretold that it would be good to see with the eyes the sun of glory, he who in the time of his divine incarnation said, I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. And again, This is judgement, that the light has come into the world. In this way, by means of the light of the sun which we see with our bodily eyes, he foretold the spiritual Sun of justice. That was indeed most sweet for those who were found worthy to be taught by him and to see him with their own eyes as any man, living and dealing with men, even though he was not just any man. He was indeed the true God and hence brought it about that the blind saw, the lame walked, the deaf heard, he cleansed those afflicted with leprosy, and by a single command called the dead back to life.

But now it is most sweet to gaze on him with the eyes of the spirit and to contemplate and ponder over his divine beauty that it is not possible for man to see. Then, by means of this communion and mutual sharing, to be enlightened and adorned; to be filled with the sweetness of the spirit and clothed in sanctity; to attain to understanding and finally to be filled with divine exultation which lasts all the days of this present life. The wise Preacher made this point when he said, For if a man live many years, let him rejoice in them all. Clearly, for those who gaze on him, the Sun of justice is the source of all joy. Of him David the Prophet said, Let them exult before God; let them be jubilant with joy!; and again, Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright.

St Gregory Agrigento, In Eccles. 10.2; The Divine Office I.

Season of the Year / Week 21

Sunday of the Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO TITUS

(The mission of Titus; qualities and duties of elders: Titus 1:1-16)

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised ages ago and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by command of God our Saviour;

To Titus, my true child in a common faith:

Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour.

This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you, if any man is blameless, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of being profligate or insubordinate. For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of goodness, master of himself, upright, holy, and self-controlled; he must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it. For there are many insubordinate men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially the circumcision party; they must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for base gain what they have no right to teach. One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, instead of giving heed to Jewish myths or to commands of men who reject the truth. To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their deeds; they are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good deed.

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON TITUS BY ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

The whole life of men in ancient times was one of action and contention; ours on the contrary is a life of indolence. They knew that they were brought into the world for this purpose, that they might labour according to the will of him who brought them into it; but we, as if we had been placed here but to eat and drink, and lead a life of pleasure, we pay no regard to spiritual things. I speak not only of the Apostles, but of those that followed them. You see them accordingly traversing all places, and pursuing this as their only business, living altogether as in a foreign land, as those who had no city upon earth. Here therefore what the blessed Apostle says, This is why I left you in Crete. As if the whole world had been one house, they divided it among themselves, administering its affairs everywhere, each taking care of his several portion of it.

Appoint elders in every city, here he is speaking of Bishops, as I directed you. If any man is blameless, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the

charge of being profligate or insubordinate. Why does he bring forward such a one? To stop the mouths of those heretics, who condemned marriage, showing that it is not an unholy thing in itself, but so far honourable, that a married man might ascend the holy throne; and at the same time reproving the wanton, and not permitting their admission into this high office who contracted a second marriage. For he who retains no kind regard for her who is departed, how shall he be a good president? And what accusation would he not incur? For you all know, that though it is not forbidden by the laws to enter into a second marriage, yet it is a thing leading to many problems.

There is also the danger of love of power. How then shall we subdue it? By looking up to heaven, by setting God before our eyes, by entertaining thoughts superior to earthly things. Lift up your thoughts to the theatre above. When in doing any good you consider that it ought to be displayed to men, and you seek for some spectators of the action, reflect that God beholds you, and all that desire will be extinguished. Retire from the earth, and look to that theatre that is in Heaven.

Nothing is more worthless than the glory of men. It is for this reason called vainglory. Do you see the masks worn by stage players? How beautiful and splendid they are, fashioned to the extreme height of elegance. Can you show me any such real countenance? No. What then? Did you ever fall in love with them? No. Why? Because they are empty, imitating beauty, but not being really beautiful. Thus human glory is empty, and an imitation of glory: it is not true glory. The only true beauty is that which is natural, which is within, is lasting. That which is put on externally often conceals deformity, conceals it from men till the evening. But when the theatre breaks up, and the masks are taken off, each appears what he really is

Let us then pursue truth, and not be as if we were on the stage and acting a part.

St John Chrysostom, In Titum 2.

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO TITUS

(Exhortations to the faithful: Titus 2:1 – 3:2)

But as for you, teach what befits sound doctrine. Bid the older men be temperate, serious, sensible, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Bid the older women likewise to be reverent in behaviour, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste, domestic, kind, and submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may not be discredited. Likewise urge the younger men to control themselves. Show yourself in all respects a model of good deeds, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us. Bid slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to be refractory, nor to pilfer, but to show entire and true fidelity, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.

For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

Declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for any honest work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all men.

A READING FROM THE EXHORTATION TO THE GREEKS OF ST CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

We should live reasonable, honest, and devout lives in this present age, as we wait for the manifestation of the glory of our great God

The Lord has mercy on us, trains, exhorts and warns, preserves and guards us. He rewards us for our learning more than we could deserve with his promise of the kingdom of heaven, his sole return from us being our salvation. For while evil lives on the destruction of mankind, truth, like the bee, harms nothing in nature, and glories only in the salvation of men.

So you have the Lord's promise and his love for man; it is yours to partake of that grace. And you need not imagine that my song of salvation is something new, like a new piece of furniture or a new house, for as Scripture says: He was before the morning star; and: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Our own existence dates from before the foundation of the world; because of our future destiny our being began in God himself. It is to the Word of God that we owe our creation

as rational beings, and through him that we belong to eternity, because: In the beginning was the Word. So in respect of his eternal nature the Word was and is the divine beginning of all things; but because he has now taken the name of Christ, a name consecrated long ago and worthy of his kingly power, for that reason I call my song new.

This Word then, the Christ, is he to whom we owe our life from of old, and the goodness of that life, by the fact that he appeared himself to men. This Word, who alone is both God and man, in teaching us to live rightly on earth conveys us to eternal life. For in the words of that holy Apostle of the Lord: The saving grace of God has appeared to all, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly desires, and to live reasonable, honest, and devout lives in this present age, as we wait for our blessed hope, the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

This is the new song of the Word, who was in the beginning, and who has now appeared on earth, our pre-existent Saviour. The Word who was with God, and by whom all things were made, has appeared as our Teacher. The Word, who, as Creator, made us in the beginning and gave us life, taught us how to live rightly when he came as our teacher, so that later as God he might grant us immortal life.

St Clement of Alexandria, Cohortatio ad Gentes 1 (PG 8:59-63); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO TITUS

(The bath of regeneration: Titus 3:3-15)

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another; but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. The saying is sure.

I desire you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to apply themselves to good deeds; these are excellent and profitable to men. But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels over the law, for they are unprofitable and futile. As for a man who is factious, after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is perverted and sinful; he is self-condemned.

When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing. And let our people learn to apply themselves to good deeds, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not to be unfruitful.

All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith.

Grace be with you all.

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON LEVITICUS BY ORIGEN

Everyone who touches the holy flesh will be sanctified. Let us suppose that now the whole of the Jews' Temple was still standing, that offerings were being presented, sacrifices were being consumed. Imagine someone wicked, unclean and impure entered the Temple, found the meat from the sacrifice, and touched it. Will he immediately be pronounced sanctified? Certainly not. Therefore, we must return to the evangelical and apostolic exposition to understand this teaching of the Law. For unless the gospel takes the veil from the face of Moses, his face cannot be seen nor can his meaning be understood. See, therefore how, in the Church of the Apostles, the disciples stand by these things which Moses wrote and defend them because they are now fulfilled and were written according to the divine reason.

Therefore, the one and perfect sacrifice, which all these sacrifices had anticipated in type and figure, is Christ sacrificed. If anyone should touch the flesh of this sacrifice, immediately, he is sanctified. If he is unclean, he is healed. So we can say that she who was suffering from a flow of blood understood that Christ was this flesh of the sacrifice, the flesh of the most holy. And indeed, she is not bold enough to touch this holy flesh, for she had not yet been made pure and did not apprehend what is perfect, but she touched the hem of his robe with which the holy flesh was covered; she drew out the power from

the flesh by the touch of faith which cleansed her from uncleanness and healed her of the injury that she was suffering. Does it not seem to you that it is better in this sense to be able to preserve the words of Moses, in which he says Everyone who touches the holy flesh will be sanctified?

For, as we have taught, all of the Gentiles who believed touched this flesh. And the holy Apostle also touched it who said, For we ourselves were once foolish, unbelievers, going astray, enslaved to various desires and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hating one another. But when the kindness and humanity of God our Saviour illumined us, he saved us through the bath of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit. For if anyone touches the flesh of Jesus in the way we explained above, with complete faith, and comes to Jesus just as to the Word made flesh, with all obedience, he has touched the flesh of the sacrifice and is sanctified.

Moreover, he also touches the flesh of the Word about whom the Apostle says, Solid food is for the perfect, who, by their ability to receive it, have trained the senses for distinguishing good and evil. Therefore, the one who examines the inner realities and can explain the secret mysteries of the Law also touches the Word of God. If we could teach the Church in such a way that nothing which was read remained ambiguous, nothing was left obscure, perhaps it could also be said about us that we had touched the holy flesh of the Word of God and were sanctified.

Origen, In Lev. 4: 7, 3 - 8, 3; FoC 83 (1990) tr. Barkley.

A READING FROM THE FIRST LETTER OF ST PAUL TO TIMOTHY

(The mission of Timothy; Paul the preacher of the Gospel: 1 Timothy 1:1-20)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope,

To Timothy, my true child in the faith:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the divine training that is in faith; whereas the aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith. Certain persons by swerving from these have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions.

Now we know that the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, immoral persons, sodomites, kidnapers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

I thank him who has given me strength for this, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful by appointing me to his service, though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him; but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the foremost of sinners; but I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

This charge I commit to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophetic utterances which pointed to you, that inspired by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith, among them Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

A READING FROM THE WRITINGS OF ST AUGUSTINE

Speak that by hearing those whom you address may believe, and that belief may give them hope, and hope inspire them to love

In everything we say we should bear in mind that the purpose of our instruction is to arouse the love that comes from a pure heart, and clear conscience, and a genuine faith. This is the end to which we should relate all our words, and toward which we should also move and direct the thoughts of those for whose instruction we are speaking.

The chief reason for Christ's coming was so that we should know how much God loves us, and knowing this be on fire with love for him who loved us first, and for our neighbour at the bidding and after the example of him who became our neighbour by loving us when we were not his neighbours, but had wandered far from him. Moreover, all inspired Scripture written before the Lord's coming was written to foretell that coming, and all that was later -committed to writing and ratified by divine authority speaks of Christ and teaches us to love. It is clear therefore that upon these two commandments, love of God and of our neighbour, depend not only the whole of the Law and the Prophets, which was all that made up holy Scripture when the Lord spoke these words, but also all the divinely inspired books which were later written for our salvation and handed down to us.

In the Old Testament, then, the New is concealed, and in the New the Old is revealed. Insofar as the New Testament is concealed, worldly people, who interpret Scripture in a worldly way, are now as in the past subject to the fear of punishment. But insofar as the Old Testament has been revealed, spiritual people, who interpret Scripture spiritually, are set free by the gift of love; that is to say, both those of old to whose devout knocking hidden things were made known, and those of today who seek without pride, for fear that even what is manifest may be hidden from them.

And so, since nothing is more contrary to love than envy, and the mother of envy is pride, to cure our boundless conceit by a more powerful antidote, the Lord Jesus Christ, God and man, became both the proof of God's love for us, and the example of humility among us. Great is the misery of human pride, but even greater is the mercy of divine humility.

With this love before you, then, you have something to which you may relate everything you say; so speak that by hearing those whom you address may believe, and that belief may give them hope, and hope inspire them to love.

St Augustine, De catechizandis rudibus I, 6-8 (CCL 46:124, 126-128); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO TIMOTHY

(An invitation to prayer: 1Timothy 2:1 – 3:2)

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarrelling; also that women should adorn themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire but by good deeds, as befits women who profess religion. Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

A READING FROM THE DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

Those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the People of God. In the first place we must recall the people to whom the Covenant and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. On account of their fathers this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts he makes nor of the calls he issues.

But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, adore along with us the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is he who gives to all men life and breath and all things, and as Saviour wills that all men be saved.

Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with his grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel. She knows that it is given by him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life.

But often men, deceived by the Evil One, have become vain in their reasonings and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator. Or some there are who, living and dying in this world without God, are exposed to final despair. Wherefore to promote the glory of God and procure the salvation of all of these, and mindful of the command of the Lord, Preach the Gospel to every creature, the Church fosters the missions with care and attention.

Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium 16.

Friday of the Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE FIRST LETTER OF ST PAUL TO TIMOTHY

(On the ministers of the Church: 1 Timothy 3:1-16)

The saying is sure: If any one aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and no lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way; for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for Gods church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil; moreover he must be well thought of by outsiders, or he may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for gain; they must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then if they prove themselves blameless let them serve as deacons. The women likewise must be serious, no slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husband of one wife, and let them manage their children and their households well; for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion:

He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

A READING FROM THE LETTER TO THE TRALLIANS BY ST IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

From Ignatius, whose other name is Theophorus, to the Church at Tralles in Asia; beloved of God the Father of Jesus Christ, elect and godly, endowed with peace of body and soul by the passion of Jesus Christ, who, through our rising again to him, is our hope.

In apostolic fashion, I send the Church my greeting in all the fullness of God, and wish her every happiness.

They tell me that your character is beyond all praise, and never falters in its endurance; and that this is not just a habit you have acquired, but your own natural disposition. I had that from your bishop Polybius, when the will of God and Jesus Christ brought him here to me in Smyrna. He was so full of joy with me in my bonds in Christ Jesus, that in him I had a vision of your whole congregation; and when I received from his hands the token of your goodwill under God for me, I gave glory for finding that you were as truly imitators of God as I had been assured.

Your obedience to your bishop, as though he were Jesus Christ, shows me plainly enough that yours is no worldly manner of life, but that of Jesus Christ himself, who gave his life for us that faith in his death might save you from death. At the same time, however, essential as it is that you should never act independently of the bishop – as evidently you do not - you must also be no less submi-ssive to your clergy, and regard them as apostles of Jesus Christ our hope, in whom we shall one day be found, if our lives are lived in him. The deacons too, who serve the mysteries of Jesus Christ, must be men universally approved in every way; since they are not mere dispensers of meat and drink, but servants of the Church of God, and therefore under obligation to guard themselves against any slur or imputation as strictly as they would against fire itself.

Equally, it is for the rest of you to hold the deacons in as great respect as Jesus Christ; just as you should also look on the bishop as a type of the Father, and the clergy as the apostolic circle forming his council; for without these three orders no Church has any right to the name. I am sure these are your own feelings too, for I have had with me, and still have, an example of your affection and the person of your bishop himself, whose grave demeanour is a notable lesson in itself, and whose very gentleness is power.

And so I entreat you (not I, though, but the love of Jesus Christ) not to nourish yourselves on anything but Christian fare, and have no truck with the alien herbs of heresy. You will be safe enough so long as you do not let pride go to your head and break away from Jesus Christ and your bishop and the apostolic institutions. To be inside the sanctuary is to be clean; to be outside it, unclean. In other words, nobody's conscience can be clean if he is acting without the authority of his bishop, clergy, and deacons.

St Ignatius of Antioch, Ep. ad Trall. 1.1-3.2; 4.1-2; 6.1; 7.1-8.1 (from The Divine Office III)

A READING FROM THE FIRST LETTER OF ST PAUL TO TIMOTHY

(On the teachers of error: 1Timothy 4:1 – 5:2)

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, through the pretensions of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving; for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

If you put these instructions before the brethren, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the good doctrine which you have followed. Have nothing to do with godless and silly myths. Train yourself in godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe.

Command and teach these things. Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Till I come, attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you. Practise these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Do not rebuke an older man but exhort him as you would a father; treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity.

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON PSALM 39 BY ST AUGUSTINE

The just shall see and be afraid, and hope in the Lord.

Those who already have their feet firmly fixed on the rock should be a model for the faithful: As St Paul says, become a model for the faithful. The faithful themselves are just. They take notice of those who outstrip them in goodness, they imitate and follow them. How do they follow them? The just shall see, and be afraid. They shall see, and be afraid to follow the wicked ways when they see that some better people have already chosen good ways. They say in their heart, in the same way as travellers are accustomed to, when they notice others walking on the road with supreme confidence while they themselves are still unsure of the road, and in two minds about which way they should go. They are not going this way without good reason, when they are going to the place where they want to go. And why are they going this way with such confidence other than because it is dangerous to go that way? Therefore the just shall see, and be afraid. They see a narrow road on the one side, they see a wide road on the other. On the one they see only a handful, on the other quite a crowd. But if you are just, do not simply

count them, but weigh them up. Bring a well-balanced pair of scales, not one you have adjusted, because the name you yourself bear is 'the just one'.

The just shall see, and be afraid – this refers to you. Do not spend your time, then, counting the hordes of men and women who take the wide roads, filling tomorrow's circus, celebrating the city's birthday with their shouting, while at the same time befouling the city with their evil living. Do not follow them, then! There are many of them, and who could possibly count them? But there are only a few who take the narrow road. I am telling you, produce a pair of scales, weigh them. Compare the amount of chaff it takes to balance a few grains. This is what the faithful just who are following should do.

The just shall see, and be afraid, and hope in the Lord. It is like what there is in another psalm: I have lifted up my eyes to the hills. By hills we understand the spiritual elite of the Church, significant and outstanding figures, outstanding for their solidity rather than by their pride. It is through them that all Scripture has been dispensed to us. These are the Prophets, the evangelists, the sound teachers. That is the place to which I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from which help will come to me. And in case you think that this help is human, the psalmist goes on to say: My help is from the Lord who has made heaven and earth. The just shall see, and be afraid, and hope in the Lord.

St Augustine, Ennar. In Ps. 39, 6 (CCL 38:428-429); Word in Season VIII.

Season of the Year / Week 22

Sunday of the Twenty-Second Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE FIRST LETTER OF ST PAUL TO TIMOTHY

(On widows and elders: 1 Timothy 5:3-25)

Honour widows who are real widows. If a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. She who is a real widow, and is left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day; whereas she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. Command this, so that they may be without reproach. If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband; and she must be well attested for her good deeds, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the feet of the saints, relieved the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way. But refuse to enrol younger widows; for when they grow wanton against Christ they desire to marry, and so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge. Besides that, they learn to be idlers, gadding about from house to house, and not only idlers but gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, rule their households, and give the enemy no occasion to revile us. For some have already strayed after Satan. If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her assist them; let the church not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are real widows.

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching; for the scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain", and, "The labourer deserves his wages." Never admit any charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without favour, doing nothing from partiality. Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor participate in another mans sins; keep yourself pure.

No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. The sins of some men are conspicuous, pointing to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. So also good deeds are conspicuous; and even when they are not, they cannot remain hidden.

A READING FROM THE APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION EVANGELICA TESTIFICATIO OF POPE ST PAUL VI

From the beginning, the tradition of the Church presents us with the privileged witness of a constant seeking for God, of an undivided love for Christ alone, and of an absolute dedication to the growth of his kingdom. Without this concrete sign there would be a danger that the charity which animates the entire Church would grow cold, that the

salvific paradox of the gospel would be blunted, and that the 'salt' of faith would lose its savour in a world undergoing secularisation.

From the first centuries, the Holy Spirit has stirred up, side by side with the heroic confession of the martyrs, the wonderful strength of disciples and virgins, of hermits and anchorites. Religious life already existed in germ, and progressively it felt the growing need of developing and of taking on different forms of community or solitary life, in order to respond to the pressing invitation of Christ: There is no one who has left house, wife, brothers, parents, or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not be given repayment many times over in this present time, and in the world to come, eternal life.

Some of you have been called to the life which is termed 'contemplative'. An irresistible attraction draws you to the Lord. Held in God's grasp, you abandon yourselves to his sovereign action, which draws you toward him and transforms you into him, as it prepares you for that eternal contemplation which is the common vocation of us all. How could you advance along this road and be faithful to the grace which animates you if you did not respond with all your being, through a dynamism whose driving force is love, to that call which directs you unswervingly toward God? Consider, therefore, every other immediate activity to which you must devote yourselves – fraternal relationships, disinterested or remunerative work, necessary recreation – as a witness rendered to the Lord of your intimate communion with him, so that he may grant you that unifying purity of intention which is so necessary for encountering him in prayer itself. In this way you will contribute to the building up of the kingdom of God by the witness of your lives and with a 'hidden apostolic fruitfulness'.

Today more than ever, in you the world needs to see men and women who have believed in the Word of the Lord, in his resurrection and in eternal life, even to the point of dedicating their lives to witnessing to the reality of that love, which is offered to all men. Is not this grace, for the individual of today, a refreshing breeze coming from infinity itself, and foreshadowing man's liberation in eternal and absolute joy? Open yourselves to this divine joy, live generously the demands of your vocation, renewing the affirmation of the realities of faith and in its light interpreting in a Christian way the needs of the world.

POPE ST PAUL VI, Evangelica Testificatio 3, 8, 53 (from Word in Season VIII)

Monday of the Twenty-Second Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE FIRST LETTER OF ST PAUL TO TIMOTHY

(On slaves and on false teachers: 1 Timothy 6:1-10)

Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honour, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be defamed. Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brethren; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved.

Teach and urge these duties. If any one teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit, he knows nothing; he has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions, and wrangling among men who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs.

A READING FROM THE COMMONITORIUM OF ST VINCENT OF LERINS

Is there to be no development of doctrine in Christ's Church? Certainly there should be great development. Who could be so grudging towards his fellow men and so hostile to God as to try to prevent it? But care should be taken to ensure that it really is development of the faith and not alteration. Development implies that each point of doctrine is expanded within itself, while alteration suggests that a thing has been changed from what it was into something different.

It is desirable then that development should take place, and that there should be a great and vigorous growth in the understanding, knowledge and wisdom of every individual as well as of all the people, on the part of each member as well as of the whole Church, gradually over the generations and ages. But it must be growth within the limits of its own nature, that is to say within the framework of the same dogma and of the same meaning.

Let religion, which is of the spirit, imitate the processes of the body. For, although bodies develop over the years and their individual parts evolve, they do not change into something different. It is true that there is a great gap between the prime of youth and the maturity of later years, but the people who reach these later years are the same people who once were adolescents. So, although the size and outward appearance of any individual may change, it is still the same person, and the nature remains the same.

The limbs of infants are tiny, while those of young men are large, but they are the same limbs. The man has no more parts to his body than the little child; and if there are parts that appear with age and greater maturity they are already present earlier in embryo. As a result, it can be said that nothing new is produced in old men that was not already present in an undeveloped form when they were boys.

There is no doubt, then, that this is the correct and legitimate rule for development and the best and most striking order of growth, if the passage of years sees those parts evolve in the adult, which the Creator in his wisdom had prepared in him beforehand when he was a child.

But if the human form is changed into some shape that is not of its own kind, or at least if something is added or taken away from the full compliment of its members, than the whole body must perish or become a monster or at least be weakened in some way. It is fitting, then, that Christian doctrine too should follow these laws of development, so that with the passage of years it may be strengthened, with time it may make progress and with age it may achieve greater profundity.

Long ago our ancestors sowed the seeds of the faith in the field of the Church. It would be quite incongruous and wrong if their descendants were to reap the weeds of error in place of the harvest of truth.

St Vincent of Lerins, Commonitorium, 1, 23; The Divine Office III.

A READING FROM THE FIRST LETTER OF ST PAUL TO TIMOTHY

(Final exhortation: 1Timothy 6:11-21)

For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs.

But as for you, man of God, shun all this; aim at righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the presence of God who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ; and this will be made manifest at the proper time by the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see. To him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen.

As for the rich in this world, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on uncertain riches but on God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous, thus laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed.

O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge, for by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith.

Grace be with you.

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON THE GOSPELS BY ST GREGORY THE GREAT

Let us listen to what our Lord has to say when he sends his disciples out to preach the gospel: The harvest is great, but the labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. It grieves us to have to say that the labourers for this great harvest are few, because there are not enough people to preach the good news, although there are people waiting to hear it. We see around us a world full of priests, but it is very rare to find a labourer in God's harvest, because we are not doing the work demanded by our priesthood, although we accepted this office.

Consider carefully, my dear brethren, what our Lord says: Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. You should pray for us to be given the strength to do the work that you deserve, that we should not be slow to exhort. If we do this, then we shall not find that we have accepted the office of preachers only to stand condemned in the sight of the just judge by our own reluctance to speak. For preachers are often prevented from speaking because of their own wickedness; on the other hand it is also often the fault of those in their care that leaders are deprived of the opportunity to preach. It is not easy, then, to judge whose fault it is that the preacher is reduced to

silence. But we do know for certain that the silence of the preacher, while sometimes damaging to himself, is always damaging to those in his care.

There is another thing, my dear brethren, that causes me great grief and it concerns the sort of life led by some pastors. But, for fear that what I have to say should seem to give offence to anybody, I accuse myself at the same time. Compelled as I am by the necessity of this barbaric age, it is with great reluctance that I find myself in this position. The fact is that we have allowed ourselves to become involved in external affairs, and the contrast between the honour we have received and the way in which we carry out the duties of our office is very great. We give up the ministry of preaching, and, to our discredit, as I see it, we are called bishops but enjoy this honour in name only, and not in practice. For the people entrusted to our care are abandoning God and we remain silent. They have fallen into wicked ways and we do not utter a word of reproach.

But we shall never be in a position to correct the lives of others as long as we neglect our own. We are wrapped up in the cares of this world, and the more we seem to busy ourselves with external affairs the more spiritually insensitive we become. Holy Church, then, expresses it well when she says of her weak members: They have placed me on guard in the vineyards and I have not guarded my own vineyard. We have been put in charge of the vineyards and we are not even looking after our own, because we are neglecting our own proper ministry, as long as we remain wrapped up in external affairs.

St Gregory the Great, Hom. in Ev. 17, 3, 14; The Divine Office III.

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO TIMOTHY

(Paul urges Timothy to be strong in the gift he has received: 2 Timothy 1:1-18)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus,

To Timothy, my beloved child:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

I thank God whom I serve with a clear conscience, as did my fathers, when I remember you constantly in my prayers. As I remember your tears, I long night and day to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you. Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control.

Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel in the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, and now has manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, and therefore I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, and among them Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me; he was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me eagerly and found me – may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day – and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.

A READING FROM THE LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS BY ST CLEMENT OF ROME

All these things are plain to us who have scanned the depths of Sacred Scripture. It is clear that there ought to be a strict order and method in our performance of the acts prescribed by the Master for certain times and seasons. Now, it was his command that the offering of gifts and liturgies should not be haphazard or irregular, but should take place at fixed times and hours. Moreover, in the exercise of his supreme will he has himself declared in what place and by what persons he desires this to be done, if it is all to be devoutly performed in accordance with his wishes. Consequently, those who present their offerings at such appointed times are accepted and blessed, since the care

with which they observe the Master's laws clears them of all offence. The High Priest, for example, has his own proper liturgies assigned to him, the priesthood has its own place, there are particular ministries laid down for the Levites, and the layman is bound by regulations affecting the laity.

In the same way, my brothers, when we offer our own Eucharist to God, each one of us should keep to his own degree. His conscience must be clear, he must not infringe the rules prescribed for his ministering, and he is to bear himself with reverence. The continual daily sacrifices, peace-offerings, sin-offerings and trespass-offerings are by no means offered in every place, brothers, but at the altar in front of the Temple; and then only after a careful scrutiny of the offering by the High Priest and the other ministers aforesaid. Anything done otherwise than in conformity with God's will is punishable with death. Take note from this, my brothers, that since we ourselves have been given so much fuller knowledge, the peril that we incur is correspondingly graver.

Now, the Gospel was given to the Apostles for us by the Lord Jesus Christ; and Jesus the Christ was sent from God. That is to say, Christ received his commission from God, and the Apostles theirs from Christ. The order of these two events was in accordance with the will of God. So thereafter, when the Apostles had been given their instructions, and all their doubts had been set at rest by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, they set out in the full assurance of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the coming of God's kingdom. And as they went through the territories and towns preaching, they appointed their first converts – after testing them by the Spirit – to be bishops and deacons for the believers of the future. This was in no way an innovation, for bishops and deacons had already been spoken of in Scripture long before that; there is a text that says, I will confirm their bishops in righteousness, and their deacons in faith.

St Clement of Rome, Ep. Ad Cor. 40-42; (1968) tr. Staniforth.

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO TIMOTHY

(An exhortation to constancy in hardship and persecution: 2 Timothy 2:1-21)

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will grant you understanding in everything.

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel, the gospel for which I am suffering and wearing fetters like a criminal. But the word of God is not fettered. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus with its eternal glory. The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself.

Remind them of this, and charge them before the Lord to avoid disputing about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. Avoid such godless chatter, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will eat its way like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth by holding that the resurrection is past already. They are upsetting the faith of some. But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his", and, "Let every one who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and earthenware, and some for noble use, some for ignoble. If any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work.

A READING FROM THE IMITATION OF CHRIST BY ST THOMAS À KEMPIS

To many this seems a hard saying: 'Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus.' But to hear these last words of all will be much harder: Go away from me, you accursed people, into eternal fire. For those who are willing to hear the message of the cross, and to follow it now, will not be afraid of hearing their eternal damnation at the end. This sign of the cross will be in heaven when the Lord comes to judge. Then all the servants of the cross, who modelled their lives on that of the crucified Lord, will approach Christ the judge with great confidence.

So why are you afraid to take up the cross, which gains you entry to the kingdom? In the cross is salvation, in the cross life, in the cross protection from our enemies: in the cross is an instilling of celestial sweetness, in the cross strength of mind, in the cross the joy of the spirit: in the cross is supreme virtue, in the cross perfect sanctity. There is no salvation for the soul nor hope of eternal life except in the cross. So take up the cross and follow Jesus to go towards eternal life. If you die on the cross together with him, you will also live together with him, and if you share his suffering you will also share his glory.

So you see that everything rests on the cross, and there is no other way to life and true spiritual peace except the way of the holy cross and daily mortification. Go wherever you like, look for whatever you want, you will find no higher way above or safer below, except the way of the holy cross. You may arrange and order all things according to your wish and what seems right to you, but whether you want to or not you will find there is always something you have to suffer, and so you will always find the cross. For you will either have physical pain, or spiritual torment in your soul.

Sometimes God will abandon you, sometimes you will be troubled by your neighbour, and what is worse you will often be weighed down by your own sorrows. Yet no remedy or consolation be able to free or help you; on the contrary you will have to bear with your situation as long as God wishes it. For God wants you to learn to suffer torment without consolation, and subject yourself totally to him and become more humble through torment. No one feels Christ's passion so profoundly as one to whose lot falls to suffer something similar. Therefore the cross is always ready, and waits for you everywhere. Wherever you run you cannot escape it, because wherever you go you take yourself with you, and will always find yourself. Run away above or below, outside or inside, and at every point you will find the cross, and everywhere you must be patient if you want to have spiritual peace and be worthy of an everlasting crown. For it is through many torments that we have to enter the kingdom of God. Amen.

Thomas à Kempis, De imitatione Christi, II, 12; Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO TIMOTHY

(Dangerous times threaten: 2 Timothy 2:22 – 3:17)

So shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with stupid, senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, fierce, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it. Avoid such people. For among them are those who make their way into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and swayed by various impulses, who will listen to anybody and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth. As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith; but they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.

Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, my sufferings, what befell me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra, what persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

A READING FROM THE DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON DIVINE REVELATION OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For holy mother Church, relying on the belief of the Apostles, holds that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by him they made use of their powers and abilities,

so that with him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which he wanted.

Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation. Therefore, all Scripture is divinely inspired and has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind.

However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.

To search out the intention of the sacred writers, attention should be given, among other things, to 'literary forms'. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer and to the patterns men normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another.

But since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the same spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living Tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith. It is the task of exegetes to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature. For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the Word of God.

Second Vatican Council, Dei Verbum 11-12 (abridged).

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PAUL TO TIMOTHY

(Paul's final exhortation: 2 Timothy 4:1-22)

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths. As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry.

For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you; for he is very useful in serving me. Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will requite him for his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. At my first defence no one took my part; all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength to proclaim the message fully, that all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. 'Erastus remained at Corinth; Trophimus I left ill at Miletus. 'Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren.

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

A READING FROM THE LETTERS OF ST BASIL THE GREAT

May God be blessed, for in every generation he singles out those who are acceptable to him, and makes his chosen instruments known so that he can use them in the service of the saints. So now he has caught you in the inescapable nets of his grace, even though you were fleeing, as you admit, not from me but from the vocation you suspected would come through me. And he is bring-ing you to central Pisidia, so that you may capture men alive for the Lord, drawing from the depths into the light people whom the devil has trapped into doing his will.

Since all who have put their hope in Christ form a single people, and all who belong to him are one Church, even though he be invoked from different places, your homeland

delightedly rejoices in the Lord's dispensations, deeming herself not to have been impoverished by the loss of one man but rather through one man to have made a profit of the whole Church. May the Lord grant me to see if I am present, and hear about if absent, the progress you make in the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the Churches.

Play the man, then, be strong, and lead the people whom the Most High has entrusted to your guiding hand. Take care that your ship does not sink in the briny and bitter waves of error; like a skilful pilot assuming command you must ride out every storm raised by the winds of heresy, and wait for the calm which the Lord will create when a voice is found worthy to arouse him for the rebuking of the winds and the sea.

The weight of your burden? Do not complain of its being beyond your strength. For if you yourself were the one who is to carry this load, it would not be merely heavy: it would be quite unbearable. But if the Lord is carrying it with you to the end, then Cast your care upon the Lord, and he will take charge. Only heed my advice to watch carefully in all circumstances that you be not yourself involved in reprehensible conduct, but through the wisdom God has granted you turn evil tendencies into something useful. For Christ has sent you not to fall in with other people, but to lead those who are on the way to salvation.

St Basil the Great, Epist. 161.1-2 (PG 32:630-631); Word in Season VIII.

Season of the Year / Week 23

Sunday of the Twenty-Third Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PETER

(An exhortation concerning the way of salvation: 2 Peter 1:1-11)

Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature. For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these things are yours and abound, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these things is blind and short-sighted and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON 2 PETER BY ST BEDE

First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter for private interpretation. This verse follows from what he had previously said, You do well to pay attention to this. For those who pay attention to the words of the Prophets certainly do well, that by means of these words they may be able to have the light of knowledge. They ought to understand this first of all, that none of the holy Prophets preached the teachings of life to the people using his own interpretation, but they handed on what they had learned from the Lord to their hearers to be put into practice by them. And they passed on the hidden heavenly mysteries which they had comprehended in secret to the people of God simply, either by speaking or by writing and not like the diviners of the gentiles who gave to the crowds they deceived what they pretended to be decisions of the divine oracle but had in fact fabricated in their own heart. Therefore, just as the Prophets wrote not their own but God's words, so also the reader of them cannot use his own private interpretation, lest he deviate from the true meaning. The reader ought to pay careful attention to how the writer wished his words to be understood.

Never at any time was a prophecy brought forth by the will of man, but the holy men of God spoke when inspired by the Holy Spirit. Just as it was not in the power of those who prophesied always to have the Holy Spirit, always to be able to predict the future, because the Spirit filled their hearts when he willed; so also it was not within their power

to teach whatever they wished, but they spoke only those things which they had learned when enlightened by the Spirit. These things are said for this reason, that no one may dare to expound the Scriptures according to his own wishes.

A certain person has interpreted these words of blessed Peter absurdly, saying that just as a reed-pipe receives the breadth of the human mouth to make a sound but nonetheless cannot itself understand the sound which it provides because by nature it is insensible, so the Prophets, inspired by the Spirit of God, might bring forward in speech those things which the same Spirit wished but they themselves could not understand them. This is according to Virgil's words, It gives forth a sound without meaning. It is clearly evident that this is a most ridiculous error, for how could they give their hearers such wise counsels about living if they themselves did not know what they were saying? Why are the Prophets called seers? For what reason was it written, The word which Isaiah or some other Prophet saw, except that they perceived in secret with the clearest grasp of the mind the hidden mysteries of heavenly visions. They then made known these mysteries outwardly and clearly to their hearers and in whatever words they wished.

St Bede, In 2 Pet. 1:20-1:21; CS82 (1985), tr. Hurst.

Monday of the Twenty-Third Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PETER

(The testimony of the Apostles and Prophets: 2 Peter 1:12-21)

Therefore I intend always to remind you of these things, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to arouse you by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. And I will see to it that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honour and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased", we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ST JOHN BY ST AUGUSTINE

Notice that lamps can be witnesses to the day because of our weakness, since we cannot bear to look at the pure light of the day. For even we Christians are already light in comparison with unbelievers. Hence the Apostle says: Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, and you must live like children of the light. And elsewhere he said: Night has passed and now day is near, so we must cast off the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. We must live properly, as in the daylight. Yet because, in comparison with that light toward which we must go, even the day in which we live is still night, listen to the Apostle Peter telling us of the words which came to the Lord Christ from the supreme power: You are my beloved Son, with whom I am pleased. We ourselves, he adds, heard those words that came from heaven, as we were with him on the holy mountain.

But because we were not there and did not hear the words that came from heaven then, Peter tells us: We also have the more certain words of the Prophets. You did not hear the words that came from heaven, but you have the more certain words of the Prophets. For the Lord Jesus Christ foresaw that there would be some wicked people who would slander his miracles, ascribing them to magic arts, and so he sent the Prophets first. For if he was a magician and used magic arts to ensure that he was worshiped even after his death, would he not have been a magician before he was born? Listen to the Prophets, you dead people, with your slanderous raging, listen to the Prophets; listen, as I read, to those who came before the Lord. We have, says the Apostle Peter, more certain prophetic words, which you will do well to pay attention to. They shine like a lamp in a dark place, until day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

So when our Lord Jesus Christ comes and, as the Apostle Paul also says, brings to light what is hidden in darkness and reveals our inward motives, so that God may give each one of us our due, then in the presence of such daylight, lamps will no longer be necessary. We shall no longer read the Prophets, nor open the Apostle's book, nor require John's witness, nor even need the gospel. Therefore all the Scriptures will be put away, which shone for us like lanterns in the night of this world, to prevent us being left in darkness. With all these withdrawn from us, what shall we see? How will our minds be fed? What will give us that joy which no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human heart has felt? I seriously ask you to love with me, to hurry and believe with me; let us long for our celestial home, sigh for our celestial fatherland, and realise that here on earth we are pilgrims. What shall we see then? Let the gospel now speak out: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

St Augustine, Tract. In Joh. 35, 8 (CCL 36:321-322); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PETER

(False teachers: 2 Peter 2:1-9)

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their licentiousness, and because of them the way of truth will be reviled. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words; from of old their condemnation has not been idle, and their destruction has not been asleep.

For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven other persons, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction and made them an example to those who were to be ungodly; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the licentiousness of the wicked (for by what that righteous man saw and heard as he lived among them, he was vexed in his righteous soul day after day with their lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.

A READING FROM THE MACARIAN HOMILIES

As once God was angry with the Jews and gave Jerusalem over for a spectacle to its enemies, and as those who hated them ruled over them and there was no longer there any feast or sacrifice, so, being angry with the soul for its transgression of his command, God handed it over to its enemies, who seduced it and utterly deformed it.

Just as a house which has no master dwelling in it is dark, neglected and despised, and is filled with dirt and filth, so a soul which does not have its Lord feasting in it with his angels is filled with the darkness of sin, the shame of passions and every sort of disgrace.

Alas for the street in which no one walks, in which the voice of man is not heard; it is a lurking place for wild beasts. Alas for the soul in which the Lord does not walk and put to flight by his voice the spiritual beasts of wickedness. Alas for the house in which its master does not dwell. Alas for the land which has no farmer to till it. Alas for the ship which has been abandoned by its steersman: it is tossed about by the winds and waves of the ocean, and perishes. Alas for the soul which does not have its true steersman Christ in it: it lives in the bitter darkness of the sea and is tossed by the waves of passions. It is buffeted by the wicked spirits as by winter tempests, and finally comes to destruction.

Alas for the soul which is without Christ to cultivate it so that it will bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. When it is deserted it becomes full of thorns and thistles, and finally, its harvest is not one of fruit but of destruction by fire. Alas for the soul which has not Christ for its Lord dwelling in it, for when it is deserted and filled with the stench of passions it becomes a den of vice.

When a farmer sets out to till the ground he has to take proper tools and clothing for work in the fields; so when Christ, the heavenly king and the true husbandman, came to humanity laid waste by sin, he clothed himself in a body and carried the cross as his implement and cultivated the deserted soul. He pulled up the thorns and thistles of evil spirits and tore up the weeds of sin. With fire he burnt up all the harvest of its sins. When thus he had tilled the ground of the soul with the wooden plough of his cross, he planted in it a lovely garden of the Spirit; a garden which brings forth for God as its master the sweetest and most delightful fruits of every sort.

Macarian Homilies, 28; The Divine Office III.

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PETER

(A denunciation of sinners: 2 Peter 2:9-22)

The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

Bold and wilful, they are not afraid to revile the glorious ones, whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a reviling judgment upon them before the Lord. But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and killed, reviling in matters of which they are ignorant, will be destroyed in the same destruction with them, suffering wrong for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, revelling in their dissipation, carousing with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! Forsaking the right way they have gone astray; they have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a dumb ass spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm; for them the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved. For, uttering loud boasts of folly, they entice with licentious passions of the flesh men who have barely escaped from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, The dog turns back to his own vomit, and the sow is washed only to wallow in the mire.

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON ST MATTHEW'S GOSPEL BY ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

So long as we continue to behave as sheep, we are victorious. Even if ten thousand wolves surround us, we conquer and are victorious. But the moment we become wolves, we are conquered, for we lose the help of the shepherd. He is the shepherd of sheep, not of wolves. If he leaves you and goes away, it is because you do not allow him to show his power.

These are his words: Do not be troubled that I send you out in the midst of wolves and tell you to be like sheep and like doves. I could have done just the opposite, and not have allowed you to suffer any hurt. I could have prevented you being the victims of wolves and made you fiercer than lions. But I chose a better way. My way makes you more glorious and proclaims my power. These were his words to Paul: My grace is sufficient

for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. That is the way I made you. When he says: I send you out as sheep, he implies: Do not despair, for I know very well that in this way you will be invincible against all your enemies.

Next he wants them too to make some contribution of their own, so that everything will not seem to come from grace. He does not want it thought that their crown was not earned, and so he says: So be as wise as serpents and innocent as doves. What power, he asks, does our wisdom have in such perils? How can we have wisdom at all when we are deluged by such billows? However wise the sheep may be when in the midst of wolves, and the wolves are as numerous as they are, what more will wisdom be able to achieve? However innocent the dove may be, what advantage will its innocence be when it is beset by so many hawks? So long as you are talking about irrational beasts, of course, the answer is none, but when you are dealing with men like you, the answer is, the greatest possible advantage.

But let us see what sort of wisdom he then demands. The serpent abandons everything, even if its body has to be cut off, and does not resist much, provided only it can save its head. In the same way, he says, abandon everything except your faith, even if it means giving up your wealth, your body, your life itself. Your faith is your head and your roots. If you preserve that, you will get everything back again with greater glory. Therefore he commanded that a man should be not only simple and honest, not only wise, but he combined the two qualities to form together virtue. The man should have the wisdom of the serpent, so as not to receive mortal wounds. He should have the innocence of a dove, so as not to take vengeance on those who do him injury, nor bear a grudge against those who plot against him. Wisdom is no use by itself unless there is innocence as well.

No one should think that these commands are impossible to fulfil. More than anyone else he knows the nature of things. Violence he knows is not overcome by violence, but by forbearance.

St John Chrysostom, In Matt. 33, 1-2; The Divine Office III.

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PETER

(God is faithful to his promises: 2 Peter 3:1-10)

This is now the second letter that I have written to you, beloved, and in both of them I have aroused your sincere mind by way of reminder; that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles. First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation." They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men.

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up.

A READING FROM THE SERMON ON MORTALITY BY ST CYPRIAN

We must remember that we ought to do what God wills, not what we will, in accordance with the prayer that the Lord ordered us to use daily. Since we pray that God's will be done, how foolish and how perverse it is not to obey immediately the command of his will when he calls us and summons us from this world. We struggle and fight, and, like obstinate slaves, we are brought before the Lord grieving and sad, and we leave this world in the chains of necessity, rather than in willing obedience. We want to be honoured with the rewards of heaven by the God to whom we come against our will. Why then do we pray and ask that the kingdom of heaven should come, if captivity on earth delights us? Why do we pray, and pray continually, that the day of that kingdom should come quickly, if our longings and desires are stronger and greater for bondage to the devil here than for reigning with Christ?

Since the world hates the Christian, why do you love that which hates you, and why do not rather follow Christ who redeemed you and loved you? In his Epistle John cries out and exhorts us not to pursue the lusts of the flesh and love the world. Do not love the world, he says, or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world is the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. And the world will pass away and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides for ever. Rather, my dear brothers, let us be ready for all that God's will may bring, with an undivided heart, firm faith and rugged strength. Let us shut out any

fear of death, and keep our mind on the immortality that follows death. Let us show that this is what we believe.

My dear brothers, we must consider and ponder again and again how we have renounced the world and now live here in the meantime as strangers and aliens. Let us welcome that day which allots to each man his final home, which snatches us from the world, frees us from the bonds which bind us to this age, and restores us to paradise and to God's kingdom. What man who lives in a foreign country would not hurry to return home? We reckon paradise to be our home. A great throng awaits us there of those dear to us; parents, brothers, sons. A packed and numerous throng longs for us, of those already free from anxiety for their own salvation, who are still concerned for our salvation. There is the glorious company of the Apostles, there the fellowship of the prophets rejoicing. There is the innumerable army of martyrs, crowned for their glorious victory in their suffering and strife. There in triumphant procession are the virgins who have subdued the lusts of the flesh with the strength of chastity. My dear brothers, let us hurry forward to meet these with eager longing. Let God see these thoughts in us, that Christ may discern in us this intention of our mind and faith, Christ who will give greater rewards to those whose longing for him has been greater.

St Cyprian, On Mortality 18.24.26; The Divine Office III.

A READING FROM THE SECOND LETTER OF ST PETER

(An exhortation on waiting for the coming of the Lord: 2 Peter 3:11-18)

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Therefore, beloved, since you wait for these, be zealous to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, beware lest you be carried away with the error of lawless men and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

A READING FROM THE CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

God's Word, through whom all things were made, was himself made flesh and dwelt on the earth of men. Thus he entered the world's history as a perfect man, taking that history up into himself and summarizing it. He himself revealed to us that God is love and at the same time taught us that the new command of love was the basic law of human perfection and hence of the world's transformation. Undergoing death itself for all of us sinners, he taught us by example that we too must shoulder that cross which the world and the flesh inflict upon those who search after peace and justice. Appointed Lord by his resurrection and given plenary power in heaven and on earth, Christ is now at work in the hearts of men through the energy of his Holy Spirit, arousing not only a desire for the age to come, but by that very fact animating, purifying and strengthening those noble longings too by which the human family makes its life more human and strives to render the whole earth submissive to this goal.

Now, the gifts of the Spirit are diverse; while he calls some to give clear witness to the desire for a heavenly home and to keep that desire green among the human family, he summons others to dedicate themselves to the earthly service of men and to make ready the material of the celestial realm by this ministry of theirs. Yet he frees all of them so that by putting aside love of self and bringing all earthly resources into the service of human life, they can devote themselves to that future when humanity itself will become an offering accepted by God .

The Lord left behind a pledge of this hope and strength for life's journey in that sacrament of faith where natural elements refined by man are changed into his glorified

Body and Blood, providing a meal of brotherly solidarity and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

We do not know the time for the consummation of the earth and of humanity, nor do we know how all things will be transformed. As deformed by sin, the shape of this world will pass away; but we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling place and a new earth where justice will abide and whose blessedness will answer and surpass all the longings for peace which spring up in the human heart. Then, with death overcome, the sons of God will be raised up in Christ, and what was sown in weakness and corruption will be invested with incorruptibility. Enduring with charity and its fruits, all that creation which God made on man's account will be unchained from the bondage of vanity. Therefore, while we are warned that it profits a man nothing if he gain the whole world and lose himself, the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age.

Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes 38-39 (abridged).

Saturday of the Twenty-Third Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST JUDE

(A denunciation of the wicked and an exhortation to the faithful: Jude 1-8, 12-13, 17-25)

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:

May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.

Beloved, being very eager to write to you of our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For admission has been secretly gained by some who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Now I desire to remind you, though you were once for all fully informed, that he who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels that did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling have been kept by him in eternal chains in the nether gloom until the judgment of the great day; just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise acted immorally and indulged in unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

Yet in like manner these men in their dreamings defile the flesh, reject authority, and revile the glorious ones. These are blemishes on your love feasts, as they boldly carouse together, looking after themselves; waterless clouds, carried along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved for ever.

But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; they said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." It is these who set up divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And convince some, who doubt; save some, by snatching them out of the fire; on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON JUDE BY ST BEDE

But I wish to remind you who once knew all things, namely, knew all the hidden mysteries of faith, and had no need to hear novelties from new teachers as if they were more holy, that Jesus saved the people from the land of Egypt and afterward destroyed

those who did not believe. He is referring not to Jesus the son of Nun but to our Lord, showing first that he did not have his beginning at his birth from the holy virgin, as the heretics have wished to assert, but existed as the eternal God for the salvation of all believers, according to the mystery of his name. For in Egypt he first so saved the humble who cried out to him from their affliction that he might afterward bring low the proud who murmured against him in the desert. He stresses this so much that we may remember even now that he so saves believers through the waters of baptism, which the Red Sea foreshadowed, that he demands a humble life of us even after baptism. He demands from us a life separated from the filth of vices, as was rightly foreshadowed by the hidden way of life of the desert. If anyone actually profane this life either by departing from the faith or by acting evilly, being turned away in heart to Egypt, he will deserve not to reach the promised fatherland of the kingdom but to perish among the ungodly.

But you, dearly beloved, build yourselves on your most holy faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God. We pray in the Holy Spirit when pierced by divine inspiration we request help from on high to receive the good things which we are unable to acquire of ourselves. Blessed Jude, therefore, advises us so to build ourselves up on the foundation of our holy faith, so as to join ourselves as living stones to the house of God which is the Church. We must never presume on our own strength but must hope in the help of divine protection, lest anyone, according to the teaching of Pelagius, declare that he can be saved on his own.

Hating even that stained garment which is fleshly. He calls our body our fleshly garment. We ought not, however, to hate our body but we ought to hate it in every way it is stained and see to it, as far as we are able, that we render it stainless, so that from being fleshly it may deserve to be made spiritual.

St Bede, In Iudam 5, 20-24; CS 82 (1985), tr. Hurst.

Season of the Year / Week 24

Sunday of the Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF ESTHER

(Repudiation of Vashti and choosing of Esther: Esther 1:1-3, 9-13, 15-16, 19; 2:5-10, 16-17)

In the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa the capital, in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his princes and servants, the army chiefs of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces being before him. Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus.

On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served King Ahasuerus as chamberlains, to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty; for she was fair to behold. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command conveyed by the eunuchs. At this the king was enraged, and his anger burned within him.

Then the king said to the wise men who knew the times – for this was the king's procedure toward all who were versed in law and judgment. According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti, because she has not performed the command of King Ahasuerus conveyed by the eunuchs? Then Memucan said in presence of the king and the princes, Not only to the king has Queen Vashti done wrong, but also to all the princes and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. If it please the king, let a royal order go forth from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be altered, that Vashti is to come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she.

Now there was a Jew in Susa the capital whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, son of Shime-i, son of Kish, a Benjaminite, who had been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away. He had brought up Hadassah, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother; the maiden was beautiful and lovely, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai adopted her as his own daughter. So when the king's order and his edict were proclaimed, and when many maidens were gathered in Susa the capital in custody of Hegai, Esther also was taken into the king's palace and put in custody of Hegai who had charge of the women. And the maiden pleased him and won his favour; and he quickly provided her with her ointments and her portion of food, and with seven chosen maids from the king's palace, and advanced her and her maids to the best place in the harem. Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had charged her not to make it known.

And when Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus into his royal palace in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign, the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

A READING FROM A RETREAT FOR PRIESTS BY RONALD KNOX

From other incidents in the Old Testament, however crude their atmosphere, however primitive their setting, it may be possible for us to derive moral exhortation. But these intrigues of the harem, these tales of plot and counterplot in the corrupt politics of an oriental despotism – what message have they for us, what instruction can they convey? I am only choosing this story out of a dozen others I might have chosen, to illustrate the principle, familiar to Christian piety, that there is a mystical significance in the Old Testament everywhere, and that, above all, the history of the Jewish people foreshadows and typifies the glories of Our Blessed Lady.

The Old Testament is, largely, the record of barbarian times; blood flows freely in its chronicles, and there is treachery, and violence, and lust, and crafty revenge; there are dull passages, too, long lists of names, and prescriptions about ceremonial ordinances which have ceased to have any interest for us; there are interminable moral precepts, and prophecies baffling in their obscurity. But through this tangled skein runs a single golden thread; between these soiled pages lies, now and again, a pressed flower that has lost neither its colour nor its sweetness. That thread, that flower, is the mention, by type and analogue, of her whom all generations of Christendom have called blessed, the Virgin of Virgins, the Queen of Heaven, the holy Mother of God.

We value, then, this story of Mordecai and Esther because we find in it a type of Our Lady's position in the economy of grace. How often a face or a scene arrests us, only because it bears some resemblance to a face or a scene we love! So it is with these Old Testament figures; they borrow their interest from the future. Like the people of the Jews, the Church of God has its enemies and its detractors; its peace is continually threatened by the world's hatred for its strictness of principle. And, when times of trouble come upon us, we, too, would win a royal audience; we would ask redress from our grievances from the King of kings. As the Jews could plead on their own behalf the loyal act of Mordecai, so we would plead before God, our one hope of pardon, the all-sufficient sacrifice of his Son. But who will plead it for us? It is not that we distrust his goodness; but, conscious of our need and of our own unworthiness, we would find some advocate who has a better claim on his attention than ourselves. Who has a better right to stand in God's royal presence than Our Blessed Lady? The law which included us all under the curse of original sin was a law made for all others, but not for her. Who else dare touch the sceptre that sways a universe? We say to her, as Mordecai said to Esther, Remember the days of your low estate; and speak to the king for us, and deliver us from death.

Ronald Knox, A Retreat for Priests, 169-170, 174-175; Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF ESTHER

(The Jews in danger: Esther 3:1-15)

After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him. And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and did obeisance to Haman; for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or do obeisance. Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?" And when they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's words would avail; for he had told them that he was a Jew. And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or do obeisance to him, Haman was filled with fury. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is the lot, before Haman day after day; and they cast it month after month till the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "here is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not for the king's profit to tolerate them. If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the king's business, that they may put it into the king's treasuries." So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. And the king said to Haman, The money is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you.

Then the king's secretaries were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and an edict, according to all that Haman commanded, was written to the king's satraps and to the governors over all the provinces and to the princes of all the peoples, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language; it was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's ring. Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces, to destroy, to slay, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province by proclamation to all the peoples to be ready for that day. The couriers went in haste by order of the king, and the decree was issued in Susa the capital. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Susa was perplexed.

A READING FROM THE DECLARATION OF THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

Christ's Church acknowledges that all Christian believers, as children of Abraham in faith, are included in the patriarch's invitation, and the salvation of the Church is prefigured mystically in the exodus of the chosen people from the land of bondage. Wherefore the Church cannot forget that she received the Old Testament through the chosen people, with whom in his unspeakable mercy God made the old covenant; and that she is nourished from the root of the good olive, to which the branches of the wild olive were grafted. For the Church believes that Christ our peace has reconciled by his cross Jew with Gentile, Gentile with Jew, and made of the two olives one single tree in himself.

As sacred Scripture bears witness, Jerusalem failed to perceive the time of his visitation, and in great part the Jews did not accept the gospel: indeed, not a few of them opposed its spread. Nevertheless the Apostle tells us that because of the patriarchs the Jews still remain most dear to God, who does not repent of his gifts or of his calling. Together with the Prophets and the Apostle himself, the Church awaits the day known only to God when all people will call upon the Lord with one voice and will serve him with one common effort.

Although the Jewish authorities with their followers encompassed Christ's death, the misdeeds perpetrated during his sacred passion cannot even so be imputed to all Jews then alive, indifferently, nor yet to modern Jewry at all. And though the Church is the new people of God, yet the Jews themselves should not be deemed as cast off or accursed by God, as if this were something which can be drawn from sacred Scripture. Let all be mindful, therefore, lest they teach anything, through their catechetics or their preaching of God's word, which is not in harmony with evangelical truth and the spirit of Christ.

Moreover, the Church condemns all persecution, no matter of whom, being mindful of its common patrimony with the Jews. It deplores all the hatred, persecution, and demonstrative anti-Semitism there has ever been at any time, from any quarter, against the Jews: and this is not said out of political motivations, but those merely of evangelical charity.

Again, the Church has always held, and still holds even now, that Christ underwent his passion and death with immeasurable love, willingly and for the sins of all men, that all might come to be saved. It is therefore for the preaching Church to declare Christ's cross to be the sign of God's universal love and the source of all grace.

We cannot call on God the Father of all if we refuse to behave in a brotherly way towards people created in God's image. Man's attitudes to God the Father and to his brethren and fellow human beings are so conjoined that Scripture says: he who does not love does not know God.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF ESTHER

(Haman seeks the destruction of all the Jews: Esther 4:1-16)

When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai rent his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, wailing with a loud and bitter cry; he went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

When Esther's maids and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was. Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her and charge her to go to the king to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people. "Remembering the days of your lowliness, when you were cared for by me, because Haman, who is next to the king, spoke against us for our destruction. Beseech the Lord and speak to the king concerning us and deliver us from death." And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mordecai, saying, "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law; all alike are to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden sceptre that he may live. And I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days." And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. Then Mordecai told them to return answer to Esther, "Think not that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish." Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ESTHER BY BLESSED RABANUS MAURUS

Mordecai, hearing that the death of the Jews was planned by imperial decree, put on mourning and, in bitterness of soul and cries of anguish, went to the entrance of the

palace. When the leaders of the Church hear of the persecution which the rulers of this world plan to bring upon the innocent servants of Christ, they display to heaven with tears and compunction of heart their pressing needs, that is, they spread them before the divine judge – so that, by the worth and prayers of the true queen, that is holy Church, which is partly still wandering in this world, and partly already reigning with the Lord in heaven, they may be found worthy to be heard by the king of all ages.

Now, should someone ask how it can be reconciled with being the most just of kings that he should inflict trials upon the innocent, let him know that this is not out of a wish to do evil, but the consequence of some supreme purpose. For the wisdom of God which overcomes all evil, and reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other and orders all things well, does all that it wills in heaven and on earth, in the sea and in the deep. By a just decision it comes about that his faithful servants are given into the hands of their persecutors, either to expiate their sins, or reform their way of living, or even to increase their merits and double their reward. For, as the Prophet bears witness: The Lord is just in all his ways and kind in all his doings. He is near to all who call upon him. In truth, he fulfils the desire of those who fear him, and he hears their cry and saves them. For, when Satan asked it, the Lord did not give Job into his hands that he might perish but that, with his help, he might conquer this most wicked enemy, and so win for himself the palm of victory, and leave a just punishment to his enemy for his malice. The Apostle Paul was given a thorn in his flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass him, that power might be made perfect in weakness. Nor should we pass over in silence the fact that it is said that Mordecai could not enter the king's palace wearing sackcloth, but merely came to the entrance to the palace. For no one can enter the palace of the heavenly kingdom in the corruption of this present life. But, in the meanwhile, everyone before the actual day of his death should knock at the gate of the kingdom by bodily mortification and compunction of heart, and thus at the hour of death enter the Lord's paradise in joy.

Mordecai with the Jews prayed for Esther, the queen, and the queen herself prayed for Mordecai and the Jews. For the master ought to pour forth his prayers to God for his disciples, and the disciples for their master, that the entire body of the faithful, that is, the members of the whole body, may be preserved from harm by the kindness of heaven. Hence too, in the Acts of the Apostles, it is written that, when Peter was in prison, ceaseless prayer was made to God for him by the Church.

Bd Rabanus Maurus, Expositio in lib. Esther 7 (PL 109:654); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF ESTHER

(The speech of Queen Esther: Esther 14:1-19)

And Esther the queen, seized with deathly anxiety, fled to the Lord; she took off her splendid apparel and put on the garments of distress and mourning, and instead of costly perfumes she covered her head with ashes and dung, and she utterly humbled her body, and every part that she loved to adorn she covered with her tangled hair. And she prayed to the Lord God of Israel, and said:

“O my Lord, thou only art our King; help me, who am alone and have no helper but thee, for my danger is in my hand. Ever since I was born I have heard in the tribe of my family that thou, O Lord, didst take Israel out of all the nations, and our fathers from among all their ancestors, for an everlasting inheritance, and that thou didst do for them all that thou didst promise. And now we have sinned before thee, and thou hast given us into the hands of our enemies, because we glorified their gods. Thou art righteous, O Lord! And now they are not satisfied that we are in bitter slavery, but they have covenanted with their idols to abolish what thy mouth has ordained and to destroy thy inheritance, to stop the mouths of those who praise thee and to quench thy altar and the glory of thy house, to open the mouths of the nations for the praise of vain idols, and to magnify for ever a mortal king. O Lord, do not surrender thy sceptre to what has no being; and do not let them mock at our downfall; but turn their plan against themselves, and make an example of the man who began this against us. Remember, O Lord; make thyself known in this time of our affliction, and give me courage, O King of the gods and Master of all dominion! Put eloquent speech in my mouth before the lion, and turn his heart to hate the man who is fighting against us, so that there may be an end of him and those who agree with him. But save us by thy hand, and help me, who am alone and have no helper but thee, O Lord. Thou hast knowledge of all things; and thou knowest that I hate the splendour of the wicked and abhor the bed of the uncircumcised and of any alien. Thou knowest my necessity that I abhor the sign of my proud position, which is upon my head on the days when I appear in public. I abhor it like a menstruous rag, and I do not wear it on the days when I am at leisure. And thy servant has not eaten at Haman’s table, and I have not honoured the king’s feast or drunk the wine of the libations. Thy servant has had no joy since the day that I was brought here until now, except in thee, O Lord God of Abraham. O God, whose might is over all, hear the voice of the despairing, and save us from the hands of evildoers. And save me from my fear!”

A READING FROM AGAINST TWO LETTERS OF THE PELAGIANS BY ST AUGUSTINE

How many enemies of Christ are today suddenly and secretly drawn to Christ by grace? Our Lord cries out: None can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. He did not, after all, say ‘guides’ so that we might by it somehow understand that the will goes first. Are any people drawn, if they are already willing? And yet, none come unless they are willing. They are drawn, then, in marvellous ways to will by the one who knows

how to work interiorly in the hearts of men, not so that men believe unwillingly – that is impossible – but so that they become men willing to believe from men who were unwilling.

It is not by some human conjecture that we come to suspect that this is true; rather, we discover that it is true by the perfectly clear authority of the divine Scriptures. Why did Queen Esther pray, Place in my mouth a pleasing speech, and make my words glorious in the sight of the lion, and turn his heart to hatred of the one who is attacking us? Why does she say this prayer to God if God does not produce the will in the hearts of human beings? But perhaps this woman prayed in a foolish way. Let us, then, see whether she foolishly expressed her desire in prayer without obtaining results from the one who heard her prayer.

See, Esther enters the presence of the king and, because she was not entering in her proper turn, since she was driven by great need, he looked at her, as Scripture says, like a bull in the heat of his wrath. The queen was frightened, and she turned pale out of consternation and leaned upon the hand of the maid who preceded her. And God turned and transformed his wrath into gentleness. What need is there to recall the rest of the passage? In it the divine Scripture testifies that God fulfilled her request by producing in the king's heart nothing other than the will by which he gave the command and the queen's request was carried out. In order for this to come about, God had already heard her. Before the king had heard the woman's words of petition, God changed and transformed the heart of the king by his most hidden and efficacious power from wrath to gentleness, that is, from the will to do harm to the will to grant favours. As the Apostle says: God produces in you even the will.

Did the men of God who wrote these things, or rather did the very Spirit of God under whose authorship they wrote these things, attack the free choice of human beings? Heaven forbid! If we belong among the vessels of honour because of grace, let us not be ungrateful and attribute to ourselves what we have received. For what do we have that we have not received?

St Augustine, Contra duas eps. Pelagianorum, 1.19-20 (PL 44:168-169); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF ESTHER

(The king and Haman at Esther's banquet. Haman is hanged: Esther 5:1-5; 7:1-10)

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, opposite the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne inside the palace opposite the entrance to the palace; and when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she found favour in his sight and he held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the top of the sceptre. And the king said to her, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom." And Esther said, "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come this day to a dinner that I have prepared for the king." Then said the king, "Bring Haman quickly, that we may do as Esther desires." So the king and Haman came to the dinner that Esther had prepared.

The king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. And on the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favour in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king." Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, that would presume to do this?" And Esther said, "A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!" Then Haman was in terror before the king and the queen. And the king rose from the feast in wrath and went into the palace garden; but Haman stayed to beg his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king. And the king returned from the palace garden to the place where they were drinking wine, as Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was; and the king said, "Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?" As the words left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face. Then said Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, Moreover, the gallows which Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing in Haman's house, fifty cubits high. And the king said, "Hang him on that." So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ESTHER BY BLESSED RABANUS MAURUS

What does it mean that Esther falls at the king's feet, and begs him to spare her people, but that holy Church humbly begs almighty God daily for the deliverance of her children, through her faith in the incarnation of the only-begotten Son of God, since by the grace of that mystery the boldness of her enemies is restrained, and the innocence of the faithful is delivered from their hands? The heavenly king extends his golden sceptre

over the prostrate queen, for he powerfully bestows the mercy of his faithful love upon her. She begs that the former letters of the most wicked Haman may be exchanged for newly-written ones. For it is the preoccupation of the true queen that every pocket of error and all the destructive devices which the ancient enemy, through his servants, contrives for the annihilation of the people of God shall be thrown back and destroyed by the saving witness of the gospel. These letters, written in the king's name, are sealed with his signet ring, for the gospel teaching which is fully proclaimed throughout the world is every-where confirmed by the seal of the Holy Spirit. By his gift, the preachers themselves, filled with abiding strength, seem to every-one to be unanswerable, and stand as glorious victors over their enemies.

How does it come to be said that Ahasuerus is king over the whole earth and makes all the islands in the sea his tributaries? For the historical king of the Medes and Persians did not have the whole world in his gift, nor could he have made all the islands in the sea his tributaries. For even the knowledge of his name could not have reached those islands or many parts of the earth. But this belief more genuinely refers to Christ, our king and lord, whose power is in heaven and earth, in the sea and in all the depths. In the gospel he calls himself the door, for through him we gain entrance to eternal life, as the psalmist bears witness: And all kings bow down before him, all nations serve him! The kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, the kings of Arabia and Seba bring him gifts. How the true Mordacai – that is to say, the company of the holy teachers of the Church – exalts the power of this king and his authority, dignity, and sublimity is testified to the whole Christian people by the words and writings not only of the one people of Judea, but of every nation in the world. For, from the beginning, he has exalted his chosen ones by the gift of his grace, and made them renowned and honoured before all peoples.

Bd Rabanus Maurus, Expositio in lib. Esther 13.14 (PL 109:662.670); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET BARUCH

(The prayer of a penitent people: Baruch 1:14 – 2:5; 3:1-8)

“And you shall read this book which we are sending you, to make your confession in the house of the Lord on the days of the feasts and at appointed seasons.

“And you shall say: ‘Righteousness belongs to the Lord our God, but confusion of face, as at this day, to us, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to our kings and our princes and our priests and our prophets and our fathers, because we have sinned before the Lord, and have disobeyed him, and have not heeded the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in the statutes of the Lord which he set before us. From the day when the Lord brought our fathers out of the land of Egypt until today, we have been disobedient to the Lord our God, and we have been negligent, in not heeding his voice. So to this day there have clung to us the calamities and the curse which the Lord declared through Moses his servant at the time when he brought our fathers out of the land of Egypt to give to us a land flowing with milk and honey. We did not heed the voice of the Lord our God in all the words of the prophets whom he sent to us, but we each followed the intent of his own wicked heart by serving other gods and doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord our God.

“ ‘So the Lord confirmed his word, which he spoke against us, and against our judges who judged Israel, and against our kings and against our princes and against the men of Israel and Judah. Under the whole heaven there has not been done the like of what he has done in Jerusalem, in accordance with what is written in the law of Moses, that we should eat, one the flesh of his son and another the flesh of his daughter. And he gave them into subjection to all the kingdoms around us, to be a reproach and a desolation among all the surrounding peoples, where the Lord has scattered them. They were brought low and not raised up, because we sinned against the Lord our God, in not heeding his voice.

“ ‘O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, the soul in anguish and the wearied spirit cry out to thee. Hear, O Lord, and have mercy, for we have sinned before thee. For thou art enthroned for ever, and we are perishing for ever. O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, hear now the prayer of the dead of Israel and of the sons of those who sinned before thee, who did not heed the voice of the Lord their God, so that calamities have clung to us. Remember not the iniquities of our fathers, but in this crisis remember thy power and thy name. For thou art the Lord our God, and thee, O Lord, will we praise. For thou hast put the fear of thee in our hearts in order that we should call upon thy name; and we will praise thee in our exile, for we have put away from our hearts all the iniquity of our fathers who sinned before thee. Behold, we are today in our exile where thou hast scattered us, to be reproached and cursed and punished for all the iniquities of our fathers who forsook the Lord our God.’”

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST FULGENTIUS OF RUSPE

I shall show you, mortal man, what is good and what it is that the Lord requires of you. But for now, use your judgement and act righteously; love mercy and be careful as you conduct your life in the Lord's sight.

First, then, as to what it might mean, to use one's judgement, at the blessed Prophet's first injunction. Judgement is said to be an agreement, or decision, reached over the accusation against and defence of some person; so what is required is for the accused to be sent down when guilty, or else victoriously acquitted. So turn your thoughts to yourself, to your own state, mortal man. Look for the accusation against you yourself: then for the defence; and then, what about the judgement itself? For now, you alone are accuser, defender, and judge. Enter the secret recesses of your mind and heart, where the eyes of the Lord alone can see you. Accuse yourself there, that you may be defended of the charge. Try your-self there, that you may carry off the victory. Condemn yourself there, in your own mind, that you may merit absolution. Do not treat yourself as a special case when criticising your own conduct. Instead, take apart and analyse your misdeeds with rigour; be strict in condemning the sins you acknowledge as yours; and in con-demning them as your own, do them to death as well.

Do them to death: that means, not to yield in the slightest, ever after, to sinful urges. Not being one who commits sin, you will then be one who has killed it off. And if you are a sound judge of your own sin you will go free of God's just judgement. But that you may rejoice in a just judgement delivered on yourself, take note of St Paul's counsel, teaching what actions of ours we need to mortify so as to arrive at the true life. For he says this: Mortify your own bodies as they walk the earth; as for fornication and all impurity, evil desires and prurience, avarice and slavery to the idols of materialism, all these call down the wrath of God on the children of disbelief. That tells us, then, what is objectionable in ourselves, what we should condemn there, what needs mortifying. Make the judgement on yourself – and you will not be judged. So condemn – and you will not be condemned. Mortify yourself – and you will not be finally mortified, with the death of the soul. Here and now be the strictest judge, a veritable butcher in cutting out defects in the flesh. Take careful thought and be abject in mortification. For if you have properly weighed your sins you have made the judgement; then by casting them off, you have killed them. To defend yourself, then, self-accusation has to come first; to secure your pardon, judgement and self-criticism; so as to conduct your cause victoriously, examination of conscience. Acknowledge your iniquity, mortify your base desires, mend your ways – and so by judging aright you shall set free your mind and heart, your very soul.

St Fulgentius of Ruspe, Sermo 10.2-3 (CCL 91A:938-939); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET BARUCH

(The salvation of Israel rests on wisdom: Baruch 3:9-15, 24 – 4:4)

Hear the commandments of life, O Israel; give ear, and learn wisdom! Why is it, O Israel, why is it that you are in the land of your enemies, that you are growing old in a foreign country, that you are defiled with the dead, that you are counted among those in Hades? You have forsaken the fountain of wisdom. If you had walked in the way of God, you would be dwelling in peace for ever. Learn where there is wisdom, where there is strength, where there is understanding, that you may at the same time discern where there is length of days, and life, where there is light for the eyes, and peace.

Who has found her place? And who has entered her storehouses?

O Israel, how great is the house of God! And how vast the territory that he possesses! It is great and has no bounds; it is high and immeasurable. The giants were born there, who were famous of old, great in stature, expert in war. God did not choose them, nor give them the way to knowledge; so they perished because they had no wisdom, they perished through their folly.

Who has gone up into heaven, and taken her, and brought her down from the clouds? Who has gone over the sea, and found her, and will buy her for pure gold? No one knows the way to her, or is concerned about the path to her. But he who knows all things knows her, he found her by his understanding. He who prepared the earth for all time filled it with four-footed creatures; he who sends forth the light, and it goes, called it, and it obeyed him in fear; the stars shone in their watches, and were glad; he called them, and they said, "Here we are!" They shone with gladness for him who made them. This is our God; no other can be compared to him! He found the whole way to knowledge, and gave her to Jacob his servant and to Israel whom he loved. Afterward she appeared upon earth and lived among men.

She is the book of the commandments of God, and the law that endures for ever. All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die. Turn, O Jacob, and take her; walk toward the shining of her light. Do not give your glory to another, or your advantages to an alien people. Happy are we, O Israel, for we know what is pleasing to God.

A READING FROM AGAINST THOSE UNWILLING TO CONFESS THE THEOTOKOS BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

Jeremiah expressly cries out, this is our God, and no other shall be compared with him; he found in every way of knowledge and gave it to Jacob this child and to Israel his beloved; and after these things, he appeared on earth and lived among men. David the hymn-writer also sings, Mother Zion will say: and a man was born in her, and the Most High himself established her.

What else could this mean but that he exists as God and man? For David confessed the same one to be man and the Most High and the Founder. And in another psalm, we find

him preserving no less the principle of the indivisibility of the union and attributing again the things, which are proper to the humanity of the very Logos of God. This is not the result of confusion of their essences, but rather of clearly perceiving the reason of the union of the essences. For he speaks in this way in the forty-fourth psalm, 'Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever; the sceptre of your kingdom is a sceptre of righteousness; you have loved righteousness and hated injustice; therefore, God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your fellows.' Do you see how he spoke of the Logos as God, confessed him to be God and King, but did not divide him, nor introduce another person in addition to him? Do you see how he spoke of the anointing? Let them then explain this saying. How was the Logos, being God, anointed except by virtue of the fact that he put on the form of the servant, which would be appropriate to the reception of anointing? But, if they say that the anointing is spoken of the person of the Logos because of his indwelling in the man, as they are deceived into saying, let them learn that indwelling is not said with reference to Christ, but with reference to the prophets and the saints, and so, the saying in the psalm greatly surpasses the terms of the indwelling. For, while God dwells in all the saints, and they are consequently sanctified and anointed, he is not himself said to be sanctified and anointed. If, then, they apply the indwelling to him in a similar manner as in the saints, their blasphemy will be obvious to everyone, and it will be clear that their teaching is entirely alien to the apostolic teaching.

St Cyril of Alexandria, Against those unwilling to confess the Theotokos 7.

Season of the Year / Week 25

Sunday of the Twenty-Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF TOBIT

(The piety, spoliation and flight of Tobit: Tobit 1:1-22)

The book of the acts of Tobit the son of Tobiel, son of Ananiel, son of Aduel, son of Gabael, of the descendants of Asiel and the tribe of Naphtali, who in the days of Shalmaneser, king of the Assyrians, was taken into captivity from Thisbe, which is to the south of Kedesh Naphtali in Galilee above Asher.

I, Tobit, walked in the ways of truth and righteousness all the days of my life, and I performed many acts of charity to my brethren and countrymen who went with me into the land of the Assyrians, to Nineveh. Now when I was in my own country, in the land of Israel, while I was still a young man, the whole tribe of Naphtali my forefather deserted the house of Jerusalem. This was the place which had been chosen from among all the tribes of Israel, where all the tribes should sacrifice and where the temple of the dwelling of the Most High was consecrated and established for all generations for ever.

All the tribes that joined in apostasy used to sacrifice to the calf Baal, and so did the house of Naphtali my forefather. But I alone went often to Jerusalem for the feasts, as it is ordained for all Israel by an everlasting decree. Taking the first fruits and the tithes of my produce and the first shearings, I would give these to the priests, the sons of Aaron, at the altar. Of all my produce I would give a tenth to the sons of Levi who ministered at Jerusalem; a second tenth I would sell, and I would go and spend the proceeds each year at Jerusalem; the third tenth I would give to those to whom it was my duty, as Deborah my father's mother had commanded me, for I was left an orphan by my father. When I became a man I married Anna, a member of our family, and by her I became the father of Tobias.

Now when I was carried away captive to Nineveh, all my brethren and my relatives ate the food of the Gentiles; but I kept myself from eating it, because I remembered God with all my heart. Then the Most High gave me favour and good appearance in the sight of Shalmaneser, and I was his buyer of provisions. So I used to go into Media, and once at Rages in Media I left ten talents of silver in trust with Gabael, the brother of Gabrias. But when Shalmaneser died, Sennacherib his son reigned in his place; and under him the highways were unsafe, so that I could no longer go into Media.

In the days of Shalmaneser I performed many acts of charity to my brethren. I would give my bread to the hungry and my clothing to the naked; and if I saw any one of my people dead and thrown out behind the wall of Nineveh, I would bury him. And if Sennacherib the king put to death any who came fleeing from Judea, I buried them secretly. For in his anger he put many to death. When the bodies were sought by the king, they were not found. Then one of the men of Nineveh went and informed the king about me, that I was burying them; so I hid myself. When I learned that I was being searched for, to be put to death, I left home in fear. Then all my property was confiscated and nothing was left to me except my wife Anna and my son Tobias.

But not fifty days passed before two of Sennacherib's sons killed him, and they fled to the mountains of Ararat. Then Esarhaddon, his son, reigned in his place; and he appointed Ahikar, the son of my brother Anael, over all the accounts of his kingdom and over the entire administration. Ahikar interceded for me, and I returned to Nineveh. Now Ahikar was cupbearer, keeper of the signet, and in charge of administration of the accounts, for Esarhaddon had appointed him second to himself. He was my nephew

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON TOBIT BY ST BEDE

The book of the holy father Tobit is clearly of saving benefit to its readers even in its superficial meaning inasmuch as it abounds in both the noblest examples and the noblest counsels for moral conduct, and anyone who knows how to interpret it historically and allegorically can see that its inner meaning excels the mere letter as much as the fruit excels the leaves. For if it is understood in the spiritual sense it is found to contain within it the greatest mysteries of Christ and the Church.

Indeed Tobit was taken captive in the days of Shalmaneser king of the Assyrians but when he was in captivity he did not forsake the way of truth. This captivity of the hands of the king of the Assyrians denotes the captivity of the human race whereby, through the king of all the perverse, that is, the devil, it was banished from the abode of its heavenly homeland and deported to its sojourn in this exile.

When Tobit became a man he took as his wife Anna from his own tribe. And this people, after they had grown up and increased in Egypt, espoused the Synagogue which had been established by Moses with legal ceremonies. By her he begot a son and gave him his own name because he learnt that Christ was to be born of his own kin as Moses had said: Your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your brethren; to him you shall listen; and the Lord said to David: One of the fruit of your womb I will set upon my throne. Then he gave him his own name believing and confessing what the Father says of him: And I will make him the first-born, as he says of the people themselves, Israel is my first-born son.

He taught him from his infancy to fear God and refrain from all sin, believing and confessing that he would commit no sin and that no deceit would be found on his lips but that the spirit of the fear of the Lord would fill him. To Gabael his fellow-kinsman who was in need, Tobit gave ten silver talents in trust. And the people of God entrusted to the Gentiles through the seventy translators the knowledge of the divine law which is contained in the decalogue in order thereby to free them from the indigence of unbelief; but they gave it in trust, that is, on condition that it be repaid after the themselves got wealthy or the one who had given it asked it back.

On the other hand, the Gentiles received the word of God from the people of Israel through the medium of translation because now after the Lord's incarnation they also understand it spiritually and work at acquiring the riches of the virtues; but they pay back the creditor when they receive into the unity of the Church Jews who believe at the end of the world; and, as well as entrusting to them the mysteries of Christ for their salvation, they also unlock for them the secrets of the Scriptures.

St Bede, Comm. in Tob. 1-3; (1997), tr. S. Connolly.

Monday of the Twenty-Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF TOBIT

(The troubles of Tobit the righteous and his speech: Tobit 2:1 – 3:6)

When I arrived home and my wife Anna and my son Tobias were restored to me, at the feast of Pentecost, which is the sacred festival of the seven weeks, a good dinner was prepared for me and I sat down to eat. Upon seeing the abundance of food I said to my son, "Go and bring whatever poor man of our brethren you may find who is mindful of the Lord, and I will wait for you." But he came back and said, "Father, one of our people has been strangled and thrown into the market place." So before I tasted anything I sprang up and removed the body to a place of shelter until sunset. And when I returned I washed myself and ate my food in sorrow. Then I remembered the prophecy of Amos, how he said, "Your feasts shall be turned into mourning, and all your festivities into lamentation." And I wept.

When the sun had set I went and dug a grave and buried the body. And my neighbours laughed at me and said, "He is no longer afraid that he will be put to death for doing this; he once ran away, and here he is burying the dead again!" On the same night I returned from burying him, and because I was defiled I slept by the wall of the courtyard, and my face was uncovered. I did not know that there were sparrows on the wall and their fresh droppings fell into my open eyes and white films formed on my eyes. I went to physicians, but they did not help me. Ahikar, however, took care of me until he went to Elymais.

Then my wife Anna earned money at women's work. She used to send the product to the owners. Once when they paid her wages, they also gave her a kid; and when she returned to me it began to bleat. So I said to her, "Where did you get the kid? It is not stolen, is it? Return it to the owners; for it is not right to eat what is stolen." And she said, "It was given to me as a gift in addition to my wages." But I did not believe her, and told her to return it to the owners; and I blushed for her. Then she replied to me, "Where are your charities and your righteous deeds? You seem to know everything!"

Then in my grief I wept, and I prayed in anguish, saying, "Righteous art thou, O Lord; all thy deeds and all thy ways are mercy and truth, and thou dost render true and righteous judgment for ever. Remember me and look favourably upon me; do not punish me for my sins and for my unwitting offences and those which my fathers committed before thee. For they disobeyed thy commandments, and thou gavest us over to plunder, captivity, and death; thou madest us a byword of reproach in all the nations among which we have been dispersed. And now thy many judgments are true in exacting penalty from me for my sins and those of my fathers, because we did not keep thy commandments. For we did not walk in truth before thee. And now deal with me according to thy pleasure; command my spirit to be taken up, that I may depart and become dust. For it is better for me to die than to live, because I have heard false reproaches, and great is the sorrow within me. Command that I now be released from my distress to go to the eternal abode; do not turn thy face away from me."

A READING FROM THE SERMONS OF ST MAXIMUS OF TURIN

If you paid close attention to the section of the Gospel that was read, that section would have moved your feelings deeply. For the Lord, as Scripture says, upon having been told by someone that he would follow him wherever he went for the sake of religious service, says instead to another person: Follow me. And, having spurned and disdained the one, he chooses the other in his place – a person who expected nothing and was silent, although a voluntary offering is usually more acceptable, and service is more pleasing when it is spontaneously rendered and not commanded.

Why is the one rejected, then? Why is he refused as if he were unworthy? For the Lord says to him: The foxes have holes and the birds of heaven have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. This is the first thing that we must consider, therefore – that the Lord is not an acceptor of persons, for he is a just and even-handed judge, but that he gives love in repayment of virtuous deeds and does not choose the one who is quick with words and slow in devotion but the one whose tongue is silent and whose mind is devout. About such a one the Prophet says: If you practise silence you will appear to be wise, but with regard to the one who speaks at every occasion Scripture has it: not everyone who says to me: Lord, Lord, but the one who does my will. From this we learn, then, that the Lord ought not to be cried out to so much from the mouth as from the heart.

Therefore he takes the one who is silent and who expects nothing. His tongue was silent, to be sure, but he spoke in spirit. For we understand how devoted he was who, as he himself maintained, left his dead father so as to lay hold of the Lord of life. For he says: First permit me to go and bury my father. The one who he had left behind as dead he begs that he might return and bury. Sorrow did not hold him nor death detain him, because he was hastening to life. He had not yet closed the eyes of the dead man, nor yet buried the stiff limbs, But as soon as he learned that the Lord had come he forgot the feeling of filial piety, believing that there was a greater piety in loving Christ more than one's parents. Perhaps he had read the prophetic passage that says: Forget your people and your father's house. So he forgot his father and remembered his Saviour. Perhaps he had also heard the Lord's Gospel words: The one loves his father or mother more is not worthy of me. Thus, as Tobit is justified because he abandons his meal for the sake of a burial, this man is approved because he abandons the burial of his father for the sake of Christ. For the one is not afraid to pass over his meal because some earthly work intervenes, while the other fears lest some delay cause him to omit the eating of heavenly bread. Hence, although in consideration of Christ we owe burial to everyone, this man forsook his father's burial out of love for Christ.

St Maximus of Turin, Sermon 41, 1-2; ACW 50 (1989) tr. Ramsey.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF TOBIT

(Sarah's misery and her prayers: Tobit 3:7-25)

On the same day, at Ecbatana in Media, it also happened that Sarah, the daughter of Raguel, was reproached by her father's maids, because she had been given to seven husbands, and the evil demon Asmodeus had slain each of them before he had been with her as his wife. So the maids said to her, "Do you not know that you strangle your husbands? You already have had seven and have had no benefit from any of them. Why do you beat us? If they are dead, go with them! May we never see a son or daughter of yours!"

When she heard these things she was deeply grieved, even to the thought of hanging herself. But she said, "I am the only child of my father; if I do this, it will be a disgrace to him, and I shall bring his old age down in sorrow to the grave. So she prayed by her window and said, "Blessed art thou, O Lord my God, and blessed is thy holy and honoured name for ever. May all thy works praise thee for ever. And now, O Lord, I have turned my eyes and my face toward thee. Command that I be released from the earth and that I hear reproach no more. Thou knowest, O Lord, that I am innocent of any sin with man, and that I did not stain my name or the name of my father in the land of my captivity. I am my father's only child, and he has no child to be his heir, no near kinsman or kinsman's son for whom I should keep myself as wife. Already seven husbands of mine are dead. Why should I live? But if it be not pleasing to thee to take my life, command that respect be shown to me and pity be taken upon me, and that I hear reproach no more."

The prayer of both was heard in the presence of the glory of the great God. And Raphael was sent to heal the two of them: to scale away the white films of Tobit's eyes; to give Sarah the daughter of Raguel in marriage to Tobias the son of Tobit, and to bind Asmodeus the evil demon, because Tobias was entitled to possess her. At that very moment Tobit returned and entered his house and Sarah the daughter of Raguel came down from her upper room.

A READING FROM ON PRAYER BY ORIGEN

In prayer you must not repeat meaningless words, nor ask for what is unimportant, nor pray for earthly things, nor come to your prayers in an angry mood or a state of mental confusion. But you cannot achieve the peace of mind which prayer requires without purity; nor when you pray can you obtain remission of your sins unless you have wholeheartedly forgiven whoever asks forgiveness from you for some offence.

I can think of many things that will help you when you pray correctly or try to do so to the best of your ability. The most helpful of all is to pray with intensity, and by means of that same intensity imagine yourselves to be in the presence of God, speaking directly to him as if he were there in person observing you.

For when we recall an object to mind it sometimes happens that certain other impressions linked with that object in memory reappear with it in our recollection corrupting our thoughts. In the same way we must believe that the remembrance of God's presence is beneficial to us. God perceives the inmost emotions of the soul; and the soul composes itself to please him who examines our hearts and searches our thoughts as if he were really there watching over us, coming to every mind. For even if you received no further help after preparing your minds for prayer, you must realise you obtain no ordinary result from having so devoutly composed yourselves during your time of prayer. And if this happens often, those who devote themselves to unceasing prayer know by experience how many sins it preserves them from, and how many good deeds it leads them towards.

For they know how the memory and recollection of a good and wise man can rouse our admiration and often hinder our impulse to evil. Then how much greater is the help we receive from the memory of God the Father of all, joined with our prayers to him; for we believe ourselves to be in his presence, speaking to God who is there in person and hears us.

Origen, De Oratione, 8-11 (PG 11:442-448); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF TOBIT

(Tobias undertakes a journey: Tobit 4:1-6, 16, 20-21; 5:1-14, 17-21)

On that day Tobit remembered the money which he had left in trust with Gabael at Rages in Media, and he said to himself; "I have asked for death. Why do I not call my son Tobias so that I may explain to him about the money before I die?" So he called him and said, "'My son, when I die, bury me, and do not neglect your mother. Honour her all the days of your life; do what is pleasing to her, and do not grieve her. Remember, my son, that she faced many dangers for you while you were yet unborn. When she dies bury her beside me in the same grave.

"Remember the Lord our God all your days, my son, and refuse to sin or to transgress his commandments. Live uprightly all the days of your life, and do not walk in the ways of wrongdoing. For if you do what is true, your ways will prosper through your deeds.

"Give of your bread to the hungry, and of your clothing to the naked. Give all your surplus to charity, and do not let your eye begrudge the gift when you made it.

"And now let me explain to you about the ten talents of silver which I left in trust with Gabael the son of Gabrias at Rages in Media. Do not be afraid, my son, because we have become poor. You have great wealth if you fear God and refrain from every sin and do what is pleasing in his sight."

Then Tobias answered him, "Father, I will do everything that you have commanded me; but how can I obtain the money when I do not know the man?" Then Tobit gave him the receipt, and said to him, "Find a man to go with you and I will pay him wages as long as I live; and go and get the money." So he went to look for a man; and he found Raphael, who was an angel, but Tobias did not know it. Tobias said to him, "Can you go with me to Rages in Media? Are you acquainted with that region?" The angel replied, "I will go with you; I am familiar with the way, and I have stayed with our brother Gabael." Then Tobias said to him, "Wait for me, and I shall tell my father." And he said to him, "Go, and do not delay." So he went in and said to his father, "I have found some one to go with me." He said, "Call him to me, so that I may learn to what tribe he belongs, and whether he is a reliable man to go with you."

So Tobias invited him in; he entered and they greeted each other. Then Tobit said to him, "My brother, to what tribe and family do you belong? Tell me." But he answered, "Are you looking for a tribe and a family or for a man whom you will pay to go with your son?" And Tobit said to him, "I should like to know, my brother, your people and your name." He replied, "I am Azarias the son of the great Ananias, one of your relatives." Then Tobit said to him, "You are welcome, my brother. Do not be angry with me because I tried to learn your tribe and family. You are a relative of mine, of a good and noble lineage. For I used to know Ananias and Jathan, the sons of the great Shemaiah, when we went together to Jerusalem to worship and offered the first-born of our flocks and the tithes of our produce. They did not go astray in the error of our brethren. My brother,

you come of good stock. But tell me, what wages am I to pay you – a drachma a day, and expenses for yourself as for my son?” So they agreed to these terms.

But Anna, his mother, began to weep, and said to Tobit, “Why have you sent our child away? Is he not the staff of our hands as he goes in and out before us? Do not add money to money, but consider it as rubbish as compared to our child. For the life that is given to us by the Lord is enough for us.” And Tobit said to her, “Do not worry, my sister; he will return safe and sound, and your eyes will see him. For a good angel will go with him; his journey will be successful, and he will come back safe and sound.” So she stopped weeping.

A READING FROM THE CONFESSIONS OF ST AUGUSTINE

O Light, Tobit saw you when despite the blindness of his carnal eyes he pointed out the path of life to his son, and strode unerringly ahead, borne by the feet of charity. Isaac saw you, though his bodily eyes were dimmed and closed by age, when true insight was granted him in blessing his sons, notwithstanding his inability to tell one from the other as he uttered his blessing. Jacob saw you when, likewise blinded by advanced age, he beheld by the radiant vision of his heart the tribes of the people that were to be, prefigured in his sons; and when, stretching out crossed hands in a gesture full of mystery, he laid them on his grandsons, Joseph’s children, not in the way indicated by their father, who saw only the externals, but as he himself judged to be right by the vision that guided him within. All these enjoyed the same Light, the Light that is one in itself and unites all who see and love it.

The case is different with earthly light, of which I was speaking. This imparts to the life of this world a seductive zest, dangerous to those whose love for it is blind. Yet once they have learned to praise you for light as well as for your other gifts, Creator God, O Lord of all, they take it up in a hymn to your glory, instead of being sapped by it in somnolence of spirit, and this is how I would wish to act. I resist alluring sights lest my feet, those feet with which I walk in your way, become entangled, and to you I lift the invisible eyes of my spirit that you may pluck my feet from the snare. I know that you will pluck them free again and again, for enmeshed they often are. I am repeatedly caught in the traps scattered on every side, but you will never fail to free me, for you neither grow drowsy nor fall asleep, who guard Israel.

How many things craftsmen have made, things without number, employing their manifold skills and ingenuity on apparel, footwear, pottery, and artefacts of every conceivable kind, on pictures too, and various images; and how far they have in these matters exceeded what is reasonably necessary or useful, or serves some pious purpose! All of them increase the temptations to which our eyes are subject. People pursue outside themselves what they are making, but forsake the One within by whom they were made, and so destroy what they were made to be by driving it out of doors.

O my God, for me you are loveliness itself; yet for all these things too I sing a hymn and offer a sacrifice of praise to you who sanctify me, because the beautiful designs that are

born in our minds and find expression through clever hands derive from that Beauty which transcends all minds, the Beauty to which my own mind aspires day and night.

St Augustine, Confessiones, 10.34 (CSEL 34:265-267); Word in Season VIII.

Thursday of the Twenty-Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF TOBIT

(Tobias and the angel make the journey; Tobit 6:1-17)

Now as they proceeded on their way they came at evening to the Tigris river and camped there. Then the young man went down to wash himself. A fish leaped up from the river and would have swallowed the young man; and the angel said to him, "Catch the fish." So the young man seized the fish and threw it up on the land. Then the angel said to him, "Cut open the fish and take the heart and liver and gall and put them away safely." So the young man did as the angel told him; and they roasted and ate the fish.

And they both continued on their way until they came near to Ecbatana. Then the young man said to the angel, "Brother Azarias, of what use is the liver and heart and gall of the fish? He replied, "As for the heart and liver, if a demon or evil spirit gives trouble to any one, you make a smoke from these before the man or woman, and that person will never be troubled again. And as for the gall, anoint with it a man who has white films in his eyes, and he will be cured."

When they approached Ecbatana, the angel said to the young man, "Brother, today we shall stay with Raguel. He is your relative, and he has an only daughter named Sarah. I will suggest that she be given to you in marriage, because you are entitled to her and to her inheritance, for you are her only eligible kinsman. The girl is also beautiful and sensible. Now listen to my plan. I will speak to her father, and as soon as we return from Rages we will celebrate the marriage. For I know that Raguel, according to the law of Moses, cannot give her to another man without incurring the penalty of death, because you rather than any other man are entitled to the inheritance."

Then the young man said to the angel, "Brother Azarias, I have heard that the girl has been given to seven husbands and that each died in the bridal chamber. Now I am the only son my father has, and I am afraid that if I go in I will die as those before me did, for a demon is in love with her, and he harms no one except those who approach her. So now I fear that I may die and bring the lives of my father and mother to the grave in sorrow on my account. And they have no other son to bury them."

But the angel said to him, "Do you not remember the words with which your father commanded you to take a wife from among your own people? Now listen to me, brother, for she will become your wife; and do not worry about the demon, for this very night she will be given to you in marriage. When you enter the bridal chamber, you shall take live ashes of incense and lay upon them some of the heart and liver of the fish so as to make a smoke. Then the demon will smell it and flee away, and will never again return. And when you approach her, rise up, both of you, and cry out to the merciful God, and he will save you and have mercy on you. Do not be afraid, for she was destined for you from eternity. You will save her, and she will go with you, and I suppose that you will have children by her." When Tobias heard these things, he fell in love with her and yearned deeply for her.

A READING FROM THE ORATIONS OF ST GREGORY NAZIANZEN

The fortunes of this world are uncertain and transient; they are tossed from hand to hand, as in a game with pebbles, and are always changing. Not one of this world's blessings belongs to its owner securely enough to prevent time destroying it, or envy transferring it elsewhere. But the rewards of heaven are fixed and abiding; they neither disappear nor change, and can never deceive the hopes of those who trust in them.

Now in my opinion there is a very good reason why people can find nothing reliable or lasting in the good things of this world. The Word, who is the architect of our destiny in this as in all things, and the Wisdom that transcends all mortal thought, have together well contrived it that we should be misled by everything we see in the constantly shifting world around us, where in the midst of this whirling to and fro we are always in pursuit of something that is forever flying from our grasp. Once we have observed the restlessness and distortion of this mortal life, we shall hasten to change our course toward the life to come. Indeed what should we have done if our prosperity here have been secure, when even in all its uncertainty we are so bound to this world, and its pleasures and allurements have so enslaved us, that we cannot imagine anything better or higher than our present life? And this, despite the fact that we are told and believe that we are created in the image of God, that image which is above and draws us to itself.

St Gregory Nazianzen, Oratio 37, 19.1-12 (PG 36:286-291); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF TOBIT

(Tobias marries Sarah: Tobit 7:1 – 8:14)

When they reached Ecbatana and arrived at the house of Raguel, Sarah met them and greeted them. They returned her greeting, and she brought them into the house. Then Raguel said to his wife Edna, "How much the young man resembles my cousin Tobit!" And Raguel asked them, "Where are you from, brethren?" They answered him, "We belong to the sons of Naphtali, who are captives in Nineveh." So he said to them, "Do you know our brother Tobit?" And they said, "Yes, we do." And he asked them, "Is he in good health?" They replied, "He is alive and in good health." And Tobias said, "He is my father." Then Raguel sprang up and kissed him and wept. And he blessed him and exclaimed, "Son of that good and noble man!" When he heard that Tobit had lost his sight, he was stricken with grief and wept. And his wife Edna and his daughter Sarah wept. They received them very warmly; and they killed a ram from the flock and set large servings of food before them.

Then Tobias said to Raphael, "Brother Azarias, speak of those things which you talked about on the journey, and let the matter be settled." So he communicated the proposal to Raguel. And Raguel said to Tobias, "Eat, drink, and be merry; for it is your right to take my child. But let me explain the true situation to you. I have given my daughter to seven husbands, and when each came to her he died in the night. But for the present be merry." And Tobias said, "I will eat nothing here until you make a binding agreement with me." So Raguel said, "Take her right now, in accordance with the law. You are her relative, and she is yours. The merciful God will guide you both for the best." Then he called his daughter Sarah, and taking her by the hand he gave her to Tobias to be his wife, saying, "Here she is; take her according to the law of Moses, and take her with you to your father." And he blessed them. Next he called his wife Edna, and took a scroll and wrote out the contract; and they set their seals to it. Then they began to eat.

And Raguel called his wife Edna and said to her, "Sister, make up the other room, and take her into it." so she did as he said, and took her there; and the girl began to weep. But the mother comforted her daughter in her tears, and said to her, "Be brave, my child; the Lord of heaven and earth grant you joy in place of this sorrow of yours. Be brave, my daughter."

When they had finished eating, they escorted Tobias in to her. As he went he remembered the words of Raphael, and he took the live ashes of incense and put the heart and liver of the fish upon them and made a smoke. And when the demon smelled the odour he fled to the remotest parts of Egypt, and the angel bound him. When the door was shut and the two were alone, Tobias got up from the bed and said, "Sister, get up, and let us pray that the Lord may have mercy upon us." And Tobias began to pray, "Blessed art thou, O God of our fathers, and blessed by thy holy and glorious name for ever. Let the heavens and all thy creatures bless thee. Thou madest Adam and gavest him Eve his wife as a helper and support. From them the race of mankind has sprung. Thou didst say, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; let us make a helper for him like

himself.' And now, O Lord, I am not taking this sister of mine because of lust, but with sincerity. Grant that I may find mercy and may grow old together with her." And she said with him, "Amen." Then they both went to sleep for the night.

But Raguel arose and went and dug a grave, with the thought, "Perhaps he too will die." Then Raguel went into his house and said to his wife Edna, "Send one of the maids to see whether he is alive; and if he is not, let us bury him without any one knowing about it." So the maid opened the door and went in, and found them both asleep. And she came out and told them that he was alive.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST BEDE

The fact that our Lord and Saviour when invited to a wedding reception not only agreed to attend it but also condescended to work a miracle at it in order to give pleasure to the assembled guests confirms the faith of any genuine believer even if understood in its literal sense alone, and without searching it for deeper spiritual meanings.

But perhaps we may experience a more sublime joy from contemplating the deeper spiritual meaning of this event. It was as he was about to begin his miracle-working on earth that the Son of God attended a wedding, to make it clear to all that it was really he whom the psalmist had symbolised in the Sun, of which he sang: He came out like a bridegroom from his bridal chamber, exulting like a strong man to run his course; his rising is at one end of the heavens, and his course takes him to the other end.

Somewhere in the gospel Christ says of himself and his disciples, Can the wedding guests be sad while the bridegroom is with them? A time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

Now from the moment our Saviour's incarnation was first promised to the patriarchs, its realisation was awaited with sighs and tears by generation after generation of holy people. In much the same way, ever since his ascension to heaven after his resurrection all the hopes of the faithful have been centred on him in return. It was only during the short period of his sojourn among men that they were excepted from the need to weep and mourn, for then they had him among them also in the flesh whom they loved spiritually. Christ, then, is the bridegroom and the Church his bride; the wedding guests are the individual believers. The wedding celebrations celebrate the time when Christ united the holy Church to himself through the mystery of the Incarnation.

So it was not by chance but in order to reveal a definite mystery that the Lord came to that wedding breakfast. It was held to celebrate the physical union of a couple in everyday life on earth; but Christ had come down from heaven to earth to join his Church to himself in a bond of spiritual love. His bridal chamber was the womb of his Virgin Mother, in which our human nature was wedded to its God, and from which he came out like a bridegroom to unite with himself his Church. It was in Judea that this wedding first took place, for it was there that the Son of God assumed human nature, and later deigned to hallow the Church by allowing it to partake of his body, and where too he graciously confirmed it in faith by the pledge of his Spirit; but after he had called

all nations to embrace that faith, the rejoicing attendant on his wedding celebrations spread abroad to every corner of the globe.

St Bede, Homily 14 (CCL 122:95-96); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF TOBIT

(The return of Tobias to his father: Tobit 10:7b – 11:17)

At that time Tobias said to Raguel, "Send me back, for my father and mother have given up hope of ever seeing me again." But his father-in-law said to him, "Stay with me, and I will send messengers to your father, and they will inform him how things are with you." Tobias replied, "No, send me back to my father." So Raguel arose and gave him his wife Sarah and half of his property in slaves, cattle, and money. And when he had blessed them he sent them away, saying, "The God of heaven will prosper you, my children, before I die." He said also to his daughter, "Honour your father-in-law and your mother-in-law; they are now your parents. Let me hear a good report of you." And he kissed her. And Edna said to Tobias, "The Lord of heaven bring you back safely, dear brother, and grant me to see your children by my daughter Sarah, that I may rejoice before the Lord. See, I am entrusting my daughter to you; do nothing to grieve her."

After this Tobias went on his way, praising God because he had made his journey a success. And he blessed Raguel and his wife Edna.

So he continued on his way until they came near to Nineveh. Then Raphael said to Tobias, "Are you not aware, brother, of how you left your father? Let us run ahead of your wife and prepare the house. And take the gall of the fish with you." So they went their way, and the dog went along behind them.

Now Anna sat looking intently down the road for her son. And she caught sight of him coming, and said to his father, "Behold, your son is coming, and so is the man who went with him!"

Raphael said, "I know, Tobias, that your father will open his eyes. You therefore must anoint his eyes with the gall; and when they smart he will rub them, and will cause the white films to fall away, and he will see you."

Then Anna ran to meet them, and embraced her son, and said to him, "I have seen you, my child; now I am ready to die." And they both wept. Tobit started toward the door, and stumbled. But his son ran to him and took hold of his father, and he sprinkled the gall upon his father's eyes, saying, "Be of good cheer, father." And when his eyes began to smart he rubbed them, and the white films scaled off from the corners of his eyes. Then he saw his son and embraced him, and he wept and said, "Blessed art thou, O God, and blessed is thy name for ever, and blessed are all thy holy angels. For thou hast afflicted me, but thou hast had mercy upon me; here I see my son Tobias!" And his son went in rejoicing, and he reported to his father the great things that had happened to him in Media.

Then Tobit went out to meet his daughter-in-law at the gate of Nineveh, rejoicing and praising God. Those who saw him as he went were amazed because he could see. And Tobit gave thanks before them that God had been merciful to him. When Tobit came

near to Sarah his daughter-in-law, he blessed her, saying, "Welcome, daughter! Blessed is God who has brought you to us, and blessed are your father and your mother."

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST MAXIMUS OF TURIN

A Christian worthy of the name will be intent on praising his Lord and Father throughout the whole day and on doing all things to his greater glory, in accordance with these words of the Apostle, Whether you eat or drink, in fact whatever you do, let all of it be offered for God's glory. This gives you some idea of what St Paul thought a Christian's meal should be like: Christian faith ought to be served up at it rather than a profusion of food; a man's spirit should be nourished at it by frequent invocations of the Lord's name rather than his body by a sequence of elaborate and over-laden dishes; piety rather than satiety should appease his hunger. Above all, says the Apostle, let all be done for the sake of God's glory. Christ wants our every act to be carried out in his own presence as companion and witness, and for this reason: that his personal inspiration may influence us for good, while his constant partnership may cause us to refrain from evil.

Let us, then, give thanks to Christ on rising, and throughout the day let us begin our every deed with the Saviour's sign. Why, even as Gentiles, you used to look for signs, and with scrupulous care you searched for such as might portend a profitable outcome to whatever business you had in hand! But now let us make no mistake as to the number of these signs. For you must realize that Christ's one sign alone will guarantee the total success of every enterprise. And whoever makes that sign at the sowing of his seed will reap the harvest of eternal life, whilst he who makes it at the outset of his journey will travel all the way to heaven. Thus in Christ's sign and name must all our actions be performed, and to it all life's ups and downs must be referred, for has not the Apostle told us, in him we live and move and have our being?

But when evening's shadows lengthen, we must sing to him in the psalmist's words and declare his praises in melodious chants, for in having overcome our labours and our struggles we, like conquerors, have deserved our rest and the oblivion of sleep as the reward of our toil. Who, then, possessing human intelligence, would not be ashamed to end the day with no repetition of the psalms, when even the birds pour out their own sweet psalms in gratitude and with no exultant hymns sung to the glory of him whom the birds praise in melodious song? Therefore, my brothers and sisters, imitate the tiniest birds by giving thanks to the Creator in the early morning and at evening; and if you are specially devout imitate the nightingale, for whom the day alone is not enough to fill with praise, and so it sings the whole night through as well! You also, then, as you vanquish the day with your songs of praise, must add a nightly round to your office, and with a sequence of psalms console your sleepless diligence in the work which you have undertaken!

St Maximus of Turin, Sermo 73.3-5 (CCL 23:305-307); Word in Season VIII.

Season of the Year / Week 26

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JUDITH

(The people pray to God to remove their danger: Judith 2:1-12; 4:1-2, 9-15)

In the eighteenth year, on the twenty-second day of the first month, there was talk in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar king of the Assyrians about carrying out his revenge on the whole region, just as he said. He called together all his officers and all his nobles and set forth to them his secret plan and recounted fully, with his own lips, all the wickedness of the region; and it was decided that every one who had not obeyed his command should be destroyed. When he had finished setting forth his plan, Nebuchadnezzar king of the Assyrians called Holofernes, the chief general of his army, second only to himself, and said to him,

“Thus says the Great King, the lord of the whole earth: When you leave my presence, take with you men confident in their strength, to the number of one hundred and twenty thousand foot soldiers and twelve thousand cavalry. Go and attack the whole west country, because they disobeyed my orders. Tell them to prepare earth and water, for I am coming against them in my anger, and will cover the whole face of the earth with the feet of my armies, and will hand them over to be plundered by my troops, till their wounded shall fill their valleys, and every brook and river shall be filled with their dead, and overflow; and I will lead them away captive to the ends of the whole earth. You shall go and seize all their territory for me in advance. They will yield themselves to you, and you shall hold them for me till the day of their punishment. But if they refuse, your eye shall not spare and you shall hand them over to slaughter and plunder throughout your whole region. For as I live, and by the power of my kingdom, what I have spoken my hand will execute.

By this time the people of Israel living in Judea heard of everything that Holofernes, the general of Nebuchadnezzar the king of the Assyrians, had done to the nations, and how he had plundered and destroyed all their temples; they were therefore very greatly terrified at his approach, and were alarmed both for Jerusalem and for the temple of the Lord their God.

And every man of Israel cried out to God with great fervour, and they humbled themselves with much fasting. They and their wives and their children and their cattle and every resident alien and hired labourer and purchased slave – they all girded themselves with sackcloth. And all the men and women of Israel, and their children, living at Jerusalem, prostrated themselves before the temple and put ashes on their heads and spread out their sackcloth before the Lord. They even surrounded the altar with sackcloth and cried out in unison, praying earnestly to the God of Israel not to give up their infants as prey and their wives as booty, and the cities they had inherited to be destroyed, and the sanctuary to be profaned and desecrated to the malicious joy of the Gentiles. So the Lord heard their prayers and looked upon their affliction; for the people fasted many days throughout Judea and in Jerusalem before the sanctuary of the Lord Almighty. And Joakim the high priest and all the priests who stood before the Lord and ministered to the Lord, with their loins girded with sackcloth, offered the continual

burnt offerings and the vows and freewill offerings of the people. With ashes upon their turbans, they cried out to the Lord with all their might to look with favour upon the whole house of Israel.

A READING FROM ON PRAYER BY ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Prayer is the height of our blessings and communion with God; for it is both companionship and unity with God. Just as the eyes of the body are enlightened when they look upon light, so a soul intent on God is illumined and enlightened by his inexpressible light. It is not indeed formal prayer that I refer to, but prayer offered from the heart, and so not confined to suitable times and fixed intervals, but continuing in action without cease day and night. For we do not only have to withdraw to pray, and suddenly turn our minds towards God. No, even while we are busy among the needy, either with the care of the poor or with other concerns, or useful good works – into their very midst we should also bring our desire for and remembrance of God, so that seasoned, as it were, with the love of God they may provide a most acceptable offering for the Lord of all men. If we devote most of our time to prayer, the delight we can gain from it will last us the whole of our lives.

Prayer is illumination of the soul and true knowledge of God. It mediates between God and men; it heals suffering and counter-acts disease. It calms the soul and guides it to heaven, for prayer has no earthly life, but follows a path leading to the very heights of heaven. It transcends the created world, and in the spirit cuts through and soars above the air; it passes beyond the circle of stars, opens the gates of heaven, and taking precedence over the angels enters the very presence of the unapproachable Trinity. There it worships the deity, and is held worthy to be the companion of the king of heaven. The soul, raised by it high into heaven, embraces the Lord in an ineffable embrace, and cries out tearfully like a child to its mother, begging for the heavenly milk. It seeks its own desires, and receives gifts surpassing all that belongs to the world of nature.

Now in speaking of prayer, you must not imagine that I mean words. I mean desire for God, unutterable love, which men cannot offer of themselves but by the inspiration of divine grace. Of this the Apostle says: We do not know how we ought to pray, but in our wordless sighs the Spirit himself intercedes for us. If the Lord grants to anyone prayer of this kind; it is wealth that will never be taken away, and heavenly food that satisfies the soul; he who tastes it is possessed with an eternal longing for the Lord, which sets his heart ablaze as with a mighty fire.

St John Chrysostom, De Precatione 6 (PG 64:462.466); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JUDITH

(Achior tells the truth about Israel in Holofernes' presence: Judith 5:1-24)

When Holofernes, the general of the Assyrian army, heard that the people of Israel had prepared for war and had closed the passes in the hills and fortified all the high hilltops and set up barricades in the plains, he was very angry. So he called together all the princes of Moab and the commanders of Ammon and all the governors of the coastland, and said to them, "Tell me, you Canaanites, what people is this that lives in the hill country? What cities do they inhabit? How large is their army, and in what does their power or strength consist? Who rules over them as king, leading their army? And why have they alone, of all who live in the west, refused to come out and meet me?"

Then Achior, the leader of all the Ammonites, said to him, "Let my lord now hear a word from the mouth of your servant, and I will tell you the truth about this people that dwells in the nearby mountain district. No falsehood shall come from your servant's mouth. This people is descended from the Chaldeans. At one time they lived in Mesopotamia, because they would not follow the gods of their fathers who were in Chaldea. For they had left the ways of their ancestors, and they worshiped the God of heaven, the God they had come to know; hence they drove them out from the presence of their gods; and they fled to Mesopotamia, and lived there for a long time. Then their God commanded them to leave the place where they were living and go to the land of Canaan. There they settled, and prospered, with much gold and silver and very many cattle. When a famine spread over Canaan they went down to Egypt and lived there as long as they had food; and there they became a great multitude – so great that they could not be counted.

"So the king of Egypt became hostile to them; he took advantage of them and set them to making bricks, and humbled them and made slaves of them. Then they cried out to their God, and he afflicted the whole land of Egypt with incurable plagues; and so the Egyptians drove them out of their sight. Then God dried up the Red Sea before them, and he led them by the way of Sinai and Kadesh-barnea, and drove out all the people of the wilderness. So they lived in the land of the Amorites, and by their might destroyed all the inhabitants of Heshbon; and crossing over the Jordan they took possession of all the hill country. And they drove out before them the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Jebusites and the Shechemites and all the Gergesites, and lived there a long time. As long as they did not sin against their God they prospered, for the God who hates iniquity is with them. But when they departed from the way which he had appointed for them, they were utterly defeated in many battles and were led away captive to a foreign country; the temple of their God was razed to the ground, and their cities were captured by their enemies. But now they have returned to their God, and have come back from the places to which they were scattered, and have occupied Jerusalem, where their sanctuary is, and have settled in the hill country, because it was uninhabited. Now therefore, my master and lord, if there is any unwitting error in this people and they sin against their God and we find out their offence, then we will go up and defeat them. But

if there is no transgression in their nation, then let my lord pass them by; for their Lord will defend them, and their God will protect them, and we shall be put to shame before the whole world.”

When Achior had finished saying this, all the men standing around the tent began to complain; Holofernes’ officers and all the men from the seacoast and from Moab insisted that he must be put to death. “For,” they said, “we will not be afraid of the Israelites; they are a people with no strength or power for making war. Therefore let us go up, Lord Holofernes, and they will be devoured by your vast army.”

A READING FROM THE ORATIONS ON EASTER BY ST GREGORY NAZIANZEN

Then comes the sacred night, the anniversary of the confused darkness of the present life, into which the primeval darkness is dissolved, and all things come in to life and rank and form, and that which was chaos is reduced to order. Then we flee from Egypt, that is from sullen persecuting sin; and from Pharaoh the unseen tyrant, and the bitter taskmasters, changing our quarters to the world above. We are delivered from the clay and from making bricks, and from the husks and dangers of this fleshly condition.

Then the Lamb is slain, and act and word are sealed with the Precious Blood; that is, habit and action, the side-posts of our doors; I mean, of course, of the movements of mind and opinion, which are rightly opened and closed by contemplation, since there is a limit even to thoughts. Then comes the last and gravest plague upon the persecutors, truly worthy of the night; and Egypt mourns the first-born of her own thoughts and actions, which are also called in the Scripture the children of Babylon who are dashed against the rocks and destroyed. The whole air is full of the cry and clamour of the Egyptians, and then the Destroyer of them shall withdraw from us in reverence for the anointing. Then comes the removal of leaven; that is, of the old and sour wickedness, not of that which is quickening and makes bread. This happens for seven days, a number which is of all the most mystical and is that of this present world, that we may not lay in provision of any Egyptian dough, or relic of Pharisaic or ungodly teaching.

So, let them lament - we will feed on the Lamb toward evening – for Christ’s Passion was at the completion of the ages. We will do so because too he communicated his disciples in the evening with his Sacrament, destroying the darkness of sin. And let us be aided by the good coals, kindling and purifying our minds from him who comes to send fire on the earth, the fire that shall destroy all evil habits. Everything that is solid and nourishing in the Word shall be eaten with the inward parts and hidden things of the mind, and shall be consumed and given up to spiritual digestion; yes, from head to foot, that is, from the first contemplations of Godhead to the very last thoughts about the Incarnation. Neither let us carry any of it abroad, nor leave it till the morning; because most of our Mysteries may not be carried out to them that are outside, nor is there beyond this night any further purification. For just as it is good and well-pleasing to God not to let anger last through the day, but to get rid of it before sunset, whether you take this of time or in a mystical sense, so too we ought not to let such food remain all night, nor to put it off till tomorrow.

St Gregory Nazianzen, 2nd Oration on Easter 15-16; NPNF2 7 (1893) tr. Browne & Swallow.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JUDITH

(Achior is handed over to the men of Israel: Judith 6:1-7, 10 – 7:1, 4-5)

When the disturbance made by the men outside the council died down, Holofernes, the commander of the Assyrian army, said to Achior and all the Moabites in the presence of all the foreign contingents:

“And who are you, Achior, and you hirelings of Ephraim, to prophesy among us as you have done today and tell us not to make war against the people of Israel because their God will defend them? Who is God except Nebuchadnezzar? He will send his forces and will destroy them from the face of the earth, and their God will not deliver them – we the king’s servants will destroy them as one man. They cannot resist the might of our cavalry. We will burn them up, and their mountains will be drunk with their blood, and their fields will be full of their dead. They cannot withstand us, but will utterly perish. So says King Nebuchadnezzar, the lord of the whole earth. For he has spoken; none of his words shall be in vain.

“But you, Achior, you Ammonite hireling, who have said these words on the day of your iniquity, you shall not see my face again from this day until I take revenge on this race that came out of Egypt. Then the sword of my army and the spear of my servants shall pierce your sides, and you shall fall among their wounded, when I return. Now my slaves are going to take you back into the hill country and put you in one of the cities beside the passes.”

Then Holofernes ordered his slaves, who waited on him in his tent, to seize Achior and take him to Bethulia and hand him over to the men of Israel. So the slaves took him and led him out of the camp into the plain, and from the plain they went up into the hill country and came to the springs below Bethulia. When the men of the city saw them, they caught up their weapons and ran out of the city to the top of the hill, and all the slingers kept them from coming up by casting stones at them. However, they got under the shelter of the hill and they bound Achior and left him lying at the foot of the hill, and returned to their master.

Then the men of Israel came down from their city and found him; and they untied him and brought him into Bethulia and placed him before the magistrates of their city, who in those days were Uziah the son of Micah, of the tribe of Simeon, and Chabris the son of Gothoniel, and Charmis the son of Melchiel. They called together all the elders of the city, and all their young men and their women ran to the assembly; and they set Achior in the midst of all their people, and Uziah asked him what had happened. He answered and told them what had taken place at the council of Holofernes, and all that he had said in the presence of the Assyrian leaders, and all that Holofernes had said so boastfully against the house of Israel. Then the people fell down and worshiped God, and cried out to him, and said,

O Lord God of heaven, behold their arrogance, and have pity on the humiliation of our people, and look this day upon the faces of those who are consecrated to thee.”

Then they consoled Achior, and praised him greatly. And Uzziah took him from the assembly to his own house and gave a banquet for the elders; and all that night they called on the God of Israel for help.

The next day Holofernes ordered his whole army, and all the allies who had joined him, to break camp and move against Bethulia, and to seize the passes up into the hill country and make war on the Israelites.

When the Israelites saw their vast numbers they were greatly terrified, and every one said to his neighbour, "These men will now lick up the face of the whole land; neither the high mountains nor the valleys nor the hills will bear their weight." Then each man took up his weapons, and when they had kindled fires on their towers they remained on guard all that night.

A READING FROM THE CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

Peace is not merely the absence of war, nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies, nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called an enterprise of justice. Peace results from that order structured into human society by its divine Founder, and actualised by men as they thirst after ever greater justice. The common good of humanity finds its ultimate meaning in the eternal law. But since the concrete demands of this common good are constantly changing as time goes on, peace is never attained once and for all, but must be built up ceaselessly. Moreover, since the human will is unsteady and wounded by sin, the achievement of peace requires a constant mastering of passions and the vigilance of lawful authority.

But this is not enough. This peace on earth cannot be obtained unless personal well-being is safeguarded and men freely and trustingly share with one another the riches of their inner spirits and their talents. A firm determination to respect other men and peoples and their dignity, as well as the studied practice of brotherhood, are absolutely necessary for the establishment of peace. Hence, peace is likewise the fruit of love, which goes beyond what justice can provide.

That earthly peace which arises from love of neighbour symbolises and results from the peace of Christ which radiates from God the Father. For by the cross the incarnate Son, the prince of peace, reconciled all men with God. By thus restoring all men to the unity of one people and one body, he slew hatred in his own flesh, and after being lifted on high by his resurrection, he poured forth the spirit of love into the hearts of men.

For this reason, all Christians are urgently summoned to do in love what the truth requires, and to join with all true peacemakers in pleading for peace and bringing it about.

Motivated by this same spirit, we cannot fail to praise those who renounce the use of violence in the vindication of their rights and who resort to methods of defence which are otherwise available to weaker parties too, provided this can be done without injury to the rights and duties of others or of the community itself.

Insofar as men are sinful, the threat of war hangs over them, and hang over them it will until the return of Christ. But insofar as men vanquish sin by a union of love, they will vanquish violence as well and make these words come true: They shall turn their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into sickles. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more.

Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes, 78.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JUDITH

(Judith is concerned for the safety of her people: Judith 8:1a, 9-14, 28-32; 9:1-6, 11-14)

At that time Judith heard about these things: she was the daughter of Merari the son of Ox. When she heard the wicked words spoken by the people against the ruler, because they were faint for lack of water, and when she heard all that Uzziah said to them, and how he promised them under oath to surrender the city to the Assyrians after five days, she sent her maid, who was in charge of all she possessed, to summon Chabris and Charmis, the elders of her city. They came to her, and she said to them,

“Listen to me, rulers of the people of Bethulia! What you have said to the people today is not right; you have even sworn and pronounced this oath between God and you, promising to surrender the city to our enemies unless the Lord turns and helps us within so many days. Who are you, that have put God to the test this day, and are setting yourselves up in the place of God among the sons of men? You are putting the Lord Almighty to the test – but you will never know anything! You cannot plumb the depths of the human heart, nor find out what a man is thinking; how do you expect to search out God, who made all these things, and find out his mind or comprehend his thought? No, my brethren, do not provoke the Lord our God to anger.”

Then Uzziah said to her, “All that you have said has been spoken out of a true heart, and there is no one who can deny your words. Today is not the first time your wisdom has been shown, but from the beginning of your life all the people have recognized your understanding, for your heart’s disposition is right. But the people were very thirsty, and they compelled us to do for them what we have promised, and made us take an oath which we cannot break. So pray for us, since you are a devout woman, and the Lord will send us rain to fill our cisterns and we will no longer be faint.”

Judith said to them, “Listen to me. I am about to do a thing which will go down through all generations of our descendants.” Then Judith fell upon her face, and put ashes on her head, and uncovered the sackcloth she was wearing; and at the very time when that evening’s incense was being offered in the house of God in Jerusalem, Judith cried out to the Lord with a loud voice, and said,

“O Lord God of my father Simeon, to whom thou gavest a sword to take revenge on the strangers who had loosed the girdle of a virgin to defile her, and uncovered her thigh to put her to shame, and polluted her womb to disgrace her; for thou hast said, ‘It shall not be done’ – yet they did it. So thou gavest up their rulers to be slain, and their bed, which was ashamed of the deceit they had practiced, to be stained with blood, and thou didst strike down slaves along with princes, and princes on their thrones; and thou gavest their wives for a prey and their daughters to captivity, and all their booty to be divided among thy beloved sons, who were zealous for thee, and abhorred the pollution of their blood, and called on thee for help – O God, my God, hear me also, a widow.

“For thou hast done these things and those that went before and those that followed; thou hast designed the things that are now, and those that are to come. Yea, the things

thou didst intend came to pass, and the things thou didst will presented themselves and said, 'Lo, we are here'; for all thy ways are prepared in advance, and thy judgment is with foreknowledge.

“For thy power depends not upon numbers, nor thy might upon men of strength; for thou art God of the lowly, helper of the oppressed, upholder of the weak, protector of the forlorn, saviour of those without hope. Hear, O hear me, God of my father, God of the inheritance of Israel, Lord of heaven and earth, Creator of the waters, King of all thy creation, hear my prayer! Make my deceitful words to be their wound and stripe, for they have planned cruel things against thy covenant, and against thy consecrated house, and against the top of Zion, and against the house possessed by thy children. And cause thy whole nation and every tribe to know and understand that thou art God, the God of all power and might, and that there is no other who protects the people of Israel but thou alone!”

A READING FROM ON THE HOLY SPIRIT BY ST BASIL THE GREAT

Every kind of help comes to our souls through Christ, and an appropriate title has been devised for each particular kind of care. When he presents a blameless soul to himself, a soul which like a pure virgin has neither spot nor wrinkle, he is called Bridegroom, but when he receives someone paralysed by the devil's evil strokes, and heals the heavy burden of his sins, he is called Physician. Because he cares for us, will this make us think less of him? Or will we not be struck with amazement at our Saviour's mighty power and love for mankind, who patiently endured to suffer our infirmities with us, and condescended to our weakness?

No heaven, or earth, or the great oceans, or all creatures living in the waters and on dry land, or plants, stars, air, and seasons, or the vast expanse of the universe, can illustrate the surpassing greatness of God's might so well as he has himself. The infinite God, remaining changeless, assumed flesh and fought with death, freeing us from suffering by his own suffering! Even when the Apostle says that in all these things (tribulations and sufferings) we are more than conquerors through him who loved us, in a phrase of this kind there is no suggestion of any lowly and subordinate ministry, but rather it speaks of the good he has accomplished in the strength of his might. He himself has bound the strong man and plundered his goods – that is, us, who had been abased in every manner of evil – and made us into vessels fit for the Master's use, the use of our free will being made ready for any good work. Thus through him we have our approach to the Father, who has transferred us from the dominion of darkness to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Our next task is to discuss the treasury of blessings which come from the Father through the Son to us. All created nature, whether visible or spiritual, is held together by God's care: he who is the creating Word, the only-begotten God. He bestows help on every creature according to its need. He shepherds, he enlightens, he nourishes, he leads, he heals, he raises up. He calls all things from non-existence into being; once things are created he keeps them in existence. Thus God's blessings reach us through the Son, who works in each case with greater speed than words can describe. Neither lightning, or the

speed of light racing through the air, or a blink of the eyes, for the movement of our thoughts, is as swift as the Son's working. Divine energy surpasses everything in speed; it is faster than birds, or the wind, or the revolution of the heavenly bodies, or our very thoughts. It makes living creatures appear sluggish. What passage of time is needed by him who upholds the universe by his word of power? He does not work by bodily strength, nor does he need the use of hands in order to fashion things, but all created things follow him, offering him their willing cooperation. As Judith says, The things you have foreordained present themselves and say, 'We are here!'

St Basil the Great, De Spiritu Sancto, 18-19; (1980) tr. Anderson.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JUDITH

(Judith in the presence of Holofernes: Judith 10:1-5, 11-16; 11:1-6, 18-21)

When Judith had ceased crying out to the God of Israel, and had ended all these words, she rose from where she lay prostrate and called her maid and went down into the house where she lived on Sabbaths and on her feast days; and she removed the sackcloth which she had been wearing, and took off her widow's garments, and bathed her body with water, and anointed herself with precious ointment, and combed her hair and put on a tiara, and arrayed herself in her gayest apparel, which she used to wear while her husband Manasseh was living. And she put sandals on her feet, and put on her anklets and bracelets and rings, and her earrings and all her ornaments, and made herself very beautiful, to entice the eyes of all men who might see her. And she gave her maid a bottle of wine and a flask of oil, and filled a bag with parched grain and a cake of dried fruit and fine bread; and she wrapped up all her vessels and gave them to her to carry.

Then they went out to the city gate of Bethulia, and found Uzziah standing there with the elders of the city, Chabris and Charmis

The women went straight on through the valley; and an Assyrian patrol met her and took her into custody, and asked her, "To what people do you belong, and where are you coming from, and where are you going?" She replied, "I am a daughter of the Hebrews, but I am fleeing from them, for they are about to be handed over to you to be devoured. I am on my way to the presence of Holofernes the commander of your army, to give him a true report; and I will show him a way by which he can go and capture all the hill country without losing one of his men, captured or slain."

When the men heard her words, and observed her face – she was in their eyes marvellously beautiful – they said to her, "You have saved your life by hurrying down to the presence of our lord. Go at once to his tent; some of us will escort you and hand you over to him. And when you stand before him, do not be afraid in your heart, but tell him just what you have said, and he will treat you well."

Then Holofernes said to her, "Take courage, woman, and do not be afraid in your heart, for I have never hurt any one who chose to serve Nebuchadnezzar, the king of all the earth. And even now, if your people who live in the hill country had not slighted me, I would never have lifted my spear against them; but they have brought all this on themselves. And now tell me why you have fled from them and have come over to us – since you have come to safety. Have courage; you will live, tonight and from now on. No one will hurt you, but all will treat you well, as they do the servants of my lord King Nebuchadnezzar."

Judith replied to him, "Accept the words of your servant, and let your maidservant speak in your presence, and I will tell nothing false to my lord this night. 6 And if you follow out the words of your maidservant, God will accomplish something through you, and my lord will not fail to achieve his purposes."

“And I will come and tell you, and then you shall go out with your whole army, and not one of them will withstand you. Then I will lead you through the middle of Judea, till you come to Jerusalem; and I will set your throne in the midst of it; and you will lead them like sheep that have no shepherd, and not a dog will so much as open its mouth to growl at you. For this has been told me, by my foreknowledge; it was announced to me, and I was sent to tell you.”

Her words pleased Holofernes and all his servants, and they marvelled at her wisdom and said, “There is not such a woman from one end of the earth to the other, either for beauty of face or wisdom of speech!”

A READING FROM THE LETTERS OF ST FULGENTIUS OF RUSPE

Behold a wisdom, famous in family, wealthy in goods, young in age, marvellous in appearance, who despised riches, repudiated delights, trampled on the attractions of the flesh, and, putting on virtue from on high, did not seek to be entangled in a second marriage. So, by the witness of so brilliant a deed, it is apparent how beloved of God is a widow's continence. Then when Holofernes besieged Bethulia in force with an army and all the power of the Israelites, shaken, grew weak, chastity went forth to assault lasciviousness and holy humility proceeded to the destruction of pride. He fought with armies, she with fasts; he with drunkenness, she with prayer. Therefore, what the entire people of the Israelites was unable to do, the holy widow accomplished by the virtue of chastity. For one woman cut off the head of the leader of so great an army and restored to the people of God an unhopd for free-dom.

Let us also see in the New Testament how the way of life of Saint Anna is revealed to us. Concerning her, Saint Luke speaks as follows: There was also a Prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped night and day with fasting and prayer.

These two widows, although they lived in different periods, still both served the mystery of the one faith; because Christ, whom Anna knew as born in the flesh, Judith had known as one who was going to be born. How God showed in each widow that continence pleases him greatly! For Judith, girded with spiritual weapons, cut off the head of the lustful brigand. But Anna, filled with the Holy Spirit, knew the very head of the Church. The death of Holofernes was given to Judith; to Anna was revealed the coming of the Saviour. To the former, God gave it to drive away a plague from the people; to the latter, he gave it to recognise the remedy of the human race. And because the continence of the widow follows after virginal holiness as a lower degree, therefore, after the Son of God was born of a virgin, he deigned to be proclaimed by the office of the widow's tongue. Still it was not a widow given over to pleasure who spoke about him, one who is dead while she lives, but one who never left the temple but worshipped night and day with fasting and prayer.

St Fulgentius of Ruspe, Ep. II ad Gallami, 29-20 (CCL 91:207-208); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JUDITH

(Holofernes' banquet: Judith 12:1 – 13:5)

Then Holofernes commanded them to bring her in where his silver dishes were kept, and ordered them to set a table for her with some of his own food and to serve her with his own wine. But Judith said, "I cannot eat it, lest it be an offence; but I will be provided from the things I have brought with me." Holofernes said to her, "If your supply runs out, where can we get more like it for you? For none of your people is here with us." Judith replied, "As your soul lives, my lord, your servant will not use up the things I have with me before the Lord carries out by my hand what he has determined to do."

Then the servants of Holofernes brought her into the tent, and she slept until midnight. Along toward the morning watch she arose and sent to Holofernes and said, "Let my lord now command that your servant be permitted to go out and pray." So Holofernes commanded his guards not to hinder her. And she remained in the camp for three days, and went out each night to the valley of Bethulia, and bathed at the spring in the camp. When she came up from the spring she prayed the Lord God of Israel to direct her way for the raising up of her people. So she returned clean and stayed in the tent until she ate her food toward evening.

On the fourth day Holofernes held a banquet for his slave only, and did not invite any of his officers. And he said to Bagoas, the eunuch who had charge of his personal affairs, "Go now and persuade the Hebrew woman who is in your care to join us and eat and drink with us. For it will be a disgrace if we let such a woman go without enjoying her company, for if we do not embrace her she will laugh at us." So Bagoas went out from the presence of Holofernes, and approached her and said, "This beautiful maidservant will please come to my lord and be honoured in his presence, and drink wine and be merry with us, and become today like one of the daughters of the Assyrians who serve in the house of Nebuchadnezzar." And Judith said, "Who am I, to refuse my lord? Surely whatever pleases him I will do at once, and it will be a joy to me until the day of my death!" So she got up and arrayed herself in all her woman's finery, and her maid went and spread on the ground for her before Holofernes the soft fleeces which she had received from Bagoas for her daily use, so that she might recline on them when she ate.

Then Judith came in and lay down, and Holofernes' heart was ravished with her and he was moved with great desire to possess her; for he had been waiting for an opportunity to deceive her, ever since the day he first saw her. So Holofernes said to her. "Drink now, and be merry with us!" Judith said, "I will drink now, my lord, because my life means more to me today than in all the days since I was born." Then she took and ate and drank before him what her maid had prepared. And Holofernes was greatly pleased with her, and drank a great quantity of wine, much more than he had ever drunk in any one day since he was born.

When evening came, his slaves quickly withdrew, and Bagoas closed the tent from outside and shut out the attendants from his master's presence; and they went to bed,

for they all were weary because the banquet had lasted long. So Judith was left alone in the tent, with Holofernes stretched out on his bed, for he was overcome with wine.

Now Judith had told her maid to stand outside the bedchamber and to wait for her to come out, as she did every day; for she said she would be going out for her prayers. And she had said the same thing to Bagoas. So every one went out, and no one, either small or great, was left in the bedchamber. Then Judith, standing beside his bed, said in her heart, "O Lord God of all might, look in this hour upon the work of my hands for the exaltation of Jerusalem. For now is the time to help thy inheritance, and to carry out my undertaking for the destruction of the enemies who have risen up against us."

A READING FROM CONCERNING WIDOWS BY ST AMBROSE

Bravery is usually not wanting to a good widow. For true bravery can pass the bound of nature and the weakness of the sex by the devotion of the mind. Such bravery was found in her who was named Judith, who of herself alone was able to rouse up her nation from utter prostration and defend from the enemy men broken down by the siege, smitten with fear, and pining with hunger.

From the time when her husband died she laid aside the garments of mirth, and took those of mourning. Every day she was intent on fasting except on the Sabbath and the Lord's Day and the times of holy days, not as yielding to desire of refreshment, but out of respect for religion, as it is said: Whether you eat or drink, all is to be done in the name of Jesus Christ. But in order to accomplish her stratagem she put on that robe of mirth, with which in her husband's life time she was accustomed to be clothed, as though she would give pleasure to her husband if she freed her country. But she also saw another man whom she was seeking to please, even him, of whom it is said: After me comes a man who is preferred before me.

Why relate the sequel? How she, amongst thousands of enemies, remained chaste. Why speak of her wisdom, in that she designed such a scheme? She reserved the merit of abstinence and the grace of chastity. For unpolluted, as we read, either by foot or by adultery, she gained no less a triumph over the enemy by preserving her chastity than by delivering her country.

And this was not so much a work of her hands, as much more a trophy of her wisdom. For having overcome Holofernes by her hand alone, she overcame the whole army of the enemies by her wisdom. For hanging up the head of Holofernes, a deed which the wisdom of the men had been unable to plan, she raised the courage of their countrymen and broke down that of the enemy. She stirred up her own friends by her modesty, and struck terror into the enemy so that they were put to flight and slain. And so the temperance and sobriety of one widow not only subdued her own nature, but, which is far more, even made men more brave.

And yet she was not so elated by this success, though she might well rejoice and exult by right of her victory, as to give up the exercises of her widowhood, but refusing all who desired to wed her she laid aside her garments of mirth and took again those of her widowhood, not caring for the adornments of her triumph, thinking those things better

whereby vices of the body are subdued than those whereby the weapons of an enemy are overcome.

St Ambrose, Concerning Widows, 7; NPNF210 (1989) tr. de Romesty.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF JUDITH

(The death of Holofernes and the thanksgiving: Judith 13:4-31)

So every one went out, and no one, either small or great, was left in the bedchamber. Then Judith, standing beside his bed, said in her heart, "O Lord God of all might, look in this hour upon the work of my hands for the exaltation of Jerusalem. For now is the time to help thy inheritance, and to carry out my undertaking for the destruction of the enemies who have risen up against us." She went up to the post at the end of the bed, above Holofernes' head, and took down his sword that hung there. She came close to his bed and took hold of the hair of his head, and said, "Give me strength this day, O Lord God of Israel!" And she struck his neck twice with all her might, and severed it from his body. Then she tumbled his body off the bed and pulled down the canopy from the posts; after a moment she went out, and gave Holofernes' head to her maid, who placed it in her food bag.

Then the two of them went out together, as they were accustomed to go for prayer; and they passed through the camp and circled around the valley and went up the mountain to Bethulia and came to its gates. Judith called out from afar to the watchmen at the gates, "Open, open the gate! God, our God, is still with us, to show his power in Israel, and his strength against our enemies, even as he has done this day!"

When the men of her city heard her voice, they hurried down to the city gate and called together the elders of the city. They all ran together, both small and great, for it was unbelievable that she had returned; they opened the gate and admitted them, and they kindled a fire for light, and gathered around them. Then she said to them with a loud voice, "Praise God, O praise him! Praise God, who has not withdrawn his mercy from the house of Israel, but has destroyed our enemies by my hand this very night!"

Then she took the head out of the bag and showed it to them, and said, "See, here is the head of Holofernes, the commander of the Assyrian army, and here is the canopy beneath which he lay in his drunken stupor. The Lord has struck him down by the hand of a woman. As the Lord lives, who has protected me in the way I went, it was my face that tricked him to his destruction, and yet he committed no act of sin with me, to defile and shame me."

All the people were greatly astonished, and bowed down and worshipped God, and said with one accord, "Blessed art thou, our God, who hast brought into contempt this day the enemies of thy people."

And Uzziah said to her, "O daughter, you are blessed by the Most High God above all women on earth; and blessed be the Lord God, who created the heavens and the earth, who has guided you to strike the head of the leader of our enemies. Your hope will never depart from the hearts of men, as they remember the power of God. May God grant this to be a perpetual honour to you, and may he visit you with blessings, because you did not spare your own life when our nation was brought low, but have avenged our ruin, walking in the straight path before our God.² And all the people said, "So be it, so be it!"

A READING FROM A HOMILY BY ST ANDREW OF CRETE

Rejoice, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. May you rejoice, instrument of joy, through whom the condemnation of a curse has been annulled and replaced by the justification of joy.

Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And you are rightly blessed. For God blessed you as his own dwelling, when in a way beyond our understanding you bore within you one supremely filled with the glory of the Father, the human Christ Jesus and the same God, in the perfection of the two natures of and in which he was formed. Most blessed are you among women, who without constriction received that heavenly treasure in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden within the inviolate inner room of your virginity. You are truly blessed whose womb gathered a sheaf for the threshing floor, because with-out seed or husbandry you brought Christ to perfection, the fruit of blessing, the ear of corn of immortality, and led an abundant harvest, ten-thousand fold, thousands of joyful people to the husbandman of our salvation.

You are really blessed, since you alone without human husband bore within you one who expanded the heavens and, in a marvellous way, made the earth of your virginity heaven. Most blessed are you among women, since you alone inherited the blessing which God promised to the Gentiles through Abraham. You are truly blessed, since you alone were the mother of the blessed child Jesus Christ and our Saviour. It was because of you that the Gentiles cried out: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; and: Blessed be his glorious name forever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, Amen.

Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Blessed is the fruit which blossomed like a marvellously ripened dark grape from the undefiled shoot of your virgin womb. Blessed is the fruit from which flows streams of water welling up for eternal life. It is from this fruit that the bread of life, the Lord's body is offered, and the chalice of immortality, the drink bringing salvation is presented. Blessed is the fruit which every tongue glorifies in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, thus including the Lord, as being of the same essence, in the threefold formation of the sanctifying Deity in the Trinity, but as a person assigning him individuality in the basic unity of the subsistent entities. Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

St Andrew of Crete, Hom. in annunciatione B. Mariae (PG 97:893.897-901); Word in Season VIII.

Season of the Year | Week 27

Sunday of the Twenty-Seventh Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(The Mystery of Divine Wisdom: Sirach 1:1-29)

All wisdom comes from the Lord and is with him for ever. The sand of the sea, the drops of rain, and the days of eternity—who can count them? The height of heaven, the breadth of the earth, the abyss, and wisdom—who can search them out? Wisdom was created before all things, and prudent understanding from eternity. The root of wisdom—to whom has it been revealed? Her clever devices – who knows them? There is One who is wise, greatly to be feared, sitting upon his throne. The Lord himself created wisdom; he saw her and apportioned her, he poured her out upon all his works. She dwells with all flesh according to his gift, and he supplied her to those who love him.

The fear of the Lord is glory and exultation, and gladness and a crown of rejoicing. The fear of the Lord delights the heart, and gives gladness and joy and long life. With him who fears the Lord it will go well at the end; on the day of his death he will be blessed.

To fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom she is created with the faithful in the womb. She made among men an eternal foundation, and among their descendants she will be trusted. To fear the Lord is wisdom's full measure; she satisfies men with her fruits; she fills their whole house with desirable goods, and their storehouses with her produce. The fear of the Lord is the crown of wisdom, making peace and perfect health to flourish. He saw her and apportioned her; he rained down knowledge and discerning comprehension, and he exalted the glory of those who held her fast. To fear the Lord is the root of wisdom, and her branches are long life.

Unrighteous anger cannot be justified, for a man's anger tips the scale to his ruin. A patient man will endure until the right moment, and then joy will burst forth for him. He will hide his words until the right moment, and the lips of many will tell of his good sense. In the treasuries of wisdom are wise sayings, but godliness is an abomination to a sinner.

If you desire wisdom, keep the commandments, and the Lord will supply it for you. For the fear of the Lord is wisdom and instruction, and he delights in fidelity and meekness. Do not disobey the fear of the Lord; do not approach him with a divided mind. Be not a hypocrite in men's sight, and keep watch over your lips.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTICUS BY BLESSED RABANUS MAURUS

All wisdom is from the Lord and it is his own forever. The beginning of this book, then, speaks of the eternal Wisdom of God which was with the Father before all ages. So also St John's Gospel which opens thus: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All wisdom is from the Lord because Christ, who is the source of life and the light which illumines every man coming into this world, was born of God the Father; and all things were made through him and without him was made nothing that was made. But whoever lacks the light of

this wisdom is walking in the dark, not knowing where he is going because the darkness has dimmed his sight. Whatever opposes this wisdom should be dubbed 'folly'. So St Paul says, The wisdom of this world is folly with God. And again, To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the wisdom of the flesh is at enmity with God since it is not subject to the law of God, nor can it be.

The sand of the sea and the raindrops and the days of eternity, who can assess them? The height of the sky and the breadth of the earth and the depth of the abyss, who has measured them? Before all other things wisdom was created; who can probe her? Ecclesi-asticus draws the comparison between material and spiritual things, so that by reference to what is most difficult in nature such a comparison might be justly assessed - but this is altogether impossible. If nobody can count the sand of the sea or the raindrops or the days of eternity, or measure the height of the sky or the breadth of the earth or the depth of the abyss - and yet these were established by their Creator according to number, measure, and weight - how can anyone probe the wisdom of God which exists without beginning and without end and abides forever, at once indescribable and immeasurable? For the power of God and the wisdom of God - Christ, that is - was always with the Father and, as the Father is without beginning, so is the Son without beginning.

Before all things wisdom was created and shrewd understanding is everlasting. The Fathers understand this text, as well as the one from Proverbs, The Lord created me at the beginning of his ways, as referring to the Lord's incarnation. Just as the Son in his divine nature was born of the Father before all ages, so before all ages he was predestined in the plan of the Father to become incarnate in time for the salvation of the human race. The word 'created' refers to his human not his divine nature, although, because of the unity of person, the Son is sometimes said to be generated, sometimes created. He is therefore the beginning of God's ways (he himself said, I am the way) who rose from the dead and made a pathway for the Church to the kingdom of God and eternal life.

Bd Rabanus Maurus, Comm. In Ecclesiasticum, 1, 1-2 (PL 109:765-766); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(Patience in temptation: Sirach 2:1-18)

My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation. Set your heart right and be steadfast, and do not be hasty in time of calamity. Cleave to him and do not depart, that you may be honoured at the end of your life. Accept whatever is brought upon you, and in changes that humble you be patient. For gold is tested in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation. Trust in him, and he will help you; make your ways straight, and hope in him.

You who fear the Lord, wait for his mercy; and turn not aside, lest you fall. You who fear the Lord, trust in him, and your reward will not fail; you who fear the Lord, hope for good things, for everlasting joy and mercy. Consider the ancient generations and see: who ever trusted in the Lord and was put to shame? Or who ever persevered in the fear of the Lord and was forsaken? Or who ever called upon him and was overlooked? For the Lord is compassionate and merciful; he forgives sins and saves in time of affliction.

Woe to timid hearts and to slack hands, and to the sinner who walks along two ways! Woe to the faint heart, for it has no trust! Therefore it will not be sheltered. Woe to you who have lost your endurance! What will you do when the Lord punishes you? Those who fear the Lord will not disobey his words, and those who love him will keep his ways. Those who fear the Lord will seek his approval, and those who love him will be filled with the law. Those who fear the Lord will prepare their hearts, and will humble themselves before him. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, but not into the hands of men; for as his majesty is, so also is his mercy.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

Let us put our trust in God, my brethren. This is the first commandment, the first principle of religion and of our life: to have our heart anchored in faith and thus to live uprightly, to hold ourselves aloof from mere pleasure, to endure temporal misfortune. What is it that we hear in the canticle? My son, if you aspire to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for an ordeal. Be sincere of heart, be steadfast. Cling to him and do not leave him, so that your life may abound at the latter day. How 'abound'? That you may abound eternally, I think. Certainly not now! Our human life is on the wane now, rather than otherwise. A man is born into the world. God allots him seventy years, say. As he grows up, we say that life is before him. But is it? Is his life increasing or decreasing? When he has lived sixty of his seventy years, ten years only remain. His span is diminished, and the longer he lives the less remains to him. While we live, then, life is not increasing but rather ebbing away. So hold fast to what God has promised you, that you may abound at the latter day.

Whatever happens to you, accept it, and in changes that humble you be patient, for gold is tested in the fire, and chosen men in the furnace of humiliation. The way may seem hard, but would you not lose an indefectible good by defecting from it? There are many

who endure great hardship in order to acquire perishable wealth, and would you not suffer for the sake of an imperishable life? You have taken on the yoke of wisdom. Is it going to be difficult? Yes, surely, but look up towards your goal, towards your reward. He who has promised is faithful. He has not shown it to you, because it is not yet time. Nevertheless, he has already shown you a great deal. He promised the Messiah, and he sent him; he promised he would rise again, and he did; he promised the gospel, and he gave it; he promised that the Church would spread throughout the world, and it has. Why do you not believe that he will keep his other promises?

Beloved brethren, let us cleanse our hearts and not lose the will to endure. Let us keep wisdom before us and hold fast to self-dis-cipline. Our striving lasts for but an instant, rest awaits us. Empty enjoyments pass away, but the good, longed for by the man of faith, the good to which every pilgrim in the world aspires, is at hand: the good country, the heavenly country, the country where we shall see the angels, where no citizen dies, no enemy finds admittance, where you shall fear no foe but have God forever as your friend.

St Augustine, Sermon 38, 5.11 (CCL 41:5-6.11); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(Dutifulness towards parents: Sirach 3:1-16)

Listen to me your father, O children; and act accordingly, that you may be kept in safety. For the Lord honoured the father above the children, and he confirmed the right of the mother over her sons. Whoever honours his father atones for sins, and whoever glorifies his mother is like one who lays up treasure. Whoever honours his father will be gladdened by his own children, and when he prays he will be heard. Whoever glorifies his father will have long life, and whoever obeys the Lord will refresh his mother; he will serve his parents as his masters. Honour your father by word and deed, that a blessing from him may come upon you. For a father's blessing strengthens the houses of the children, but a mother's curse uproots their foundations.

Do not glorify yourself by dishonouring your father, for your father's dishonour is no glory to you. For a man's glory comes from honouring his father, and it is a disgrace for children not to respect their mother. O son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; in all your strength do not despise him. For kindness to a father will not be forgotten, and against your sins it will be credited to you; in the day of your affliction it will be remembered in your favour; as frost in fair weather, your sins will melt away. Whoever forsakes his father is like a blasphemer, and whoever angers his mother is cursed by the Lord.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

How precious is the wisdom by which we know God and despise the world! The one who has found it is indeed blessed, if he holds fast to it. What will he give to possess it? Give obedience as its price, and you will receive wisdom in return. Scripture tells us: Do you desire wisdom? Keep the commandments and God will give it to you. If you want to be wise, be obedient. Obedience has no will of its own: it is at the service of another's will, subject to another's command. Embrace it, then, with all the yearning of your heart, with all the effort of your body. Embrace, I repeat, the blessing of obedience, drawing near by obedience to the light of wisdom. Scripture says: Draw near to him and be enlightened. Draw near, that is, by means of obedience, for there is no approach more direct or secure, and be enlightened by wisdom.

The man who does not know God does not know where he is going, but walks in darkness and dashes his foot against a stone. Wisdom is light, the true light that shines on every person coming into this world, not the one who is wise with the wisdom of this world, but the one who is not of the world though in the world. This is the new self of one who has turned away from the sinful and slothful ways of his former self, and strives to walk in newness of life, knowing that damnation is not for those who walk in the way of the Spirit, but in the way of sinful nature.

As long as you follow your own will, you cannot escape turmoil within you, even though at times you seem to escape turmoil outside you. This turmoil of self-will cannot end until the desires of your sinful nature are changed, and God becomes for you a source of delight. Sinners enlightened by wisdom are said to be freed from turmoil because, once they taste the goodness of the Lord, they are freed from their sin: from that time they worship the Creator, not the creature, and when they leave self-will behind they are freed from their feverish turmoil.

While at last they get rid of the turmoil of desires and the discord of thoughts, they experience peace in their inmost heart, and God takes up his dwelling within them: his dwelling-place is in peace. Where God is, there is joy; where God is, there is calm; where God is, there is happiness.

St Bernard, Sermo in epiphania 7 (Opera Omnia VI, 1. 26-27); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(Humility and pride: Sirach 3:17 – 4:10)

My son, perform your tasks in meekness; then you will be loved by those whom God accepts. The greater you are, the more you must humble yourself; so you will find favour in the sight of the Lord. For great is the might of the Lord; he is glorified by the humble. Seek not what is too difficult for you, nor investigate what is beyond your power. Reflect upon what has been assigned to you, for you do not need what is hidden. Do not meddle in what is beyond your tasks, for matters too great for human understanding have been shown you. For their hasty judgment has led many astray, and wrong opinion has caused their thoughts to slip.

A stubborn mind will be afflicted at the end, and whoever loves danger will perish by it. A stubborn mind will be burdened by troubles, and the sinner will heap sin upon sin. The affliction of the proud has no healing, for a plant of wickedness has taken root in him. The mind of the intelligent man will ponder a parable, and an attentive ear is the wise man's desire. Water extinguishes a blazing fire: so almsgiving atones for sin. Whoever requites favours gives thought to the future; at the moment of his falling he will find support.

My son, deprive not the poor of his living, and do not keep needy eyes waiting. Do not grieve the one who is hungry, nor anger a man in want. Do not add to the troubles of an angry mind, nor delay your gift to a beggar. Do not reject an afflicted suppliant, nor turn your face away from the poor. Do not avert your eye from the needy, nor give a man occasion to curse you; for if in bitterness of soul he calls down a curse upon you, his Creator will hear his prayer.

Make yourself beloved in the congregation; bow your head low to a great man. Incline your ear to the poor, and answer him peaceably and gently. Deliver him who is wronged from the hand of the wrongdoer; and do not be fainthearted in judging a case. Be like a father to orphans, and instead of a husband to their mother; you will then be like a son of the Most High, and he will love you more than does your mother.

A READING FROM THE EXHORTATION TO HUMILITY OF MARTIN OF BRAGA

The greater you are, so Solomon said, humble yourself that much more. Though you govern many, you have not perfection if – and this is most important – you alone resist the person whom you cannot govern. You will truly be in charge of others when you are first in charge of yourself. I am not now saying this to wicked people, but most especially to the good. For if you consider God's teaching, God's precepts are not only for sinners, but also for the holy. The word of truth is spoken to them also, not to make them good, which they are, but to prevent them from becoming wicked, which they are not. In fact, I believe the good are more pleased with what is pure and what is free from blame. For our God is placated not so much by the pleasant prayers of those who praise him as by

innocence and simplicity; God inclines his ear more to those who offer him a mind pure and free from guilt than to those who bring him the sweet blandishments of their prayers.

When I speak of vainglory or pride, there is none to whom I could more suitably address my words than to you who are in charge of many; for, even though you do not pay attention, they all heap compliments upon you, they all flatter, they all extol; and there is not one who offers something which is pleasant and, at the same time, far removed from danger. I am not surprised that they are all eager to do this, for just as there is not much work in praising a ruler, so is there not much cause for fear.

I had to offer you these methods of obtaining humility and even to add something on how to moderate your regimen, even though it may be unnecessary, since you may possess it already: for the wind of vanity is always stronger when the position of honour is stronger. Accordingly, I desire you to walk always with a humble heart in the sight of God, 'to whom', as Augustine says, 'the depths of human consciousness are fully revealed'. For it is writ-ten: Upon whom does my Spirit rest, says the Lord, but on the lowly one who trembles at my words?

It is only humility of the heart, therefore, that by declaring itself weak can do all things, that achieves everything good by ascribing it always to God, not to itself. If one ascends in humility, he does not have room to fall. All the other virtues can summon us to perfection through high and difficult courses. Humility alone is on the level ground and, even though it seems lowly to others, it is actually higher than heaven, for it brings a person to its kingdom by descending rather than ascending.

Martin of Braga, *Exhortatio ad humilitatem*, 4-7 (PL 72:40-42); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(Divine retribution: Sirach 5:1 – 6:4)

Do not set your heart on your wealth, nor say, "I have enough." Do not follow your inclination and strength, walking according to the desires of your heart. Do not say, "Who will have power over me?" for the Lord will surely punish you. Do not say, "I sinned, and what happened to me?" for the Lord is slow to anger. Do not be so confident of atonement that you add sin to sin. Do not say, "His mercy is great, he will forgive the multitude of my sins", for both mercy and wrath are with him, and his anger rests on sinners. Do not delay to turn to the Lord, nor postpone it from day to day; for suddenly the wrath of the Lord will go forth, and at the time of punishment you will perish.

Do not depend on dishonest wealth, for it will not benefit you in the day of calamity. Do not winnow with every wind, nor follow every path: the double-tongued sinner does that. Be steadfast in your understanding, and let your speech be consistent. Be quick to hear, and be deliberate in answering. If you have understanding, answer your neighbour; but if not, put your hand on your mouth. Glory and dishonour come from speaking, and a man's tongue is his downfall.

Do not be called a slanderer, and do not lie in ambush with your tongue; for shame comes to the thief, and severe condemnation to the double-tongued. In great and small matters do not act amiss, and do not become an enemy instead of a friend for a bad name incurs shame and reproach: so fares the double-tongued sinner. Do not exalt yourself through your soul's counsel, lest your soul be torn in pieces like a bull. You will devour your leaves and destroy your fruit, and will be left like a withered tree. An evil soul will destroy him who has it, and make him the laughingstock of his enemies.

A READING FROM ON PERFECTION OF LIFE BY ST BONAVENTURE

Two motives may be suggested capable of impelling not merely a religious, but even a lay person, to a love of poverty. The first is the irreproachable example of our Divine Lord. The second is the priceless divine promise.

Let us take the first motive. The love and the example of our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, ought to excite in you a love of poverty. Christ was born poor, lived poor, and died poor. Realise and bear in mind that Christ gave you this wonderful example of poverty in order to induce you to become a friend of poverty.

It was meditation on this poverty of Christ that roused the heart of St Paul and caused him to exclaim: You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that being rich he became poor for our sakes, that through his poverty we might be rich. St Bernard, speaking of this same poverty, says: 'An eternal and copious abundance of riches existed in heaven. Poverty, however, was not to be found there. It abounded and was superabundant on earth. Alas! human beings did not know its worth. The Son of God, though, loved poverty, and desired it, and came down from heaven and took it as his own possession in order to make it precious in our eyes.'

All his life long, Jesus Christ our Lord was an example of poverty. Let me tell you how poor the Son of God and King of Angels was while he lived in this world. He was so poor that oftentimes he did not know which way to turn for a lodging. St Matthew writes: The foxes have holes and the birds of the air nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

O blessed servant of God, recall the poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ, poor for our sake! Cleave to poverty and practice it zeal-ously and courageously. Keep your heart free from love of honours, temporal things, and riches. The advantage, the security, the de-light of life and the act of perfect virtue is neither to possess riches nor to have any fondness for riches. Therefore, our Lord's example and counsel ought to prompt and excite every Christian to love poverty.

O blessed poverty, which makes those who love it beloved of God and secure even in this world! 'For those who have nothing in the world on which their heart is set, there exists nothing of the world to fear,' St Gregory says.

The second motive to inspire a love of poverty is the promise, the priceless promise of Christ. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven, O my Lord Jesus Christ, is nothing else than you yourself, who are 'the King of kings and Lord of lords'. As reward, as the price of their labour, as a complete and perfect joy, you will give to your voluntary poor even the possession of yourself. They will rejoice in possessing you. They will find delight in you. They will, at last, find complete satiety in you. For the poor shall eat and shall be filled; and they shall praise the Lord that seek him; their hearts shall live forever and ever. Amen.

St Bonaventure, De perfectione vitae ad sorores (unpubl. ms); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(True friendship. The sweet yoke of wisdom: Sirach 6:5-37)

Let those that are at peace with you be many, but let your advisers be one in a thousand. When you gain a friend, gain him through testing, and do not trust him hastily. For there is a friend who is such at his own convenience, but will not stand by you in your day of trouble. And there is a friend who changes into an enemy, and will disclose a quarrel to your disgrace. And there is a friend who is a table companion, but will not stand by you in your day of trouble. In prosperity he will make himself your equal, and be bold with your servants; but if you are brought low he will turn against you, and will hide himself from your presence. Keep yourself far from your enemies, and be on guard toward your friends.

A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter: he that has found one has found a treasure. There is nothing so precious as a faithful friend, and no scales can measure his excellence. A faithful friend is an elixir of life; and those who fear the Lord will find him. Whoever fears the Lord directs his friendship aright, for as he is, so is his neighbour also.

My son, from your youth up choose instruction, and until you are old you will keep finding wisdom. Come to her like one who ploughs and sows, and wait for her good harvest. For in her service you will toil a little while, and soon you will eat of her produce. She seems very harsh to the uninstructed; a weakling will not remain with her. She will weigh him down like a heavy testing stone, and he will not be slow to cast her off. For wisdom is like her name, and is not manifest to many.

Listen, my son, and accept my judgment; do not reject my counsel. Put your feet into her fetters, and your neck into her collar. Put your shoulder under her and carry her, and do not fret under her bonds. Come to her with all your soul, and keep her ways with all your might. Search out and seek, and she will become known to you; and when you get hold of her, do not let her go. For at last you will find the rest she gives, and she will be changed into joy for you. Then her fetters will become for you a strong protection, and her collar a glorious robe. Her yoke is a golden ornament, and her bonds are a cord of blue. You will wear her like a glorious robe, and put her on like a crown of gladness.

If you are willing, my son, you will be taught, and if you apply yourself you will become clever. If you love to listen you will gain knowledge, and if you incline your ear you will become wise. Stand in the assembly of the elders. Who is wise? Cleave to him. Be ready to listen to every narrative, and do not let wise proverbs escape you. If you see an intelligent man, visit him early; let your foot wear out his doorstep. Reflect on the statutes of the Lord, and meditate at all times on his commandments. It is he who will give insight to your mind, and your desire for wisdom will be granted.

A READING FROM ON SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP BY ST AELRED OF RIEVAULX

I do not presume the power to explain the dignity of so great a matter; for in all the affairs of mankind nothing more sacred is aimed at, nothing more profitable is sought, nothing is more difficult to find, nothing is sweeter to experience, nothing is more fruitful to retain than friendship, for it bears fruit both in this life and in the next. It flowers all the virtues with its sweetness; it chokes the vices by its power; it tempers adversity and brings settled prosperity; indeed without a friend almost nothing can be pleasant among humans. A man should be likened to an animal if he has no one to rejoice with him in prosperity and to lament with him in sadness; no one to whom he can relieve his mind if it is filled with some unpleasant thought and with whom he can share any unusually lofty or brilliant idea. Woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up. He is indeed alone who has no friend.

But what happiness it is, what freedom from care, what pleasure to have one to whom you dare to speak as freely as to yourself; to whom you are not afraid to confess if you have done any wrong; to whom you do not hesitate to reveal any advance you may have made in spiritual things; to whom you may entrust all the secrets of your heart and commit your plans!

What then is more pleasant than to write mind to mind in such a way that the two become one, no boasting need be feared, no suspicion dreaded, so that no rebuke of the one by the other cause pain, nor praise be taken as the ground for a charge of flattery? A friend, says the wise man, is an elixir of life. That indeed is a very great truth. For there is no healing treatment that is stronger, more effective, or more remarkable for our wounds in all temporal affairs than to have someone to come to our help in every misfortune, to congratulate us at any good fortune, as the Apostle says, Bear one another's burdens, shoulder to shoulder, unless perhaps each man finds his own burden lighter to bear than that of his friend. Friendship then makes prosperity even more brilliant, dividing adversity and sharing the lighter burdens. The best elixir of life then is a friend; just as it was the pleasure even of pagans, we do not make as universal use of water or fire as of a friend. In every action, in every pursuit, whether we are in doubt or certain, in any event, in any fortune, publicly or privately, in every discussion, at home or away from home, friendship is everywhere welcome, a friend is needful, kindness is always found useful.

Moreover, what is more important than all these, friendship is a sort of step closely approaching to perfection, which consists of the love and recognition of God; so that a man from being a man's friend may become a friend of God, as our Saviour says in the Gospel. No longer do I call you servants, but my friends.

St Aelred, De Spirituali Amicitia, II, 9-14 (CCCM I:303-305); Word in Season VIII.

Saturday of the Twenty-Seventh Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(Duties towards children, parents, priests, the poor: Sirach 7:18-36)

Do not exchange a friend for money, or a real brother for the gold of Ophir. Do not deprive yourself of a wise and good wife, for her charm is worth more than gold. Do not abuse a servant who performs his work faithfully, or a hired labourer who devotes himself to you. Let your soul love an intelligent servant; do not withhold from him his freedom.

Do you have cattle? Look after them; if they are profitable to you, keep them. Do you have children? Discipline them, and make them obedient from their youth. Do you have daughters? Be concerned for their chastity, and do not show yourself too indulgent with them. Give a daughter in marriage; you will have finished a great task. But give her to a man of understanding.

If you have a wife who pleases you, do not cast her out; but do not trust yourself to one whom you detest. With all your heart honour your father, and do not forget the birth pangs of your mother. Remember that through your parents you were born; and what can you give back to them that equals their gift to

With all your soul fear the Lord, and honour his priests. With all your might love your Maker, and do not forsake his ministers. Fear the Lord and honour the priest, and give him his portion, as is commanded you: the first fruits, the guilt offering, the gift of the shoulders, the sacrifice of sanctification, and the first fruits of the holy things. Stretch forth your hand to the poor, so that your blessing may be complete. Give graciously to all the living, and withhold not kindness from the dead. Do not fail those who weep, but mourn with those who mourn. Do not shrink from visiting a sick man, because for such deeds you will be loved. In all you do, remember the end of your life, and then you will never sin.

A READING FROM THE ORATIONS OF ST GREGORY NAZIANZEN

The fortunes of this world are uncertain and transient; they are tossed from hand to hand, as in a game with pebbles, and are always changing. Not one of this world's blessings belongs to its owner securely enough to prevent time destroying it, or envy transferring it elsewhere. But the rewards of heaven are fixed and abiding; they neither disappear nor change, and can never deceive the hopes of those who trust in them.

Now in my opinion there is a very good reason why people can find nothing reliable or lasting in the good things of this world. The Word, who is the architect of our destiny in this as in all things, and the Wisdom that transcends all mortal thought, have together well contrived it that we should be misled by everything we see in the constantly shifting world around us, where in the midst of this whirling to and fro we are always in pursuit of something that is forever flying from our grasp. Once we have observed the restlessness and disorder of this mortal life, we shall hasten to change our course toward the life to come. Indeed what should we have done if our prosperity here had

been secure, when even in all its uncertainty we are so bound to this world, and its pleasures and allurements have so enslaved us, that we cannot imagine anything better or higher than our present life? And this, despite the fact that we are told and believe that we are created in the image of God, that image which is above and draws us to itself.

Who is wise enough to understand these things? Who will abandon the things that pass away, and devote himself to those that last? Who will think of the present as something that is always moving away? Happy indeed is he who has such powers of discernment, and who uses the keen edge of the Word to separate the better from the worse. His heart is set on the journey upward, as holy David was inspired to say in one of the psalms; and so he flies with all speed from this valley of weeping, and seeks the realms above.

Crucified to the world with Christ, he takes his stand beside Christ and ascends in the company of Christ, an heir to a life that henceforth is neither changing nor deceptive, and where he will no longer find a serpent waiting on the road to bite his heel, while he watches out for its head.

Therefore without delay let us follow the Word, seek our rest in the world beyond, and throw away the riches of this world. Let us profit by them in the only good way we can, that is, let us gain possession of our souls by giving alms, and share our earthly goods with the poor so as to enrich ourselves with the wealth of heaven.

St Gregory Nazianzen, Oratio, 14, 20-22, De pauperum amore (PG 35: 882-886); Word in Season VIII.

Season of the Year / Week 28

Sunday of the Twenty-Eighth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(Against pride: Sirach 10:6-18)

Do not be angry with your neighbour for any injury, and do not attempt anything by acts of insolence. Arrogance is hateful before the Lord and before men, and injustice is outrageous to both. Sovereignty passes from nation to nation on account of injustice and insolence and wealth. How can he who is dust and ashes be proud? For even in life his bowels decay. A long illness baffles the physician; the king of today will die tomorrow. For when a man is dead he will inherit creeping things, and wild beasts, and worms. The beginning of man's pride is to depart from the Lord; his heart has forsaken his Maker. For the beginning of pride is sin, and the man who clings to it pours out abominations. Therefore the Lord brought upon them extraordinary afflictions, and destroyed them utterly. The Lord has cast down the thrones of rulers, and has seated the lowly in their place. The Lord has plucked up the roots of the nations, and has planted the humble in their place. The Lord has overthrown the lands of the nations, and has destroyed them to the foundations of the earth. He has removed some of them and destroyed them, and has extinguished the memory of them from the earth. Pride was not created for men, nor fierce anger for those born of women.

A READING FROM THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

If a man refuses to love God with his whole heart and his whole mind, how can he honestly and faithfully care about loving his brethren, since he withholds love from him for whose sake he is concerned to love them? A man in this state, who has neither given his whole soul to God nor has any fellowship in the love of God, is defenceless in the face of the expert in evil, who easily trips him up and subdues him with his dangerous arguments. At one moment he makes the commandments of Scripture seem harsh and service of the brethren a grievous burden, at another he incites a man to arrogance and pride on account of that very service to his fellow servants, persuading him that he has fulfilled the Lord's commands and will be great in heaven.

There is no small offence here. For the good and zealous servant must leave it to his master to judge his service, and not take his master's place in judging and applauding his own behaviour. For if he usurps the office of the true judge, he will get no reward from his own self-satisfied praise with which he presumes to replace his master's judgement. For it is necessary, according to the saying of Paul, for the Spirit of Good to unite with our spirit in bearing witness, but we ourselves must not judge our actions to be good. For Paul says: It is not the one who commends himself that is accepted, but the one whom the Lord commends. He who cannot wait for the Lord's praise, but anticipates his judgement, is forced to take refuge in the glory of his fellow men.

In thus seeking to win honour from his brethren by his own labours he behaves like an unbeliever, for it is only an unbeliever who would rather pursue the honours of this

world than those of heaven. As the Lord himself says: How can you have faith, who take praise from one another but do not seek the praise which comes from God alone?

Such people seem to me like those who clean the outside of the cup and the dish, while inside they are full of every kind of evil. Take care then not to be like that yourselves. Offer your souls to God, with the one thought of pleasing the Lord, and never lose your awareness of heavenly things. Do not accept the honours of this life; run in such a way as to hide, but keep silent about your struggles for virtue, so as to give no opportunities to the one who tempts you with earthly honours and who, having distracted your minds from thinking of what is real, might lead into vanity and error. But if he finds no such chance, or opportunity, and his way securely barred to the enticement of those whose souls are devoted to the things of heaven, he is destroyed and lies dead; for it is death to the devil when his efforts to use his evil power are unsuccessful. So with the love of God present among you, all other good is bound to follow: brotherly love, gentleness, guilelessness, zeal, and perseverance in prayer, and indeed every virtue.

St Gregory of Nyssa, The Christian Way of Life (Jaeger VIII, 72-74); Word in Season VIII.

Monday of the Twenty-Eighth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(Trust in God alone: Sirach 11:12-28)

There is another who is slow and needs help, who lacks strength and abounds in poverty; but the eyes of the Lord look upon him for his good; he lifts him out of his low estate and raises up his head, so that many are amazed at him.

Good things and bad, life and death, poverty and wealth, come from the Lord. The gift of the Lord endures for those who are godly, and what he approves will have lasting success. There is a man who is rich through his diligence and self-denial, and this is the reward allotted to him: when he says, "I have found rest, and now I shall enjoy my goods!" he does not know how much time will pass until he leaves them to others and dies. Stand by your covenant and attend to it, and grow old in your work.

Do not wonder at the works of a sinner, but trust in the Lord and keep at your toil; for it is easy in the sight of the Lord to enrich a poor man quickly and suddenly. The blessing of the Lord is the reward of the godly, and quickly God causes his blessing to flourish. Do not say, "What do I need, and what prosperity could be mine in the future?" Do not say, "I have enough, and what calamity could happen to me in the future?" In the day of prosperity, adversity is forgotten, and in the day of adversity, prosperity is not remembered. For it is easy in the sight of the Lord to reward a man on the day of death according to his conduct. The misery of an hour makes one forget luxury, and at the close of a man's life his deeds will be revealed. Call no one happy before his death; a man will be known through his children.

A READING FROM THE CONFERENCES OF ST JOHN CASSIAN

Germanus asked Abba Theodore, "Is our mind able to hold on to one state constantly and to remain always in the same condition?"

He replied, "As the Apostle says, it is necessary for one who is renewed in the spirit of his mind to make progress every day, always reaching out to what is ahead. The alternative is that the neglectful person reverses himself and falls back into a worse state. We confess that God alone is unchanging. Him alone does the prayer of the holy Prophet address in this way: You yourself are the same. And he says of himself: I am God, and I do not change. For only he to whom nothing can ever be added and from whom nothing can ever be taken away is by nature always good, always complete, and always perfect. Therefore we must always push ourselves with unceasing care and concern to attain the virtues, lest our progress suddenly cease and regression occur. For, as we have said, the mind cannot remain in one and the same condition – that is, so that it does not either increase or decrease in virtue. Not to have gained is to have lost, because when the desire of making progress ceases, the danger of falling back will appear.

"Therefore one must abide constantly in one's cell. For as often as a person has wandered out of it and has returned to it like a novice who is only starting to live there, he will

waver and be disturbed. The person who stays in his cell has acquired an intensity of mind that, once let go slack, he will not be able to recover again without effort and pain.

“But that even the heavenly powers, as we have said, are subject to change is proclaimed by those of their number who fell because of the sinfulness of their corrupt will.

Therefore we should not think of those who have persevered in the blessedness in which they were created as possessing an unchanging nature because they did not likewise behave wickedly. For it is one thing to possess an unchanging nature and another not to be changed because of zeal for virtue and perseverance in the good, which is due to the grace of an immutable God. Whatever is acquired and maintained through diligence can also be lost through negligence. Consequently it is said: You should not call a person blessed before his death, because whoever is still involved in this struggle, even though he usually overcomes and obtains the palm of victory, still cannot be free of fear and of concern about an uncertain result.

“God alone, then, is said to be unchangeable and good – he who possesses goodness not because of laborious effort but by nature, and who cannot be anything other than good. Therefore no virtue can be possessed unwaveringly by a man, but for it to be firmly maintained once it has been acquired it must always be preserved with the same concern and effort with which it was obtained.”

St John Cassian, Conferences 6, 13-16; ACW 57 (1997) tr. Ramsey.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(The happiness of wisdom: Sirach 14:20 – 15:10)

Blessed is the man who meditates on wisdom and who reasons intelligently. He who reflects in his mind on her ways will also ponder her secrets. Pursue wisdom like a hunter, and lie in wait on her paths. He who peers through her windows will also listen at her doors; he who encamps near her house will also fasten his tent peg to her walls; he will pitch his tent near her, and will lodge in an excellent lodging place; he will place his children under her shelter, and will camp under her boughs he will be sheltered by her from the heat, and will dwell in the midst of her glory.

The man who fears the Lord will do this, and he who holds to the law will obtain wisdom. She will come to meet him like a mother, and like the wife of his youth she will welcome him. She will feed him with the bread of understanding, and give him the water of wisdom to drink. He will lean on her and will not fall, and he will rely on her and will not be put to shame. She will exalt him above his neighbours, and will open his mouth in the midst of the assembly. He will find gladness and a crown of rejoicing, and will acquire an everlasting name. Foolish men will not obtain her, and sinful men will not see her. She is far from men of pride, and liars will never think of her.

A hymn of praise is not fitting on the lips of a sinner, for it has not been sent from the Lord. For a hymn of praise should be uttered in wisdom, and the Lord will prosper it.

A READING FROM THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

For those who love God, practising his com-mandments is an easy and enjoyable task, since our love for him lightens the struggle and makes it welcome. It is for that reason that the devil strives by every means to drive out the fear of the Lord from our souls, and to destroy our love for him with unlawful pleasure and treacherous delights. It is why he does his best to catch the soul off its guard and without its spiritual armour, and so to destroy our labours, offering us earthly in place of heavenly glory, and confusing our vision of true beauty with its deceptive image. For if he finds the guards careless, he is quick to seize the oppor-tunity to appear to the field of virtue, and amidst the growing corn to sow his own weeds, that is, slander, arrogance, vainglory, desire for honour, quarrelling, and all the other products of evil. Therefore we must be vigilant and keep watch for our enemy on all sides, so that whatever shameless device he uses against us we may drive him off before he lays hands on our souls.

You must often remember that story of how Abel and Cain offered sacrifice to the Lord, Abel with some of his firstborn sheep and their fat, Cain with fruits of the earth, but no first fruits. And God observed Abel's sacrifice, as Scripture tells us, but the gifts of Cain he ignored. What then is the moral of the story? It teaches us that God accepts whatever we offer him in fear and faith, but has no use for the costliest gift offered without love. The very reason why Abraham received Melchizedek's blessing is that he offered the

priest of God the first fruits and the richest spoils. Now the richest spoils and the first fruits that we ourselves possess are our souls and minds; and thus we are commanded to make no trivial sacrifice of praise and prayer to God, nor to offer the Lord any chance gift but what is best in our souls, or rather to dedicate to God our entire souls with all possible love and desire. So continually nourished by the grace of the Spirit and taking to ourselves the power that comes from Christ, we shall run with ease the race of salvation and make the struggle for righteousness carefree and joyous. For God himself will help us to toil with zeal, and will accomplish his righteous works through us.

St Gregory of Nyssa, The Christian Way of Life (Jaeger VIII:75-77); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(Man's freedom: Sirach 15:11-20)

Do not say, "Because of the Lord I left the right way"; for he will not do what he hates. Do not say, "It was he who led me astray"; for he had no need of a sinful man. The Lord hates all abominations, and they are not loved by those who fear him. It was he who created man in the beginning, and he left him in the power of his own inclination. If you will, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. He has placed before you fire and water: stretch out your hand for whichever you wish. Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him. For great is the wisdom of the Lord; he is mighty in power and sees everything; his eyes are on those who fear him, and he knows every deed of man. He has not commanded any one to be ungodly, and he has not given any one permission to sin.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW BY ST PASCHASIUS RADBERTUS

Your will be done. – There is no one who can obstruct or frustrate the fulfilment of God's will. Especially as it is written that The Lord accomplished in heaven and on earth all the things that he wills. But we make this prayer in order to unite our free will, by his grace, with his will also, so that he who lives, lives no longer to himself, but that God's free will may be fulfilled in all things. And to that will indeed St Paul testifies when he says: God's will is your sanctification, that you distance yourselves from sensual desire. And elsewhere the Lord himself says: This is the will of my Father who sent me – that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life. Hence it is that we devoutly make this prayer, not for the Lord's advantage but for our own.

When, therefore, we say Your will be done we need to think about the faith and the charity which is ours, in speaking the words: for no one who hesitates about the Father's will is praying aright. Whence our great faith, great devotion, and our feeling of entire security, which come from knowing about his never-ending kindness, his wishing no evil. As St Paul says: His will is that all should be saved and come to recognise the truth. And so no one could have said those things with all his heart unless he believed for sure that all things visible and invisible, whether for our temporal prosperity or otherwise, are ordained by God for our profit and advantage. For one must believe with unquestioning faith that he is more shrewd a judge and caring a provider than we ourselves ever could be, ceaselessly watching for what can work our salvation. For his will is the salvation of all. This indeed was known to the one and only Son of God, teacher of the truth, who said: Father, that this chalice might pass from me, but – but not my will but yours be done. And, in another passage: I have not come to do my will, but the will of him that sent me, the Father.

For the humanity of God-made-man took on more of the Father than of himself, so as to show us all how much trust and what kind of trust we should place in his will. No one need be in doubt, according to what St John writes: May he who does God's will live for

all eternity. On this thought let our minds expand and our hearts enlarge, as we realise what we are praying; for whatever the heavenly teacher has taught by word or example, it is the will of the Father that it should all be accomplished. It is for this purpose that those things are written or done, that we work out our salvation faithfully through our deeds. So let each of us look to what he is about, what he intends, what he encompasses in his heart. But if he should see his will to differ in aught from God's will, let him correct his error, lest what he pray with his words he frustrate with his outward behaviour.

Paschasius Radbertus, Expositio in Matt. IV, VI: PL 120, 286-287 (from Word in Season VIII)

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(Man, the summit of all creation: Sirach 16:24 – 17:14)

Listen to me, my son, and acquire knowledge, and pay close attention to my words. I will impart instruction by weight, and declare knowledge accurately. The works of the Lord have existed from the beginning by his creation, and when he made them, he determined their divisions. He arranged his works in an eternal order, and their dominion for all generations; they neither hunger nor grow weary, and they do not cease from their labours. They do not crowd one another aside, and they will never disobey his word. After this the Lord looked upon the earth, and filled it with his good things; with all kinds of living beings he covered its surface, and to it they return.

The Lord created man out of earth, and turned him back to it again. He gave to men few days, a limited time, but granted them authority over the things upon the earth. He endowed them with strength like his own, and made them in his own image. He placed the fear of them in all living beings, and granted them dominion over beasts and birds. He made for them tongue and eyes; he gave them ears and a mind for thinking. He filled them with knowledge and understanding, and showed them good and evil. He set his eye upon their hearts to show them the majesty of his works. And they will praise his holy name, to proclaim the grandeur of his works. He bestowed knowledge upon them, and allotted to them the law of life. He established with them an eternal covenant, and showed them his judgments. Their eyes saw his glorious majesty, and their ears heard the glory of his voice. And he said to them, “Beware of all unrighteousness.” And he gave commandment to each of them concerning his neighbour.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON GENESIS BY ORIGEN

God made man; he made him in his own image. We must understand what this image of God means and ask in whose likeness it is that man is made. For it is not said that ‘God made man in his image or likeness’, but that he made him in the image of God. So what is the other, this distinct image of God, in whose likeness man is made, except our Saviour who is the firstborn of all creatures, he of whom it is said that he is the splendour of the eternal light and the imprint of God’s substance, he who said of himself: I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and he who has seen me has seen the Father? For just as he who has seen someone’s picture has seen him also whose picture it is, so likewise through the incarnate Word of God, which is the picture, the image of God, one sees God himself. And so we can see the truth of what was said: He who has seen me has seen the Father.

In the likeness of this image, then, was man made and for that very reason our Saviour, who is himself the image of God, was moved by pity for man. For man had been made in his likeness; and yet he was seen to put off that likeness and put on instead the image of evil. And so, moved by pity, our Saviour came to him, assuming the likeness of man, as the Apostle testifies, saying: When he was still in the likeness of God he was not possessive or self-assertive about being equal to God, but emptied himself out, taking the

form of a servant, made in the likeness of man; and man he was found to be, through and through, as he humbled himself even unto death.

We who come to him, then, and strive to be made sharers in his image as we can understand it, are by our endeavour and our progress renewed inwardly each day in the image of him who made us; so that we may be made like the body of his radiance, his glory, each of us according to his capacity. The Apostles remade themselves in his likeness; so much so, that he said of them: I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. For he had prayed to the Father for his disciples, that the original likeness might be restored to them, when he said: Father, grant that just as you and I are one, so they also may be one in us.

Let us therefore contemplate this likeness of God, that we may be remade on that pattern. For if man, having been made in God's image, can be made, against his nature, to resemble the devil merely by looking on him, how much more, by looking on the likeness of God, in whose image he is made, will he receive through the incarnate Word both the virtue and the likeness, already given him by his nature. Let no one despair on seeing that he is more like the devil than God: for he is yet able to recover even so his likeness to God. Our Saviour came to call, not the just, but sinners to repentance. Matthew was a publican and indeed resembled the devil; but by coming as he did to the incarnate image of God, our Lord and Saviour, and following him, he has been transformed in the likeness of God.

Origen, In Gen., 1, 13 (SC 7bis, 60-64); Word in Season VIII.

Friday of the Twenty-Eighth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(God is judge; an exhortation to conversion: Sirach 17:15-32)

Their ways are always before him, they will not be hid from his eyes. He appointed a ruler for every nation, but Israel is the Lord's own portion. All their works are as the sun before him, and his eyes are continually upon their ways. Their iniquities are not hidden from him, and all their sins are before the Lord. A man's almsgiving is like a signet with the Lord and he will keep a person's kindness like the apple of his eye. Afterward he will arise and requite them, and he will bring their recompense on their heads. Yet to those who repent he grants a return, and he encourages those whose endurance is failing.

Turn to the Lord and forsake your sins; pray in his presence and lessen your offences. Return to the Most High and turn away from iniquity, and hate abominations intensely. Who will sing praises to the Most High in Hades, as do those who are alive and give thanks? From the dead, as from one who does not exist, thanksgiving has ceased; he who is alive and well sings the Lord's praises. How great is the mercy of the Lord, and his forgiveness for those who turn to him! For all things cannot be in men, since a son of man is not immortal. What is brighter than the sun? Yet its light fails. So flesh and blood devise evil. He marshals the host of the height of heaven; but all men are dust and ashes.

A READING FROM THE REVELATIONS OF DIVINE LOVE OF JULIAN OF NORWICH

Our good Lord showed me the enmity of the fiend, from which I gathered that everything opposed to love and peace comes from the fiend and his set. Inevitably we fall because of our weakness and stupidity – and just as surely we get up with even greater joy because of the mercy and grace of the Holy Spirit. Even if our enemy gains something from us when we fall (this is what he likes!), he loses very much more because of our love and humility when we get up again. This glorious rising up gives him such sorrow and pain (he hates our soul so much) that he burns and burns with envy. The very sorrow he would impose on us turns back upon himself. Which was the reason why our Lord spurned him – and the reason, too, why I laughed so much.

The remedy is to be aware of our wretchedness, and to fly to our Lord. The greater our need, the more important it is to draw near to him. Let our meaning be, 'I am well aware that my suffering is deserved. Our Lord is almighty, and may punish me mightily; he is all-wise, and can punish me wisely; and he is all-good, and loves me most tenderly.' And with the sight of this we have got to stay. The humility of a sinful soul is a lovely thing, and is a work of the Spirit's mercy and grace, when we consciously and gladly accept the scourge and punishment given by our Lord himself. It even becomes gentle and bearable when we are really content with him and with what he does. What penance a man should impose upon himself was not revealed to me - not specifically at any rate. But this was shown, with particular and loving emphasis, that we are to accept and endure humbly whatever penance God himself gives us, with his blessed passion ever in mind.

When in pitying love we recall his blessed passion we suffer with him, as did his friends who actually saw it.

Our Lord is with us, protecting us and leading us into fullness of joy. For it is an unending source of joy to us that our Lord should intend that he, our protector here, is to be our bliss there – our way and our heaven is true love and sure trust! This is the message of all the revelations, and particularly in that of his passion where he made me wholeheartedly choose him to be my heaven.

Flee to our Lord, and we shall be strengthened. Touch him, and we shall be cleansed. Cling to him, and we shall be safe and sound from every danger. For it is the will of our courteous Lord that we should be as much at home with him as heart may think or soul desire. But we must be careful not to accept this privilege so casually that we forget our own courtesy. For our Lord himself is supremely friendly, and he is as courteous as he is friendly: he is very courteous.

Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love, 77; Word in Season VIII.

Saturday of the Twenty-Eighth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(Wisdom in creation and in the history of Israel: 24:1-22)

Wisdom will praise herself, and will glory in the midst of her people. In the assembly of the Most High she will open her mouth, and in the presence of his host she will glory: "I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist. I dwelt in high places, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud. Alone I have made the circuit of the vault of heaven and have walked in the depths of the abyss. In the waves of the sea, in the whole earth, and in every people and nation I have gotten a possession. Among all these I sought a resting place; I sought in whose territory I might lodge.

"Then the Creator of all things gave me a commandment, and the one who created me assigned a place for my tent. And he said, 'Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance.' From eternity, in the beginning, he created me, and for eternity I shall not cease to exist. In the holy tabernacle I ministered before him, and so I was established in Zion. In the beloved city likewise he gave me a resting place, and in Jerusalem was my dominion. So I took root in an honoured people, in the portion of the Lord, who is their inheritance.

"I grew tall like a cedar in Lebanon, and like a cypress on the heights of Hermon. I grew tall like a palm tree in En-ge'di, and like rose plants in Jericho; like a beautiful olive tree in the field, and like a plane tree I grew tall. Like cassia and camel's thorn I gave forth the aroma of spices, and like choice myrrh I spread a pleasant odour, like galbanum, onycha, and stacte, and like the fragrance of frankincense in the tabernacle. Like a terebinth I spread out my branches, and my branches are glorious and graceful. Like a vine I caused loveliness to bud, and my blossoms became glorious and abundant fruit.

"Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my produce. For the remembrance of me is sweeter than honey, and my inheritance sweeter than the honeycomb. Those who eat me will hunger for more, and those who drink me will thirst for more. Whoever obeys me will not be put to shame, and those who work with my help will not sin."

A READING FROM ON THE TRINITY BY ST AUGUSTINE

Why is it that Scripture hardly ever mentions wisdom, except to point out that it has been either begotten or made by God? That is to say, it was begotten, through which all things were made; but it was created or made, as in men, when they turn to and are enlightened by that wisdom, which was not created or made but begotten. Then something is brought about in them which may be called their wisdom, which the Scriptures foretell and describe when they say: The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. For Christ became our wisdom in this way when he became man.

Is it for this reason, then, that wisdom does not speak in those books, or say anything about itself, except to show that it was born or made by God, although the Father himself is also wisdom, because wisdom was to be commended to and indicated by us, since we ourselves were to be formed by imitating it?

The Son, who is wisdom, is from the Father, who is wisdom, light from light and God from God. And the Father singly is light and the Son singly is light; the Father singly is God and the Son singly is God. Consequently, the Father singly is wisdom and the Son singly is wisdom. And as both together are one light and one God, so both together are one wisdom. But the Son has been made for us wisdom from God, and justice and sanctification, because we turn ourselves to him temporally, that is, from some particular time, in order to remain with him eternally. For he himself at a certain moment of time was the Word made flesh that dwelt among us.

Therefore, when anything concerning wisdom is said or recorded in the Scriptures, whether wisdom itself speaks or anything is said of it, then the Son is particularly meant. And with the example of this image before us, let us also not depart from God. For we are, likewise, the image of God, not indeed an equal image, since it was made by the Father through the Son, not born of the Father as that is. And we are so, because we are enlightened by the light, but he is the light that enlightens. And, therefore, this image is an example for us without itself having an example. For he does not imitate anyone who comes before him in respect to the Father, from whom he is wholly inseparable, since he has the same essence with him from whom he is. But by our striving we imitate him who remains and follow him who stands; when we walk in him, we tend towards him, because by his humility he has been made a road for us in time, in order that by his divinity he might be for us a mansion in eternity.

St Augustine, De Trinitate, 7.3; FoC 45 (1963) tr. McKenna.

Season of the Year | Week 29

Sunday of the Twenty-Ninth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(A good wife and a bad wife: Sirach 26:1-4, 9-18)

Happy is the husband of a good wife; the number of his days will be doubled. A loyal wife rejoices her husband, and he will complete his years in peace. A good wife is a great blessing; she will be granted among the blessings of the man who fears the Lord. Whether rich or poor, his heart is glad, and at all times his face is cheerful.

A wife's harlotry shows in her lustful eyes, and she is known by her eyelids. Keep strict watch over a headstrong daughter, lest, when she finds liberty, she use it to her hurt. Be on guard against her impudent eye, and do not wonder if she sins against you. As a thirsty wayfarer opens his mouth and drinks from any water near him, so will she sit in front of every post and open her quiver to the arrow.

A wife's charm delights her husband, and her skill puts fat on his bones. A silent wife is a gift of the Lord, and there is nothing so precious as a disciplined soul. A modest wife adds charm to charm, and no balance can weigh the value of a chaste soul. Like the sun rising in the heights of the Lord, so is the beauty of a good wife in her well-ordered home. Like the shining lamp on the holy lampstand, is a beautiful face on a stately figure. Like pillars of gold on a base of silver, so are beautiful feet with a steadfast heart.

A READING FROM THE APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO OF POPE ST JOHN PAUL II

God created man in his own image and likeness: calling him to existence through love, he called him at the same time for love. God is love and in himself he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in his own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.

As an incarnate spirit, that is a soul which expresses itself in a body and a body informed by an immortal spirit, man is called to love in his unified totality. Love includes the human body, and the body is made a sharer in spiritual love. Christian revelation recognizes two specific ways of realising the vocation of the human person in its entirety, to love: marriage and virginity or celibacy. Either one is, in its own proper form, an actuation of the most profound truth of man, of his being created in the image of God.

The communion of love between God and people, a fundamental part of the revelation and faith experience of Israel, finds a meaningful expression in the marriage covenant which is established between a man and a woman. For this reason the central word of revelation, 'God loves his people', is likewise proclaimed through the living and concrete word whereby a man and a woman express their conjugal love. Their bond of love becomes the image and the symbol of the covenant which unites God and his people. And the same sin which can harm the conjugal covenant becomes an image of the infidelity of the people to their God: idolatry is prostitution, infidelity is adultery,

disobedience to the law is abandonment of the spousal love of the Lord. But the infidelity of Israel does not destroy the eternal fidelity of the Lord, and therefore the ever faithful love of God is put forward as the model of the relations of faithful love which should exist between spouses.

The communion between God and his people finds its definitive fulfilment in Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom who loves and gives himself as the Saviour of humanity, uniting it to himself as his body. he reveals the original truth of marriage, the truth of the 'beginning', and, freeing man from his hardness of heart, he makes man capable of realising this truth in its entirety. This revelation reaches its definitive fullness in the gift of love which the Word of God makes to humanity in assuming a human nature, and in the sacrifice which Jesus Christ makes of himself on the Cross for his bride, the Church. In this sacrifice there is entirely revealed that plan which God has imprinted on the humanity of man and woman since their creation; the marriage of baptized persons thus becomes a real symbol of that new and eternal covenant sanctioned in the blood of Christ.

St John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, 11-13.

Monday of the Twenty-Ninth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(Against anger and vengeance: Sirach 27:22 – 28:7)

Whoever winks his eye plans evil deeds, and no one can keep him from them. In your presence his mouth is all sweetness, and he admires your words; but later he will twist his speech and with your own words he will give offence. I have hated many things, but none to be compared to him; even the Lord will hate him. Whoever throws a stone straight up throws it on his own head; and a treacherous blow opens up wounds. He who digs a pit will fall into it, and he who sets a snare will be caught in it. If a man does evil, it will roll back upon him, and he will not know where it came from. Mockery and abuse issue from the proud man, but vengeance lies in wait for him like a lion. Those who rejoice in the fall of the godly will be caught in a snare, and pain will consume them before their death.

Anger and wrath, these also are abominations, and the sinful man will possess them. He that takes vengeance will suffer vengeance from the Lord, and he will firmly establish his sins. Forgive your neighbour the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray. Does a man harbour anger against another, and yet seek for healing from the Lord? Does he have no mercy toward a man like himself, and yet pray for his own sins? If he himself, being flesh, maintains wrath, who will make expiation for his sins? Remember the end of your life, and cease from enmity, remember destruction and death, and be true to the commandments. Remember the commandments, and do not be angry with your neighbour; remember the covenant of the Most High, and overlook ignorance.

A READING FROM THE HOMILIES ON MATTHEW BY ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Two things are required of us, here and now: to acknowledge our sins and to forgive others; the first, so that the second may become easier. For someone properly aware of his own behaviour and its shortcomings will be the more forgiving to his fellow humans. And that does not mean, forgiveness in words merely, but from the heart, lest in our resentment we turn the sword on ourselves. For is the harm done to you comparable to that which you do yourself when you renew your anger and draw down on yourself God's condemnation? If you are vigilant and wise the misdeed will fall to his account and he will suffer for it; but if you persevere in your resentment and anger it will be you who gets hurt – and not from him but from yourself. Do not say: He has insulted me and slandered me, he has done me great wrong; for the more you protest, the more you put him in the right. For he has given you an opportunity for casting off your sinful character. So the more he has injured you, the greater the forgiveness of your own sin, in consequence.

Let us take care that we hate no one, so that God may still love us; so that even though we may be owing him a thousand talents he may yet be generous and merciful to us. Has someone offended you? Be merciful to him, then; do not hate him. Weep and lament for

him, but do not show aversion. For it is not you who have offended God, but he; you will do well to put up with it. Recall how Christ was content to be crucified – and yet shed tears over those who did it. That must be your disposition also: the more you are wronged, the more you must lament for the wrongdoers. For it is we who profit from this – and greatly – but not they.

Or is it that you have received injury from those you treated kindly? For that very reason you should wail and lament over them, being content that therein you resemble the Lord himself, who makes the sun to rise on the unjust as also on the just. If it seems beyond you so to imitate God, be assured otherwise: it is not a difficult task to a man of vigilance. But if it still seems a greater burden than you can bear, think of others we could mention: Joseph, who endured so much from his brethren and was kind to them nevertheless; Moses, praying for those who had vexed him so much; the blessed Paul, whose sufferings were beyond his reckoning, and yet he would still have been anathema on account of those who had caused them; or Stephen, praying for the forgive-ness of his very malefactors, even as they stoned him. With all that in mind, cast off your anger so that God may forgive you all your transgressions, by the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power, honour, now and always, forever and ever. Amen.

St John Chrysostom, Hom. LXI in Matth. (Bareille XII, 506-509); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(On lending, alms and riches: Sirach 29:1-13; 31:1-4)

He that shows mercy will lend to his neighbour, and he that strengthens him with his hand keeps the commandments. Lend to your neighbour in the time of his need; and in turn, repay your neighbour promptly. Confirm your word and keep faith with him, and on every occasion you will find what you need. Many persons regard a loan as a windfall, and cause trouble to those who help them. A man will kiss another's hands until he gets a loan, and will lower his voice in speaking of his neighbour's money; but at the time for repayment he will delay, and will pay in words of unconcern, and will find fault with the time. If the lender exert pressure, he will hardly get back half, and will regard that as a windfall. If he does not, the borrower has robbed him of his money, and he has needlessly made him his enemy; he will repay him with curses and reproaches, and instead of glory will repay him with dishonour. Because of such wickedness, therefore, many have refused to lend; they have been afraid of being defrauded needlessly.

Nevertheless, be patient with a man in humble circumstances, and do not make him wait for your alms. Help a poor man for the commandment's sake, and because of his need do not send him away empty. Lose your silver for the sake of a brother or a friend, and do not let it rust under a stone and be lost. Lay up your treasure according to the commandments of the Most High, and it will profit you more than gold. Store up almsgiving in your treasury, and it will rescue you from all affliction; more than a mighty shield and more than a heavy spear, it will fight on your behalf against your enemy.

Wakefulness over wealth wastes away one's flesh, and anxiety about it removes sleep. Wakeful anxiety prevents slumber, and a severe illness carries off sleep. The rich man toils as his wealth accumulates, and when he rests he fills himself with his dainties. The poor man toils as his livelihood diminishes, and when he rests he becomes needy.

A READING FROM ON WORKS AND ALMSGIVING BY ST CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE

Truly I tell you, that whatever you did for one of the least of these my brothers or sisters, you did for me. What greater command could Christ have given us? How could he have given us greater incitement toward works of our own mercy and justice, than by saying that anything we gave to the poor and needy we gave to him, and that we offended him if we gave them nothing? It was in the hope that one who is unmoved by the thought of his brother in the Church would at least be moved at the thought of Christ, and one who has no consideration for the distress and poverty of his fellow servant would at least have consideration for the Lord in the person of the one he despises.

And therefore, dearest brothers, you who are prepared to fear the Lord, and have already rejected and spurned the world, raised your minds to celestial and divine matters, and made yourselves deserving through complete faith, a devout mind, and

continuous good works, let us offer our worship to God. Let us give Christ earthly clothes to receive celestial ones; let us give him earthly food and drink, to join Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the heavenly feast. Let us sow abundantly so that our harvest will not be small. Let us look to our eternal safety and well-being while there is time, as the Apostle Paul urges us to do, saying: Therefore while we have time let us do whatever is for the good of all, but especially for the members of the faith. But let us not grow weary of doing good; for in its own time we shall reap our reward.

And the glory and the joy of those who do good works, dearest brothers, will be very great, when the Lord begins to examine his people, and gives us the promised rewards for our merits and our good works, celestial rewards for earthly efforts, eternal for temporal, great for small. He will offer us to the Father to whom he has returned us by his own sanctification, and give us the eternity and immortality to which he returned us by his life--giving blood. He will bring us back to paradise again, and true to his promise he will open the kingdom of heaven to us!

To win this palm for good works, let us enter the contest gladly and promptly, and all run in the fight for justice, with God and Christ as spectators. And when we are already well ahead of the world, let no worldly desires slow us down. If the day of retribution or of persecution falls upon us while we are running freely and swiftly in this context of good works, the Lord will in no way fail to reward us for our merits. In time of peace he will give the victorious a white crown for their good works; in time of persecution it will be a double purple one for their suffering.

St Cyprian, De opera et eleemosynis, 23-24, 26 (PL 4:643-646); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(A demand for sincerity in the worship of God: Sirach 35:1-18)

He who keeps the law makes many offerings; he who heeds the commandments sacrifices a peace offering. He who returns a kindness offers fine flour, and he who gives alms sacrifices a thank offering. To keep from wickedness is pleasing to the Lord, and to forsake unrighteousness is atonement. Do not appear before the Lord empty-handed, for all these things are to be done because of the commandment. The offering of a righteous man anoints the altar, and its pleasing odour rises before the Most High. The sacrifice of a righteous man is acceptable, and the memory of it will not be forgotten. Glorify the Lord generously, and do not stint the first fruits of your hands. With every gift show a cheerful face, and dedicate your tithe with gladness. Give to the Most High as he has given, and as generously as your hand has found. For the Lord is the one who repays, and he will repay you sevenfold.

Do not offer him a bribe, for he will not accept it; and do not trust to an unrighteous sacrifice; for the Lord is the judge, and with him is no partiality. He will not show partiality in the case of a poor man; and he will listen to the prayer of one who is wronged. He will not ignore the supplication of the fatherless, nor the widow when she pours out her story. Do not the tears of the widow run down her cheek as she cries out against him who has caused them to fall? He whose service is pleasing to the Lord will be accepted, and his prayer will reach to the clouds. The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds, and he will not be consoled until it reaches the Lord; he will not desist until the Most High visits him, and does justice for the righteous, and executes judgment. And the Lord will not delay, neither will he be patient with them, till he crushes the loins of the unmerciful and repays vengeance on the nations; till he takes away the multitude of the insolent, and breaks the sceptres of the unrighteous.

A READING FROM THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE BY ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

In speaking about the different virtues, we cannot say that one is better than the rest, or that we should pursue them in order of merit. For in fact they are of equal importance with one another, and linked together they lead those who practice them to the height of perfection. Sincerity leads to obedience, obedience in turn to faith, and faith to hope, hope to righteousness, righteousness to service, and service to humility. From humility we learn gentleness which leads to joy, as joy leads to love, and love to prayer. Thus bound to one another and binding their zealous follower, the virtues lead him to the very height of his desires, just as the various forms of wickedness lead those attached to them down the oppo-site way to the utmost depths of evil.

But we must above all devote ourselves to prayer; for prayer is like a choir-leader in the choir of virtues, by means of which we ask God for the virtues we still lack. Devotion to prayer unites the Christian to God in the communion of a mystic sanctity, in a spiritual possession and a disposition of the soul that no words can describe. With the Spirit then

to guide and help him, his love for the Lord like a bright flame, he prays unceasingly in ardent desire, always burning with love for the divine good and refreshing his soul with renewed zeal. As Scripture says: Those who eat me will hunger for more, and those who drink me will thirst for more; and elsewhere: You have filled my heart with gladness; so too the Lord says: The kingdom of heaven is within you.

By the kingdom within us he certainly means that joy which the Spirit instils into our souls from above, as an image and a pledge, reflecting the eternal joy which the souls of the faithful possess in the life to come. So the Lord comforts us in all our afflictions through the working of the Spirit, to keep us safe and to grant us a share of spiritual gifts and of his own special grace. He comforts us in all our troubles, says the Apostle, so that we may be able to comfort others in their distress. And the psalmist says: My whole being cries out with joy to the living God; and: My soul is richly feasted, indicating in all such symbolic sayings the joy and comfort that come from the Spirit.

St Gregory of Nyssa, The Christian Way of Life, II (Jaeger VIII, 77-79); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(Knowledge of crafts is compared with wisdom of the scribe: Sirach 38:24 – 39:11)

The wisdom of the scribe depends on the opportunity of leisure; and he who has little business may become wise. How can he become wise who handles the plough, and who glories in the shaft of a goad, who drives oxen and is occupied with their work, and whose talk is about bulls? He sets his heart on ploughing furrows, and he is careful about fodder for the heifers. So too is every craftsman and master workman who labours by night as well as by day; those who cut the signets of seals, each is diligent in making a great variety; he sets his heart on painting a lifelike image, and he is careful to finish his work. So too is the smith sitting by the anvil, intent upon his handiwork in iron; the breath of the fire melts his flesh, and he wastes away in the heat of the furnace; he inclines his ear to the sound of the hammer, and his eyes are on the pattern of the object. He sets his heart on finishing his handiwork, and he is careful to complete its decoration. So too is the potter sitting at his work and turning the wheel with his feet; he is always deeply concerned over his work, and all his output is by number. He moulds the clay with his arm and makes it pliable with his feet; he sets his heart to finish the glazing, and he is careful to clean the furnace. All these rely upon their hands, and each is skilful in his own work. Without them a city cannot be established, and men can neither sojourn nor live there. Yet they are not sought out for the council of the people, nor do they attain eminence in the public assembly. They do not sit in the judge's seat, nor do they understand the sentence of judgment; they cannot expound discipline or judgment, and they are not found using proverbs. But they keep stable the fabric of the world, and their prayer is in the practice of their trade.

On the other hand he who devotes himself to the study of the law of the Most High will seek out the wisdom of all the ancients, and will be concerned with prophecies; he will preserve the discourse of notable men and penetrate the subtleties of parables; he will seek out the hidden meanings of proverbs and be at home with the obscurities of parables. He will serve among great men and appear before rulers; he will travel through the lands of foreign nations, for he tests the good and the evil among men. He will set his heart to rise early to seek the Lord who made him, and will make supplication before the Most High; he will open his mouth in prayer and make supplication for his sins.

If the great Lord is willing, he will be filled with the spirit of understanding; he will pour forth words of wisdom and give thanks to the Lord in prayer. He will direct his counsel and knowledge aright, and meditate on his secrets. He will reveal instruction in his teaching, and will glory in the law of the Lord's covenant. Many will praise his understanding, and it will never be blotted out; his memory will not disappear, and his name will live through all generations. Nations will declare his wisdom, and the congregation will proclaim his praise; if he lives long, he will leave a name greater than a thousand, and if he goes to rest, it is enough for him.

A READING FROM THE LETTERS OF ST JEROME

Scripture says: I shall destroy the wisdom of the wise, and condemn the intelligence of the intelligent. True wisdom will destroy the false; and although preaching about the cross is foolishness, yet Paul speaks wisdom among the mature. Not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, who pass away; but he speaks the wisdom of God which was hidden in a mystery, and which God predestined from the beginning. The wisdom of God is Christ. For Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. This wisdom was hidden in a mystery, in which all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge were hidden, and he who was hidden in the mystery was predestined from the beginning. He was predestined and prefigured in the Law and the Prophets. That is why the Prophets were also called seers: for they saw him whom the rest did not see.

Abraham saw his day and rejoiced. The heavens were opened to Ezekiel on behalf of a sinful people. Open my eyes, said David, so that I may gaze at the wonders of your law. For the law is spiritual and needs to be revealed to be understood, and so that we may contemplate the glory of God when his face is revealed.

In the Apocalypse there is shown a book sealed with seven seals. If you give it to a literate man to read, he will tell you: I cannot, because it is sealed. How many people today think they are literate, and are in possession of a sealed book which they cannot open unless he unlocks it who holds the key of David, and when he opens it no one can shut it, and when he shuts it no one can open it.

In the Acts of the Apostles there is a holy eunuch who was reading Isaiah, and when Philip asked him: Do you really understand what you are reading? he answered: How can I without a teacher? To speak of myself for a moment, I am neither holier nor more zealous than that eunuch, who came to the temple from Ethiopia, that is, from the ends of the earth, setting out from the royal palace. He loved the law and divine knowledge so much that even while sitting in his chariot he read the sacred writings. And yet all the time that he was holding the book, ruminating on the Lord's words, reading them fluently and out loud, he did not know whom he was unwittingly revering in the book. Then Philip came and showed him Jesus, who lay enclosed in the text in secret. The marvellous power of a teacher! In that same hour the eunuch believed, was baptized, was faithful and holy, and turned from a pupil into a master.

I have touched briefly on these matters, to make you understand that you cannot enter upon the holy Scriptures without someone to go before you and show you the way. I beg you, dearest brother, to live in the midst of these things, meditate on them, know nothing else, look for nothing – does that not seem to you to be a dwelling-place in the heavenly kingdom already here on earth?

St Jerome, Ep. LIII ad Paulinum (PL 22:544-549); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(Divine praise in creation: Sirach 42:15-25; 43:27-33)

I will now call to mind the works of the Lord, and will declare what I have seen. By the words of the Lord his works are done. The sun looks down on everything with its light, and the work of the Lord is full of his glory. The Lord has not enabled his holy ones to recount all his marvellous works, which the Lord the Almighty has established that the universe may stand firm in his glory. He searches out the abyss, and the hearts of men, and considers their crafty devices. For the Most High knows all that may be known, and he looks into the signs of the age. He declares what has been and what is to be, and he reveals the tracks of hidden things. No thought escapes him, and not one word is hidden from him. He has ordained the splendours of his wisdom, and he is from everlasting and to everlasting. Nothing can be added or taken away, and he needs no one to be his counsellor. How greatly to be desired are all his works, and how sparkling they are to see! All these things live and remain for ever for every need, and are all obedient. All things are twofold, one opposite the other, and he has made nothing incomplete. One confirms the good things of the other, and who can have enough of beholding his glory?

Though we speak much we cannot reach the end, and the sum of our words is: "He is the all." Where shall we find strength to praise him? For he is greater than all his works. Terrible is the Lord and very great, and marvellous is his power. When you praise the Lord, exalt him as much as you can; for he will surpass even that. When you exalt him, put forth all your strength, and do not grow weary, for you cannot praise him enough. Who has seen him and can describe him? Or who can extol him as he is? Many things greater than these lie hidden, for we have seen but few of his works. For the Lord has made all things, and to the godly he has granted wisdom.

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON PSALM 144 BY ST AUGUSTINE

The same God who has put everything in order is the God who made it. To some, he has given awareness and understanding and immortality, as he did to the angels; to others, awareness and understanding and mortality, as to us humans; to yet others, he gave bodily sense but not understanding nor immortality, like the beasts of the field; and to yet others still, neither awareness nor understanding nor immortality, like the plants, the trees, like stones. But even these, on their level, cannot fall short: so he has ordained creation at each step, from earth to sky, from visible to invisible, from mortal to immortal. This interweaving of creation, this most well-proportioned beauty and elegance, sealing the heights from the depths, plumbing the depths from the heights, never breaking off or going short indeed, yet ever harmonising the variety. Everything there is gives praise to God.

And yet, what do we mean when we say that? It really means this: when you consider it all and see how beautiful it all is, in so doing you yourself are praising God in it, or through it. For the speechless earth has yet a voice of its own, its eloquent beauty. Take stock of its beauty, its abundance and strength, the way the seed germinates, so much

commonly being brought forth that never was planted. You examine it all, marvelling as you do so at the great strength, the great beauty of it, the potency you find in it, realising that all this could not have come of itself. And it strikes you, therefore, that it could only have got there from the Creator. What you have found there is the voice, just alluded to: this manifestation presenting itself in praise of the Creator. Does not the thought of all the beauty there is in the world lead you on to the point where the very beauty itself seems to proclaim with one voice: It was not I who made me, who put me here, but God?

Observe, then, the beauty of the world: the earth, the sea, the air, the sky, the stars! Does not all this overawe the beholder? Does not the beauty itself strike the gaze as if to suggest that naught else could be devised more beautiful? And yet, here amidst all this beauty and elegance well nigh unutterable, you have worms and mice and reptiles for company. How beautiful, then, that kingdom which you share but with the angels! It was little indeed to sing the praises of visual elegance, the beauty we can see. All that would apply to anything there is, in this world, the earth resplendent with forest and glade, or the sky aflame with celestial light. But those words, the great beauty of your kingdom, tell us of a sight which we have not seen and yet believe; not having seen, yet desire because we believe, bearing all things in the meantime for that desire. That is the measure of a beauty (one which does not fade): may it be loved before it can be seen, so that once seen it may be securely possessed.

St Augustine, Enarr. In Ps. 144, 13.15 (CCL 40:2098-2100); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF SIRACH

(A hymn of thanksgiving: Sirach 51:1-12)

I will give thanks to thee, O Lord and King, and will praise thee as God my Saviour. I give thanks to thy name, for thou hast been my protector and helper and hast delivered my body from destruction and from the snare of a slanderous tongue, from lips that utter lies. Before those who stood by thou wast my helper and didst deliver me, in the greatness of thy mercy and of thy name, from the gnashings of teeth about to devour me, from the hand of those who sought my life, from the many afflictions that I endured, from choking fire on every side and from the midst of fire which I did not kindle, from the depths of the belly of Hades, from an unclean tongue and lying words – the slander of an unrighteous tongue to the king. My soul drew near to death, and my life was very near to Hades beneath. They surrounded me on every side, and there was no one to help me; I looked for the assistance of men, and there was none. Then I remembered thy mercy, O Lord, and thy work from of old, that thou dost deliver those who wait for thee and dost save them from the hand of their enemies. And I sent up my supplication from the earth, and prayed for deliverance from death. I appealed to the Lord, the Father of my lord, not to forsake me in the days of affliction, at the time when there is no help against the proud. I will praise thy name continually, and will sing praise with thanksgiving. My prayer was heard, for thou didst save me from destruction and rescue me from an evil plight. Therefore I will give thanks to thee and praise thee, and I will bless the name of the Lord.

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON PSALM 90 BY ST AUGUSTINE

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the protection of the Almighty. I commend these lines to you, so that none may place their hope in themselves, but put all their hope in him in whom our strength lies. We conquer by virtue of his shelter, not of our own presumption. Therefore the Almighty protects us if we say the next words to the Lord: He will say to the Lord: You are my helper and my refuge, my God, in whom I shall trust; for he will save me from the hunter's trap and from the harsh word. I emphasise this; for in their fear of the harsh word many people fall into the hunter's trap.

You are taunted for being a Christian, and are sorry you became a Christian, and because of a harsh word you fall into the devil's trap. You are even taunted for living a better life than most Christians, and because you are afraid of the taunters and their harsh words you fall into the devil's snares, so as not to be wheat on the threshing-floor but to follow the chaff. But one who trusts in God is saved from the hunter's trap and the harsh word.

But how does God protect you? He will cover you between his shoulders; that is, he will hold you to his heart, to protect you with his wings; provided only that you acknowledge your weakness, so that you flee like a weak little chicken under the wings of your mother, to avoid being snatched away by the kite. For the powers of the air, the devil and his angels, are kites; they are bent on seizing our weakness. Let us flee under the wings of

our mother Wisdom, for even Wisdom herself became weak for our sake; for the Word became flesh. Just as the hen becomes weak with her chickens, to protect them with her wings, so our Lord Jesus Christ, who, since he was in the form of God, did not think equality with God was something to be seized, to become weak with us and protect us with his wings, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, made in human likeness and found in human appearance. And you will find refuge under his wings.

St Augustine, Enarr. In Ps. 90, II.2 (CCL 39:1267); Word in Season VIII.

Season of the Year | Week 30

Sunday of the Thirtieth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF WISDOM

(Praise of the wisdom of God: Wisdom 1:1-15)

Love righteousness, you rulers of the earth, think of the Lord with uprightness, and seek him with sincerity of heart; because he is found by those who do not put him to the test, and manifests himself to those who do not distrust him. For perverse thoughts separate men from God, and when his power is tested, it convicts the foolish; because wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul, nor dwell in a body enslaved to sin. For a holy and disciplined spirit will flee from deceit, and will rise and depart from foolish thoughts, and will be ashamed at the approach of unrighteousness.

For wisdom is a kindly spirit and will not free a blasphemer from the guilt of his words; because God is witness of his inmost feelings, and a true observer of his heart, and a hearer of his tongue. Because the Spirit of the Lord has filled the world, and that which holds all things together knows what is said; therefore no one who utters unrighteous things will escape notice, and justice, when it punishes, will not pass him by. For inquiry will be made into the counsels of an ungodly man, and a report of his words will come to the Lord, to convict him of his lawless deeds; because a jealous ear hears all things, and the sound of murmurings does not go unheard.

Beware then of useless murmuring, and keep your tongue from slander; because no secret word is without result, and a lying mouth destroys the soul.

Do not invite death by the error of your life, nor bring on destruction by the works of your hands; because God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he created all things that they might exist, and the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them; and the dominion of Hades is not on earth. For righteousness is immortal.

A READING FROM THE CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

Though made of body and soul, man is one. Through his bodily composition he gathers to himself the elements of the material world; thus they reach their crown through him and through him raise their voice in free praise of the Creator. For this reason man is not allowed to despise his bodily life; rather, he is obliged to regard his body as good and honourable since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day. Nevertheless, wounded by sin, man experiences rebellious stirrings in his body. But the very dignity of man postulates that man glorify God in his body and forbid it to serve the evil inclinations of his heart.

Now, man is not wrong when he regards himself as superior to bodily concerns, and as more than a speck of nature or a nameless constituent of the city of man. For by his interior qualities he outstrips the whole sum of mere things. He plunges into the depths of reality whenever he enters into his own heart; God, who probes the heart awaits him there; there he discerns his proper destiny beneath the eyes of God. Thus, when he

recognises in himself a spiritual and immortal soul, he is not being mocked by a fantasy born only of physical or social influences, but is rather laying hold of the proper truth of the matter.

It is in the face of death that the riddle of human existence grows most acute. Not only is man tormented by pain and by the advancing deterioration of his body, but even more so by a dread of perpetual extinction. He rightly follows the intuition of his heart when he abhors and repudiates the utter ruin and total disappearance of his own person. He rebels against death because he bears in himself an eternal seed which cannot be reduced to sheer matter. All the endeavours of technology, though useful in the extreme, cannot calm his anxiety, for prolongation of biological life is unable to satisfy that desire for higher life which is inescapably lodged in his breast.

Although the mystery of death utterly beggars the imagination, the Church has been taught by divine revelation and firmly teaches that man has been created by God for a blissful purpose beyond the reach of earthly misery. In addition, that bodily death from which man would have been immune had he not sinned will be vanquished, according to the Christian faith, when man who was ruined by his own doing is restored to wholeness by an almighty and merciful Saviour. For God has called man and still calls him so that with his entire being he might be joined to him in an endless sharing of a divine life beyond all corruption. Christ won this victory when he rose to life, for by his death he freed man from death.

Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes 14-15, 18 (abridged).

Monday of the Thirtieth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF WISDOM

(The foolish thoughts of the ungodly against the righteous: Wisdom 1:16 – 2:24)

But ungodly men by their words and deeds summoned death; considering him a friend, they pined away, and they made a covenant with him, because they are fit to belong to his party. For they reasoned unsoundly, saying to themselves, “Short and sorrowful is our life, and there is no remedy when a man comes to his end, and no one has been known to return from Hades. Because we were born by mere chance, and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been; because the breath in our nostrils is smoke, and reason is a spark kindled by the beating of our hearts. When it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes, and the spirit will dissolve like empty air. Our name will be forgotten in time and no one will remember our works; our life will pass away like the traces of a cloud, and be scattered like mist that is chased by the rays of the sun and overcome by its heat. For our allotted time is the passing of a shadow, and there is no return from our death, because it is sealed up and no one turns back.

“Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that exist, and make use of the creation to the full as in youth. Let us take our fill of costly wine and perfumes, and let no flower of spring pass by us. Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither. Let none of us fail to share in our revelry, everywhere let us leave signs of enjoyment, because this is our portion, and this our lot. Let us oppress the righteous poor man; let us not spare the widow nor regard the gray hairs of the aged. But let our might be our law of right, for what is weak proves itself to be useless.

“Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions; he reproaches us for sins against the law, and accuses us of sins against our training. He professes to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a child of the Lord. He became to us a reproof of our thoughts; the very sight of him is a burden to us, because his manner of life is unlike that of others, and his ways are strange. We are considered by him as something base, and he avoids our ways as unclean; he calls the last end of the righteous happy, and boasts that God is his father. Let us see if his words are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his life; for if the righteous man is God’s son, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries. Let us test him with insult and torture, that we may find out how gentle he is, and make trial of his forbearance. Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected.”

Thus they reasoned, but they were led astray, for their wickedness blinded them, and they did not know the secret purposes of God, nor hope for the wages of holiness, nor discern the prize for blameless souls; for God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON JOHN BY ST AUGUSTINE

Scripture says that death was not God's doing, and that he takes no pleasure in the destruction of the living. To be – for this he created everything. How then does it continue? It was through the devil's envy that death entered the world. The devil could not force upon man the death he held before his eyes; he had no power to determine the human will. All he had was his own cunning and persuasive skills. Without your consent, the devil could have done nothing to harm you; it was that consent which brought death upon you. Though born mortal of mortal flesh, it was from an immortal state that we were brought to mortality. Since Adam all human beings have been subject to death. Even Jesus, Son of God, Word of God through whom all things were made, the only Son equal to the Father, was made subject to death; for the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. Because he accepted death, death itself was hung on the cross, while humankind was freed from death.

What took place symbolically in times of old was recalled by the Lord when he said: As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. A great mystery is here, as those who have read the Scriptures know. When the Israelites were in the desert, they were struck down by bites they received from serpents, and death claimed countless victims. This was the stroke of God, scourging and correcting them for their instruction. A great mystery, prefiguring something yet to come, was thus revealed, as the Lord himself testifies in this passage, ensuring that it should bear no interpretation other than the one he, the Truth, gives about himself. For the Lord had bidden Moses to fashion a bronze serpent, lift it up on a pole in the desert, and tell the Israelites that all who were bitten by a serpent should fix their eyes on the serpent raised up on the pole. What does this serpent lifted on high signify? The Lord's death on the cross. Death came into being through a serpent, and so the figure of a serpent is its symbol. But whereas the serpent's bite was deadly, our Lord's death is life-giving. Is not Christ life itself? And yet Christ died. But in the death of Christ, it was death that met its end: life by dying slew death, the fullness of life swallowed up death, in the body of Christ death was destroyed. This is what we shall proclaim at the resurrection when we sing in triumph, O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? But in the meantime, to find healing for our sins, let us fix our eyes on Christ crucified.

St Augustine, Tract. In Joh. 12, 10-11 (CCL 36:126-127); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF WISDOM

(The righteous will possess the Kingdom: Wisdom 3:1-19)

But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them.

In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be an affliction, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. For though in the sight of men they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them. In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble. They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them for ever. Those who trust in him will understand truth, and the faithful will abide with him in love, because grace and mercy are upon his elect, and he watches over his holy ones. But the ungodly will be punished as their reasoning deserves, who disregarded the righteous man and rebelled against the Lord; for whoever despises wisdom and instruction is miserable. Their hope is vain, their labours are unprofitable, and their works are useless. Their wives are foolish, and their children evil; their offspring are accursed. For blessed is the barren woman who is undefiled, who has not entered into a sinful union; she will have fruit when God examines souls. Blessed also is the eunuch whose hands have done no lawless deed, and who has not devised wicked things against the Lord; for special favour will be shown him for his faithfulness, and a place of great delight in the temple of the Lord. For the fruit of good labours is renowned, and the root of understanding does not fail. But children of adulterers will not come to maturity, and the offspring of an unlawful union will perish. Even if they live long they will be held of no account, and finally their old age will be without honour. If they die young, they will have no hope and no consolation in the day of decision. For the end of an unrighteous generation is grievous.

A READING FROM THE ORTHODOX FAITH BY ST JOHN OF DAMASCUS

The saints must be honoured as friends of Christ and children and heirs of God, as John the Theologian and Evangelist says: But as many as received him, he gave them the power to be made the sons of God. Furthermore, if the Creator and Lord of all is called both King of kings and Lord of lords and God of gods, then most certainly the saints, too, are both gods and lords and kings. However, I say that they are gods, lords, and kings not by nature, but because they have ruled over and dominated sufferings, and because they have kept undebased the likeness of the divine image to which they were made – for the image of the king is also called a king, and, finally, because they have really been united to God and receiving him as a dweller within themselves have through association with him become by grace what he is by nature. How, then, should these not be honoured to have been accounted servants, friends, and sons of God? For the honour shown the more sensible of one's fellow servants gives proof of one's love for the common Master.

These are become repositories and pure dwelling places of God, for I will dwell in them and walk among them, says God, and I will be their God. So, indeed, sacred Scripture says that the souls of the just are in the hand of God: and death shall not touch them. For the death of the saints is rather sleep than death, since they have laboured unto eternity and shall live unto the end', and 'precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. What then is more precious than to be in the hand of God? For God is life and light, and they that are in the hand of God abide in life and light.

Moreover, because through their mind God has also dwelt in their bodies, the Apostle says: Know you not that your members are the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you? Now the Lord is in the Spirit; and again: If any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy. How, then, should they not be honoured, who are the living temples of God, the living tabernacles of God. These in life openly took their stand with God.

In the relics of the saints the Lord Christ has provided us with saving fountains which in many ways pour out benefactions and gush with fragrant ointment. And let no one disbelieve. For, if by the will of God water poured out of the precipitous living rock in the desert, and for the thirsty Sampson from the jawbone of an ass, is it unbelievable that fragrant ointment should flow from the relics of the martyrs? Certainly not, at least for such as know the power of God and the honour which the saints have from him.

St John of Damascus, The Orthodox Faith 4.15; FoC 37 (1958) tr. Chase.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF WISDOM

(True and false happiness: Wisdom 4:1-20)

Better than this is childlessness with virtue, for in the memory of virtue is immortality, because it is known both by God and by men. When it is present, men imitate it, and they long for it when it has gone; and throughout all time it marches crowned in triumph, victor in the contest for prizes that are undefiled. But the prolific brood of the ungodly will be of no use, and none of their illegitimate seedlings will strike a deep root or take a firm hold. For even if they put forth boughs for a while, standing insecurely they will be shaken by the wind, and by the violence of the winds they will be uprooted. The branches will be broken off before they come to maturity, and their fruit will be useless, not ripe enough to eat, and good for nothing. For children born of unlawful unions are witnesses of evil against their parents when God examines them.

But the righteous man, though he die early, will be at rest. For old age is not honoured for length of time, nor measured by number of years; but understanding is grey hair for men, and a blameless life is ripe old age.

There was one who pleased God and was loved by him, and while living among sinners he was taken up. He was caught up lest evil change his understanding or guile deceive his soul. For the fascination of wickedness obscures what is good, and roving desire perverts the innocent mind. Being perfected in a short time, he fulfilled long years; for his soul was pleasing to the Lord, therefore he took him quickly from the midst of wickedness. Yet the peoples saw and did not understand, nor take such a thing to heart, that God's grace and mercy are with his elect, and he watches over his holy ones.

The righteous man who had died will condemn the ungodly who are living, and youth that is quickly perfected will condemn the prolonged old age of the unrighteous man. For they will see the end of the wise man, and will not understand what the Lord purposed for him, and for what he kept him safe. They will see, and will have contempt for him, but the Lord will laugh them to scorn. After this they will become dishonoured corpses, and an outrage among the dead for ever; because he will dash them speechless to the ground, and shake them from the foundations; they will be left utterly dry and barren, and they will suffer anguish, and the memory of them will perish.

They will come with dread when their sins are reckoned up, and their lawless deeds will convict them to their face.

A READING FROM A COMMENTARY ON PSALM 24 BY ST AUGUSTINE

Be my helper, do not abandon me; and do not despise me, God, my Saviour. For you help those you have created; you do not forsake them.

For my father and my mother have abandoned me. The psalmist made himself God's child, he made God his father and God his mother. God is his father because he created him, because he calls, commands, and directs him; God is his mother because she cherishes, feeds, takes care of him, and keeps him safe. My father and my mother have

abandoned me; but the Lord has taken me to himself, both to direct and nourish him. Mortal parents produce children, their children succeed them, mortal from mortal; and they were born to succeed them so that their parents might pass away. He who has created me will not pass away, nor shall I leave him. My father and my mother have abandoned me; but the Lord has taken me to himself. Even apart from those two parents to whom we owe our birth in the flesh, a male father and a female mother, Adam and Eve as it were, apart from those two parents we have another father and another mother on earth, or rather we have had. Our worldly father is the devil, and he was our father when we were unbelievers; for it was to unbelievers that the Lord said: Your father is the devil.

If he who is at work in the children of unbelief is the father of all the godless, who is their mother? It is a city called Babylon; that city is a community of all the lost from east to west; it has an earthly kingdom. There is a city like this one, called a republic, which you now see growing old and declining; this was our first mother, here we were born. We know a different father, God; we have left the devil. For does he ever dare to come near those whom he who surpasses all things has taken to himself? We know a different mother, the heavenly Jerusalem, which is the holy Church, part of which sojourns on earth; we have left Babylon. My father and my mother have abandoned me. They have nothing now to give me; for even when they seemed to give me a gift, it was yours, and I ascribed it to them.

For who, even in this world, gives us anything, if not God? Or who takes anything away from us, without the command or permission of him who gave it? So let our father and our mother abandon us, let the devil and the city of Babylon abandon us; let the Lord take us to himself, to comfort us with temporal things and bless us with eternal ones. For my father and my mother have abandoned me; but the Lord has taken me to himself.

St Augustine, Enarr. In Ps. 24, II, 17-19 (CCL 38:164-165); Word in Season VIII.

Thursday of the Thirtieth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF WISDOM

(Corrupt men are condemned by God: Wisdom 5:1-23)

Then the righteous man will stand with great confidence in the presence of those who have afflicted him, and those who make light of his labours. When they see him, they will be shaken with dreadful fear, and they will be amazed at his unexpected salvation. They will speak to one another in repentance, and in anguish of spirit they will groan, and say, "This is the man whom we once held in derision and made a byword of reproach – we fools! We thought that his life was madness and that his end was without honour. Why has he been numbered among the sons of God? And why is his lot among the saints? So it was we who strayed from the way of truth, and the light of righteousness did not shine on us, and the sun did not rise upon us. We took our fill of the paths of lawlessness and destruction, and we journeyed through trackless deserts, but the way of the Lord we have not known. What has our arrogance profited us? And what good has our boasted wealth brought us?

"All those things have vanished like a shadow, and like a rumour that passes by; like a ship that sails through the billowy water, and when it has passed no trace can be found, nor track of its keel in the waves; or as, when a bird flies through the air, no evidence of its passage is found; the light air, lashed by the beat of its pinions and pierced by the force of its rushing flight, is traversed by the movement of its wings, and afterward no sign of its coming is found there; or as, when an arrow is shot at a target, the air, thus divided, comes together at once, so that no one knows its pathway. So we also, as soon as we were born, ceased to be, and we had no sign of virtue to show, but were consumed in our wickedness." Because the hope of the ungodly man is like chaff carried by the wind, and like a light hoarfrost driven away by a storm; it is dispersed like smoke before the wind, and it passes like the remembrance of a guest who stays but a day.

But the righteous live for ever, and their reward is with the Lord; the Most High takes care of them. Therefore they will receive a glorious crown and a beautiful diadem from the hand of the Lord, because with his right hand he will cover them, and with his arm he will shield them. The Lord will take his zeal as his whole armour, and will arm all creation to repel his enemies; he will put on righteousness as a breastplate, and wear impartial justice as a helmet; he will take holiness as an invincible shield, and sharpen stern wrath for a sword, and creation will join with him to fight against the madmen. Shafts of lightning will fly with true aim, and will leap to the target as from a well-drawn bow of clouds, and hailstones full of wrath will be hurled as from a catapult; the water of the sea will rage against them, and rivers will relentlessly overwhelm them; a mighty wind will rise against them, and like a tempest it will winnow them away. Lawlessness will lay waste the whole earth, and evil-doing will overturn the thrones of rulers.

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

Your Saviour took flesh to himself, your Mediator took flesh to himself, and by taking flesh he took the Church to himself. He was the first to make a libation, as coming from

the head, of what he would offer to God, a high priest for ever, and the propitiation for our sins. The Word took human nature to himself, and the two became one, as it is written, They shall be two in one flesh. This is a great sacrament, he says, but I mean in Christ and in the Church. The bridal chamber of this marriage was the womb of the virgin. And he, like a bridegroom coming forth from his chamber, exulted like a giant to run the way. A giant because strong, overcoming weakness with weakness, annihilating death with death.

He was running the way himself in order to fulfil what had been foretold about him: He drinks from the torrent on the way; therefore he shall lift up the head. The torrent, you see, is this world. Waters which flow as a result of sudden storms or winter floods are called torrents – which are, of course, going to stop flowing just as quickly. That's what all these affairs of time are like – a transient torrent, soon going to cease.

Today, New Year's Day, those who are enjoying the excesses and vanities of the world don't see that they are being swept along by the rushing force of the torrent. Let them summon back, if they can, this same day last year; let them at least call back yesterday. They don't see that their enjoyments too pass like a torrent, so that they will find themselves saying later on, These are the ones whom at one time we held in derision and in the likeness of a reproach. We, fools that we were, reckoned their life madness and their end without honour. Now they are counted among the sons of God, and their lot is among the saints! So we strayed from the way of truth, and the light of justice did not shine on us, and the sun did not rise for us.

Which sun? Not this visible one, surely? This one rises for them daily. It is about this one, after all, that the Lord says, Who makes his sun rise up on the good and the bad. There is another sun who made this one, invisible and intelligible, the sun of justice, about which it says in another place, The sun of justice has risen for me. This is the sun that did not rise for them. And listen to their lament: What use to us was pride, and what did the boastfulness of riches confer upon us? All those things have passed like a shadow. It has all flowed away already like that torrent; but yet that other one who was born, who suffered, was crucified, was buried, has risen again. He drinks from this torrent on the way; that is why he has lifted up the head, which is to say, himself.

St Augustine, Sermo 198.43; WSA (1997) tr. Hill.

Friday of the Thirtieth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF WISDOM

(Wisdom is to be loved: Wisdom 6:1-25)

Listen therefore, O kings, and understand; learn, O judges of the ends of the earth. Give ear, you that rule over multitudes, and boast of many nations. For your dominion was given you from the Lord, and your sovereignty from the Most High, who will search out your works and inquire into your plans. Because as servants of his kingdom you did not rule rightly, nor keep the law, nor walk according to the purpose of God, he will come upon you terribly and swiftly, because severe judgment falls on those in high places. For the lowliest man may be pardoned in mercy, but mighty men will be mightily tested. For the Lord of all will not stand in awe of any one, nor show deference to greatness; because he himself made both small and great, and he takes thought for all alike. But a strict inquiry is in store for the mighty. To you then, O monarchs, my words are directed, that you may learn wisdom and not transgress. For they will be made holy who observe holy things in holiness, and those who have been taught them will find a defence. Therefore set your desire on my words; long for them, and you will be instructed.

Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her. She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her. He who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty, for he will find her sitting at his gates. To fix one's thought on her is perfect understanding, and he who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care, because she goes about seeking those worthy of her, and she graciously appears to them in their paths, and meets them in every thought.

The beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction, and concern for instruction is love of her, and love of her is the keeping of her laws, and giving heed to her laws is assurance of immortality, and immortality brings one near to God; so the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom.

Therefore if you delight in thrones and sceptres, O monarchs over the peoples, honour wisdom, that you may reign for ever. I will tell you what wisdom is and how she came to be, and I will hide no secrets from you, but I will trace her course from the beginning of creation, and make knowledge of her clear, and I will not pass by the truth; neither will I travel in the company of sickly envy, for envy does not associate with wisdom. A multitude of wise men is the salvation of the world, and a sensible king is the stability of his people. Therefore be instructed by my words, and you will profit.

A READING FROM THE DIVINE NAMES BY DENYS THE AREOPAGITE

Let us praise the good and eternal life as also wise and as absolute wisdom, or rather as essential to all wisdom, and surpassing all wisdom and understanding. For God is not only supremely full of wisdom, and his understanding is infinite, but he transcends all reason, mind, and wisdom. And this was marvellously understood by that truly holy man, that bright sun shared in common by ourselves and our teacher, who said: God's foolishness is wiser than men. Not only because every human thought is astray

compared with the firmness and constancy of the perfect thoughts of God, but because theologians are accustomed to speak of the nature of God in a contrary sense, in terms of privation. So they describe all-shining light as invisible; they call him who is praised for many qualities and under many names indescribable and not to be named; and they call him who is present to all and can be found by all infinite and unsearchable. Even in his time the holy Apostle is said to have praised the foolishness of God in the same way, making what seems to be unexpected and out of place in this a symbol of the ineffable truth which is beyond all understanding.

But, as I have said elsewhere, if in our familiar fashion we light on matters far above us, gripped by commonplace feelings and viewing the divine from our own angle, we cannot fail to go astray, since we pursue divine and ineffable reason with our eyes fixed on the world of appearances. We must recognise that our mind has the power to think, which enables it to examine mental objects, but the union by which it is united to what transcends it surpasses the nature of the human mind. Therefore, in accordance with this, we must think of God not in our own way but by abandoning our-selves completely and becoming wholly attached to God. It is better to belong to God than to ourselves, for knowledge of God can only be given to those who are with God.

So let us praise transcendently this irrational, mindless, and foolish wisdom, declaring it to be the origin of all mind, reason, wisdom, and understanding, and that all counsel is in its power, all knowledge and understanding come from it, and that in it are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. For also in accordance with what has been said before, the supremely wise and all-wise origin is even the foundation of absolute wisdom, both universal and singular.

Denys the Areopagite, The Divine Names (PG 3:865-868); Word in Season VIII.

Saturday of the Thirtieth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF WISDOM

(Wisdom, an image of God: Wisdom 7:15-30)

May God grant that I speak with judgement and have thought worthy of what I have received, for he is the guide even of wisdom and the corrector of the wise. For both we and our words are in his hand, as are all understanding and skill in crafts. For it is he who gave me unerring knowledge of what exists, to know the structure of the world and the activity of the elements; the beginning and end and middle of times, the alternations of the solstices and the changes of the seasons, the cycles of the year and the constellations of the stars, the natures of animals and the tempers of wild beasts, the powers of spirits and the reasonings of men, the varieties of plants and the virtues of roots; I learned both what is secret and what is manifest, for wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me.

For in her there is a spirit that is intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, mobile, clear, unpolluted, distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen, irresistible, beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, free from anxiety, all-powerful, overseeing all, and penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent and pure and most subtle. For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things. For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness. Though she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the man who lives with wisdom. For she is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail.

A READING FROM THE DIALOGUES OF ANSELM OF HAVELBERG

Let us consider how God's Church is one in itself and by its own nature, and how it is manifold by the nature of its children, whom it has generated and continues to generate in different ways and ages, and has instructed and continues to instruct by different laws and institutions, from the descendants of righteous Abel to the last of the chosen. For in the words of the Bridegroom: My dove is one; she is her mother's only child, her mother's darling. The Church is one, with one faith, one love; one of one without stain of wicked faithlessness or wrinkly of perverse duplicity; and there is one generation of the good, of which it is written: The generation of the good will be blessed. And the body of the Church is one, which is given life and is ruled and governed by the Holy Spirit, to which the Holy Spirit is united, manifold, subtle, mobile, eloquent, unde-filed, true, kind, loving the good, sagacious, whom nothing pre-vents from doing good, compassionate, gracious, steadfast, un-troubled, all-powerful, taking care of everything, and permeating every spirit, wise and pure.

In other words, as the Apostle explains: In the Holy Spirit there are varieties of gifts, but the Spirit is the same. And: to each the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one, that is, words of wisdom are given by the Spirit; to another, words of learning according to the same Spirit; to one, faith by the same Spirit; to another, prophecy; to one the ability to distinguish between spirits; to another various kinds of language; to yet another the interpretation of languages. So all these gifts originate from one and the same Spirit, allotting them to each individually at will.

Thus it is manifestly clear that the one body of the Church is given life by the one Holy Spirit, which is both single in itself and manifold in the multiform distribution of its gifts. Yes, this body of the Church, given life by the Holy Spirit, divided and separated through the diversity of its members in different times and ages, began with the righteous Abel and will end with the last of the chosen, ever one with one faith, but distinguished by the manifold variety of its life.

Anselm of Havelberg, Dialogues 1, 2 (SC 118:41-44); Word in Season VIII.

Season of the Year / Week 31

Sunday of the Thirty-First Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF WISDOM

(Wisdom is desired by God: Wisdom 8:1-21)

She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well.

I loved her and sought her from my youth, and I desired to take her for my bride, and I became enamoured of her beauty. She glorifies her noble birth by living with God, and the Lord of all loves her. For she is an initiate in the knowledge of God, and an associate in his works. If riches are a desirable possession in life, what is richer than wisdom who effects all things? And if understanding is effective, who more than she is fashioner of what exists? And if any one loves righteousness, her labours are virtues; for she teaches self-control and prudence, justice and courage; nothing in life is more profitable for men than these. And if any one longs for wide experience, she knows the things of old, and infers the things to come; she understands turns of speech and the solutions of riddles; she has foreknowledge of signs and wonders and of the outcome of seasons and times. Therefore I determined to take her to live with me, knowing that she would give me good counsel and encouragement in cares and grief. Because of her I shall have glory among the multitudes and honour in the presence of the elders, though I am young. I shall be found keen in judgment, and in the sight of rulers I shall be admired. When I am silent they will wait for me, and when I speak they will give heed; and when I speak at greater length they will put their hands on their mouths. Because of her I shall have immortality, and leave an everlasting remembrance to those who come after me. I shall govern peoples, and nations will be subject to me; dread monarchs will be afraid of me when they hear of me; among the people I shall show myself capable, and courageous in war. When I enter my house, I shall find rest with her for companionship with her has no bitterness, and life with her has no pain, but gladness and joy. When I considered these things inwardly, and thought upon them in my mind, that in kinship with wisdom there is immortality, and in friendship with her, pure delight, and in the labours of her hands, unfailing wealth, and in the experience of her company, understanding, and renown in sharing her words, I went about seeking how to get her for myself. As a child I was by nature well endowed, and a good soul fell to my lot; or rather, being good, I entered an undefiled body. But I perceived that I would not possess wisdom unless God gave her to me and it was a mark of insight to know whose gift she was so I appealed to the Lord and besought him.

A READING FROM A HOMILY BY ABBOT WILLIAM OF SAINT-THIERRY

It is to my crucified one that I turn. His cross is my glory: its mark is on my brow; it gives joy to my mind, direction to my life, love even for death itself. May they not despise me for this, O Lord, they who are worthy to behold you, seated as you are on your throne, the exaltation of your godhead, filling all the earth with your majesty. The mysteries of your dealings with men here and now fill the temple of every mind, great and small. May your holy angels have the honour that is their due in heaven: but may they sometimes

also share their grace and favours with us here on earth. For he loves us to make progress in our lives: and their blessed perfection is sweet to him. As the Apostle says: God's many-splendoured wisdom has been manifested to principalities and powers in heaven through his dealings with the Church. Wherefore may they pardon us, Lord, even if your love should sometimes so captivate us that we desire to see, with them, what with them we already love: with a full heart we felicitate them, as they behold what we are not yet worthy to behold.

May they blissfully contemplate your divine majesty residing in your eternal wisdom: those things to be, seen before this our mortal wayfaring and after it, everything that is, past and future, enfolding it all within his eternal present: it reaches in its power and strength from one extremity to another. But our temporal passage, belonging to your dealings with men as a whole, he has strewn with his charity, disposing all things in sweetness, for the sake of the daughters of Jerusalem, the devout but as yet infirm souls. They who have not thus far their elevated gaze fixed on contemplating the sublime would fain undergo hardship for your servants and be transformed so as to belong among their fellows. Among these, O Lord, may my spirit some day be taught to adore you, spirit as you are, in spirit and in truth, flesh no longer desiring what is contrary to the spirit, nor yet holding it back. But now that for the moment you are kept from boldly taking possession of what is to be yours, make a proper disposition of what is his, with what grace and harmony you best can, as befits him, the true owner. I have not yet risen above the rough-hewn figures of my earthly imagination: but may you indulge and be gracious to my feeble spirit, as it expresses its true nature in letting its fancy play on your more humble creatures. Behold! the meagre enfolding the newly born, the holy child being adored; the footprints of the crucified one being licked, as he hangs on the cross; his feet being held and kissed now that he is risen; the hand, put in the place where the nails went; and then the exclamation – My Lord and my God!

William of Saint-Thierry, Meditativae orationes X (PL 180:235); Word in Season VIII.

Monday of the Thirty-First Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF WISDOM

(A discourse on acquiring wisdom: Wisdom 8:21 – 9:18)

I perceived that I would not possess wisdom unless God gave her to me and it was a mark of insight to know whose gift she was so I appealed to the Lord and besought him, and with my whole heart I said:

“O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy, who hast made all things by thy word, and by thy wisdom hast formed man, to have dominion over the creatures thou hast made, and rule the world in holiness and righteousness, and pronounce judgment in uprightness of soul, give me the wisdom that sits by thy throne, and do not reject me from among thy servants. For I am thy slave and the son of thy maidservant, a man who is weak and short-lived, with little understanding of judgment and laws; for even if one is perfect among the sons of men, yet without the wisdom that comes from thee he will be regarded as nothing. Thou hast chosen me to be king of thy people and to be judge over thy sons and daughters. Thou hast given command to build a temple on thy holy mountain, and an altar in the city of thy habitation, a copy of the holy tent which thou didst prepare from the beginning. With thee is wisdom, who knows thy works and was present when thou didst make the world, and who understand what is pleasing in thy sight and what is right according to thy commandments. Send her forth from the holy heavens, and from the throne of thy glory send her, that she may be with me and toil, and that I may learn what is pleasing to thee. For she knows and understands all things, and she will guide me wisely in my actions and guard me with her glory. Then my works will be acceptable, and I shall judge thy people justly, and shall be worthy of the throne of my father. For what man can learn the counsel of God? Or who can discern what the Lord wills? For the reasoning of mortals is worthless, and our designs are likely to fail, for a perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthy tent burdens the thoughtful mind. We can hardly guess at what is on earth, and what is at hand we find with labour; but who has traced out what is in the heavens? Who has learned thy counsel, unless thou hast given wisdom and sent thy holy Spirit from on high? And thus the paths of those on earth were set right, and men were taught what pleases thee, and were saved by wisdom.”

A READING FROM THE CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of him who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. It is not surprising, then, that in him all the aforementioned truths find their root and attain their crown.

He who is the image of the invisible God, is himself the perfect man. To the sons of Adam he restores the divine likeness which had been disfigured from the first sin onward.

Since human nature as he assumed it was not annulled, by that very fact it has been raised up to a divine dignity in our respect, too. For by his Incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin.

As an innocent lamb he merited life for us by the free shedding of his own blood. In him God reconciled us to himself and among ourselves; from bondage to the devil and sin he delivered us, so that each one of us can say with the Apostle: The Son of God loved me and gave himself up for me. By suffering for us he not only provided us with an example for our imitation, he blazed a trail, and if we follow it, life and death are made holy and take on a new meaning.

The Christian man, conformed to the likeness of that Son who is the firstborn of many brothers, received the first-fruits of the Spirit by which he becomes capable of discharging the new law of love. Through this Spirit, who is the pledge of our inheritance, the whole man is renewed from within, even to the achievement of the redemption of the body: If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the death dwells in you, then he who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also bring to life your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who dwells in you. Pressing upon the Christian, to be sure, are the need and the duty to battle against evil through manifold tribulations and even to suffer death. But, linked with the Paschal Mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope.

All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this Paschal Mystery.

Such is the mystery of man, and it is a great one, as seen by believers in the light of Christian revelation. Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful. Apart from his Gospel, they overwhelm us. Christ has risen, destroying death by his death; he has lavished life upon us so that, as sons in the Son, we can cry out in the Spirit: Abba, Father.

Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes 22.

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF WISDOM

(Our fathers were saved through wisdom: Wisdom: 10:1 – 11:4)

Wisdom protected the first-formed father of the world, when he alone had been created; she delivered him from his transgression, and gave him strength to rule all things. But when an unrighteous man departed from her in his anger, he perished because in rage he slew his brother. When the earth was flooded because of him, wisdom again saved it, steering the righteous man by a paltry piece of wood.

Wisdom also, when the nations in wicked agreement had been confounded, recognized the righteous man and preserved him blameless before God, and kept him strong in the face of his compassion for his child. Wisdom rescued a righteous man when the ungodly were perishing; he escaped the fire that descended on the Five Cities. Evidence of their wickedness still remains: a continually smoking wasteland, plants bearing fruit that does not ripen, and a pillar of salt standing as a monument to an unbelieving soul. For because they passed wisdom by, they not only were hindered from recognizing the good, but also left for mankind a reminder of their folly, so that their failures could never go unnoticed.

Wisdom rescued from troubles those who served her. When a righteous man fled from his brother's wrath, she guided him on straight paths; she showed him the kingdom of God, and gave him knowledge of angels; she prospered him in his labours, and increased the fruit of his toil. When his oppressors were covetous, she stood by him and made him rich. She protected him from his enemies, and kept him safe from those who lay in wait for him; in his arduous contest she gave him the victory, so that he might learn that godliness is more powerful than anything.

When a righteous man was sold, wisdom did not desert him, but delivered him from sin. She descended with him into the dungeon, and when he was in prison she did not leave him, until she brought him the sceptre of a kingdom and authority over his masters. Those who accused him she showed to be false, and she gave him everlasting honour.

A holy people and blameless race wisdom delivered from a nation of oppressors. She entered the soul of a servant of the Lord, and withstood dread kings with wonders and signs. She gave holy men the reward of their labours; she guided them along a marvellous way, and became a shelter to them by day, and a starry flame through the night. She brought them over the Red Sea, and led them through deep waters; but she drowned their enemies, and cast them up from the depth of the sea. Therefore the righteous plundered the ungodly; they sang hymns, O Lord, to thy holy name, and praised with one accord thy defending hand, because wisdom opened the mouth of the dumb, and made the tongues of babes speak clearly.

Wisdom prospered their works by the hand of a holy prophet. They journeyed through an uninhabited wilderness, and pitched their tents in untrodden places. They withstood their enemies and fought off their foes. When they thirsted they called upon thee, and water was given them out of flinty rock.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON WISDOM BY BLESSED RABANUS MAURUS

God calls the Israelites an upright people, a race without re-proach, descended from the seed of the patriarchs and ever a worshipper of the one true God, whether oppressed by the Egyptians and other nations, or freed from them by the leadership of Moses and Aaron; and raised aloft by the wonders of God, at the crossing of the Red Sea, a cloud covering them by day and a pillar of fire shining over them by night; and other miracles abundantly worked for them in the desert besides. The Lord mysteriously frees his chosen ones from the hands of their persecutors, terrifying their enemies by a blinding flash of miracles. He gives his servants wisdom of a kind not to be resisted or gainsaid by any adversary. Wherefore they stand fearless in the presence of the kings and potentates of this world, speaking the word of God with confidence; and through the sufferings of martyrs they attain to the rewards of the kingdom of heaven, where they sing praises forever to their king and saviour.

His wisdom has opened the mouths of the dumb and made eloquent tongues of babes. Clear it is that, apart from God's gift of wisdom, the mind of man cannot think anything out aright, or speak to any great purpose. Wherefore from him alone is sound understanding to be sought, or the faculty of talking good sense; for from him, through him, and in him are all things.

He entrusted their concerns to the hands of his holy Prophet. They made their journey through the desert places where no man dwelt; and in the secret places did they find their lodging. The ancient people set out from Egypt led by Moses and went through the desert, pitching their tents in uninhabitable places, as the Pentateuch relates. So also nowadays the people follow – the Christians follow, that is to say – the lead of the prophecy, to make their way in the desert of this world, whereby they are to reach their homeland, in the heavenly kingdom, where Christ reigns. This is what Saint Peter the Apostle revealed, when he said: We have a surer prophetic utterance which you would do well to heed, as it were a lantern lit in a dark place till the day shall dawn and the morning star rise in your hearts.

Bd Rabanus Maurus, Comm. In Lib. Sapientiae, 2.7 (PL 109:718-719); Word in Season VIII.

Wednesday of the Thirty-First Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF WISDOM

(On the loving-kindness and patience of God: Wisdom 11:20b – 12:2, 11b-19)

Thou hast arranged all things by measure and number and weight.

For it is always in thy power to show great strength, and who can withstand the might of thy arm? Because the whole world before thee is like a speck that tips the scales, and like a drop of morning dew that falls upon the ground. But thou art merciful to all, for thou canst do all things, and thou dost overlook men's sins, that they may repent. For thou lovest all things that exist, and hast loathing for none of the things which thou hast made, for thou wouldst not have made anything if thou hadst hated it. How would anything have endured if thou hadst not willed it? Or how would anything not called forth by thee have been preserved? Thou sparest all things, for they are thine, O Lord who lovest the living. Therefore thou dost correct little by little those who trespass, and dost remind and warn them of the things wherein they sin, that they may be freed from wickedness and put their trust in thee, O Lord.

It was not through fear of any one that thou didst leave them unpunished for their sins.

For who will say, "What hast thou done?" Or will resist thy judgment? Who will accuse thee for the destruction of nations which thou didst make? Or who will come before thee to plead as an advocate for unrighteous men? For neither is there any god besides thee, whose care is for all men, to whom thou shouldst prove that thou hast not judged unjustly; nor can any king or monarch confront thee about those whom thou hast punished. Thou art righteous and rulest all things righteously, deeming it alien to thy power to condemn him who does not deserve to be punished. For thy strength is the source of righteousness, and thy sovereignty over all causes thee to spare all. For thou dost show thy strength when men doubt the completeness of thy power, and dost rebuke any insolence among those who know it. Thou who art sovereign in strength dost judge with mildness, and with great forbearance thou dost govern us; for thou hast power to act whenever thou dost choose. Through such works thou has taught thy people that the righteous man must be kind, and thou hast filled thy sons with good hope, because thou givest repentance for sins.

A READING FROM A HOMILY BY SEVERIAN OF GABALA

Creation, in its entirety and in its arrangement, proclaims the merciful love of God. For there is no visible reality that does not proclaim his goodness: heaven, earth, and sea, the visible world and the invisible universe. Everything owes its becoming, its being, and its conservation to the mercy of God. The heavens were produced by God's goodness and not for his advantage. But before the heavens and before those endless centuries that had no beginning, God exists and existed. The word 'existed' must be understood as transcending every moment conceived by thought. The heavens, therefore, were not created for God's use but are a work of his goodness. Thus the heavens proclaim not God's neediness but his glory.

The heavens were undoubtedly created for the glory of God, but they were also created for our use, in order that the sun, along with the moon and stars, might give us its brightness. God did not need the sun; the creator of light had no need of a sensible light. For he, who alone is immortal, dwells in light inaccessible.

Everything, then, has been created both for God's glory and for our advantage: the sun to give us light, the clouds to bring us rain, the earth for its abundant fruits, the sea for the convenience of trade. Everything is thus at the service of human beings or, rather, at the service of the images of God which human beings are. Creation does not honour the earthly vessel but reveres the heavenly image in us.

Everything, then, has been created not to meet a divine need but for our use and in order that we may glorify the goodness of God. Thus the wisdom of God bears witness to the divine mercy, saying: You have mercy on all, Lord, because you can do all things. In the beginning, it was God's love that created us, and now it is God's goodness that governs us. If God were inspired by hatred, God would not have made the world; if God had hated human beings, God would not have created them; if God hated them now, God would not govern them by his providence. This is why Scripture says: you do not hate anything that you have made. If you had hated anything, you would not have made it.

Severian of Gabala, Homily: Revue des Études Byzantines 25 (1967) 230-232; Word in Season VIII.

Thursday of the Thirty-First Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF WISDOM

(The wise man disapproves of idols: Wisdom 13:1-10; 14:15-21; 15:1-6)

For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know him who exists, nor did they recognize the craftsman while paying heed to his works; but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water, or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world. If through delight in the beauty of these things men assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them. And if men were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is he who formed them. For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator. Yet these men are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find him. For as they live among his works they keep searching, and they trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful. Yet again, not even they are to be excused; for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things?

But miserable, with their hopes set on dead things, are the men who give the name 'gods' to the works of men's hands, gold and silver fashioned with skill, and likenesses of animals, or a useless stone, the work of an ancient hand.

Will you not leave the fruit of your labours to another, and what you acquired by toil to be divided by lot? Give, and take, and beguile yourself, because in Hades one cannot look for luxury. All living beings become old like a garment, for the decree from of old is, "You must surely die!" Like flourishing leaves on a spreading tree which sheds some and puts forth others, so are the generations of flesh and blood: one dies and another is born. Every product decays and ceases to exist, and the man who made it will pass away with it. Blessed is the man who meditates on wisdom and who reasons intelligently. He who reflects in his mind on her ways will also ponder her secrets.

The man who fears the Lord will do this, and he who holds to the law will obtain wisdom. She will come to meet him like a mother, and like the wife of his youth she will welcome him. She will feed him with the bread of understanding, and give him the water of wisdom to drink. He will lean on her and will not fall, and he will rely on her and will not be put to shame. She will exalt him above his neighbours, and will open his mouth in the midst of the assembly. He will find gladness and a crown of rejoicing, and will acquire an everlasting name.

A READING FROM THE DIVINE NAMES BY DENYS THE AREOPAGITE

We must ask how we can know God, since he cannot be understood by our minds or perceived by our senses, and belongs in no way to the category of existent things. Perhaps it is true to say, then, that we do not know God from his own nature (for this is unknown and surpasses all our powers of thought and perception); but from the

regulation of all existent things, since this emanates from himself and contains images and likenesses of the patterns of his own divine reality. Thus step by step to the best of our ability we rise to what surpasses all in the negation of all things and the supremacy over all things, and by the cause of all things.

Therefore God is known both in everything and apart from everything; and God is known through knowledge and through ignorance, and although there is thought and speech of him, and there is knowledge, contact, sense, opinion, imagination, naming and all the rest, he is also neither thought nor spoken of or named; nor is he anything existent, or known in anything existent; but he is all in all, and nothing in nothing, and known by all things to all people, and by nothing to no one; for indeed we say this rightly about God, and he is praised because of all existent things and the resemblance of all to their creator.

And again the most divine knowledge of God is that which is known through ignorance, by a union which transcends the mind, when the mind withdraws from all existent things and then lets go even of itself, and is made one with rays of transcendent light, where it is illuminated in the unfathomable depth of wisdom.

Yet, as I said, wisdom must also be known from all things; for according to Scripture wisdom is productive of all things and constantly joining all, and is the cause of the indestructible union and order of all things, and eternally uniting the ends of earlier things to the beginnings of later, and making a single beautiful concord and harmony of the whole.

Denys the Areopagite, The Divine Names (PG 3:867-872); Word in Season VIII.

Friday of the Thirty-First Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF WISDOM

(The kindnesses of God towards his people: Wisdom 16:2b-13, 20-26)

Thou didst show kindness to thy people, and thou didst prepare quails to eat, a delicacy to satisfy the desire of appetite; in order that those men, when they desired food, might lose the least remnant of appetite because of the odious creatures sent to them, while thy people, after suffering want a short time, might partake of delicacies. For it was necessary that upon those oppressors inexorable want should come, while to these it was merely shown how their enemies were being tormented.

For when the terrible rage of wild beasts came upon thy people and they were being destroyed by the bites of writhing serpents, thy wrath did not continue to the end; they were troubled for a little while as a warning, and received a token of deliverance to remind them of thy law's command. For he who turned toward it was saved, not by what he saw, but by thee, the Saviour of all. And by this also thou didst convince our enemies that it is thou who deliverest from every evil. For they were killed by the bites of locusts and flies, and no healing was found for them, because they deserved to be punished by such things; but thy sons were not conquered even by the teeth of venomous serpents, for thy mercy came to their help and healed them. To remind them of thy oracles they were bitten, and then were quickly delivered, lest they should fall into deep forgetfulness and become unresponsive to thy kindness. For neither herb nor poultice cured them, but it was thy word, O Lord, which heals all men. For thou hast power over life and death; thou dost lead men down to the gates of Hades and back again.

Instead of these things thou didst give thy people food of angels, and without their toil thou didst supply them from heaven with bread ready to eat, providing every pleasure and suited to every taste. For thy sustenance manifested thy sweetness toward thy children; and the bread, ministering to the desire of the one who took it, was changed to suit every one's liking. Snow and ice withstood fire without melting, so that they might know that the crops of their enemies were being destroyed by the fire that blazed in the hail and flashed in the showers of rain; whereas the fire, in order that the righteous might be fed, even forgot its native power.

For creation, serving thee who hast made it, exerts itself to punish the unrighteous, and in kindness relaxes on behalf of those who trust in thee. Therefore at that time also, changed into all forms, it served thy all-nourishing bounty, according to the desire of those who had need, so that thy sons, whom thou didst love, O Lord, might learn that it is not the production of crops that feeds man, but that thy word preserves those who trust in thee.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON JOHN BY ST AUGUSTINE

This is the bread which comes down from heaven. Manna signified this bread; the altar of God signified this bread. Those were mysteries; in signs they are different, in the thing which is signified they are alike. Hear the Apostle: He says, For I would not have you

ignorant, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses, into the cloud and in the sea. And all ate the same spiritual food. The same spiritual food, of course; for corporeally it was another thing, because they ate manna, we something else, but they ate the spiritual food which we eat. But our fathers, not those men's fathers, those to whom we are like, not those to whom they were like.

I am the living bread, who have come down from heaven. Living for the reason that I have come down from heaven. The manna also came down from heaven; but the manna was shadow, he is truth. If anyone eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world. When would flesh comprehend flesh – that which he said was bread? It is called flesh, that which flesh does not comprehend; and flesh does not comprehend it, therefore, all the more because it is called flesh. For they were horrified at this; they said that this was too much for them, they thought this could not be. It is my flesh, he said, for the life of the world. The faithful know the body of Christ if they should not neglect to be the body of Christ. Let them become the body of Christ, if they want to live from the Spirit of Christ. No thing lives from the Spirit of Christ except the body of Christ.

O mystery of true faith! O sign of unity! O bond of love! He who wishes to live has the place to live, has the means to live. Let him approach, let him believe, let him be embodied, that he may be given life. Let him not shrink back from the coalition of members, let him not be a rotten limb which deserves to be cut off, let him not be a deformed one on account of which there is embarrassment. Let him be a beautiful limb, let him be a fitting one, let him be a healthy one, let him adhere to the body, let him live for God from God. Let him now labour on earth that afterwards he may reign in heaven.

St Augustine, Tract. In Joh. 26.12; FoC 79 (1988) tr. Rettig.

Saturday of the Thirty-First Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF WISDOM

(Passover night and the crossing of the Red Sea: Wisdom 18:1-15; 19:4-9)

But for thy holy ones there was very great light. Their enemies heard their voices but did not see their forms, and counted them happy for not having suffered, and were thankful that thy holy ones, though previously wronged, were doing them no injury; and they begged their pardon for having been at variance with them. Therefore thou didst provide a flaming pillar of fire as a guide for thy people's unknown journey, and a harmless sun for their glorious wandering. For their enemies deserved to be deprived of light and imprisoned in darkness, those who had kept thy sons imprisoned, through whom the imperishable light of the law was to be given to the world.

When they had resolved to kill the babes of thy holy ones, and one child had been exposed and rescued, thou didst in punishment take away a multitude of their children; and thou didst destroy them all together by a mighty flood. That night was made known beforehand to our fathers, so that they might rejoice in sure knowledge of the oaths in which they trusted. The deliverance of the righteous and the destruction of their enemies were expected by thy people. For by the same means by which thou didst punish our enemies thou didst call us to thyself and glorify us. For in secret the holy children of good men offered sacrifices, and with one accord agreed to the divine law, that the saints would share alike the same things, both blessings and dangers; and already they were singing the praises of the fathers. But the discordant cry of their enemies echoed back, and their piteous lament for their children was spread abroad. The slave was punished with the same penalty as the master, and the common man suffered the same loss as the king; and they all together, by the one form of death, had corpses too many to count. For the living were not sufficient even to bury them, since in one instant their most valued children had been destroyed. For though they had disbelieved everything because of their magic arts, yet, when their first-born were destroyed, they acknowledged thy people to be God's son. For while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, thy all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed.

For the fate they deserved drew them on to this end, and made them forget what had happened, in order that they might fill up the punishment which their torments still lacked, and that thy people might experience an incredible journey, but they themselves might meet a strange death.

For the whole creation in its nature was fashioned anew, complying with thy commands, that thy children might be kept unharmed. The cloud was seen overshadowing the camp, and dry land emerging where water had stood before, an unhindered way out of the Red Sea, and a grassy plain out of the raging waves, where those protected by thy hand passed through as one nation, after gazing on marvellous wonders. For they ranged like horses, and leaped like lambs, praising thee, O Lord, who didst deliver them.

A READING FROM ON CONTEMPLATING GOD BY BLESSED WILLIAM OF SAINT-THIERRY

How is it we are saved by you, O Lord, from whom salvation comes and whose blessing is upon your people, if it is not to receive from you the gift of loving you and being loved by you? That, Lord, is why you willed that the Son of your right hand, the man whom you made strong for your own self, should be called Jesus, that is to say, Saviour, for he will save his people from their sins. There is no other in whom is salvation except him who taught us to love himself when he first loved us, even to death on the cross. By loving us and holding us so dear he stirred us up to love himself, who first had loved us to the end. This is the righteousness of the sons of men: 'Love me, for I love you.' One seldom meets a person who can say: 'I love you, in order that you may love me!' But, as the servant of your love proclaims and preaches, you who first loved us did this, precisely this. And that was not because you needed to be loved by us, but because we could not be what you created as to be, except by loving you.

Having then in many ways and on various occasions spoken to the fathers by the Prophets, now in these last days you have spoken to us in the Son, your Word, by whom the heavens were established, and all the power of them by the breath of his mouth. For you to speak thus in your Son was an open declaration, a 'setting in the sun', as it were, of how much and in what sort of way you loved us, in that you spared not your own Son, but delivered him up for us all. Yes, and he himself loved us and gave himself for us.

This, Lord, is your word to us this is your all-powerful message: he who, while all things kept silence (that is, were in the depths of error), came from the royal throne, the stern opponent of error and the gentle Apostle of love. And everything he did and everything he said on earth, even the insults, the spitting, the buffeting, the cross and the grave, all that was nothing but yourself speaking in the Son, appealing to us by your love, and stirring up our love for you.

For you, O God, our souls' Creator, knew that this affection cannot be forced in the souls of the sons of men, but has to be evoked. And this is for the obvious reason that there is no freedom where there is compulsion, and, where freedom is lacking, so too is righteousness. But you, O righteous Lord, you who wish to save us, you never save or condemn anyone otherwise than justly. You are both the author of our judgement and the advocate of our cause. Sitting upon your throne and judging righteous judgement, you judge the righteousness that you yourself have made. Thus will every mouth be shut, and the whole world be made subject to God, when you have pity on him on whom you will have pity, and extend mercy to him to whom you will be merciful. We could not with justice have been saved, had we not loved you, nor could we have loved you, save by your gift.

Bd William of Saint-Thierry, On Contemplating God, 10; CF 3 (1970) tr. Sr Penelope.

Season of the Year / Week 32

Sunday of the Thirty-Second Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE FIRST BOOK OF THE MACCABEES

(The victory and pride of the Greeks: 1 Maccabees 1:1-25)

After Alexander son of Philip, the Macedonian, who came from the land of Kittim, had defeated Darius, king of the Persians and the Medes, he succeeded him as king. (He had previously become king of Greece.) He fought many battles, conquered strongholds, and put to death the kings of the earth. He advanced to the ends of the earth, and plundered many nations. When the earth became quiet before him, he was exalted, and his heart was lifted up. He gathered a very strong army and ruled over countries, nations, and princes, and they became tributary to him.

After this he fell sick and perceived that he was dying. So he summoned his most honoured officers, who had been brought up with him from youth, and divided his kingdom among them while he was still alive. And after Alexander had reigned twelve years, he died.

Then his officers began to rule, each in his own place. They all put on crowns after his death, and so did their sons after them for many years; and they caused many evils on the earth.

From them came forth a sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of Antiochus the king; he had been a hostage in Rome. He began to reign in the one hundred and thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks.

In those days lawless men came forth from Israel, and misled many, saying, "Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles round about us, for since we separated from them many evils have come upon us." This proposal pleased them, and some of the people eagerly went to the king. He authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.

When Antiochus saw that his kingdom was established, he determined to become king of the land of Egypt, that he might reign over both kingdoms. So he invaded Egypt with a strong force, with chariots and elephants and cavalry and with a large fleet. He engaged Ptolemy king of Egypt in battle, and Ptolemy turned and fled before him, and many were wounded and fell. And they captured the fortified cities in the land of Egypt, and he plundered the land of Egypt.

After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred and forty-third year. He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels;

he took also the hidden treasures which he found. Taking them all, he departed to his own land.

He committed deeds of murder, and spoke with great arrogance. Israel mourned deeply in every community,

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

This world is a scene of conflict between good and evil. The evil not only avoids, but persecutes the good; the good cannot conquer, except by suffering. Good men seem to fail; their cause triumphs, but their own overthrow is the price paid for the success of their cause. When was it that this conflict, and this character and issue of it, have not been fulfilled? So it was in the beginning.

And from the way in which St Paul speaks on the subject we may infer that it is ever so to be: All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution: or, as he says, after referring to the history of Isaac and Ishmael, As then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now: and indeed we see this fulfilled in its measure before our eyes even at this day. Hence our Saviour, to console all who suffer for his sake, graciously says, Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteous-ness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

In many, very many ways you may be called upon to bear the ill-usage of the world, or to withstand its attempts to draw you from God; but you must be firm, and you must not be surprised that they should be made. You must consider that it is your very calling to bear and to withstand. This is what you offer to God, as a sort of return for his great mercies to you. Did not Christ go through much more for you than you can possibly be called upon to undergo for him? Did he bear the bitter cross who was sinless, and do you, who are at best so sinful, scruple to bear such poor trials and petty inconveniences?

When we are brought into temptation of any kind, we should lift up our hearts to God. We should say to him, 'Good Lord, deliver us.' Our Lord, when he was going away, promised to his disciples a comforter instead of himself; that was God the Holy Ghost, who is still among us (though we see him not), as Christ was with the Apostles. He has come in order to enlighten us, to guide us in the right way, and in the end to bring us to Christ in heaven. And he came down, as his name 'comforter' shows, especially to stand by, and comfort, and strengthen those who are in any trouble, particularly trouble from irreligious men. The disciples, when Christ went, had to go through much trouble, and therefore he comforted them by the coming of the holy and eternal Spirit, the third person in the Blessed Trinity. These things I have spoken to you, he says, that in me you might have peace; in the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

St John Henry Newman, Parochial & Plain Sermons VIII, 141-142.150-152; Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE FIRST BOOK OF THE MACCABEES

(The persecution of Antiochus: 1 Maccabees 1:41-63)

Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and that each should give up his customs. All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the Sabbath. And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane Sabbaths and feasts, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals, and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they should forget the law and change all the ordinances. "And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die."

In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. And he appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the cities of Judah to offer sacrifice, city by city. Many of the people, every one who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land; they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had.

Now on the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the one hundred and forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege upon the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding cities of Judah, and burned incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. The books of the law which they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. Where the book of the covenant was found in the possession of any one, or if any one adhered to the law, the decree of the king condemned him to death. They kept using violence against Israel, against those found month after month in the cities. And on the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar which was upon the altar of burnt offering. According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers' necks.

But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die. And very great wrath came upon Israel.

A READING FROM THE DIALOGUE OF COMFORT AGAINST TRIBULATIONS OF ST THOMAS MORE

Our Saviour was himself taken prisoner for our sake, and prisoner was he carried, and prisoner was he kept to the end of his passion. The time of his imprisonment, I grant, was not long, but as for hard handling which our hearts most abhor, he had as much in that short time, as many men in a much longer time. And surely then if we consider of what estate he was, and therewith that he was prisoner in such wise for our sake, we shall I hope never shamefully play the unkind coward as for fear of imprisonment

sinfully to forsake him, neither let us be so foolish as by forsaking him to give him the occasion to forsake us.

How can any faithful wise man dread death so sore out of fear of shame when his reason and his faith together may shortly make him perceive that herein there is no shame at all? For how can that death be shameful that is glorious? Or how can it be but glorious to die for the faith of Christ, if we die both for the faith and in the faith, joined with hope and charity, when Scripture so plainly says, Precious in the sight of God is the death of his saints? Now if the death of his saints be glorious in the sight of God, it can never be shameful in fact, however shameful it may seem here in the sight of men. For here we may see and be sure, that not at the death of Saint Stephen only, to whom he showed himself with heaven open over his head, but at the death also over every man that so dies for the faith, God with his heavenly company beholds his whole passion and verily looks on him.

This same short and momentary tribulation of ours that is in this present time works within us the weight of glory above measure on high. Now to this great glory can no man come headless. Our head is Christ and therefore to him must we be joined and as members of his must we follow him if he will come in before us, and he therefore that will enter in after, the same way that Christ walked, the same way must he walk too. And what was the way by which he walked into heaven? He himself shows what way it was that his Father had provided for him, when he said to the two disciples going toward Emmaus: Knew you not that Christ must suffer passion and by that way enter into his kingdom? Who can for very shame desire to enter into the kingdom of heaven with ease when Christ himself entered not into his own without pain?

St Thomas More, Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulations; Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE SECOND BOOK OF THE MACCABEES

(The martyrdom of Eleazar: 2 Maccabees 6:12-31)

Now I urge those who read this book not to be depressed by such calamities, but to recognize that these punishments were designed not to destroy but to discipline our people. In fact, not to let the impious alone for long, but to punish them immediately, is a sign of great kindness. For in the case of the other nations the Lord waits patiently to punish them until they have reached the full measure of their sins; but he does not deal in this way with us, in order that he may not take vengeance on us afterward when our sins have reached their height. Therefore he never withdraws his mercy from us. Though he disciplines us with calamities, he does not forsake his own people. Let what we have said serve as a reminder; we must go on briefly with the story.

Eleazar, one of the scribes in high position, a man now advanced in age and of noble presence, was being forced to open his mouth to eat swine's flesh. But he, welcoming death with honour rather than life with pollution, went up to the rack of his own accord, spitting out the flesh, as men ought to go who have the courage to refuse things that it is not right to taste, even for the natural love of life.

Those who were in charge of that unlawful sacrifice took the man aside, because of their long acquaintance with him, and privately urged him to bring meat of his own providing, proper for him to use, and pretend that he was eating the flesh of the sacrificial meal which had been commanded by the king, so that by doing this he might be saved from death, and be treated kindly on account of his old friendship with them. But making a high resolve, worthy of his years and the dignity of his old age and the grey hairs which he had reached with distinction and his excellent life even from childhood, and moreover according to the holy God-given law, he declared himself quickly, telling them to send him to Hades.

"Such pretence is not worthy of our time of life," he said, "lest many of the young should suppose that Eleazar in his ninetieth year has gone over to an alien religion, and through my pretence, for the sake of living a brief moment longer, they should be led astray because of me, while I defile and disgrace my old age. For even if for the present I should avoid the punishment of men, yet whether I live or die I shall not escape the hands of the Almighty. Therefore, by manfully giving up my life now, I will show myself worthy of my old age and leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws."

When he had said this, he went at once to the rack. And those who a little before had acted toward him with good will now changed to ill will, because the words he had uttered were in their opinion sheer madness. When he was about to die under the blows, he groaned aloud and said: "It is clear to the Lord in his holy knowledge that, though I might have been saved from death, I am enduring terrible sufferings in my body under this beating, but in my soul I am glad to suffer these things because I fear him."

So in this way he died, leaving in his death an example of nobility and a memorial of courage, not only to the young but to the great body of his nation.

A READING FROM THE LETTERS OF SAINT AMMONAS

I, your father, have endured temptations both openly and in secret; I proved strong in waiting and prayer, and my Lord has set me free. Now it is your turn, dearly beloved. You have experienced God's blessing and now you must experience temptations too, until you have surmounted them. Then you will grow in stature; your dignity will increase and great joy will be given to you from heaven, a joy beyond your understanding.

What does it mean to surmount temptations, and what is the cure for them? The answer is this: you must never grow weary but pray to God with your whole heart, praising him and being patient in all circumstances; and then the temptation will leave you. Thus was Abraham tested, and he emerged victorious from the struggle. That is why Scripture says, Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but from them all the Lord delivers them. Again, James says in his letter, If anyone among you is sad, let him pray. You see then how all the righteous, on falling into temptation, have cried to God. It also stands written: God is faithful, and he does not allow you to be tried beyond your strength. So now God is at work in you because of the integrity of your hearts. If he did not love you, he would not bring temptations upon you; Scripture tells us that God disciplines those he loves, and chastises the children he accepts. Accordingly the faithful need temptations, for those who have not been through them are not of the elect. They wear a habit indeed, but fail to show the fortitude it demands. Our father Antony used to say to us, Without trials a person cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, and blessed Peter too wrote in his letter: Rejoice now, though you seem to be saddened by various temptations, that your faith may be tested and proved excellent, more so than gold which passes through fire.

With this in mind, then, you understand how it is in the spiritual life that the first fruits of the Holy Spirit give joy to those whose hearts he sees to be pure, and yet after bestowing this joy and sweetness on them the Spirit holds aloof and forsakes them. The explanation is this: he deals thus with those that seek him and fear God, withdrawing to a distance and leaving them to themselves until he knows whether they will seek him or not. There are some people who after he has abandoned them and gone away sit down overwhelmed by disgust, and remain immovably fixed in it. They do not pray to God, asking him to remove the disgust from them and cause the joy and sweetness they knew earlier to return, but through carelessness and self-will they become strangers to God's sweetness. If, however, they become aware of this disgust, so unaccustomed and alien to their former joy, they ought to pray to God with tears and fasting. Then he of his graciousness, seeing their heartfelt sincerity and knowing that they are praying to him with all their hearts and entirely renouncing their own will, would give them joy greater than they had before and make them even stronger. This is a sign of God's work in any soul that seeks him.

A READING FROM THE SECOND BOOK OF THE MACCABEES

(The martyrdom of the seven brothers: 2 Maccabees 7:1-19)

It happened also that seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being compelled by the king, under torture with whips and cords, to partake of unlawful swine's flesh. One of them, acting as their spokesman, said, "What do you intend to ask and learn from us? For we are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our fathers."

The king fell into a rage, and gave orders that pans and cauldrons be heated. These were heated immediately, and he commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out and that they scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of the brothers and the mother looked on. When he was utterly helpless, the king ordered them to take him to the fire, still breathing, and to fry him in a pan. The smoke from the pan spread widely, but the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, saying, "The Lord God is watching over us and in truth has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song which bore witness against the people to their faces, when he said, 'And he will have compassion on his servants.'"

After the first brother had died in this way, they brought forward the second for their sport. They tore off the skin of his head with the hair, and asked him, "Will you eat rather than have your body punished limb by limb?" He replied in the language of his fathers, and said to them, "No." Therefore he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done. And when he was at his last breath, he said, "You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws."

After him, the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, and said nobly, "I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again." As a result the king himself and those with him were astonished at the young man's spirit, for he regarded his sufferings as nothing.

When he too had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way. And when he was near death, he said, "'One cannot but choose to die at the hands of men and to cherish the hope that God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!'"

Next they brought forward the fifth and maltreated him. But he looked at the king, and said, "Because you have authority among men, mortal though you are, you do what you please. But do not think that God has forsaken our people. Keep on, and see how his mighty power will torture you and your descendants!"

After him they brought forward the sixth. And when he was about to die, he said, "Do not deceive yourself in vain. For we are suffering these things on our own account,

because of our sins against our own God. Therefore astounding things have happened. But do not think that you will go unpunished for having tried to fight against God!"

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

When the astonishing martyrdom of the Maccabees is related, not merely do we hear the tale told, but we see it enacted, as it were, before us. It all happened before the incarnation, before the passion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In that ancient nation, where the Prophets lived their lives, there had been those who foretold what was now happening. Let no one think that before there was a Christian people there was no people dedicated to God either. For indeed, if one may speak as the truth dictates, rather than as ordinary language dictates, the people we are thinking about were even then a Christian people. For not even Christ himself began to have a people of his own until after his passion: but yet these people of his were descended from Abraham. Abraham longed to see my days; he saw them and rejoiced. This then is to be commended to your charity: that in your admiration for those martyrs you might think that they were not Christians; but Christians indeed they were, though the word 'Christians', current only later, must here be understood as preceding what was to happen later.

A Jew might object and say: How do you reckon these people of ours to be martyrs of yours? What an outrage for you to celebrate their memory! Take what they actually said and just see whether they confessed Christ! Well, what can we say to that? No, indeed, they did not confess Christ openly, or explicitly: for the mystery of Christ was still under a veil. The Old Testament is a veiled version of the New and the New Testament is the unveiled Old Testament. From it, Christ began to be preached most openly of all only after the resurrection. The prophetic sayings contained in it then began to be most manifestly fulfilled.

The Christian martyrs overtly confessed him whom the Macca-bees have confessed covertly. Some martyrs died for the Christ revealed and unveiled in the gospels; but the Maccabees died for the name of the Christ still veiled in the old law. Christ has both kinds in his service, like some great general making a conquest with his army of subjects, some far ahead and some following on behind. And that you may clearly understand how it is that those who die for the law of Moses die for Christ, here are Christ's own words: If you had believed Moses you would believe me also. The Maccabees, then, are martyrs for Christ. We venerate their mem-ory, we keep hold of it: their sufferings have been imitated by thousands of holy martyrs throughout the world. So let no one hesitate, dear brethren, to imitate the Maccabees, thinking that he would not thereby be imitating Christians. Let the will to imitate them be fervent and strong in our hearts. Let husbands learn to die for the truth. Let wives learn from that mother's heroic patience, from that virtue beyond telling; for she knew well how she could have saved her sons. She knew how to keep them but feared not to lose them.

St Augustine, Sermon 300, 1-3.5-6 (PL 38:1377-1379); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE SECOND BOOK OF THE MACCABEES

(The martyrdom of the seven brothers: the mother and the last son: 2 Maccabees 7:20-41)

The mother was especially admirable and worthy of honourable memory. Though she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord. She encouraged each of them in the language of their fathers. Filled with a noble spirit, she fired her woman's reasoning with a man's courage, and said to them, "I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of man and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws."

Antiochus felt that he was being treated with contempt, and he was suspicious of her reproachful tone. The youngest brother being still alive, Antiochus not only appealed to him in words, but promised with oaths that he would make him rich and enviable if he would turn from the ways of his fathers, and that he would take him for his friend and entrust him with public affairs. Since the young man would not listen to him at all, the king called the mother to him and urged her to advise the youth to save himself. After much urging on his part, she undertook to persuade her son. But, leaning close to him, she spoke in their native tongue as follows, deriding the cruel tyrant: "My son, have pity on me. I carried you nine months in my womb, and nursed you for three years, and have reared you and brought you up to this point in your life, and have taken care of you. I beseech you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. Thus also mankind comes into being. Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God's mercy I may get you back again with your brothers."

While she was still speaking, the young man said, "What are you waiting for? I will not obey the king's command, but I obey the command of the law that was given to our fathers through Moses. But you, who have contrived all sorts of evil against the Hebrews, will certainly not escape the hands of God. For we are suffering because of our own sins. And if our living Lord is angry for a little while, to rebuke and discipline us, he will again be reconciled with his own servants. But you, unholy wretch, you most defiled of all men, do not be elated in vain and puffed up by uncertain hopes, when you raise your hand against the children of heaven. You have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty, all-seeing God. For our brothers after enduring a brief suffering have drunk of ever-flowing life under God's covenant; but you, by the judgment of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance. I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our fathers, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation and by afflictions and plagues to make you confess that he alone is God, and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty which has justly fallen on our whole nation."

The king fell into a rage, and handled him worse than the others, being exasperated at his scorn. So he died in his integrity, putting his whole trust in the Lord.

Last of all, the mother died, after her sons.

A READING FROM A HOMILY BY ST VALERIAN OF CIMIEZ

Dearly beloved, our yearning for eternal life is fired with great hope if from time to time we recall the deeds of individual martyrs. As often as the mother of the Maccabees occurs to our memory, our soul bestirs itself with a joy somehow far greater to love God and win his favour. By the encouragement she gave, she on one day put the crown of martyrdom on seven sons. She was just as strong in faith as she was fruitful in offspring.

In her case there are as many proofs of her virtues as she had sons. For, on one day she gave to the almighty God as many martyrs as she had gained sons on separate occasions of mother-hood. Blessed is she among mothers, and more fortunate still in her bereavement! Her faith brought her this great blessing: to migrate on one day with all her offspring to the glory of the heavenly kingdom.

Turn your attention from her to that passage in the Gospel which tells that we should prefer neither parents nor children to Christ. Let it be, perhaps, with some a glorious thing, to be explained with salutary examples, that they have offered one son as a victim to God. This mother has exceeded all the power and wishes of souls - so much so that in the grief of her fierce sufferings she did not let the affections of her motherly love keep back even one of her sons.

Furthermore, notice through how many degrees of virtue her precious faith grew. It is enough to acquiesce once. Yet, because of her love of the Lord, through her willing bereavement she did violence to her motherly love seven times. She was well aware of what she was about, since she knew that all her offspring were taking their place in that eternity of life, according to the scriptural statement: He who loves his life will lose it; and he who hates his life, keeps it to everlasting life.

O new and admirable example of virtue! A mother rejoices in her own bereavement, and her love gains profit from the same source which brought it loss. After she has sent ahead her youngest son whom she loved so tenderly, she herself enters the way of glorious death. Pained for a short while by innumerable tortures, she followed her sons in triumph. Despising this short-lived light, she extended her grasp toward heavenly and eternal goods. Therefore, dearly beloved, if any mother has loving anxiety for the children of her womb, let her imitate the numerous and brave examples this mother has left. Furthermore, let those who serve Christ imitate the struggles of those brave men. Proof that she loves her sons is given by that mother who has banished the error on which this world relies, and from the fruit of her womb she has given a victim to God, and offered willingly herself and those dear ones whom she was every day to immolate.

St Valerian of Cimiez, Hom. 18, 1.5 (PL 52:746.747-748); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE FIRST BOOK OF THE MACCABEES

(The rebellion and death of Matathias: 1 Maccabees 2:1, 15-28, 42-50, 65-70)

In those days Mattathias the son of John, son of Simeon, a priest of the sons of Joarib, moved from Jerusalem and settled in Modein.

Then the king's officers who were enforcing the apostasy came to the city of Modein to make them offer sacrifice. Many from Israel came to them; and Mattathias and his sons were assembled. Then the king's officers spoke to Mattathias as follows: "You are a leader, honoured and great in this city, and supported by sons and brothers. Now be the first to come and do what the king commands, as all the Gentiles and the men of Judah and those that are left in Jerusalem have done. Then you and your sons will be numbered among the friends of the king, and you and your sons will be honoured with silver and gold and many gifts."

But Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice: "Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him, and have chosen to do his commandments, departing each one from the religion of his fathers, yet I and my sons and my brothers will live by the covenant of our fathers. Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances. We will not obey the king's words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left."

When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice upon the altar in Modein, according to the king's command. When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him upon the altar. At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. Thus he burned with zeal for the law, as Phinehas did against Zimri the son of Salu.

Then Mattathias cried out in the city with a loud voice, saying: "Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!" And he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the city.

Then there united with them a company of Hasideans, mighty warriors of Israel, every one who offered himself willingly for the law. And all who became fugitives to escape their troubles joined them and reinforced them. They organized an army, and struck down sinners in their anger and lawless men in their wrath; the survivors fled to the Gentiles for safety. And Mattathias and his friends went about and tore down the altars; they forcibly circumcised all the uncircumcised boys that they found within the borders of Israel. They hunted down the arrogant men, and the work prospered in their hands. They rescued the law out of the hands of the Gentiles and kings, and they never let the sinner gain the upper hand.

Now the days drew near for Mattathias to die, and he said to his sons: "Arrogance and reproach have now become strong; it is a time of ruin and furious anger. Now, my children, show zeal for the law, and give your lives for the covenant of our fathers.

“Now behold, I know that Simeon your brother is wise in counsel; always listen to him; he shall be your father. Judas Maccabeus has been a mighty warrior from his youth; he shall command the army for you and fight the battle against the peoples. You shall rally about you all who observe the law, and avenge the wrong done to your people. Pay back the Gentiles in full, and heed what the law commands.”

Then he blessed them, and was gathered to his fathers. He died in the one hundred and forty-sixth year and was buried in the tomb of his fathers at Modein. And all Israel mourned for him with great lamentation.

A READING FROM THE ADMONITION TO ENGLISH CATHOLICS BY WILLIAM CARDINAL ALLEN

Our days cannot be many, because we are human: neither can it be either godly or worldly wisdom, for a remnant of three or four years and perchance not so many months, to hazard the loss of all eternity.

No martyrdoms of what length or torment whatsoever can be more grievous than a long sickness and a languishing death; and he that departs upon the pillow has as little ease as he that dies upon the gallows, or block, or under the butcher's knife. And our Master's death, both for pains and ignominy, passed both sorts, and all other kinds either of martyrs or malefactors. Let no tribulation then, no peril, no prison, no persecution, no life, no death separate us from the charity of God, and the society of our sweet Saviour's passion, by and for whose love we shall have the victory in all these conflicts.

Nevertheless, if God permits, for causes hidden unto us, any to shrink (which Christ forbid) for fear of death, torments, or tribulations, from the fellowship of your happy confession and crown prepared for the same, as in the time of St Cyprian, be not scandalized or troubled thereat, but use such with all lenity, taking compassion on their infirmity, considering that yourselves also, or any of us all, may be tempted and overthrown with Peter, and by God's grace afterward repent and rise with him again, though it be perilous to presume thereon, many more following him in his fall and misery, than attaining to his martyrdom and mercy.

William Allen, Admonition to English Catholics; Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE FIRST BOOK OF THE MACCABEES

(About Judas Maccabeus: 1 Maccabees 3:1-26)

Then Judas his son, who was called Maccabeus, took command in his place. All his brothers and all who had joined his father helped him; they gladly fought for Israel. He extended the glory of his people. Like a giant he put on his breastplate; he girded on his armour of war and waged battles, protecting the host by his sword.

He was like a lion in his deeds, like a lion's cub roaring for prey. He searched out and pursued the lawless; he burned those who troubled his people. Lawless men shrank back for fear of him; all the evildoers were confounded; and deliverance prospered by his hand. He embittered many kings, but he made Jacob glad by his deeds, and his memory is blessed for ever. He went through the cities of Judah; he destroyed the ungodly out of the land; thus he turned away wrath from Israel. He was renowned to the ends of the earth; he gathered in those who were perishing.

But Apollonius gathered together Gentiles and a large force from Samaria to fight against Israel. When Judas learned of it, he went out to meet him, and he defeated and killed him. Many were wounded and fell, and the rest fled. Then they seized their spoils; and Judas took the sword of Apollonius, and used it in battle the rest of his life.

Now when Seron, the commander of the Syrian army, heard that Judas had gathered a large company, including a body of faithful men who stayed with him and went out to battle, he said, "I will make a name for myself and win honour in the kingdom. I will make war on Judas and his companions, who scorn the king's command." And again a strong army of ungodly men went up with him to help him, to take vengeance on the sons of Israel.

When he approached the ascent of Beth-horon, Judas went out to meet him with a small company. But when they saw the army coming to meet them, they said to Judas, "How can we, few as we are, fight against so great and strong a multitude? And we are faint, for we have eaten nothing today." Judas replied, "It is easy for many to be hemmed in by few, for in the sight of Heaven there is no difference between saving by many or by few. It is not on the size of the army that victory in battle depends, but strength comes from Heaven. They come against us in great pride and lawlessness to destroy us and our wives and our children, and to despoil us; but we fight for our lives and our laws. He himself will crush them before us; as for you, do not be afraid of them."

When he finished speaking, he rushed suddenly against Seron and his army, and they were crushed before him. They pursued them down the descent of Beth-horon to the plain; eight hundred of them fell, and the rest fled into the land of the Philistines. Then Judas and his brothers began to be feared, and terror fell upon the Gentiles round about them. His fame reached the king, and the Gentiles talked of the battles of Judas.

A READING FROM A SERMON ON PSALM 123 BY ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Blessed be the Lord for not having given us up as a prey to their teeth. Our life has escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowler. Do you see how the psalmist describes the weakness of the Jews and the strength of their enemies? The latter, armed with native strength and fury, rush on their prey like wild beasts, ready to devour their flesh, while the Jews are weaker than any bird. For then are the wonders of God most plainly seen, when the weak overpower the strong.

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Consider the strength, the power of their champion, who has frustrated the schemes and brought to nothing the machinations of their enemies. These words could be taken in a spiritual sense as referring to the devil and the human race. The psalmist shows how the Lord has delivered us, how he has released us from the snares of the devil.

This has been happening ever since Christ said to his disciples: You shall tread underfoot snakes and scorpions, and all the power of the enemy. It is no longer open warfare, then, no longer equal combat. The enemy has fallen headlong, whereas you are standing upright and can thrash him from above. He is exhausted, while you are fighting fit.

How then can we explain his frequent victories? They are due to our indolence, to the indifference of people who are half asleep. Anyone, however weak, can overpower someone who is sleeping. Disarmed and bound, the strong man has been rendered power-less, his dwelling broken into, his weapons taken away. Besides, are you not aware of the help you have at hand? Recall not only the weakness of your enemy but also the great assistance you are given. God has enabled you to rule your body; for arms he has given you the breastplate of integrity, the belt of truth, the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit. He has given you the pledge of your inheritance, he feeds you with his body and gives you his blood to drink. He has put his cross into your hands to use as a spear, a spear that will never bend; finally, he has bound your enemy and hurled him to the ground. You would have no excuse, then, if you were defeated; you would have thrown away all chance of pardon, for you have many ways of winning the victory. The snare has been broken and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

St John Chrysostom, In Ps. 123 (Bareille IX, 483-485); Word in Season VIII.

Season of the Year | Week 33

A READING FROM THE FIRST BOOK OF MACCABEES

(The purification and dedication of the Temple: 1 Maccabees 4:36-59)

Then said Judas and his brothers, "Behold, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it." So all the army assembled and they went up to Mount Zion. And they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket, or as on one of the mountains. They saw also the chambers of the priests in ruins. Then they rent their clothes, and mourned with great lamentation, and sprinkled themselves with ashes. They fell face down on the ground, and sounded the signal on the trumpets, and cried out to Heaven. Then Judas detailed men to fight against those in the citadel until he had cleansed the sanctuary.

He chose blameless priests devoted to the law, and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place. They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. And they thought it best to tear it down, lest it bring reproach upon them, for the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until there should come a prophet to tell what to do with them. Then they took unhewn stones, as the law directs, and built a new altar like the former one. They also rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple, and consecrated the courts. They made new holy vessels, and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. Then they burned incense on the altar and lighted the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple. They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken.

Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Chislev, in the one hundred and forty-eighth year, they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering which they had built. At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and offered burnt offerings with gladness; they offered a sacrifice of deliverance and praise. They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and furnished them with doors. There was very great gladness among the people, and the reproach of the Gentiles was removed.

Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with gladness and joy for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev.

A READING FROM THE LETTER TO THE PRELATES OF MAINZ BY ST HILDEGARD OF BINGEN

I heard a voice from the living light tell of the diverse kinds of praises, of which David says in the psalms: Praise him in the call of the trumpet, praise him on psaltery and lute, praise him on the tambour and in dancing, praise him on strings and on organ, praise him on resonant cymbals, praise him on cymbals of jubilation – let every spirit praise the Lord!

In these words outer realities teach us about inner ones – namely how, in accordance with the material composition and quality of instruments, we can best transform and shape the performance of our inner being toward praises of the Creator. If we strive for this lovingly, we recall how man sought the voice of the living spirit, which Adam lost through disobedience – he who, still innocent before his fault, had no little kinship with the sounds of the angels' praises.

But in order that mankind should recall that divine sweetness and praise by which, with the angels, Adam was made jubilant in God before he fell, instead of recalling Adam in his banishment, and that mankind too might be stirred to that sweet praise, the holy Prophets - taught by the same spirit, which they had received - not only composed psalms and canticles, to be sung to kindle the devotion of listeners, but also they invented musical instruments of diverse kinds with this in view, by which the song could be expressed in multitudinous sounds, so that listeners, aroused and made adept outwardly, might be nurtured within by the forms and qualities of the instruments, as by the meaning of the words performed with them.

Eager and wise men imitated the holy Prophets, inventing human kinds of harmonised melody by their art, so that they could sing in the delight of their soul; and they adapted their singing to the notation indicated by the bending of the finger joints, as it were, recalling that Adam was formed by the finger of God, which is the Holy Spirit, and that in Adam's voice before he fell there was the sound of every harmony and the sweetness of the whole art of music. And if Adam had remained in the condition in which he was formed, human frailty could never endure the power and the resonance of that voice. But when his deceiver, the devil, heard that man had begun to sing through divine inspiration, and that he would be transformed through this to remembering the sweetness of the songs in the heavenly land, seeing the machinations of his cunning going awry, he became so terrified that he has not ceased to trouble or destroy the affirmation and beauty and sweetness of divine praise and of the hymns of the spirit.

And because at times, when hearing some melody, a human being often sighs and moans, recalling the nature of the heavenly harmony, the Prophet David, subtly contemplating the profound nature of the spirit, and knowing that the human soul is sym-phonetic, exhorts us in his psalm to proclaim the Lord on the lute and play for him on the ten-stringed psaltery.

St Hildegard of Bingen, To the prelates of Mainz; Word in Season VIII.

Monday of the Thirty-Third Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE SECOND BOOK OF MACCABEES

(Sacrifice for the dead: 2 Maccabees 12:32-45)

After the feast called Pentecost, they hastened against Gorgias, the governor of Idumea. And he came out with three thousand infantry and four hundred cavalry. When they joined battle, it happened that a few of the Jews fell. But a certain Dositheus, one of Bacenor's men, who was on horseback and was a strong man, caught hold of Gorgias, and grasping his cloak was dragging him off by main strength, wishing to take the accursed man alive, when one of the Thracian horsemen bore down upon him and cut off his arm; so Gorgias escaped and reached Marisa.

As Esdris and his men had been fighting for a long time and were weary, Judas called upon the Lord to show himself their ally and leader in the battle. In the language of their fathers he raised the battle cry, with hymns; then he charged against Gorgias' men when they were not expecting it, and put them to flight.

Then Judas assembled his army and went to the city of Adullam. As the seventh day was coming on, they purified themselves according to the custom, and they kept the Sabbath there.

On the next day, as by that time it had become necessary, Judas and his men went to take up the bodies of the fallen and to bring them back to lie with their kinsmen in the sepulchres of their fathers. Then under the tunic of every one of the dead they found sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. And it became clear to all that this was why these men had fallen. So they all blessed the ways of the Lord, the righteous Judge, who reveals the things that are hidden; and they turned to prayer, beseeching that the sin which had been committed might be wholly blotted out. And the noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen. He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honourably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin.

A READING FROM THE CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

When the Lord comes in his majesty, and all the angels with him, death will be destroyed and all things will be subject to him. Meanwhile, some of his disciples are exiles on earth. Some have finished with this life and are being purified. Others are in glory, beholding clearly God himself, triune and one, as he is.

But in various ways and degrees we all partake in the same love of God and neighbour, and all sing the same hymn of glory to our God. For all who belong to Christ, having his Spirit, form one Church and cleave together in him. Therefore the union of the wayfarers with the brethren who have gone to sleep in the peace of Christ is not in the least interrupted. On the contrary, according to the perpetual faith of the Church it is strengthened through the exchange of spiritual goods.

For by reason of the fact that those in heaven are more closely united with Christ, they establish the whole Church more firmly in holiness, lend nobility to the worship which the Church offers here on earth to God, and in many ways contribute to its greater upbuilding. For after they have been received into their heavenly home and are present to the Lord, through him and with him and in him, they do not cease to intercede with the Father for us. Rather, they show forth the merits which they have won on earth through the one Mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus. There they served God in all things and filled up in their flesh whatever was lacking of the sufferings of Christ on behalf of his body which is the Church. Thus by their brotherly interest our weakness is greatly strengthened. Very much aware of the bonds linking the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the pilgrim Church from the very first ages of the Christian religion has cultivated with great piety the memory of the dead. Because it is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins, she has also offered prayers for them. For as long as all of us, who are sons and daughters of God and comprise one family in Christ, remain in communion with one another in mutual charity and in one praise of the most holy Trinity, we are responding to the deepest vocation of the Church and partaking in a foretaste of the liturgy of consummate glory. For when Christ shall appear and the glorious resurrection of the dead takes place, the splendour of God will brighten the heavenly city and the Lamb will be the lamp thereof. Then in the supreme happiness of charity the whole Church of the saints will adore God and the Lamb who was slain, proclaiming with one voice: To him who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb blessing, and honour and glory and dominion forever and ever.

Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium, 49-50, 51; Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE FIRST BOOK OF MACCABEES

(The end of Antiochus: 1 Maccabees 6:1-17)

King Antiochus was going through the upper provinces when he heard that Elymais in Persia was a city famed for its wealth in silver and gold. Its temple was very rich, containing golden shields, breastplates, and weapons left there by Alexander, the son of Philip, the Macedonian king who first reigned over the Greeks. So he came and tried to take the city and plunder it, but he could not, because his plan became known to the men of the city and they withstood him in battle. So he fled and in great grief departed from there to return to Babylon.

Then some one came to him in Persia and reported that the armies which had gone into the land of Judah had been routed; that Lysias had gone first with a strong force, but had turned and fled before the Jews; that the Jews had grown strong from the arms, supplies, and abundant spoils which they had taken from the armies they had cut down; that they had torn down the abomination which he had erected upon the altar in Jerusalem; and that they had surrounded the sanctuary with high walls as before, and also Beth-zur, his city.

When the king heard this news, he was astounded and badly shaken. He took to his bed and became sick from grief, because things had not turned out for him as he had planned. He lay there for many days, because deep grief continually gripped him, and he concluded that he was dying. So he called all his friends and said to them, "Sleep departs from my eyes and I am downhearted with worry. I said to myself, 'To what distress I have come! And into what a great flood I now am plunged! For I was kind and beloved in my power.' But now I remember the evils I did in Jerusalem. I seized all her vessels of silver and gold; and I sent to destroy the inhabitants of Judah without good reason. I know that it is because of this that these evils have come upon me; and behold, I am perishing of deep grief in a strange land."

Then he called for Philip, one of his friends, and made him ruler over all his kingdom. He gave him the crown and his robe and the signet, that he might guide Antiochus his son and bring him up to be king. Thus Antiochus the king died there in the one hundred and forty-ninth year. And when Lysias learned that the king was dead, he set up Antiochus the king's son to reign. Lysias had brought him up as a boy, and he named him Eupator.

A READING FROM A SERMON ON PSALM 18 BY ST AUGUSTINE

If my own secret sins and those of others shall have no dominion over me, then I shall be without spot and I shall be cleansed from the great sin. From what sin, are we to suppose? What is this great sin? Possibly it is not what I am going to say, yet I will not hide my opinion. This great sin, I consider, is pride. This is perhaps what he expresses in other terms by saying: And I shall be cleansed from the great sin. Do you ask how great that sin is which overthrew an angel, which changed an angel into a devil and closed the kingdom of heaven against him forever? A great sin it surely is, and the head and origin

of all sins. For the Scripture tells us: Pride is the beginning of all sin; and for fear you should disregard this as a light matter, it adds: The beginning of the pride of man is to fall off from God. No, my brethren, this vice is no slight fault. Those high and mighty personages whom you see addicted to this vice find Christian humility distasteful. It is this vice which makes them scorn to bend their necks beneath the yoke of Christ, constrained though they are yet more tightly by the yoke of sin. Serve they must, yet serve they will not, even when it would be to their advantage. By refusing to serve they merely withdraw their service from a good Master without finding any escape from servitude, since anyone who will not serve love must needs become the slave of sin.

That vice, the source of all vices, since all the rest spring from it, has caused a falling off from God, when a soul, by a deplorable misuse of its free will, plunges into darkness and all other sins follow on. Thus the soul squanders its substance in living riotously with prostitutes, and the former companion of angels becomes through want a feeder of swine. It was because of this vice, because of this enormous sin of pride, that God came in humility. This enormous sin, this monstrous disease of souls, was the very thing which brought the almighty Physician down from heaven, humbled him even to taking the form of a slave, exposed him to ignominy, hung him upon the tree, that by the saving strength of so potent a remedy this tumour might be healed. And now finally let man blush to be proud, for whose sake God has become humble. So, says the Psalmist, I shall be cleansed from the great sin, because God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.

St Augustine, Enarr. In Ps. 18, 11, 14-15 (CCL 38:112-113); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE FIRST BOOK OF MACCABEES

(The death of Judas in battle: 1Maccabees 9:1-22)

When Demetrius heard that Nicanor and his army had fallen in battle, he sent Bacchides and Alcimus into the land of Judah a second time, and with them the right wing of the army. They went by the road which leads to Gilgal and encamped against Mesaloth in Arbela, and they took it and killed many people. In the first month of the one hundred and fifty-second year they encamped against Jerusalem; then they marched off and went to Berea with twenty thousand foot soldiers and two thousand cavalry.

Now Judas was encamped in Elasa, and with him were three thousand picked men. When they saw the huge number of the enemy forces, they were greatly frightened, and many slipped away from the camp, until no more than eight hundred of them were left.

When Judas saw that his army had slipped away and the battle was imminent, he was crushed in spirit, for he had no time to assemble them. He became faint, but he said to those who were left, "Let us rise and go up against our enemies. We may be able to fight them." But they tried to dissuade him, saying, "We are not able. Let us rather save our own lives now, and let us come back with our brethren and fight them; we are too few." But Judas said, "Far be it from us to do such a thing as to flee from them. If our time has come, let us die bravely for our brethren, and leave no cause to question our honour."

Then the army of Bacchides marched out from the camp and took its stand for the encounter. The cavalry was divided into two companies, and the slingers and the archers went ahead of the army, as did all the chief warriors. Bacchides was on the right wing. Flanked by the two companies, the phalanx advanced to the sound of the trumpets; and the men with Judas also blew their trumpets. The earth was shaken by the noise of the armies, and the battle raged from morning till evening.

Judas saw that Bacchides and the strength of his army were on the right; then all the stout-hearted men went with him, and they crushed the right wing, and he pursued them as far as Mount Azotus. When those on the left wing saw that the right wing was crushed, they turned and followed close behind Judas and his men. The battle became desperate, and many on both sides were wounded and fell. Judas also fell, and the rest fled.

Then Jonathan and Simon took Judas their brother and buried him in the tomb of their fathers at Modein, and wept for him. And all Israel made great lamentation for him; they mourned many days and said, "How is the mighty fallen, the saviour of Israel!" Now the rest of the acts of Judas, and his wars and the brave deeds that he did, and his greatness, have not been recorded, for they were very many.

A READING FROM THE TREATISE ON THE BLESSING OF DEATH BY ST AMBROSE

The Apostle says: The world is crucified to me and I to the world. Then wishing to make it clear that the death to which he is referring is death in this life, and a happy death too,

he bids us, carry round the death of Jesus in our bodies; for whoever has the death of Jesus in his body, will have the life of the Lord Jesus too in his body.

Death then must already be active in us if life too is to be active; and by life and happiness after death, we mean life and happiness after victory, when the battle is over, when the law of the flesh is no longer at variance with the law of the mind, when there is no longer a struggle between us and our mortal flesh, but victory over the body of this death, our fallen nature. I am not sure that this death is not a higher state than life, and we have the authority of the Apostle for this: Death works in us with life in you. Think of the vast number of people who owe their life to one man's death. And so the Apostle teaches us that we must embrace Christ's death while we are still alive in this world so that the splendour of his death may shine out in our body. This is the death which leads to happiness, by which our outer nature wastes away so that our inner nature may be renewed; our earthly habitation is pulled down so that the gates of our heavenly home may be unlocked.

Metaphorically a man dies when he breaks away from the thralldom of the flesh and casts off its bonds, of which the Lord says to us by the Prophet Isaiah: Loose every bond of wickedness, dissolve unjust contracts, let the oppressed go free, break all dishonesty. The Lord allowed death to make its way into our world so that guilt should come to an end; but lest human nature should perish by death he ordained the resurrection of the dead. Thus by death guilt should have an end, by the resurrection human nature should endure forever.

Death in this sense is a pilgrimage, a lifetime's pilgrimage which none must shirk, a pilgrimage from decay to imperishable life, from mortality to immortality, from anxiety to unruffled calm. Do not be afraid of the word death: rather rejoice in the blessings which follow a happy death. What is death after all but the burial of vice, the flowering of goodness? Hence the words of Scripture, Let my soul die with the souls of the just, that is, let it be buried with them and so slough off its own vice and be clothed in the grace of the saints who carry round the mortification of Christ in their own bodies and souls.

St Ambrose, De bono mortis, 3, 9; 4, 15; The Divine Office III.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET DANIEL

(The young men of Israel are faithful in the palace of the king of Babylon: Daniel 1:1-21)

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, youths without blemish, handsome and skilful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to serve in the king's palace, and to teach them the letters and language of the Chaldeans. The king assigned them a daily portion of the rich food which the king ate, and of the wine which he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Misha-el, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Misha-el he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's rich food, or with the wine which he drank; therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. And God gave Daniel favour and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs; and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear lest my lord the king, who appointed your food and your drink, should see that you were in poorer condition than the youths who are of your own age. So you would endanger my head with the king." Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Misha-el, and Azariah; "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's rich food be observed by you, and according to what you see deal with your servants." So he hearkened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's rich food. So the steward took away their rich food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all letters and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king spoke with them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Misha-el, and Azariah; therefore they stood before the king. And in every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. And Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.

A READING FROM ON THE TRINITY AND ITS WORKS BY ABBOT RUPERT OF DEUTZ

We shall now look at the book of Daniel. May Christ, whose mysteries we seek to find in it, open our eyes to the light. What is so arresting is the grandiose vision it contains. There, in the language of imagery, is described the single combat between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, revealed under several different aspects to the captives in Babylon for the consolation of the citizens of God's kingdom.

First, there is the single stone, hurtling from the mountain, which smote and shattered, without the aid of human hands, the mighty and frightening statue. Then, the fire which neither touched nor distressed the three children in the fiery furnace. Then, the strong and mighty king, marvelling at the Babylon he had built, who became demented by the voice which fell from heaven, was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox. It was after this experience that he acknowledged the most high God, who lives forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion. Then, the kingdom of Babylon itself is conquered by God our king and given to the Medes and Persians. There is Daniel himself, a man of prayer, who got the better of the calumnious men who criticized him to the king. Then there are the four competing winds of heaven and the four great beasts coming up out of the sea, and after that, there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. Finally, that the kingdom of sin is to be destroyed and to be succeeded by the reign of the kingdom of God is very clearly shown by this prophecy: Seventy weeks of years are decreed concerning your people and your holy city to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and Prophet and to anoint the Holy One.

But let us now remember Daniel. Daniel loved God, so he had to take a stand against the kingdom opposed to God – against sinful men who are the enemies of God's kingdom. Born into the world, he knew that because of original sin, he was an exile; he heard the Gentiles say to the captive people of God, because of their actual sins, Where is your God? On the one hand, the tyranny of the evil; on the other, human arrogance. Daniel shunned intimacy with either, desirous as he was of the true glory of the one God. And he won his consolation in proportion to his zeal, for as the psalmist says, You will hear the desires of the meek. At the very beginning of the book Scripture shows Daniel's zeal: Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's rich food. As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all letters and wisdom, but Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

Abt Rupert of Deutz, De Trinitate et Operibus eius, XLII (PL 167:1499-1502); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET DANIEL

(The vision of the image and the stone; the eternal Kingdom of God: Daniel 2:26-47)

The king said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, “Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?” Daniel answered the king, “No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery which the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these: To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be hereafter, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be. But as for me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living has this mystery been revealed to me, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.

“You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its breast and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it smote the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces; then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

“This was the dream; now we will tell the king its interpretation. You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the sons of men, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air, making you rule over them all – you are the head of gold. After you shall arise another kingdom inferior to you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things; and like iron which crushes, it shall break and crush all these. And as you saw the feet and toes partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom; but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. As you saw the iron mixed with miry clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever; just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be hereafter. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.”

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and did homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. The king said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery."

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST AUGUSTINE

Daniel saw a vision. I saw, said Daniel, and beheld a stone cut from a mountain without hands. He did not mean that the stone was without hands, but that the stone was cut from the mountain without human action; no human hands came along to cut the stone from the mountain. Your honours will be aware that stones are not cut from mountains unless human hands come along to do it. But that one was cut from a mountain without hands, and it came and broke all the kingdoms of earth into pieces. I do not know if it conjures up before your eyes a picture of anything but Christ, of whom it is said, All the kings of the earth shall worship him. He is the one who broke all the kingdoms of the earth into pieces. A proud king will not have any other king ahead of him. Now all kings have Christ as their king. So he has broken into pieces all the kingdoms of the earth, that he himself may reign.

And what does it say? This stone grew, and became a great mountain, such that it filled the whole face of the earth. Now I imagine that you recognize Christ. You have heard about the land: Those who have given themselves to me shall possess the land. You have also heard about the mountain: And shall inhabit my holy mountain. Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves of every defilement of flesh and spirit.

Cut from a mountain, and it became a mountain by growing. But what sort of mountain? Not one like the mountain it was cut from. You see, about the mountain it was cut from it does not say, 'It grew and filled the whole earth.' So there are two mountains. The first mountain is the synagogue, the second the Church. The first is the Jewish people, the second mountain the Christian people. But in order that the Christian people might become a great mountain and fill the whole earth, a stone was cut from that other mountain, because Christ came from the Jews. So why without hands? Without human agency. Christ, you see, was born of a virgin, he was conceived apart from conjugal embrace.

So that is the mountain we have in Christ; we have the Church, let us love the Church. This mountain grew and filled the whole wide world. It is obvious that those who have formed a party are not in this mountain, and do not hold the whole earth with us.

So you there, love this mountain and make yourself ready to inhabit this mountain forever. And cleanse yourself from every defilement of flesh and spirit, having such promises. What promises? If you want to possess the land and inhabit the holy mountain, cleanse yourself from every defilement of flesh and spirit.

St Augustine, Sermo 45.6-8; Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET DANIEL

(The king's golden statue; the youths thrown into the furnace: Daniel 3:8-12,19-23, 1, 68, 24-30)

At that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live for ever! You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image; and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no heed to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up."

Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he ordered certain mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their mantles, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were cast into the burning fiery furnace. Because the king's order was strict and the furnace very hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.

And they walked about in the midst of the flames, singing hymns to God and blessing the Lord. "Bless him, all who worship the Lord, the God of gods, sing praise to him and give thanks to him, for his mercy endures for ever."

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He said to his counsellors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered the king, "True, O king." He answered, "But I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace and said, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come forth, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counsellors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men; the hair of their heads was not singed, their mantles were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. Nebuchadnezzar said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set at nought the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins; for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way." Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON DANIEL BY ST HIPPOLYTUS

Look well; behold three youths who have set an example for all. They were unafraid of the numerous satraps and of the words of the king: they did not tremble when they heard about the fiery flames of the furnace, but they spurned all and the whole world for they thought only of the fear of God.

You see how the Spirit of the Father teaches eloquence to the martyrs, consoling them and exhorting them to despise death in this world, to hasten their attainment of heavenly goods. But a person who is without the Holy Spirit is frightened of the struggle. He hides himself, takes precautions against a death that is only temporal, is afraid of the sword, falls into a panic at the thought of the torture. He no longer sees any other thing than the world here below, worries only about the present life, prefers his wife to everything else, is bothered only about love for his children, and seeks nothing but wealth.

Such a man, because he is not endowed with heavenly strength, is quickly lost. That is why anyone who desires to come near the Word listens to the behest of the King and Lord of heaven: Whoever does not bear his cross and follow me is not worthy of me, and whoever does not renounce all that he possesses cannot be my disciple.

Scripture tells us that after this those three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell into the white-hot furnace and walked about in the flames, singing to God and blessing the Lord. The fire had no difficulty in devouring the fetters with which they had been bound by order of the king, but it did not touch their coats, hats, shoes and other garments. This miracle brought out the wonderful power of God.

But someone might say: 'Why did God of old not rescue martyrs of our own day? For we see that blessed Daniel was cast twice into the den, and that he was not devoured by the beasts, just as the three youths were cast into the furnace and suffered not the least damage from the fire.'

Think it over, O man! At that time, God saved those he wanted, in order that the wonders of his works might be revealed to the whole world. But those whom he desired to undergo martyrdom, he crowned and let them come to him. If he drew the three youths out of their predicament, it was to show the emptiness and folly of Nebuchadnezzar's boastfulness and prove at the same time that what is impossible to man is possible to God. Nebuchadnezzar had proudly declared: Who is the God that can deliver you out of my hands? God proved to him that he can free his servants when he wishes to do so. That is why it is improper for man to oppose the decisions of God. For if we live, we live for the Lord. And if we die, we die for the Lord. Whether we live or whether we die, we belong to the Lord.

St Hippolytus of Rome, Comm. in Dan. II, 18-37 (SC 14:150-184); Word in Season VIII.

Season of the Year | Week 34

Christ the King

A READING FROM THE PROPHET DANIEL

(The vision of the Son of Man accepting the kingdom: Daniel 7:1-17, 23-27)

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream, and told the sum of the matter. Daniel said, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand upon two feet like a man; and the mind of a man was given to it. And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side; it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.' After this I looked, and lo, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back; and the beast had four heads; and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrible and dreadful and exceedingly strong; and it had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces, and stamped the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots; and behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things. As I looked, thrones were placed and one that was ancient of days took his seat; his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came forth from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

"I looked then because of the sound of the great words which the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

"As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious and the visions of my head alarmed me. I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me, and made known to me the interpretation of the things. 'These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, for ever and ever.'

"Thus he said: 'As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces. As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them; he shall be different from the former

ones, and shall put down three kings. He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, two times, and half a time. But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.”

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON JOHN BY ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

Father, glorify me with the glory which I had with you before the world was made. Notice that Christ does not ask for a new beginning in glory, but a restoration of the glory which he had of old, and also that he speaks these words as a man. Again, the fact that he became a man is the reason why all things are said to have been given to the Son. We who are eager for knowledge will gather wisdom from every source in seeking to understand this. But nothing will teach us better than that awe-inspiring vision of Daniel, in which the Prophet says he saw him whose days are without beginning seated in majesty, with thousands upon thousands and myriads upon myriads there to serve and attend him. He continues: And behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a man, who approached him whose days have no beginning and was presented to him. And to him was given the dominion and glory of the kingdom, so that all people, the nations of all tongues, should serve him.

Do you see how in these words we have an accurate portrayal of the whole mystery of the incarnation? In telling us how the Son received the kingdom from the Father, the Prophet refers not merely to the Son, but to one who appeared as a man. For he humbled himself, as it is written, by taking the form of a man for our sake, so that in ascending first to the kingdom he might open up the way for us to follow him to the kingdom of glory. And just as he is by nature life, so it was for our sake that he came down to die in the flesh for all humanity, to set us free from death and corruption. By his likeness to ourselves he could as it were mingle his own nature with ours, and make us to be partakers of eternal life. So although as God he is the Lord of glory, yet he takes on the form of our low estate in order to raise human nature also to royal honour.

For he came to take precedence in all things, as Paul says. He is the way, the door, the first fruits of our blessings; he leads us from death to life, from corruption to incorruption, from weakness to strength, from slavery to adoption as children of God, and from all the obscurity of our low estate to kingly honour and glory.

St Cyril of Alexandria, In Ioannis Evangelium II, 35 (PG 73:283-286); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET DANIEL

(God's judgement at Belshazzar's feast: Daniel 5:1-2, 5-9, 13-17, 25-31)

King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in front of the thousand.

Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them.

Immediately the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand; and the king saw the hand as it wrote. Then the king's colour changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together. The king cried aloud to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers. The king said to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and shows me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation. Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, and his colour changed; and his lords were perplexed.

Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king said to Daniel, "You are that Daniel, one of the exiles of Judah, whom the king my father brought from Judah. I have heard of you that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. Now the wise men, the enchanters, have been brought in before me to read this writing and make known to me its interpretation; but they could not show the interpretation of the matter. But I have heard that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple, and have a chain of gold about your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

Then Daniel answered before the king, "Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; nevertheless I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation.

"And this is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. This is the interpretation of the matter: MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

Then Belshazzar commanded, and Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was put about his neck, and proclamation was made concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

A READING FROM ON DIVINE PROVIDENCE BY THEODORET OF CYRUS

When the people had lapsed into the depths of impiety, loot was sent to Babylon and the sacred vessels became the spoils of the enemy. Now Nebuchadnezzar, since they were sacred, removed them from profane use and brought them to the temples of those whom they cultivated as gods. His son, Belshazzar, however, had not learned his lesson sufficiently from his father's disasters and did not calculate the penalty he should pay for such arrogance; having honoured, as he thought, these sacred vessels, he brought out the vessels once consecrated to God, drank from them – the wretch – and handed round the vessels that should not be touched to his fellow drinkers. While this was going on, the decision against the accursed wretch was produced and a hand of somebody invisible wrote on the wall the sentence of God. Belshazzar was held in doubt, unable to read or understand the import of what was written.

Then his mother brought into the court Daniel, who often solved such problems for his father. Daniel read and interpreted it, and told him the cause of the punishment, saying: 'We have been made captives to pay the penalty for our sins. And God has given those vessels consecrated by us to our vanquisher to teach us that he suffered us to offer sacrifices which he did not need and accepted our offerings as long as we remained holy, because he wished to be of help to us. But when we drifted into impiety he rejected the gifts we offered. Your father, then, accepting the rebuke, worshipped as he thought best, withdrawing objects from profane use and offering them to his supposed gods. You have no use for such worship; you have fallen into the abyss of arrogance and have drunk from the sacred vessels. The reason the Lord gives you such a lesson to end your arrogance is not his care for inanimate objects, but his loving care for all, and he proposes your punishment as a lesson in discipline for many.' So much he said, and that night Belshazzar paid the penalty.

Behold, then, how the Maker of the universe has always shown a loving care for mankind, not merely for the race of the descendants of Abraham, but for all the descendants of Adam; through one tribe he has led all tribes to a knowledge of himself. He used them for this purpose both when they were religious and when they were paying the penalty for their sins - for instance, Nebuchadnezzar, the arrogant tyrant, who raised up the golden image and called on all to adore it, saying: I will exalt my throne above the stars. I will ascend above the height of the clouds. I will be like the Most High. I will gather in my hand the whole earth as a nest, as eggs that lie abandoned will I gather it.

Theodoret of Cyrus, De Divina Providentia, 10, 52-54; Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET DANIEL

(Daniel is thrown into the lions' den: Daniel 6:4-28)

The presidents and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom; but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God."

Then these presidents and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, "O King Darius, live for ever! All the presidents of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counsellors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an interdict, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the interdict and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked." Therefore King Darius signed the document and interdict.

When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem; and he got down upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God. Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the interdict, "O king! Did you not sign an interdict, that any man who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered, "The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked." Then they answered before the king, "That Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no heed to you, O king, or the interdict you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day."

Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed, and set his mind to deliver Daniel; and he laboured till the sun went down to rescue him. Then these men came by agreement to the king, and said to the king, "Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no interdict or ordinance which the king establishes can be changed."

Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" And a stone was brought and laid upon the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace, and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him.

Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. When he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish and said to Daniel, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able

to deliver you from the lions?” Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live for ever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not hurt me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no wrong.” Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of hurt was found upon him, because he had trusted in his God. And the king commanded, and those men who had accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions – they, their children, and their wives; and before they reached the bottom of the den the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.

Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: “Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring for ever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues, he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.”

So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON DANIEL BY ST HIPPOLYTUS

When Daniel became acquainted with the decree he sensed that there was a plot against him, but he was not afraid; he did not yield to fright, for he was ready to become the prey of beasts rather than submit to the decree of the king. He recalled the example of the three young men. Because they had refused to adore the statue of the king, they were saved from the fiery furnace. Having returned home, Daniel knelt in prayer in the upper chamber three times a day, with the windows open toward Jerusalem, as was his custom.

Let us contemplate the piety of blessed Daniel. Although he seemed to have much work to do for the king, he continued to be faithful to daily prayer, rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God what belongs to God.

Someone might object: Was it not possible for him to pray to God in the intimacy of his heart during the day, and then, during the night, remain secretly recollected in his home as he desired, and without endangering himself? Of course, he could have acted in that way, but he did not want that kind of conduct. For in such a case, the supervisors and the satraps might have said: What is the value of the fear of God, since he is afraid of the king’s edict and is submissive to his commands? And they would have been ready to accuse him of infidelity. Here we have the work of hypocrisy; but faith and the fear of God do not operate in that way. Hence, Daniel did not give his adversaries any ‘pretext’ for de-traction, for whoever submits to a man is that man’s slave.

That is why the blessed Daniel, who had preferred the fear of God and delivered himself to death, was saved from the lions by the angel. If he had taken the edict into consideration and had remained quiet for thirty days, his faith would not have preserved its purity. No one can serve two masters. The wily devil exercises his wits to

persecute, oppress, bring down the saints, and prevent them from raising their holy hands to God in their prayers.

The devil knows well that the prayer of the saints gives peace to the world and brings chastisements to the wicked, which makes us recall that when Moses in the desert raised his hands, Israel overcame, and when he lowered them, it was Amalek who had the upper hand. This still takes place for us today. When we stop praying, the adversary is victorious over us; and when we cling to prayer, the power and energy of the Evil One are fruitless.

How powerful are those who trust more in God than in men! Men extinguish all hope and deliver us to death, but God will not abandon his servants. That is why the psalmist teaches that it is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to trust in princes.

St Hippolytus of Rome, Comm. in Dan. III, 21-30 (SC 14:242-258); Word in Season VIII.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET DANIEL

(Vision of the ram and the he-goat; victories and ruin of the Greeks' kingdom: Daniel 8:1-26)

In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared to me, Daniel, after that which appeared to me at the first. And I saw in the vision; and when I saw, I was in Susa the capital, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in the vision, and I was at the river Ulai. I raised my eyes and saw, and behold, a ram standing on the bank of the river. It had two horns; and both horns were high, but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. I saw the ram charging westward and northward and southward; no beast could stand before him, and there was no one who could rescue from his power; he did as he pleased and magnified himself.

As I was considering, behold, a he-goat came from the west across the face of the whole earth, without touching the ground; and the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. He came to the ram with the two horns, which I had seen standing on the bank of the river, and he ran at him in his mighty wrath. I saw him come close to the ram, and he was enraged against him and struck the ram and broke his two horns; and the ram had no power to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled upon him; and there was no one who could rescue the ram from his power. Then the he-goat magnified himself exceedingly; but when he was strong, the great horn was broken, and instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven.

Out of one of them came forth a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. It grew great, even to the host of heaven; and some of the host of the stars it cast down to the ground, and trampled upon them. It magnified itself, even up to the Prince of the host; and the continual burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown. And the host was given over to it together with the continual burnt offering through transgression; and truth was cast down to the ground, and the horn acted and prospered. Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to the one that spoke, "For how long is the vision concerning the continual burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled under foot?" And he said to him, "For two thousand and three hundred evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state."

When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it; and behold, there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision." So he came near where I stood; and when he came, I was frightened and fell upon my face. But he said to me, "Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end."

As he was speaking to me, I fell into a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me and set me on my feet. He said, "Behold, I will make known to you what shall be at the latter end of the indignation; for it pertains to the appointed time of the end. As for the ram which you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia.

And the he-goat is the king of Greece; and the great horn between his eyes is the first king. As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power. And at the latter end of their rule, when the transgressors have reached their full measure, a king of bold countenance, one who understands riddles, shall arise. His power shall be great, and he shall cause fearful destruction, and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men and the people of the saints. By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall magnify himself. Without warning he shall destroy many; and he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes; but, by no human hand, he shall be broken. The vision of the evenings and the mornings which has been told is true; but seal up the vision, for it pertains to many days hence.”

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON DANIEL BY ST HIPPOLYTUS

All that Daniel had recounted in his first vision, he wished to describe a second time at length for the edification of believers. The ram that butted against the sea, and toward the north and the south, is Darius, the king of Persia, who was victorious over all the nations, for Daniel tells us: No beast could withstand it. The he-goat that came from the West is Alexander of Macedonia, the king of the Greeks. The he-goat approached the ram and struck its face. It crushed the ram, cast it down to earth and trampled on it. This means – and this truly happened – that after battling with Darius, Alexander overcame him, became the master of all Darius’ might, destroyed his army, and trampled it under foot.

Afterward, when the he-goat had risen, its great horn was shattered and in its place came up four others, facing the four winds of heaven. We know, in fact, that Alexander, after becoming the master and lord of all Persia, died after he had divided his empire into four principalities namely, those of Seleucus, De-metrius, Ptolemy, and Philip.

Out of one of them came a little horn which kept growing as far as the host of heaven. It removed the daily sacrifice. It cast truth to the ground. We find that indeed the race of Alexander gave birth to king Antiochus, surnamed Epiphanius, who reigned over Syria and subjected the whole army of Egypt to his power. Then he went up against Jerusalem, invaded the sanctuary and took away the treasures of the house and the golden candlestick, the table and the altar of sacrifices.

He massacred many in the land and uttered words of extreme pride. He prohibited sacrifice and oblation and constructed sacred shrines and idolatrous temples throughout the city. Pigs and unclean animals were immolated, thus accomplishing the words of the Prophet that because of him the sacrifice would be interrupted and the sanctuary and the army trampled underfoot until one evening and one morning: a thousand and three hundred days.

It is a historical fact also that during all that time, that is during three-and-a-half years, the sanctuary was abandoned. This makes a thousand and three hundred days until the appearance of Judas Maccabeus. After the death of his father, Judas rebelled against

Antiochus, destroyed his armies, delivered the city, restored the sacred ceremonies, and renewed them by having all things done in accordance with the law.

All this, therefore, has been properly fulfilled according to Scripture.

St Hippolytus of Rome, Comm in Dan. IV, 26-27 (SC 14:316, 317); Word in Season VIII.

Thursday of the Thirty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE PROPHET DANIEL

(Daniel's prayer in persecution: Daniel 9:1-4, 18-27)

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by birth a Mede, who became king over the realm of the Chaldeans – in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years which, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.

Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and supplications with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, “O Lord, the great and terrible God, who keepest covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, O my God, incline thy ear and hear; open thy eyes and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name; for we do not present our supplications before thee on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of thy great mercy. O LORD, hear; O LORD, forgive; O LORD, give heed and act; delay not, for thy own sake, O my God, because thy city and thy people are called by thy name.”

While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God; while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. He came and he said to me, “O Daniel, I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding. At the beginning of your supplications a word went forth, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly beloved; therefore consider the word and understand the vision.

“Seventy weeks of years are decreed concerning your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. Know therefore and understand that from the going forth of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off, and shall have nothing; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war; desolations are decreed. And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week; and for half of the week he shall cause sacrifice and offering to cease; and upon the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

A READING FROM THE COMMENTARY ON DANIEL BY ST HIPPOLYTUS

The Holy of Holies is none other than the Son of God, who appeared and declared himself to be the Anointed of the Father, sent into the world, for he said: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor,

to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favour from the Lord.

All who believed in the heavenly Priest were purified by the Priest himself and received remission of their faults. But those who did not believe in him, paid no more attention to him than to any other man, and their sins remained 'sealed'; they were indelible.

That is why Gabriel says: Seal the vision and the Prophet. We must note that fullness of the Law and the Prophets came 'in person' for the Law and the Prophets were in force till John - and for that reason their words had to be sealed in order that at the advent of the Lord everything would appear loosed and the things that were sealed and difficult to know would be known, and that which formerly was fettered would be unfettered from then on.

The Lord himself indicated as much to the princes of the people who were indignant because they saw him perform miracles on the Sabbath and cure all sickness and infirmity. He told them: O you hypocrites! Which of you does not let his ox or ass out of the stall on the Sabbath to water it? Should not this daughter of Abraham here who has been in the bondage of Satan for eighteen years have been released from her shackles on the Sabbath?

The Lord has come to release from the shackles of death all those who had been in the bondage of Satan, to shackle him who against everyone else had been the strong man, and liberate man-kind, according to the words of Isaiah: Saying to the prisoners: Come out! To those in darkness, show yourselves!

Now, all that the Law and the Prophets had said of old to men was something sealed and unknown to them. This is what Isaiah illustrates: When the sealed scroll is handed to one who can read, with the request, 'Read this', he replies, 'I cannot; it is sealed.' It was necessary, then, that everything the prophets had said for the unbelieving Pharisees, who considered themselves to be learned in the law, should be sealed for them but open to believers.

We see, therefore, that everything which was formerly sealed is now open to the saints by the grace of the Lord. For he is the perfect seal, the key of David, who opens, and no one shuts; who shuts, and no one opens. He, then, has taken the book and loosed the seals so that what had been said about him in an obscure way, could now be announced unequivocally from the house-tops. That is why the Angel said to Daniel: Seal up those words, for the vision refers to distant days. But to the Christ it was not said: 'Seal', but: 'Loose what was formerly bound' that his grace might make us know the will of the Father and we may believe in him whom the Father has sent for the salvation of men, Jesus Christ our Lord.

St Hippolytus of Rome, Comm. in Dan. IV, 38-39 (SC 14:340-343); Word in Season VIII.

Friday of the Thirty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE PROPHET DANIEL

(The vision of the man and the appearance of the angel; Daniel 10:1-21)

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a word was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar. And the word was true, and it was a great conflict. And he understood the word and had understanding of the vision.

In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks. On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, that is, the Tigris, I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with gold of Uphaz. His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the noise of a multitude. And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves. So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me; my radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. Then I heard the sound of his words; and when I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in a deep sleep with my face to the ground.

And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. 11 And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly beloved, give heed to the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you." While he was speaking this word to me, I stood up trembling. Then he said to me, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, so I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia and came to make you understand what is to befall your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come."

When he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and was dumb. And behold, one in the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke. I said to him who stood before me, "O my lord, by reason of the vision pains have come upon me, and I retain no strength. How can my lord's servant talk with my lord? For now no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me."

Again one having the appearance of a man touched me and strengthened me. And he said, "O man greatly beloved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage." And when he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me." Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I am through with him, lo, the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince."

A READING FROM THE CONFERENCES OF ST JOHN CASSIAN

It is very clear that the evil spirits desire the onslaughts by which they attack men, even when these set them against one another. For, in similar fashion, they do not cease to incite discord and conflict on behalf of some peoples that they have befriended because of a kind of mutual wickedness. We see this very plainly depicted in the vision of the Prophet Daniel, when the angel Gabriel speaks as follows: Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day when you set your heart to understand that you should afflict yourself in the sight of your God your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. But the prince of the kingdom of the Persians resisted me for twenty-one days. And behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to my help, and I remained there next to the king of the Persians. But I have come to teach you what will befall your people in the last days.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the prince of the kingdom of the Persians was the adversary power that defended the Persian nation, which was hostile to the people of God. And he stood in the way of the benefit that he saw the archangel was going to procure in response to the request that the Prophet had made of the Lord. He was envious lest the angel's consolation come to Daniel too quickly and lest he comfort the people of God who were protected by the archangel Gabriel. The latter said that he would have been unable to come to him even then because of the vehemence of his onslaught were it not that the archangel Michael helped him by resisting the prince of the kingdom of the Persians.

And shortly afterward it says: The angel said: Do you know why I came to you? And now I will return to fight against the prince of the Persians. For when I went out, the prince of the Greeks appeared coming. But I shall tell you what is set down in the writings of truth, and no one is my helper in all these things but Michael your prince. And again: At that time Michael, the great prince, who stands for the children of your people, shall arise. We read, then, that there is another who is called the prince of the Greeks, and he favoured the people subject to him while seeming to be opposed both to the people of Israel and to the nation of the Persians.

Hence it is quite clear that the discords and conflicts and animosity of peoples, which the adversary powers promote among themselves by these provocations, are also carried on against themselves. They either rejoice in their clients' victory or are tormented by their defeat, and therefore they cannot be at peace among themselves as long as one of them is constantly struggling with aggressive rivalry against the leader of another people on behalf of those over whom he himself is set.

St John Cassian, Conferences, 8.13.1-3; ACW 57 (1997) tr. Ramsey.

Saturday of the Thirty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

A READING FROM THE PROPHET DANIEL

(The prophecy of the Last Day and of the Resurrection: Daniel 12:1-13)

“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time; but at that time your people shall be delivered, every one whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.”

Then I Daniel looked, and behold, two others stood, one on this bank of the stream and one on that bank of the stream. And I said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream, “How long shall it be till the end of these wonders?” The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream, raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven; and I heard him swear by him who lives for ever that it would be for a time, two times, and half a time; and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be accomplished. I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, “O my lord, what shall be the issue of these things?” He said, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. Many shall purify themselves, and make themselves white, and be refined; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand; but those who are wise shall understand. And from the time that the continual burnt offering is taken away, and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he who waits and comes to the thousand three hundred and thirty-five days. But go your way till the end; and you shall rest, and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.”

A READING FROM A SERMON BY ST JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

Our present state is precious as revealing to us, amid shadows and figures, the existence and attributes of Almighty God and his elect people: it is precious, because it enables us to hold intercourse with immortal souls who are on their trial as we are. It is momentous, as being the scene and means of our trial; but beyond this it has no claims upon us. Vanity of vanities, says the preacher, all is vanity. We may be poor or rich, young or old, honoured or slighted, and it ought to affect us no more, neither to elate us nor depress us, than if we were actors in a play, who know that the characters they represent are not their own, and that though they may appear to be superior one to another, to be kings or to be peasants, they are in reality all on a level. The one desire which should move us should be, first of all, that of seeing him face to face, who is now hid from us; and next of enjoying eternal and direct communion, in and through him,

with our friends around us, whom at present we know only through the medium of sense, by precarious and partial channels, which give us little insight into their hearts.

These are suitable feelings toward this attractive but deceitful world. What have we to do with its gifts and honours, who, having been already baptized into the world to come, are no longer citizens of this? Why should we be anxious for a long life, or wealth, or credit, or comfort, who know that the next world will be every-thing which our hearts can wish, and that not in appearance only, but truly and everlastingly? Why should we rest in this world, when it is the token and promise of another? Why should we be content with its surface, instead of appropriating what is stored beneath it?

To those who live by faith, everything they see speaks of that future world; the very glories of nature, the sun, moon, and stars, and the richness and the beauty of the earth, are as types and figures witnessing and teaching the invisible things of God. All that we see is destined one day to burst forth into a heavenly bloom, and to be transfigured into immortal glory. Heaven at present is out of sight, but in due time, as snow melts and discovers what it lay upon, so will this visible creation fade away before those greater splendours which are behind it, and on which at present it depends. In that day shadows will retire, and the substance show itself. The sun will grow pale and be lost in the sky, but it will be before the radiance of him whom it does but image, the Sun of Righteousness, with healing on his wings, who will come forth in visible form, as a bridegroom out of his chamber, while his perish-able type decays. The stars which surround it will be replaced by saints and angels circling his throne. Above and below, the cloud of the air, the trees of the field, the waters of the great deep will be found impregnated with the forms of everlasting spirits, the ser-vants of God which do his pleasure. And our own mortal bodies will then be found in like manner to contain within them an inner man, which will then receive its due proportions, as the soul's harmonious organ, instead of that gross mass of flesh and blood which sight and touch are sensible of. For this glorious manifesta-tion the whole creation is at present in travail, earnestly desiring that it may be accomplished in its season.

These are thoughts to make us eagerly and devoutly say, 'Come, Lord Jesus, to end the time of waiting, of darkness, of turbulence, of disputing, of sorrow, of care.'

St John Henry Newman, Parochial & Plain Sermons, IV, 222-224; Word in Season VIII.