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Could You Not Spend One Hour With Me? MT XXVI – 40

Inspiration

Who has a stronger conflict than he who strives to overcome himself?

Thomas a Kempis

Begin What We Hope to be Forever

Useless reflections upon ourselves and upon exterior things occasion us to lose much time, many graces and much merit. Did we but endeavor to substitute a respectful remembrance of God, in place of a vain and hurtful attention to ourselves and to creatures, we should be always well employed. To consider God as within us, and ourselves as existing in God: to live under the eye of Jesus Christ by means of recollection, in His hands by resignation, and at His feet by humility and a sincere acknowledgement of our miseries, is to live really as Christians; for we can only be such in proportion as we are devoted to Jesus Christ. Why then are we so much and so frequently attracted by news, curiosities, and vanity, and so little interested with God, our duties and our salvation? It is because we are indifferent to the things of eternity, and too much attached to those which pass away with time. Let us, therefore begin to be now what we hope to be forever—occupied only with God, in God and for God.

Bishop Richard Challoner

St. John the Baptist – St. Augustine’s Profound Insight

The Church observes the birth of John as a hallowed event. We have no such commemoration for any other fathers; but it is significant that we celebrate the birthdays of John and Jesus. This day cannot be passed by. And even if my explanation does not match the dignity of the feast, you may still meditate on it with great depth and profit.

John was born of a woman too old for childbirth; Christ was born of a youthful virgin. The news of John’s birth was met with incredulity, and his father was struck dumb. Christ’s birth was believed, and he was conceived through faith.

Such is the topic, as I have presented it, for our inquiry and discussion. But as I said before, if I lack either the time or the ability to study the implications of so profound a mystery, he who speaks within you even when I am not here will teach you better; it is he whom you contemplate with devotion, whom you have welcomed into your hearts, whose temples you have become.

John then appears as the boundary between the two testaments, the old and the new. That he is a sort of boundary the Lord himself bears witness, when he speaks of *the law and the prophets up until John the Baptist*. Thus he represents times past and is the herald of the new era to come. As a representative of the past he is born of aged parents; as a herald of the new era, he is declared to be a prophet while still in his mother's womb. For when yet unborn, he leapt in his mother's womb at the arrival of the blessed Mary. In that womb he had already been designated a prophet, even before he was born; it was revealed that he was to be Christ's precursor, before they ever saw one another. These are divine happenings, going beyond the limits of our human frailty. Eventually he is born, he receives a name, his father's tongue is loosened. See how these events reflect reality.

Zechariah is silent and loses his voice until John, the precursor of the Lord, is born and restores his voice. The silence of Zechariah is nothing but the age of prophecy lying hidden, obscured, as it were, and concealed before the preaching of Christ. At John's arrival Zechariah's voice is released, and it becomes clear at the coming of the one who was foretold. The release of Zechariah's voice at the birth of John is a parallel to the rending of the veil at Christ's crucifixion. If John were announcing his own coming, Zechariah's lips would not have been opened. The tongue is loosened because a voice is born. For when John was preaching the Lord's coming he was asked: *Who are you?* And he replied: *I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness*. The voice is John, but the Lord *in the beginning was the Word*. John was a voice that lasted only for a time; Christ, the Word in the beginning, is eternal. (1)

Joachim and Ann: How Blessed a Couple

St. John Damascene, bishop d. 749

Ann was to be the mother of the Virgin Mother of God, and hence nature did not dare to anticipate the flowering of grace. Thus nature remained sterile, until grace produced its fruit. For she who was to be born had to be a first-born daughter, since she would be the mother of the first-born of all creation, *in whom all things are held together*.

Joachim and Ann, how blessed a couple! All creation is indebted to you. For at your hands the Creator was offered a gift excelling all other gifts: a chaste mother, who alone was worthy of him.

And so rejoice, Ann, that *you were sterile and have not borne children; break forth into shouts, you who have not given birth*. Rejoice, Joachim, because from your daughter *a child is born for us, a son is given us, whose name is Messenger of great counsel and universal salvation, mighty God*. For this child is God.

Joachim and Ann, how blessed and spotless a couple! You will be known by the fruit you have borne, as the Lord says: *By their fruits you will know them*. The conduct of your life pleased God and was worthy of your daughter. For by the chaste and holy life you led together, you have fashioned a jewel of virginity: she who remained a virgin before, during and after giving birth. She alone for all time would maintain her virginity in mind and soul as well as in body.

Joachim and Ann, how chaste a couple! While safe guarding the chastity prescribed by the law of nature, you achieved with God's help something which transcends nature in giving the world the Virgin Mother of God as your daughter. While leading devout and holy lives in your human nature, you gave birth to a daughter nobler than angels, whose queen she now is. Girl of utter beauty and delight, daughter of Adam and mother of God, blessed the loins and blessed the womb from which you come! Blessed the arms that carried you and blessed your parents' lips, which you were allowed to cover with chaste kisses, ever maintaining your virginity. *Rejoice in God, all the earth. Sing, exult and sing hymns.* Raise your voice, raise it and be not afraid.

On the love of Christ

St. Alphonsus Liguori, bishop, d. 1787

All holiness and perfection of soul lies in our love for Jesus Christ our God, who is our Redeemer and our supreme good. It is part of the love of God to acquire and to nurture all the virtues which make a man perfect.

Has not God in fact won for himself a claim on all our love? From all eternity he has loved us. And it is in this vein that he speaks to us: "O man consider carefully that I first loved you. You had not yet appeared in the light of day, nor did the world yet exist, but already I loved you. From all eternity I have loved you."

Since God knew that man is enticed by favors, he wished to bind him to his love by means of his gifts: "I want to catch men with the snare, those chains of love in which they allow themselves to be entrapped, so that they will love me." And all the gifts which he bestowed on man were given to this end. He gave him a soul, made in his likeness, and endowed with memory, intellect and will; he gave him a body equipped with sense; it was for him that he created heaven and earth and such an abundance of things. He made all these things out of love for man, so that all creation might serve man, and man in turn might love God out of gratitude for so many gifts.

But he did not wish to give us only beautiful creatures; the truth is that to win for himself our love, he went so far as to bestow upon us the fullness of himself. The eternal Father went so far as to give us his only Son. When he saw that we were all dead through sin and deprived of his grace, what did he do? Compelled, as the Apostle says, by the superabundance of his love for us, he sent his beloved Son to make reparation for us and to call us back to a sinless life.

By giving us his Son, whom he did not spare precisely so that he might spare us, he bestowed on us at once every good: grace, love and heaven; for all these goods are certainly inferior to the Son: *He who did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for all of us; how could he fail to give us along with his Son all good things?*

Adoration in Spirit and Truth

Father, because Jesus, your servant, became obedient even unto death, his sacrifice was greater than all the holocausts of old. Accept the sacrifice of praise we offer you through him, and may we show the effects of it in our lives by striving to do your will until our whole life becomes adoration in spirit and truth. (2)

The Two Standards

Servant of God, Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J., conference. (3)

One the most remarkable features of the Gospels are the number of exorcisms performed by the Savior. The Fathers of the Church explained these exorcisms in telling us why. For the coming of Christ, the devils saw that their power over the world was being broken and they reacted in dramatic, shall I say, in demonic self-defense. In our day there is extraordinary attention given to the devil. He must be extraordinarily active. One reason, told me by my friend, the chief exorcist of Rome, is that people preoccupied with worldly pursuits are an easy prey to the prince of this world. Satanism is widespread, I never thought I'd have to say this, but say it I must, Satanism has penetrated the Catholic Church and even, may God have mercy on them, religious communities. We close part one of our meditation by reflecting on the contrast between the Church militant and what the early Fathers of the Church call the mystical body of Satan. There are two mystical bodies, one of Christ and one of Satan. The devil, the devil is highly organized and unless the followers of Christ are correspondingly, deeply motivated, strongly organized and zealous, profoundly, heroically zealous, they are no match for the followers of the evil spirit.

St. Ignatius calls this the Two Standards. Basic to a correct understanding of the spiritual life in every state of life is the fact that the following of Christ is a social venture. Let me repeat, the following of Christ is a social enterprise. We must go beyond the desire for our own sanctification to cooperate with Christ in propagating His doctrine among all men throughout the world. Togetherness is of the essence of our faith. Equally basic is the corresponding fact that the evil spirit is active in his propagation of his doctrine and he has a doctrine among all men throughout the world. Remember the parable of the sower who sowed good seed during the day, and then sometime later weeds began to grow. Sown in the same field by an enemy. There are two sowers sowing their seed in the hearts and minds of men, one sower is Jesus Christ, the other is Lucifer. And let me tell you, this is not pious rhetoric or mere devotion. This is bedrock Christianity. The focus of our concentration here is to compare the method used by Christ in organizing His followers with a corresponding and competitive method of Satan in mobilizing his agents. Or as St. Ignatius calls them, the Two Standards are commonly associated with the Spiritual Exercises. They are really part of Divine Revelation and essential to every believer's Christian spirituality. Not to know what I want to share with you, is to be sheer ignorant, blind, to what is going on in the world today.

The standard of Satan

Let me first quote from St. Ignatius, "The chief of all the enemy summons innumerable demons and scatters them. Some to one city and some to another throughout the whole world, so that no province, no place, no state of life, no individual is overlooked. He goes around to lay snares for men to seek to chain them. First they are to tempt them to covet riches, as Satan himself is accustomed to do in most cases, that they more easily obtain the empty honors of this world and then come to overweening pride. The first step then, will be riches, the second;

honor, the third; pride, from these three steps the one leads to all other vices”, unquote St. Ignatius.

Now some explanation, the devil’s strategy is to get people to become attached to earthly things. He urges them to, well, acquire say material wealth, which is the cheapest kind of riches, or acquire education. Ah, dear Lord, how clever the devil is. Or acquire mastery in the use of their emotions, or cultivate gifts in the social order, or, would you believe it, the devil will even tempt people to acquire spiritual riches. Forty-seven years in the priesthood, as I keep telling people, have taught me an awful lot. Twenty-five years of teaching the most highly intellectual people that the Church can gather, members of the Society of Jesus, oh how hungry men can be for knowledge. But whatever the possession, whether as cheap a thing as money, or special things say as, secular knowledge or even spiritual wisdom, the beginning is to become wealthy and thus to attain to recognition, praise, honor. How well I know, I’ve lived with too many people, too many highly gifted individuals, who have fallen like cheap tinder because they’ve allowed themselves to be beguiled by the evil spirit. Attachment to the things of this world gradually makes a person, not only satisfied with what he or she possesses, but hungry for acceptance, recognition, praise, and honor. And once, as Ignatius says, once a person becomes a victim of empty honors, then pride follows as a matter of course. I’ve struggled with too many multi-millionaires not to know how weak these wealthy people can be if they allow their attachment to the things of this world to bewitch them, and as a consequence make them an easy prey by making them proud. Because once a person falls into pride, there is no limit to that person’s malice. Proud people are the agents of the devil. He uses them to seduce others. In fact, he uses them to work with him, and under his demonic power he organizes proud people into what some of the Fathers of the Church, as I have said, call a distinct power, call it the mystical body of satan. By whatever name, it is mastered by the father of lies. And God allows the demons to exercise superhuman power over those who allow themselves to be victimized.

The Standard of Christ

In the words of St. Ignatius, I quote, “Christ our Lord, the Lord of all the world, chooses so many persons, apostles, disciples and sends them throughout the whole world to spread His Sacred doctrine among all men. No matter what their state or condition may be, the address which Christ our Lord makes to His servants, whom He sends on this enterprise, is to urge them to seek to help everyone. First, by attracting them to the highest spiritual poverty and should it please the Divine Majesty and should He deign to choose them, even to actual poverty. Secondly, by encouraging them to desire insults and contempt, for from these two things comes humility. So then, there are three steps. The first poverty, opposed to riches, the second scorn or contempt, opposed to worldly honor, the third humility, opposed to pride. From these three steps Christ leads them to all virtues”, unquote St. Ignatius. We now have the contrast and what a contrast this is. Christ’s strategy is the direct opposite of Satan’s. It begins by inspiring His followers and future apostles in every age, in every state of life to practice the first beatitude, ‘blessed are the poor in spirit’, detachment of heart from earthly possessions. And even, if it is God’s will, attracting them to dispossession. In all my years in the priesthood I don’t go to theological analysis when I invite people to work in the apostolate, but behind every invitation is the principle behind the Two Standards.

The first condition is that the person who wants to serve Christ in winning souls for His Divine Majesty is himself, at least internally, detached from everything and I mean everything, and I mean everything, in this world, money is the most obvious but not only. This is so fundamental in the apostolate that in two thousand years, what am I saying, I mean it, in two thousand years there have been no exceptions, the only persons that Jesus Christ uses to spread His gospel are the people detached from the things of this world. And nobody cheats. You cannot play both sides. You cannot love, as Christ tells us, both God and mammon. Then Christ inspires His followers just the opposite of the devil's instigation. And those are the two words I always use theologically, instigation by the devil, inspiration by Christ. Christ inspires His followers to actually desire, of course, of course, under the influence of grace, to be scorned or contempted. I know whereof I speak. I made the Spiritual Exercises for the first time at the ripe old age of twenty-two. I have not had to change one syllable ever since. You must want, I mean it, you must want, and I quote Ignatius, "to be scorned, despised, ignored, rejected." That doesn't mean you go around behaving as somebody who is well, out of his mind. But, for the world, and I mean that in the most generic sense possible, for the world anyone who follows Christ faithfully is out of his mind, do you hear me. And in the world's estimate we are only as out of our mind as we are faithful in the following of Christ. And having, God knew I didn't know then, having done my own graduate studies and got my degree in psychology, having read, because, well I had to, volumes of Sigmund Freud. One of his favorite definitions of a psychotic, "a psychotic is anyone who believes that he will be rewarded after death for the good that he has done here on earth", unquote Sigmund Freud. Pardon me ladies and gentlemen, my dear fellow psychotics. In other words, presumed behind all that we are saying is that sincerely to imitate Jesus Christ is to be considered, well, not just unworldly, but irrational. And the best we can do is, well, hide or protect or mask what the world calls our irrationality, quite an art. I give a whole course on that subject.

Some explanation of Christ's call

What this means to all of us who wish to follow the Savior, and mind you not merely follow Him individually, but follow Him as one who wants to bring others, through us, to follow Him. We must look around or search for rejection or dishonor. Do we to have to look around? No. They will come unbidden, unsolicited. My five-year tenure at a state university taught me a lot, including what I'm sharing here. And the key element here is the disposition of will, which is ready to endure. Let me go through the litany, scorn or contempt even, in the faithful following of Christ, but mind you, in the faithful following of Christ the Leader, the One who is inviting the whole human race to follow Him. The net result, on our part of sincere detachment from creatures and corresponding attachment to Jesus Christ who Himself was scorned and condemned is deep, deep, deep humility. And a perfect synonym for this deep humility is interior humility, inside humility, in the mind and will. Humble people and only humble people are used by Christ to propagate His message of salvation to the world. Let me repeat. Only humble people are used by Jesus Christ to propagate His message of salvation to the world. And Christ knows who is humble and who isn't. But don't you dare for a moment suspect that humble people are, well, stupid people or that humble people are weak people. Oh, no. Humble people can be extraordinarily gifted people.

Ah, and the more gifted they are, the more God will use them. Provided, that's the proviso, provided they are really, sincerely, profoundly, interiorly humble. This now brings us to part three of our meditation.

How to overcome the devil

I thought it was worth quoting at some length from St. Peter's first letter where he talks about the evil spirit. See here we are, we now are asking how concretely and specifically we are to overcome the evil spirit. Here is Peter's statement, a little long but worth quoting. "All of you practice humility towards one another, for God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in the time of visitation. Cast all your anxiety upon Him because He cares for you. Be calm, be vigilant, because your enemy, the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same suffering befalls your brethren all over the world." 1 Peter 5:5-9

At the Altar

Fr. George W. Rutler (4)

At the altar, all who have been baptized into Christ offer their souls and bodies, still in the tokens of earthly imperfection but admitted to holy communion by divine forgiveness. The Apostle teaches that the attempt to enter this communion unforgiven, on our own, must go wrong by the very nature of things. To eat and drink Perfection in sin is to eat and drink an enigma instead of a mystery. Christ is sacrificed forgiving; the Christian offers sacrifice having been forgiven. Now the sacrifice offered in the Mass is the sacrifice of Christ himself, perfectly offered on a Friday in the Middle East once and for all. It does not have to be repeated and cannot be repeated; but it can be entered into. Christ reigns now outside the confines of time and space and the Sacrifice of the Mass is his sacrifice once offered, always offered. The first true sacrifice is offered because it is the last sacrifice that will be received. When he was on the cross he was at every true altar, and at every true altar the priest is on the cross. Were there only one other human, had you been the only soul since Adam, Christ would have hung crucified for you. These are your hours as well as his. The Mass lifts us up to him and brings him down to us.

One has read of some churches where the altar rails have been taken away. Well, some people do redecorate from time to time, but let us be careful whose house we redecorate. An expert said that removing the rails would emphasize the Mass as a meal. The Mass is indeed a meal. It was bequeathed at the Last Supper. But it became the Last Supper when it began the First Sacrifice. A nation that consumes more food than half the population of the world does not have to be reminded of supper; but it does have to be reminded of sacrifice.

ENDS

Fr. George W. Rutler (5)

There are two kinds of ends. A terminus: when a film is over the screen says The End. The other is a purpose. Therefore there are two kinds of lives. The life that ends, and the life that has an end. The greatest sorrow in the world is in the soul that knows it must end and does not know that it has an end. The heraldic motto embroidered on the throne of Mary, Queen of Scots, seemed cryptic to some: "In my end is my beginning."

The Old Man

Thomas a Kempis (6)

The wise of this world and the admirers of the flesh are mistaken in their wisdom; because in the world is much vanity, and following the flesh leads to death. (*Rom.8:6*).

But they that follow Thee by despising the things of this world, and mortifying the flesh, are found to be wise indeed, for they are translated from vanity to truth, from the flesh to the spirit.

Such as these have a relish of God, and what good soever is found in creatures they offer to the praise of their Maker.

But great, yea very great, is the difference between the relish of the Creator and the creature, of eternity and of time, of light uncreated and of light enlightened.

O Light eternal! transcending all created lights, dart forth Thy light from above, which may penetrate the most inward parts of my heart.

Cleanse, gladden, enlighten, and quicken my spirit with its powers, that I may be absorbed in Thee with ecstasies of joy.

Oh, when will this blessed and desirable hour come when Thou shalt fill me with Thy presence and become to me all in all (*1 Cor. 15:28*)

As long as this is not granted to me my joy will not be full.

Alas! The old man is still living in me; he is not wholly crucified; he is not perfectly dead. (*Rom. 6:6*)

He still lusts strongly against the spirit; he wages war within me, and suffers not the kingdom of my soul to be quiet. (*Ga. 5:17*)

How can parishes best support their seminarians?

Answer: Mrs. Carol Behna, mother of Deacon Max Behna, Diocese of Joliet

Adoration chapels are huge in the life of a seminarian. Support yours if your parish has one and, if not, try to start one. Pray for and encourage not only them but your parish priests. The priests and seminarians would be the first to remind us that they are not saints and they need our daily prayers to survive.

From: "My Son, The Seminarian" an interview in *Christ is our Hope* magazine of the Diocese of Joliet, May 2017. The entire article and magazine may be accessed at: DIOCESEOFJOLIET.ORG

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- 1) *The Liturgy of the Hours, III*, Office of Readings, Birth of John The Baptist, pp. 1487-1489, New York, 1975, Catholic Book Publishing Corp.
 - 2) *The Liturgy of the Hours, III*, Office of Readings, Week IV, p. 1217, Psalm-prayer, New York, 1975, Catholic Book Publishing Corp.
 - 3) John A. Hardon, conference: http://www.therealpresence.org/archives/Christian_Morality/Christian_Morality_003.htm. Note: there is much more to this Conference at the above site and we highly recommend reading it and surveying this excellent repository of Father's works. While serving as its spiritual director, Fr. Hardon gave the Holy Eucharist Apostolate permission to quote from any of his works.
 - 4) George W. Rutler, *Adam Danced*, pp.44-45, Front Royal, VA, 1989, Christendom Press. With permission of Fr. Rutler.
 - 5) George W. Rutler, *Adam Danced*, p. 42, Front Royal, VA, 1989, Christendom Press. With permission of Fr. Rutler
 - 6) Thomas a Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, Book III, Chapter 33, Rockford, IL ,1989, TAN Books.