

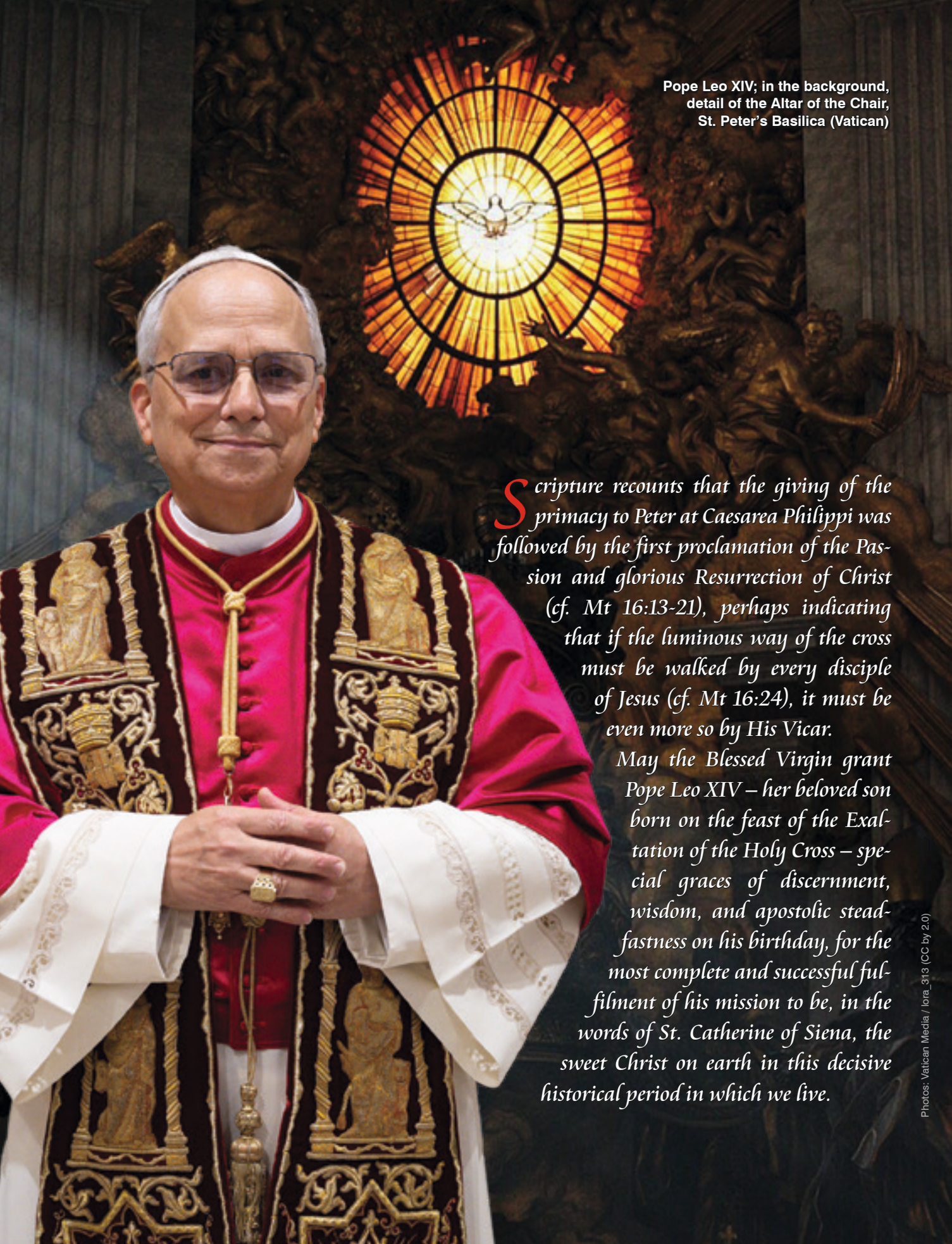


HERALDS OF THE GOSPEL

Nº 215 - September 2025



“Search the Scriptures”

A portrait of Pope Leo XIV, an elderly man with glasses, wearing a white zucchetto and a red cassock with a dark, ornate stole. He is standing in front of a large, circular stained glass window featuring a sunburst design with a dove in the center. The background is dark and textured.

Pope Leo XIV; in the background,
detail of the Altar of the Chair,
St. Peter's Basilica (Vatican)

Scripture recounts that the giving of the primacy to Peter at Caesarea Philippi was followed by the first proclamation of the Passion and glorious Resurrection of Christ (cf. Mt 16:13-21), perhaps indicating that if the luminous way of the cross must be walked by every disciple of Jesus (cf. Mt 16:24), it must be even more so by His Vicar.

May the Blessed Virgin grant Pope Leo XIV – her beloved son born on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross – special graces of discernment, wisdom, and apostolic steadfastness on his birthday, for the most complete and successful fulfillment of his mission to be, in the words of St. Catherine of Siena, the sweet Christ on earth in this decisive historical period in which we live.

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Editor:

Mario Luiz Valerio Kühl

Editorial Board:

Severiano Antonio de Oliveira;
Silvia Gabriela Panez;
Marcos Aurelio Chacaliaza C.

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P.O. Box 42359
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United States of America

Phone: 281-676-8526
E-mail: hgmag@heraldsusa.org
www.heraldsusa.org

Virgin of Fatima Association
P. O. Box 698
Nobleton, ON L0G 1N0

Canada

Phone: 1-800-674-3410
www.virginfatima.org
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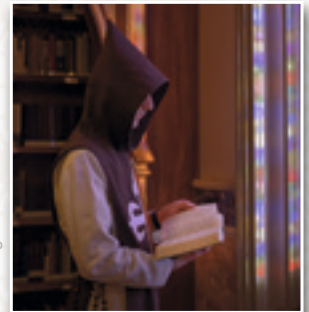
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Send your questions to Fr. Ricardo, by email:
ourreadersask@heralds.org



✠ Fr. Ricardo José Basso, EP

Since I was little, I have always heard that walking under a ladder or sweeping someone's feet brings bad luck, that eating lentils on New Year's brings prosperity, that in order to find a lost object you need to give three little hops for St. Longinus, and other such things. But a friend told me it is wrong to believe this. So I wanted to know if superstition is really a sin.

Maria Aparecida Ferreira – Brazil

Yes, superstition is a sin against the First Commandment of Divine Law, as taught by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (cf. CCC 2110-2111), which also explains that it is a deviation from religious feeling and the practices it imposes, and this deviation can adversely affect the worship we render to the true God.

Indeed, according to St. Thomas Aquinas (cf. *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q.92, a.1), superstition is a vice that opposes, through excess, the moral virtue of religion, by leading people to wrong forms of divine worship or to render it to whom it is not due – that is, to mere creatures – by attrib-

uting to an object or gesture a supernatural power it does not possess. This is the case in the examples cited in your question and in so many other examples we know.

Instead of placing our hope in practices lacking even any rational foundation, let us grow in confidence in God and in the protection of Our Lady, the Angels, and the saints. We Catholics know what is pleasing to our Heavenly Father: avoiding occasions of sin, frequenting the Sacraments, praying...

These are indeed actions that can bring us true happiness on this earth and, above all, eternal glory in Heaven.

Sometimes I arrive late for Sunday Mass and I am always unsure as to whether I have fulfilled the precept or not... Could you please clarify this for me?

Luigi Marino – Ribeirão Preto (Brazil)

We have many obligations in our lives, some easier, others more difficult to fulfil. We also have needs that we tend to meet with joy and satisfaction, such as eating, drinking, going for a walk, sleeping and taking vacations...

Now, what about our weekly encounter with God? This great precept also constitutes an immense need, does it not?

First, it is worth remembering that "On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are obliged to participate in the Mass" (CIC, can. 1247); and that "A person who assists at a Mass celebrated anywhere in a Catholic rite either on the feast day itself or in the evening of the preceding day satisfies the obligation of participating in the Mass" (CIC, can. 1248 § 1).

Regarding arriving late for Mass, moralists have taught since ancient times that fulfilling the precept of attending the entire Mass on Sundays and holy days requires physical presence, from beginning to end.

However, when, through no fault of their own, the faithful arrive late for Mass or even fail to attend, they are not guilty. For example, when the failure is due to a traffic accident, the need to care for a sick person who requires continuous care, or the work legitimately necessary for their livelihood – in short, a motive that is not the result of personal whim, but a serious external factor beyond their control.

For those who wish to conduct a thorough examination of conscience in this regard, the following consideration will be very helpful. When I arrive late for work, my salary will be deducted, and when I produce little, I will receive little; on the other hand, if I am told that at the end of the month I will receive a large bonus if I am perfectly punctual, I will do my utmost to never be late. So, when it is a matter of gaining Heaven, is it worth making every effort to always be punctual or not?



MARY, THE BEST INTERPRETER OF THE WORD OF GOD

The Sacred Scriptures were written by God Himself, through the pens of various authors. In this sense, the Bible bears a certain analogy to the hypostatic union, for, as the latter unites human and divine natures, the pages of the former involve the participation of both.

Now, even united to humanity, Christ possesses only divine personality. Therefore, an infinite distance separates Him from creation, made up of countless degrees of perfection. This gradation also applies to Revelation, whose apex is the Word of God Himself. Given its infinite greatness, it was fitting that at the summit of the “book of creatures” there should be a bridge connecting the Divine Majesty to the rest of humanity. And the name of this blessed bridge is Mary.

Even before the Incarnation of the Word, the Angel announced that the Lord had already united Himself to her. Full of grace, She began to meditate, as a perfect exegete, on the words of God contained in the angelic announcement. Finally, the Paraclete overshadowed her, so that She might conceive the Father’s only Son (cf. Lk 1:28-38). In her, the Word not only revealed Himself, but also became flesh and dwelt among us (cf. Jn 1:14).

Our Lady is also a model for the interpretation of Scripture, owing to her humility – “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord” (Lk 1:38) – for “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (Jas 4:6). By her *fiat*, a new creation was made. Formerly, God had revealed Himself through the prophets; “but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son” (Heb 1:2), born of Mary.

In her visitation to Elizabeth, the Blessed Virgin faithfully follows the Thomistic motto: more perfect than to simply contemplate is to transmit to others what one has contemplated (cf. *Summa Theologiæ*, II-II, q.188, a.6). She became a herald of the Word to her cousin, by whom She was acclaimed with the highest of praise: “Blessed are You among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Lk 1:42).

At the wedding feast at Cana, the Mother of Good Counsel again manifests herself as the one who discerns God’s plans: “Do whatever He tells you” (Jn 2:5). Her *lectio divina* was essentially mystical: “Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19). As a distinguished exegete, She read the mystery of the Cross standing at the foot of it (cf. Jn 19:25), demonstrating her total fidelity to the Word. Finally, at Pentecost, She drew the Holy Spirit like a magnet, so that He would reveal Himself, as always, in *medio Ecclesiæ* – in the heart of the Church.

In short, as a masterpiece of creation, Our Lady is the aqueduct through which flows the source of living water of God’s Revelation. In her, it bears repeating, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. ✠



Sacred Scripture

Photo: Santiago Vieto



How Should the Bible Be Interpreted?

The lack of a hermeneutic of faith with regard to Scripture entails more than a simple absence; in its place there inevitably enters another hermeneutic, a positivistic and secularized hermeneutic ultimately based on the conviction that the Divine does not intervene in human history.

A TOPIC OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE

The interpretation of Sacred Scripture is of paramount importance to the Christian Faith and the life of the Church. “Indeed, in the Sacred Books,” as the Council rightly reminded us, “the Father who is in Heaven lovingly comes to meet His children and converses with them [...]” The way in which biblical texts are interpreted by men and women today has direct consequences for their personal and communal relationship with God, and is also closely linked to the mission of the Church.

ST. JOHN PAUL II.
Speech, 23/4/1993

INTERPRET SCRIPTURE WITH THE SAME SPIRIT WITH WHICH IT WAS WRITTEN

But, since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred 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 ac-

cording 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.

ST. PAUL VI. *Dei Verbum*.
Second Vatican Council, 18/11/1965

DANGERS OF A SECULARIZED HERMENEUTIC

The lack of a hermeneutic of faith with regard to Scripture entails more than a simple absence; in its place there inevitably enters another hermeneutic, a positivistic and secularized hermeneutic ultimately based on the conviction that the Divine does not intervene in human history. According to this hermeneutic, whenever a divine element seems present, it has to be explained in some other way, reducing everything to the human element. This leads to interpretations that deny the historicity of the divine elements. Such a position can only prove harmful to the life of the Church, casting doubt over fundamental mysteries of Christianity and their historicity – as, for example, the institution of the Eucharist and the resurrection of Christ.

BENEDICT XVI.
Verbum Domini, 30/9/2010

BEWARE OF AN EXEGESIS THAT BEGINS WITH THE NEGATION OF GOD

To hear them [the Modernists] talk about their works on the Sacred Books, in which they have been able to discover so much that is defective, one would imagine that before them nobody ever even glanced through the pages of Scripture, whereas the truth is that a whole multitude of Doctors, infinitely superior to them in genius, in erudition, in sanctity, have sifted the Sacred Books in every way [...]

Unfortunately, these great Doctors did not enjoy the same aids to study that are possessed by the Modernists for their guide and rule, – a philosophy borrowed from the negation of God, and a criterion which consists of themselves. We believe, then, that We have set forth with sufficient clearness the historical method of the Modernists. The philosopher leads the way, the historian follows, and then in due order come internal and textual critique. And since it is characteristic of the first cause to communicate its virtue to secondary causes, it is quite clear that the critique We are concerned with is an agnostic, immanentist, and evolutionist critique. Hence whoever embraces it and employs it, thereby professes the errors

contained in it, and places himself in opposition to Catholic doctrine.

ST. PIUS X. *Pascendi Dominici gregis*, 8/7/1907

AN EXPOSITION USEFUL TO THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Let the Catholic exegete undertake the task, of all those imposed on him the greatest, that namely of discovering and expounding the genuine meaning of the Sacred Books. [...] not only to expounding exclusively these matters which belong to the historical, archaeological, philological and other auxiliary sciences – as, to Our regret, is done in certain commentaries – but, having duly referred to these, in so far as they may aid the exegesis, they should set forth in particular the theological doctrine in faith and morals of the individual books or texts so that their exposition may not only aid the professors of theology in their explanations and proofs of the dogmas of faith, but may also be of assistance to priests in their presentation of Christian doctrine to the people, and in fine may help all the faithful to lead a life that is holy and worthy of a Christian.

PIUS XII. *Divino afflante Spiritu*, 30/9/1943

NOT LIMITED TO HUMAN ASPECTS

To respect the coherence of the Church's faith and the inspiration of Scripture, Catholic exegesis must be careful not to limit itself to the human aspects of biblical texts. It must also help Christians to perceive the Word of God more clearly in these texts, so that they may better welcome it and live fully in communion with God.

To this end, it is evidently necessary that the exegete himself perceive the Divine Word in the texts, and this is only possible if his intellectual work is fuelled by an impulse of spiritual life. Without this foundation, exegetical

research remains incomplete; it loses sight of its primary purpose and is limited to secondary tasks.

ST. JOHN PAUL II. *Speech*, 23/4/1993

ECCLESIAL FAITH, CONDITION FOR AUTHENTIC BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Authentic biblical hermeneutics can only be had within the faith of the Church, which has its paradigm in Mary's *fiat*. St. Bonaventure states that without faith there is no key to throw open the sacred text: "This is the knowledge of Jesus Christ, from whom, as from a fountain, flow forth the certainty and the understanding of all sacred Scripture. Therefore it is impossible for anyone to attain to knowledge of that truth unless he first have infused faith in Christ, which is the lamp, the gate and the foundation of all Scripture." And St. Thomas Aquinas, citing St. Augustine, insists that "the letter, even that of the Gospel, would kill, were there not the inward grace of healing faith." Here we can point to a fundamental criterion of biblical hermeneutics: the primary setting for scriptural interpretation is the life of the Church.

BENEDICT XVI. *Verbum Domini*, 30/9/2010

IT IS THE CHURCH'S RIGHT TO JUDGE THE TRUE SENSE OF THE SCRIPTURES

To restrain petulant spirits, [the same sacred Synod] decrees that no one, relying on his own prudence, in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, twisting Holy Scripture to suit his own senses, dare to interpret Holy Scripture itself contrary to that sense which holy mother Church has held and holds, whose right it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, or even contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers.

PAUL III. *Decree on the Vulgate and the mode of interpreting Sacred Scripture*. Council of Trent, 8/4/1546

LAW PROTECTING BIBLICAL SCIENCE FROM ERROR

By this most wise decree the Church by no means prevents or restrains the pursuit of Biblical science, but rather protects it from error, and largely assists its real progress. A wide field is still left open to the private student, in which his hermeneutical skill may display itself with signal effect and to the advantage of the Church.

LEO XIII. *Providentissimus Deus*, 18/11/1893

It is the Church's right to judge the true sense and interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures

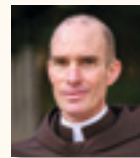
St. Stephen, St. Emeric and St. Gerard Sagredo - Church of Our Lady of the Assumption, Budapest

Francisco Lecaros





Everything Depends on the First Impulse



✠ Fr. Santiago Ignacio Morazzani, EP

*Our Lord
imposes
a tough
condition for
us to be His
disciples:
“Renounce
all”. But...
who has to
make this
renunciation?
Just a few?
Or everyone?*

Let us imagine that ten friends set off on a pilgrimage to a certain Marian shrine located in the mountains. The journey promises to be arduous: seventy kilometres of uphill walking. We ask ourselves: how many of them will reach the finish line? It is quite simple. Those who, when they set off, said with conviction: “I am going all the way.”

Experience shows that spiritual journeys are happily successful when they start from a determined and fervent first impulse. This principle applies above all to God’s call to the priesthood or religious life. The young person who feels the call to give themselves entirely to Christ and the Church, and responds immediately with a “yes” full of enthusiasm and generosity, without considering the possibility of turning back, will certainly make it very far and very high on the hard climb to the shrine of their own vocation.

In this light, let us analyse Our Lord’s announcement, the focal point of this Sunday’s Gospel, that a disciple must “renounce all his possessions” (Lk 14:33). Everything that the conditions of surrender to God may demand. Examples? The lives of the saints. How much St. Therese loved her father, who was old and in poor health! However, she left him to enter Carmel, because grace inspired her to do so: “I felt my heart beating with such violence that it seemed impossible to me to advance [...] however, I advanced while wondering if I was not going to die by the force of the beating of my heart... Ah! what a moment! You have to have been there to know what it is...”¹

A good number of our readers might then ask: “What is the point of this Gospel for me, since I am not going to be a priest or a religious?” Let us

note that Jesus was speaking to “great crowds” (Lk 14:25) who accompanied Him. His words, therefore, apply to all those who claim to be His followers, or in other words, Christians.

“It is beyond doubt,” remarked a great preacher, commenting on this passage, “that Christ’s call to perfect self-denial is addressed to all those who want to follow Him; and He makes it not in terms of a simple invitation, but as a true and rigorous precept. [...] Everyone is obliged, without any exception, to that abnegation of self which is indispensable for the perfect fulfilment of the duties of their own state and condition.”²

Yes, we are all invited to make arduous, even painful renunciations in order to obey Jesus.

And this fidelity is all the more difficult the more “normal” the attitude we have to avoid seems, according to the world’s criteria. It might be when it comes to closing a deal whose terms involve a degree of dishonesty, opening an app on our mobile phone that will tarnish the purity of our eyes, planning our Sunday with the possibility of missing Mass, choosing clothing that will vio-

late the rules of Christian decency...

At moments like these we must ask God for strength! We want to be disciples of Jesus! Let us say a brief prayer to Mary Most Holy – who never abandons those who trust in her – and take the step with determination and generosity, without looking back. ✠



“St. Francis renounces his goods”, by Giotto di Bondone - Basilica of St. Francis, Assisi (Italy)

¹ ST. THERESE OF LISIEUX. *Manuscript A*, 69r.

² ROYO MARÍN, OP, Antonio. *La vida religiosa*. 2.ed. Madrid: BAC, 1968, p.459.

Through the Cross We Reach the Light

✠ Fr. Antonio Jakoš, EP



The historical occasion celebrated by the feast of this Sunday takes us back to the discovery of the true Cross of Christ in Jerusalem by St. Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, in approximately 320, and the consecration, in the same city, of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre on September 13, 335. The following day, the Patriarch of Jerusalem presented the relics for the first time to the solemn adoration of the faithful.

It seems curious that the feast is dedicated to the relic and not to the One who makes it worthy of adoration, Our Lord Jesus Christ. The fact is that, beyond the historical circumstances of its discovery, the Cross became one of the greatest symbols of the Catholic Faith and has been placed atop Church steeples and the most splendid crowns of the kings of Christendom.

What is the deeper reason for this honour?

In the Old Testament, the Lord revealed Himself as the Creator of the universe, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of the burning bush and the plagues of Egypt, the God who exterminated the prophets of Baal at the hands of Elijah. In the New Testament we find the same God, but made Man to save us: Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity incarnate.

The main difference between the two Testaments lies precisely in the suffering endured for love of mankind. The suffering of a humanized God who, unable to touch the hearts of sinners with portentous manifestations, does the unthinkable: He makes Himself contingent and places Himself in the hands of tormentors who, in retribution for the countless miracles worked by Him, despise Him, call Him possessed by demons, hand Him over to the authorities as a malefactor, crown Him with thorns, crucify Him, and pierce Him with a lance... And as a witness to all these outrages remains the Cross, bathed in the Most Precious Blood, marked by the nail holes and the inscription placed on it as

a sign of ignominy: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (Jn 19:19).

When well-accepted, suffering is, as Msgr. João teaches us, a sacramental that sanctifies and saves us: it is the light and gentle weight of Our Lord’s Cross. But there is also another form of suffering: the yoke of Satan.

If we want unhappiness, let us carry our crosses with a spirit of revolt; if we prefer to be happy, let us do so with love and resignation. Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira sums up this dual option with pulchritude: “Do you want to define a man? Ask him if there is a cross at the centre of his life! Ask what cross he carries and how he carries it; the man will be defined. [...] ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt’ (Mt 26:39), Our Lord asked at the beginning of the Passion. At the end, He cried out: ‘My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?’ (Mt 27:46). That is how far His sacrifice went! But then came the glories of the Resurrection! So the Catholic concept of life is clear. It is beautiful to imitate Our Lord Jesus Christ and carry our cross to the end!”¹ ✠

¹ CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Conference*. São Paulo, 6/10/1984.

*The symbol
par excellence
of Christianity
shows us
the value of
suffering for
the conquest
of true glory*



Crucifix of the Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Tocancipá (Colombia)

Juan Tavárez

Magazine archive

Preferential Option for All



✠ Fr. Felipe Ramos, EP

*Did Jesus
have any
preferences
in His
desire that
“everyone
be saved and
to come to
knowledge of
the truth”?*

The parable of the unfaithful steward can cause a certain degree of consternation because of the master’s praise for the cleverness of this bad steward, as well as Jesus’ recommendation that we use dishonest wealth to make friends who will welcome us into eternal dwellings (cf. Lk 16:1-9). How can we understand these commendations?

St. Augustine makes it clear that the master is not praising the fraud itself, but his subordinate’s foresight regarding his future. Indeed, “he was concerned about the life that has an end, and are you not concerned about everlasting life?”¹ The children of light must therefore cultivate a “resolute determination”² in their quest for the heavenly homeland.

Again from an Augustinian perspective, “dishonest wealth” – in Latin, *mamona iniquitatis* – denotes false riches as opposed to authentic ones, which are the treasures of Heaven that neither moth nor rust can destroy (cf. Mt 6:19-20). In this way, Our Lord admonishes the materialistic vision, concerned exclusively with earthly possessions, while at the same time giving His approval for them to be used for a greater good, such as evangelization and the consequent salvation of souls.

Of course, Divine Providence “wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth” (1 Tm 2:4). Jesus called both Zacchaeus, who was rich and had to give up half his fortune in order to gain Heaven, and Peter, who had nothing more than a small boat and a net. The Redeemer is no respecter of persons, He “came to seek and to save the lost” (Lk 19:10) and to remove sin from the world (cf. Jn 1:29). This does not mean that everyone will be saved, but it does express that salvation comes about through His power alone. It is like a doctor who wants to save all his patients, but it is up to each one to take the prescribed medicine and thus be cured.

It should be noted that in order to fulfil God’s will, one’s financial condition does not matter. Whether rich or poor, everyone can accept the Gospel, be converted and lead a holy life. There are, of course, counter-testimonies, such as that of the rich young man who preferred to be opulent with earthly goods, but in misery due to sin (cf. Lk 18:18-25). Ingratitude does not respect people’s pockets... So where are the nine lepers – presumably poor – cured by Jesus? Nothing is said about their salvation, but it is certain that only one of their companions – also poor, but rich through grace – was able to hear from the divine lips: “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well” (Lk 17:19).

In conclusion, Jesus prefers everyone, but not everyone prefers Jesus. In the apostolate, we must also prefer everyone, because everyone has been the object of the Redeemer’s Blood. It is through it that we conquer the imperishable treasure, the greatest of all riches, Heaven. Apart from it, there is only the greatest of all miseries, the path of iniquity proposed by the prince of this world, the devil. There is therefore, as the Saviour warns, no third way... ✠



Detail of “The tax collectors”, by Marinus van Reymerswaele - Royal Collection (England)

¹ ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO. *Sermon 359A*, n.10.

² ST. TERESA OF JESUS. *The Way of Perfection*, c.21, n.2.

Heaven and Hell

Begin on This Earth...

✠ Fr. Rodrigo Fugiyama, EP



By revelation from Our Lord and solemn definition from the Church, we know that there is an eternal destiny after our death: Heaven or hell, depending on how we have lived. No one escapes this, as we are taught in this Sunday's Gospel, in which a rich man is condemned to a place of torment and poor Lazarus is carried by the Angels to the bosom of Abraham (cf. Lk 16:22-23).

However, we can easily forget one thing: in some manner Heaven and hell begin on this earth! How so? There are many ways of looking at it. However, today it seems appropriate to emphasize one important aspect, taking inspiration from the second reading, in which St. Paul admonishes Timothy: "Fight the good fight for the faith" (1 Tm 6:12).

Yes, we are at war! And in this constant struggle we do not fight alone: Angels and demons are constantly intervening in our lives.

The Angels want to be our companions already in this world, in anticipation of the moment when we will go to be with them forever, close to the Blessed Virgin. For their part, the demons want to tempt us, lead us to perdition and away from God, so as to make us share in their eternal unhappiness, now and forever.

This is a real supernatural battle, great and serious, on which our eternity depends. Hence the warning of the prophet Amos in the first reading: "Woe to the complacent" (6:1)!

The big question that arises, then, is how to start living Heaven on this earth. And the answer is simple: do what attracts the Angels and avoid what invites the presence of demons.

For example, if a person – especially a the mother or father of a family – watches an immoral video on the internet, they will undoubtedly attract demons to themselves and those around them. On the other hand, someone who prays the Rosary, attends Mass, adores the Blessed Sacrament or goes to

confession will be surrounded by Angels wherever they are.

Demons are attracted by rebellion, vulgarity, sadness, agitation, disorder, impurity, pride, lies and any dishonesty. Angels approach those who seek order, respect, cleanliness, true joy, trust in God, purity, humility, truthfulness, prayer and, in particular, devotion to Our Lady.

There is more: there are songs, places, people, objects, words, environments, clothing and many other things that link us to Angels or demons. One question simplifies discernment in this matter: would the music I listen to or the clothes I wear be fit to be heard or seen in Heaven?

Today's world is unfortunately losing its heavenly reflections and tending towards hellish chaos. We must be different! In our families, in our homes, in our whole lives, we should only look for what is a reflection of Heaven, with the help of Mary Most Holy. That way, when our time comes to die, we will, like Lazarus, be carried by the Angels to contemplate God for all eternity. And then we will realize how worthwhile it was to have fought the good fight of faith! ✠

Already on this earth, both Angels and demons want us to share in their fate. How can we attract the former and drive away the latter?



"St. Michael and the Angels at war with the devil",
by Domenico Ghirlandaio -
Detroit Institute of Arts (Michigan)

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The Creator's Conversation with His Creatures

It was God Himself who, albeit indirectly, wrote the Sacred Scriptures, pointing out to us with extraordinary logic and cohesion the eternal truths of the Faith, in order to open our eyes to realities we cannot see.

✠ Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP

When we analyse the work of creation, it is striking to note the exuberance of generosity manifested by God throughout the universe, from the smallest pebbles to intelligent creatures, Angels and humans.

We see this in mineral nature, whether in the enormous quantity of grains of sand in deserts and beaches, or in the stars without number that fill the sky on a magnificent clear night, or in the prodigious abundance of water that flows over the Earth's surface. The perfect structure of the mineral order resembles a "conversation," in which some substances depend on others, balance each other, integrate with and support each other.

This "exchange of benefits" among minerals, in turn, results in a relationship with the plant world, through which water, evaporating from the oceans and condensing into clouds, falls again, irrigating the crops; the sun, when it rises on the horizon, warms and illuminates the forests; the wind, when it blows, strengthens the stems of the plants.

However, this law seems more intense when we observe plants. There is also a kind of "communication" between them, through which they protect and benefit those just above them. Leafier trees benefit herbs that only

grow in the shade; some fruit-bearing species produce fruit year-round, feeding countless animals...

And if we move on to consider moving creatures, this generosity is even more profuse! There are so many species of fish in the deep sea that sustain each other, without human beings even knowing about them! Even the smallest insects seem to help one another. What is the "news" that one ant, for example, transmits to another? And how does this information then spread, to the point where they all organize to carry a grain of sugar back to the anthill, in a veritable "pilgrimage"?

It seems that reigning among all beings is the "desire" to distribute and give what is theirs to others. Why is this?

It befits the Supreme Good to communicate

The reason lies in the very nature of God, who is the Supreme Good. Being absolute and self-sufficient, He did not create out of necessity, but, as St. Thomas teaches,¹ it was fitting for Him to communicate Himself to the utmost degree, in order to externalize what He is and establish a relationship with the works that belong to Him.

He arranged hierarchies in the order He created and He loves the "rapport"

existing among all things. Irrational creatures are, therefore, diverse mirrors in which the excellence of God is reflected, and they give glory to Him by the simple fact of existing. Their entire being is a permanent hymn of sublime, albeit silent, eloquence to the beauty, omnipotence, and goodness of the Creator.

However, to Angels and human beings, God wished to grant participation in His divine life, with a view to our attaining the supreme happiness of being with Him for eternity.

To this end, He gave the Angels a superior dialogue, through the illumination of intelligence, in "conversations" as quick as lightning; and for us, human beings, He reserved an extraordinary gift: speech.

This allows us to convey our feelings, observations, analyses, and experiences regarding whatever has captured our enchantment and enthusiasm... in short, our entire interior universe. We have a need to communicate and express what we carry in our souls, and to be understood by others. Therefore, a person who has an exceptional level of goodness will be extremely communicative, for his virtue will constantly drive him to want to give of himself to others for the simple joy of doing good.

A letter from God to men

Now we come to the essential point: so infinite, inexpressible, and unimaginable is the desire of the Almighty to give Himself and make Himself known to us, that He chose to speak to us using human language, in order to elevate us to a very precise notion of Himself.

What did He do then? How did He speak to us?

The Holy Spirit breathed into the souls of the prophets and other sacred writers – using the intelligence, the personal characteristics and mentality of each of them, in accordance with the customs, culture, and literary genres in use at the time – to write what pleased Him to convey to us.

Some Fathers and Doctors of the Church, such as St. Anthony, St. Athanasius, and St. Augustine, call Sacred Scripture a letter sent to men from Heaven,² and St. Gregory the Great calls it “an epistle of Almighty God to His creature.”³

It is God Himself who wrote to us, albeit indirectly, demonstrating with extraordinary logic and cohesion the eternal truths of our Faith, in order to open our eyes to realities we cannot see and teach us to analyse everything through a supernatural prism.

The highest communication of divinity

However, divine communication with humanity could not be reduced to a book, no matter how excellent. Is

Christianity, then, the religion of the letter? Is it not adherence to the living God?

In His immense love for us, the Lord wanted us to know Him more perfectly in His Three Persons, giving us a clear, real, and tangible notion of who He is and placing within our reach the supreme model of holiness. Therefore, He accomplished the most extraordinary plan of communication between God and His creature: the hypostatic union.

At a determined moment, the Word, begotten from all eternity by the fruitful thought of the Father, became flesh and dwelt among us. And by assuming human form, uniting the fullness of divinity with our weak nature, He revealed precisely and sensibly what He had previously revealed in writing.

Living among men, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the exemplary Cause of all creation, showed us the standard for being perfect as is the Heavenly Father (cf. Mt 5:48), saying: “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30) and “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). It is by looking at the Son and imitating Him that we will understand the Father and reach the highest perfection, and thus be prepared to contemplate the Trinity eternally, when we will all be one with Jesus in the Father.

The Old Law was imperfect and transitory, for it merely educated the human race in moral principles, showing us our duties and teaching us to avoid sin. But it did not give us the strength to practise these principles.

By establishing the regime of grace through Baptism and the other Sacraments, Our Lord came to bring the solution to all our ills, aiding us in the practice of faith and other virtues and granting us, furthermore, the actual graces and gifts to overcome temptations and become holy.

The unity of Scripture in accordance with an Archetype

Here, therefore, is a fundamental principle: if we read the Scriptures with eyes of faith, we will see how divine Providence ordered events, centuries in advance, to serve as a seamless preparation for the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

Every beginning is not yet complete fulfilment, but it has its own value, its role of paramount importance, because it moves toward the end in accordance with an Archetype.

Thus, the Old Testament is a grand musical overture composed by the Father for the coming of His Son. The deeds of the patriarchs and the departure of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land pointed to the birth, life,

Passion and Death of the Lamb of God; the rites of the synagogue constituted images of the Crucifixion of



In His immense love, the Lord wanted us to know Him more perfectly in His Three Persons, giving us a clear, real, and tangible notion of who He is by means of the hypostatic union

The Blessed Trinity - Tympanum of the Abbey of the Holy Trinity, Caen (France)

Our Lord and His bloodless sacrifice, the Eucharist; and the religion of Moses, David, and Solomon prefigured the Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church.

We see, then, the religious history of humanity divided into two periods: before Christ and after Christ.

The covenant remains the same and has never been revoked. Those who came before remained in expectation, as the Letter to the Hebrews states: “not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar” (11:13). We, who have achieved the fulfilment of the promise, have received all the influences brought by the Redemption; we have the Scripture completed, the Revelation ready, the prophecies fulfilled.

In short, Our Lord is at the centre of all Scripture and maintains the unity that exists between the Old and New Testaments.

One alone is the Author of the Sacred Books and of the humanity of Our Lord Jesus Christ: God! If we venerate the written word, dictated by the Holy Spirit, we also venerate the Incarnate Word, the Body of the Lord formed in the womb of Mary by the power of the same Spirit. The latter reflects the former, and the former is synthesized in the latter.

In this regard, St. Caesarius of Arles expressed himself thus, evoking a thought from his beloved St. Augustine: “The Word of God is no less important than the Body of Christ. Moreover, just as we are careful, when the Body of Christ is distributed to us, not to let any of it fall to the ground, so we must be equally careful not to let the Word of God slip from our hearts when it is communicated to us, by thinking or speaking of something else. For he who listens to the Word of God negligently will be no less guilty than he

who negligently lets the Body of the Lord fall to the ground.”³⁴

How to read the Sacred Scriptures?

Let us remember how useful, and even indispensable, meditation on Sacred Scripture is as one of the best sources of prayer, allowing us to establish a dialogue with God through what is contained therein.

There is a covenant between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit that always accompanies the reading of the

they will let their impressions take flight and savour God’s direct conversation deep within their soul, through mystical graces. Much like someone walking through a field who finds precious stones: when they see something shine, they naturally pick up that gem or pearl and put it in their pocket. On certain occasions, God will proceed differently. Simply reading will not suffice; He will only grant us grace to understand a seemingly obscure passage when it is read with others, for He wants some to teach others and be a source of encouragement and progress for them.

Above all, we must read Scripture according to the Church’s living tradition, that is, as taught by the preaching of her ministers who have received the charism and mandate to guard the truth, and subjecting any interpretation to the judgment of the one at the top of the hierarchy, the Pope, who enjoys infallibility when speaking *ex cathedra* on matters of faith and morals.

It is moving to see the absolute cohesion of Catholic doctrine, constituting a single, magnificent, and entirely solid body, in which there is no possibility of error and in the face of which nothing can be affirmed contrary to what the entire Church teaches.

This gives us an experiential understanding of how much God loves human society and

has an extraordinary appreciation for community life, as a reflection of that primary matrix that is the perichoresis of the three Divine Persons, living happily among themselves from all eternity and for all eternity.

Our Lady is yet to be revealed

Regarding the interpretation of Scripture, much has already been studied and commented on. Over time, the



Santiago Vilela

The written word reflects the Incarnate Word; accordingly, those who savour God’s conversation deep in their soul will profit most from their reading

Word of God – especially the four Gospels, for these contain the most enlightening substance of all Scripture – for which reason it is sometimes enough to open them at random and choose the first sentence that catches our eye, to receive special blessings and become purer.

Those who do so without worrying about understanding or memorizing will profit most from the reading, for

Church has assimilated the explanations of the Holy Fathers and the most varied authors – such as St. Athanasius, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and the immense host of doctors – and recognized them as official doctrine, part of the body of Tradition. But it may be that, according to the circumstances and needs of the time, the Holy Spirit will raise up inspired souls in history who will draw attention to new aspects, making the meaning of Scripture more explicit, as no exegete has yet affirmed.

At the same time, the Holy Spirit Himself – whose mission is to foster the growth of the Church and make her ever more perfect and splendid – will disseminate a grace among the faithful that will give rise to an eager desire for that truth to be proclaimed. In view of this, being deeply Marian, we cannot fail to speak of Our Lady's role in this plan of the Incarnate Word, since She is the Mother of God.

We have seen how the Father wanted to give us an experience of who He is by sending “His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him” (1 Jn 4:9). However, seeing the Man-Jesus so strong – His powerful and awe-inspiring voice subdued storms, silenced demons, and cast down His adversaries when they sought to arrest Him – we might think that God is only Justice and Severity.

Furthermore, considering that humanity is made up of both the male and female genders, something would be missing to better understand, in our rationality, who God is.

He was merciful in pointing us to His divine Mother, a model of charity and affection, so that, looking at her, we might have a very precise idea of



Magazine archive

God further makes Himself known through Mary Most Holy, so that, looking at her, we might see how God can operate with absolute perfection in a purely human creature

Msgr. João in April of 2008

God in His infinite perfection, operating in a purely human creature. Sublime innocence and rectitude, when presented in the feminine gender as they are in Our Lady, are utterly captivating! The Blessed Virgin, therefore, constitutes for us a stepping stone to reach Our Lord Jesus Christ more securely and understand His goodness. We cannot consider Mary without Jesus, and it is also not fitting to consider Jesus without Mary.

But it seems that Our Lady's greatest secret has not yet been fully known in these twenty centuries of Church history. In my personal opinion – though I am willing to accept the Church's pronouncement on this matter, as in any other area – I believe that Jesus wished to reserve the privilege of revealing His Mother for a historical era that will be the most splendid before the end of the world.⁵

Why did He leave her hidden for so long?

There are many reasons, but perhaps one of them is this. As men have fallen through pride, an extraordinary example of humility was needed, so that it could then be proclaimed: only those who humble themselves will be exalted (cf. Lk 1:52; 14:11). Our Lady herself must have begged her Divine Son not to be named, and He accepted this request for two thousand years.

But the day will come when the foundations of a civilization born from the triumph of her Immaculate Heart will be laid! And the two figures of Jesus and Mary will fully complete a well-focused idea towards attaining the fullest possible knowledge of God on this earth. ✠

Excerpts from oral expositions given between 1992 and 2007

¹ Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Contra Gentiles*. L.III, c.24, n.6.

² Cf. CORNELIUS A LÁPIDE. *Commentaria in II Epist. S. Petri*. In: *Commentarii in Sac-*

ram Scripturam. Lugduni: Pelagaud et Lesne, 1840, t.X, p.766.

³ ST. GREGORY THE GREAT. *Epistolarum*. L.IV, Epistola 31: PL 77, 706.

⁴ ST. CAESARIUS OF ARLES. *Sermon LXXVIII*, n.2: CCSL 103, 323-324.

⁵ ST. LOUIS-MARIE GRIGNION DE MONTFORT. *Traité de la vraie dévotion à la*

Sainte Vierge, n.50. In: *Œuvres Complètes*. Paris: Du Seuil, 1966, p.515-516.

The Book Written by God

After heated controversies, obscure translations, inexplicable mutilations, losses and forgeries, the Work of works, under the maternal custody of the Holy Church, has reached us.



✠ Mariana Cristina Moniz

Following the development of institutions or customs has always been an effective and beneficial way of growing in love for them. Pragmatism, however—the great ruler of our age—has accustomed us to seeing things only as they appear to our eyes, focussing on their immediate usefulness and forgetting the often immense values behind them. One of the most illustrative examples of this is books.

There are thousands of books. They are sold, read and forgotten about... They usually end up in the dusty recesses of a library or, with some good fortune, on a collector's shelf. But how much effort went into producing each one! And this reality, which applies to both old and new publications, the famous or the little-known, applies, above all, to the Work of works, the *Book* written and inspired by God Himself: Sacred Scripture.

Today, anyone who wants to own a Bible can buy one for an often negligible sum. They come large and small, illustrated, bilingual... in short, there is a Bible for every taste. But if, while leafing through its pages, we go back to its Author and to His “scribes”, who worked since ancient times to transmit the wonders of the Lord to posterity, we will realize how many difficulties

had to be overcome for the numerous copies we have today to have taken their current configuration.

Indeed, a quick overview of this book's marvellous history will certainly make us look at its pages in a different light.

From “rule” to “rule of life”

In order to understand this intricate story, our readers will need to familiarize themselves with some specialized terms throughout the article. The first of these is *canon*, because the books of the Bible are catalogued in the so-called canon of Sacred Scripture.

The word has Semitic roots, although we inherited it from the Greeks: *kanon*, *kanōn* came from the

Hebrew word *qaneh*, which in time immemorial designated a reed used for measuring, as mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel (cf. Ez 40:3-5), but which, in a derivative sense, was applied to everything that was measured or regulated.

Ancient Greek grammarians designated as *kanon* collections of classical works that could serve as literary models, and in profane Greek the term also acquired the meaning of norm or moral rule, with some even applying it metaphorically to those who set themselves as examples of conduct. At some point in history the Greek word was transliterated into Latin, giving rise to the word *canon*.¹

In Sacred Scripture, the pioneer to use the term in the sense of a moral rule was probably St. Paul. The Apostle to the Gentiles employed it in his letters, writing, for example, to the Galatians: “Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this *rule*, upon the Israel of God” (6:16). From then on, the Pauline epistles certainly became *rules of life* for Christians, but it would be centuries before they would become an official part of the biblical canon...

But let us not get ahead of ourselves. We will now return to the Old Testament.

Learning the journey of the Sacred Scriptures, the Book whose author is God Himself, makes us look at its pages in a different light



The beginning of the divergence between Christians and Jews

The pre-Messianic books, written at God's command and compiled with admirable zeal by the Chosen People, constituted the first source of inspiration for the Christians of the communities born from Calvary.² The Divine Master had given eminent proof of scriptural knowledge and His Apostles would continue to pray with the Psalms, meditating on the divine precepts entrusted to Moses and verifying the fulfilment of all the prophecies with the Pentateuch and other sacred works. All these books were accepted as the canon of the Old Testament since the middle of the first century.

However, if the reader wants to compare our Old Testament with current Jewish scripture, he will find several differences... Why?

The explanation lies between the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century of the Christian era. A great gulf already separated the old Synagogue from the nascent Catholic Church when, gathered in Jamnia, eminent rabbis, Pharisees and priests of the Jewish people defined

which books they would accept as sacred and which they would not. In the end, of the numerous writings in circulation, they approved only twenty-three, and eliminated, among

others, the Book of Sirach, Wisdom, Baruch, Judith, Tobit, the two Books of the Maccabees – the latter because their protagonists were not politically aligned with them – and the Greek passages of Esther and Daniel – since this language was considered pagan.³

Other books, however, had already mysteriously disappeared even before this decision by the Jewish assembly. This is the case, for example, with the Book of Jasher or the Just, mentioned in Joshua (10:13) and in the Second Book of Samuel (1:18); the Book of the Wars of the Lord, which appears in Numbers (21:14); the Book of Jeremiah against all the wickedness of Babylon, mentioned in Jeremiah (51:60) and many others... What became of these writings? What did they say? Perhaps we will never know. What is certain is that the canon of the Old Testament held by Christians became different from that defended by the Jews, just

Several pre-Messianic books accepted in the Old Testament canon were excluded by the Jewish people between the 1st and 2nd centuries AD

as Judaism and the Christian religion would forever be different.

The New Testament emerges

While this was happening, the canon of the New Testament was being born.

The Gospels were written until the end of the first century, as were the Acts of the Apostles, Revelation and the Epistles of Peter, James, John, Paul and Jude. These missives, addressed to specific recipients but disseminated by the nascent communities in an organic way, were included into what we know today as the New Testament.

However, do not think that the process was simple. There were heated discussions about the veracity of some writings, translations that rendered certain passages obscure, inexplicable mutilations, epistles that were lost forever and even falsified passages with the aim of diverting the faithful from the true faith or of further “embellishing” the story of the Divine Master and His Apostles – of itself already unsurpassable...

As far as the brevity of this article allows, we will consider some of the details of this process.

Disagreements among Christians

Over the centuries, controversies concerning the biblical canon have united and separated supporters of different theories, who have fought to prove their positions in a veritable “minefield” on which not even the saints have been exempt from error.

The starting point for the disagreements was translation.⁴ While some – following the rabbinical school – accepted only the texts written in Hebrew or Aramaic, the majority of the communities defended the Version of the Seventy, written in Greek. The first group included illustrious names: St. Jerome, Origen and Rufinus. However, the champions of the Greek version were not far behind: among them were St. Augustine, St. Irenaeus and Tertullian. On neutral ground, but

Hebrew manuscript of the Book of Esther -
Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto)

Gustavo Kraij



with some still very imprecise conceptions, there were some like St. Athanasius, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. Epiphanius.

To further cloud the picture, heretics and gnostics of all kinds also appeared on the scene, such as Marcion who, denying the divine origin of the Old Testament, accepted only the Gospel of St. Luke – full of erasures! – and some of St. Paul’s epistles. There was also Montanus who, claiming to be a “prophet” of the New Testament, tried to introduce his own “prophecies” into the biblical canon of the Bible.⁵

Crowning this uproar, apocryphal books – from the Greek word *ἀπόκρυφος*, *apokryphos*, hidden – began to proliferate everywhere, a term which initially referred to “hidden writings” and was later also applied to various biblical texts which, presented as inspired, were in reality the work of forgers, some even pious, others often heretical. The multiplication of these compositions contributed greatly to spreading doubt among the faithful, who were unable to distinguish the false from the true.

It was therefore necessary for the Magisterium of the Church to make an official pronouncement in order to clarify which texts were in fact revealed and which were spurious.

The Church’s wise intervention

For this delicate selection procedure, the Holy Church needed to discern the voice of the Lord in the writings of men. “Biblical inspiration is a supernatural action of God, at once discreet and profound, which fully respects the personality of the human authors – for God does not maim the man He Himself made – but elevates him above himself, since He is capable of doing so. Thus, the books arising from the activity of these authors are not just human, but divine; they do not only express a human thought, but God’s thought. And yet they are rooted in human nature: in them everything is man’s and everything is God’s.”⁶

In analysing the various texts, three criteria were used, which can be iden-

tified as *external*, *internal* and *ecclesial*.

External criteria include the need for the text to come from apostolic times, to be orthodox – both ecclesiastically and doctrinally, to have agreement and unity in its message, and be instructive for the community.

The *ecclesial* criteria entail that the writing is accepted by many ancient particular churches, and that the official ecclesiastical authorities have recognized and cited it as Scripture. The role of Tradition was therefore vital in this sense: “Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is con-signed to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred Tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known.”⁷

The *internal* criteria are the most important, as they aim to recognize the inspiration of the text. Only the Holy Church has the authority to pass judgement on this characteristic, since only she can infallibly discern when a book has indeed been inspired by the Holy Spirit.

To define the biblical canon, it was necessary to face polemics and combat heretics, distinguishing revealed text from apocryphal writings



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Gustavo Kralj

At left, “The Apocalypse of St. Peter” - Austrian National Library, Vienna, and the “Gospel of Mary” - Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (England), apocryphal manuscripts. At right, St. Jerome and St. Augustine, detail of the “Apotheosis of St. Thomas Aquinas”, by Francisco de Zurbarán - Fine Arts Museum of Seville (Spain)



The four Evangelists, by Francisco de Zurbarán - Museum of Cádiz (Spain)

Thus, as the Mother and Teacher of truth, the Church began to allay the quarrels and show the way forward. From the fourth century onwards, the word canon, both in the sense of a collection of biblical books recognized by the Magisterium and as a rule of faith, came into use in the Latin Church. It is known, in fact, that a document from the local council of Laodicea, held around the year 360, used the adjective *canonical* for the first time, referring to the Holy Books.⁸ Later, the dogmatic definition of the current canon of Scripture was promulgated in the decree *De Canonici Scripturas* of the Council of Trent, which states that it is Catholic faith that all the books listed are sacred, inspired and canonical.⁹

Since then, the canonical books can be categorized as protocanonical and deuterocanonical, continuing our list of little-used words. The Greek particle *πρώτο*, *proto* means *first*; and *δεύτερο*, *deutero*, in turn, *second*. Protocanonicals are therefore the

*The Church as Teacher
of the truth showed
the way, and we thus
received the treasure
of Sacred Scripture,
apostolic legacy and
bulwark of our Faith*

first books to be canonically acknowledged, those which, in both the Old Testament and the New, have always been considered revealed; and deuterocanonicals are the books accepted later, after centuries of discussion regarding their divine inspiration. The New Testament deuterocanonicals include the Letter to the Hebrews, the Letter of St. James and St. Jude, the Second Letter of St. Peter, the Second and Third Letters of St. John and the Book of Revelation.

Thus it came down to us

It is amazing to think of how many controversies took place in the first centuries of Christianity! Thereafter, the Bible still had to face the whims of the Renaissance and the Reformation, the clashes against the adulterated translations of Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, the contentions of modern researchers, the revealing clarifications of science... in short, a veritable odyssey.

In spite of everything, the decisions of Trent endured and were reiterated in various subsequent magisterial documents, such as the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* of the First Vatican Council, the Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* of Leo XIII and the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* of the Second Vatican Council, which brought the centuries of discussion to a close.

This is how we received the treasure of Sacred Scripture, the apostolic legacy and bulwark of our Faith, the Book written by God to illuminate human history! ✚

¹ Cf. PAUL, André. *La inspiración y el canon de las Escrituras*. Navarra: Verbo Divino, 1985, p.45-47.

² Since ancient times, the Jews separated their sacred writings into three groups: the *Torah*, meaning law, comprised the Pentateuch; the *Nevi'im*, proph-

ets, brought together the prophetic books; and the *Ketuvim*, meaning writings, grouped together the rest of the works.

³ Despite this, reminiscences of these writings and references to them are found in the Jewish *midrash*.

⁴ Cf. ARTOLA, Antonio M.; CARO, José Manuel Sánchez. *Biblia y Palabra de Dios*. Navarra: Verbo Divino, 1989, p.90-100.

⁵ Cf. BARUCQ, A.; CAZELLES, H. Los libros inspirados. In: ROBERT, A.; FEUILLET, A. (Dir.). *Introducción a la Biblia*.

2.ed. Barcelona: Herder, 1967, v.I, p.69-70.

⁶ Idem, p.36.

⁷ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL. *Dei Verbum*, n.9.

⁸ Cf. ARTOLA, op. cit., p.64.

⁹ Cf. DH 1501-1505.

What Language Does the Holy Spirit Speak?

When inspiring the men who composed the Sacred Books, the Divine Paraclete chose to use the languages specific to each one. However, in the hundreds of pages of the original Bible, only three languages would appear.

✦ João Pedro Serafim Freitas



In his characteristic style, St. Luke offers us a detailed description of the event that marked the beginnings of the Church: Pentecost. After tongues of fire rested upon each of the Apostles, “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). This marvellous phenomenon, which surpasses the ordinary capacities of human intelligence, called *glossolalia* by theologians, is listed by St. Thomas Aquinas¹ among the graces that are *gratis datae* or gratuitous, that is, graces freely granted to someone, not for their own personal advantage, but for the benefit of others.

It was clearly an exceptional event, since learning a new language normally requires a certain level of effort and dedication, varying in intensity depending on the indi-

vidual’s abilities and aptitudes. Only the Spirit of Intelligence could perform such a miracle...

Something different, however, happened when the sacred authors, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the Word of God to writing. According to the designs of Divine Providence, the Scriptures were not to be a complex “symphony of languages,” like that of the day of Pentecost. When inspiring the men who composed the Sacred Books, the Paraclete chose to use the languages specific to each of them, and therefore, only three languages appear in the original manuscripts of the Bible.

The first language of the sacred texts

Composed between the 13th century BC and the 1st century AD, the Scriptures narrate, in their historical context, events that unfolded

in the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, and the Middle East. Struggles, victories, and defeats, sorrows and joys, miracles and trials... The Israelites experienced great moments during the fourteen centuries during which the Holy Books were written! Considerable changes also contributed to altering the customs of the Chosen People during this long period.

There is no doubt that Hebrew was the first language used by the children of Abraham when composing the Holy Scriptures. Although we know little about the original texts, the writings in this language constitute almost the entire Old Testament.

We know that a rich variety of Hebrew versions of the Bible circulated among the Jews. Indeed, in the first century AD, Judaism was quite divided among itself, with four main factions: Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, and Essenes, each with its own version of the Holy Books. With the invasion of Jerusalem in 70 AD and the subsequent Roman wars, this multiplicity of sects,

The sacred authors consigned the Word of God to writing in different languages and historical contexts, but under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit

“The prophets Jeremiah and Baruch”, by Rutilio di Lorenzo Manetti - National Gallery of Ancient Art, Rome



Hebrew was the first language used by the sons of Abraham in composing the Sacred Scriptures, later to be replaced with Aramaic

The Book of Isaiah in one of the Hebrew manuscripts found near the Dead Sea - Israel Museum, Jerusalem

and consequently, biblical texts, ceased. With the destruction of the Temple, the Sadducees' role was extinguished; the Essenes disappeared when Titus' troops ruined their properties at Qumran; finally, in 135 AD, when Rome managed to suppress the Zealot revolt, the latter disintegrated. The only group left was the Pharisees, to whom is associated the biblical version that endured and established itself as the only one in Judaism: the pre-Masoretic text.²

Like any other Hebrew writing, it contained only consonants, since vowels were transmitted orally. Over time, this characteristic of the Hebrew language became a source of doubts regarding certain words whose consonants could be pronounced in different ways, giving rise to diverse meanings. To deal with this concern, from the 7th century onward, Jews called *Masoretes* – a name derived from the word *massora*, meaning *tradition* – established the vocalization of the text.

For a long time – until the last century, in fact – it was believed that the pre-Masoretic text, compiled in the 2nd century,³ was the oldest. But a completely fortuitous event would disprove this hypothesis.

In early 1947, a Bedouin shepherd was passing through the region called Khirbet-Qumran, near the Dead Sea. While practising his aim by throwing stones into the numerous cavities in the mountains, he heard the characteristic sound of pottery shattering. He hurried to the site, where he soon discovered what had happened: one of the stones had hit a vessel containing valuable biblical papyri and parchments, and there were nine other amphorae in the cave...

Later studies confirmed that the writings belonged to the Essene community and could be dated between the 3rd century BC and 1st century AD.⁴

The new language of Judah: Aramaic

Since the 13th century BC, Hebrew remained the only language used to convey the Word of God in sacred manuscripts. Over time, however, another language was also used by hagiographers: Aramaic, which we find in short passages from the Books of Daniel, Ezra, and Jeremiah. What determined this change?

Aramaic was the official language of the Assyrian Empire, as well as of its two successors: the Babylonian and Persian. During the reign of Ahaz in the 8th century BC, the Kingdom of Judah became a vassal of Assyria as a result of the Syro-Ephraimite War,⁵ and it disappeared in 600 BC with the fall of this empire to Babylonian military might. In 587 BC, Nebuchadnezzar II's army captured Jerusalem, and a large portion of the Jews were deported to Babylon. This began the period of exile, during which they would spend no less than fifty years outside their homeland.⁶

It was only in 539 BC that Cyrus, king of Persia, having conquered Babylon and subdued all the peoples under its control, would allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple.

It was in connection with these events that the Aramaic language entered Jewish popular culture, replacing the Hebrew, and so it would remain for many centuries, to the point of being the vernacular language in the time of Our Lord Jesus Christ.⁷



With Alexander the Great, a new era

The years passed, and the great Persian Empire declined, giving way to another power emerging on the horizon.

The Scriptures recount that, "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" (1 Mc 1:1-4).

In the 4th century BC, Alexander the Great, at only thirty years of age, expanded his vast empire throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. Gradually, his new lands changed their semblance, taking on the characteristic features of Hellenism. Among the Israelites, there were once again instances of apostasy and religious infidelity.

According to the First Book of Maccabees, "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” (1:11-13).

After Alexander’s unexpected death in 322 BC, the gigantic empire was fragmented among his generals. The Jews, who until then had enjoyed a certain peace, were subjected to the rule of the Ptolemies, who soon dealt them a terrible blow: in 312 BC they took over the city of Jerusalem, which saw part of its inhabitants deported to Alexandria, in Egypt.⁸

This city would be the site of an event of outstanding importance in the history of the Bible.

Greek in the Scriptures

According to an ancient tradition – more symbolic than strictly historical – the Egyptian King Ptolemy II, intending to gather all the writings of the ancient world into his library, sent a group of representatives to Jerusalem to obtain a copy of the Scriptures, as well as scholars capable of translating them into Greek. For this purpose, seventy-two wise men were chosen, who, on an island near Alexandria, completed their own work in seventy-two days.

By a marvellous miracle, each one’s translation coincided word for word with the others’ texts, a clear sign of divine intervention and inspiration. The work would become known as the *Septuagint Version*. It is worth noting that most of the Old Testament quotations used in the New Testament come from this version.

In the biblical canon, there are also texts written directly in Greek,

such as the Book of Wisdom, the two Books of Maccabees, and some parts of the Books of Esther and Daniel. Furthermore, the entire New Testament – with the exception, according to ancient authors, of the Gospel of Matthew, written in Aramaic, and the Epistle to the Hebrews, composed by St. Paul in Hebrew and translated by St. Luke into Greek – was written in this language.⁹



Regardless of their respective languages, the hagiographers became repositories of the “living and active” Word

St. John the Evangelist,
“The Grandes Heures of Anne of Brittany” -
National Library of France, Paris

The Hellenistic era was succeeded by the Roman era: the Caesars’ rule reached enormous proportions, encompassing the entire Mediterranean region. The Greek language, however, remained deeply rooted in much of the empire.

This factor was decisive for the expansion of Christianity. Having received from Our Lord the mandate to go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature (cf. Mk 16:15), the Apostles and disciples had at their disposal a language considered universal and a translation of the Old Testament in that language, the Septuagint Version, which the Church would later adopt as its own.¹⁰

In the end, which is the language of the Holy Spirit?

Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek. Which of the three languages proved most appropriate for transmitting Revelation? The truth is that, regardless of their respective languages, the hagiographers became authentic repositories of the “living and active” Word (Heb 4:12).

If we consider the history of sacred philology from a higher perspective, we will see that Hebrew has the inestimable value of being the language in which eminent prophets prophesied tragic and grandiose events, especially the coming of the Messiah; Aramaic, the immense glory of being the language of Our Lord Jesus Christ; Greek, the singular merit of having been used to compose the Holy Gospels...

The three languages together are, in short, of incomparable greatness because, at a given moment, they served as instruments of the Divine Paraclete who manifests Himself to whomever He wishes, at the time and in the language He wishes. ✠

¹ Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiae*. I-II, q.111, a.4.

⁴ Cf. Idem, p.468; 471.

² Cf. CARBAJOSA, Ignacio; ECHEGARAY, Joaquín González; VARO, Francisco. *La Biblia en su entorno*. Estella: Verbo Divino, 2020, p.450-451.

⁵ Samaria and Damascus joined forces to attack the Kingdom of Judah, as the latter refused to join them in combating the Assyrian power. Faced with this threat, Ahaz sought help from Tiglath-Pileser III, king of Assyria.

⁶ Cf. CASCIARO, José Maria (Dir.). Introducción. In: *Sagrada Biblia. Antiguo Testamento. Libros Históricos*. 2.ed. Pamplona: EUNSA, 2005, p.17-18.

Macabeus. In: *Biblia Sagrada. Edição de estudos*. 9.ed. São Paulo: Ave-Maria, 2018, p.679.

⁷ Cf. CARBAJOSA, op. cit., p.426.

⁹ Cf. MÁLEK, Ludvik et al. *El mundo del Antiguo Testamento*. Estella: Verbo Divino, 2021, p.379-380.

³ Cf. Idem, p.450.

⁸ Cf. SANTOS, Moisés Alves dos. Introdução aos Livros dos

¹⁰ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL. *Dei Verbum*, n.22.



Why Read the Bible?

What is our aim when we listen to a lecture, watch a play, read a book, or, in short, come into contact with any kind of text? In the first part of the work *“This is the Book of God’s Commandments,”* one of his first lectures, St. Thomas explains what we all seek in a good speaker or good reading: *instruction* for ignorance, *delight* for tedium, and *motivation*, or stimulation, for sluggishness.

These three benefits are found in an eminent form in the Sacred Scriptures. The Angelic Doctor explains that the *Sacra Pagina* – as the medieval people called the Bible – *instructs* firmly by the eternal truth of its words, *delights* by its usefulness, and effectively *convinces* by the strength of its authority.

In our century, when the whirlwind of empty doctrines creates the strange sensation that everything is chaos, lies, and illusion, where can we find the sure teaching that satisfies man’s natural desire for truth, if not in that “Law that endures for ever” (Bar 4:1)?

Aquinas explains that the eternal character of Scriptural doctrine comes from the divine authority that pronounced it: “For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it?” (Is 14:27). Indeed, “God is not man, that He should lie, or a son of man, that He should repent” (Nm 23:19). And it is God, moreover, who declares of Himself: “For I the Lord do not change” (Mal 3:6).

The Word of God also moves the will through its necessity. When he mentions motivation, St. Thomas is not referring to a mere interior and sentimental stirring, but to an incentive to act virtuously: “to be moved”.

Indeed, man will be judged according to his actions in this life. How can one act with righteousness and holiness if not guided by divine light and impelled by charity? Thus, the truth contained in the Scriptures, by nourishing faith and love, impels us to the practice of good works, without which no one will be saved.

The Bible, therefore, has an authority by which it convinces those who come into contact with it. This authority proves effective for three reasons: first, because of its origin, which is God; second, because of the necessity to believe, for this is what Christ commands us; third, owing to the uniformity of its teaching.

Besides securely instructing the intellect and strengthening the will, the *Sacra Pagina* also delights and attracts by reason of its usefulness: “I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit” (Is 48:17). A good is profit-

able when it helps us achieve a greater good. In this sense, the value of the Sacred Scriptures reveals itself to be maximal and universal, for it guides us toward the best of all goods: “All who hold her fast will live” (Bar 4:1).

What life is this? According to Aquinas, it is divided into three: the life of grace, by which we participate – already on this earth! – in divine life itself; the life of justice, which consists in good works – impossible to practise without heavenly help; and the life of glory, in which we will see God as He is.

In short, the Scriptures, together with Sacred Tradition, constitute the “map” that God gave to men so that they might find the path that anticipates and leads to the heavenly homeland:

“But he who looks into the perfect Law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing” (Jas 1:25). ✚

The Scriptures, alongside Tradition, constitute the “map” that God granted to man, to find the path that anticipates and leads to the heavenly homeland

Detail of “Reading the Bible”,
by Elisabeth Baumann - Private collection



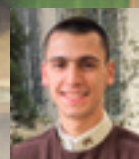
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The Vulgate Bible

A “Betrayal” of the Word of God?

Its text was the most copied in history and a favourite among those chosen for printing. Spread throughout the world, in the Middle Ages it became the great stylebook and inspiration for writers, scholars, and sages.

✠ **Ângelo Francisco Neto Martins**



Injustice can penetrate even the most unsuspected areas of human culture. The proof is that it has infiltrated proverbs, as exemplified by the Italian adage: “*Traduttore traditore* – The translator is a traitor.” But, despite the insult it casts on the honourable profession, this aphorism has its grain of truth.

Who would not consider it a betrayal to translate *saudade* as *añoranza*, *longing*, *regret*, or *rimpianto*? The nuances that make our word so expressive become in these translations like a light made to pass through frosted glass: unclear, confused, and indefinite.

An impossible translation

To mitigate this consequence of the sin of Babel (cf. Gn 11:7-9), the translator who does not wish to be a traitor must have perfect knowledge of the language he interprets and the one into which he translates. This applies to grammar, syntax, and semantics, as well as to typical proverbs, the nuances of each expression, interjections, metaphors, ironies, word order and implications... everything, in short, that comprises the eloquence of a people.

But that is not all. It is an obligation to know the work in question thor-

oughly and, above all, the author: his convictions and intentions, his personality and ways of speaking, being, and understanding, his historical context, his life and experiences. Even before understanding the book, it is necessary to understand who composed it.

I ask the reader to imagine a work that is impossible or almost impossible to translate into another language: a book written in multiple tongues – most of them with distinct alphabets and grammars – and in different literary styles; elaborated over centuries for peoples of every age; endowed with both literal and allegorical meaning; in which there is no superfluous or missing word; whose author, or rath-

er, whose authors were known almost exclusively through this work and who were but “plumes” of a single Author capable of such variety. Would anyone have the courage to undertake such a translation?

Yes, his name was Jerome. And this book is the Holy Bible.

Unintentional preparation

St. Jerome possessed all the qualities mentioned for carrying out such a risky mission: on the human side, mastery of Latin, Greek, Syrian, and Hebrew, as well as literature and exegesis; on the spiritual side, the holiness to orthodoxly understand the sacred pages – an indispensable skill, since only those who love can understand God. How, then, did the Divine Inspirer of the Scriptures prepare His interpreter?

Born in 347 to a wealthy family of Greek origin, in Stridon – the frontier of the Roman Empire and a crossroads of peoples, languages, and cultures – he is sent at a young age to study in the great city. There, he attends four years of classes in grammar, rhetoric, and literature with the renowned Aelius Donatus, reputed to be the best teacher of the time. Jerome distinguishes himself from his peers for his intellectual

The faithful translation of the Bible was an almost impossible task, but there was one man capable of carrying it out: St. Jerome

capacity, his remarkable memory, and his devotion to Roman literature, which resulted in the assembling of an enormous personal library. The first tools for his mission were already in place: Latin, literature, and erudition.

While in this respect he contrasts with his companions, in his customs he is identical: not yet baptized – it was a time when men received the healing waters as adults – with money and licentious friends, without any relatives to restrain him, Jerome leads a life in keeping with the proverbial Roman decadence. However, not for long...

The edict of June 17, 362, promulgated by Julian the Apostate, stripped certain rights from Catholics. But what Caesar did not imagine was that a student would use this onset of persecution to affirm his faith: Jerome, with the ardour of youth and temperament to match, enrolls himself among the catechumens and is baptized three years later by Pope Liberius. From then on, he will be a Catholic in the fullest sense of the word – that which today would perhaps be called a “fanatic”... Having completed his studies, he decides to embark on the religious path: he sets out on foot for the East, yearning for the desert. In the spring of 375, he arrives at a coenobitic community in Chalcis, where he spends two years amidst penance, temptations, illnesses, and raptures of love for God. Thus, he achieves another indispensable element of his vocation: holiness.

To escape the seductions of the flesh that continually assail him in his retreat, he spends his time learning Hebrew from a converted Jew. Shortly thereafter, he leaves his ascetic seclusion and, ordained a priest in Antioch, the same place where he had attended exegesis classes, sets off for the Council of Constantinople in 381. There, he

rapidly perfects his Greek rudiments and his already ample exegetical foundations. Two steps toward fulfilling the divine plan: fluency in two more of the languages of the Sacred Scriptures – he would forever lack perfect Aramaic – and the art of interpreting them.

A risky mission

The aforementioned Byzantine council closely preceded another held in Rome. Once the sessions opened, we see him drafting the decrees as papal secretary... Yes, Jerome of Stri-

don, who had recently been a desert monk! Accompanying his bishop to the Eternal City, he was added to the Lateran service because he was seen as a Christian expert – a rarity! – in the biblical languages. Alongside these duties, he wrote and translated extensively, never abandoning his studies.

St. Damasus, Supreme Pontiff at that time, sensing a special calling in the young secretary, tested his abilities: he asked him to explain the meaning of the term *Hosanna* and resolve other biblical questions. The answers were so swift and brilliant – accompanied by a treatise against the heretic Helvidius and the translation of several exegetical works by Origen – that the Pope dared to reveal from among his concerns a problem that had lingered in his mind for many years: the translation of the New Testament.

At that time, multiple Latin translations of the sacred pages were circulating throughout the Catholic world: contradictory, flawed, and poor, there were “as many versions as there were manuscripts.”¹ This was the so-called *Vetus Latina*. The solution lay in a revision initiated by a single mind. And this mind could only be that of Jerome. Having reached this conclusion, St. Damasus asked his secretary in 383 for a translation of the New Testament. Delay was something unknown to Jerome, and he finished the work with a rapidity that remains astonishing to this day. In 384, he delivered to the Pope a Latin version of the Gospels, which he had translated based on reliable Greek texts.

Despite the Holy Father’s support, the work received attacks from all quarters. There was talk of disrespect for the ancient editions. But Jerome, supported by the Shepherd of shepherds, feared nothing; to the point that he wrote openly against the dissolute



“St. Jerome presents the translation of the Gospels to St. Damasus”, by Alessandro Allori - Church of Santa Maria Novella, Florence (Italy). On the previous page, “St. Jerome in his study”, by Vincenzo Catena - National Gallery, London

*In his capacity as
papal secretary, Jerome
received from St.
Damasus the mission
of translating the
New Testament
into Latin*

lives of Roman clergy and monks. He feared nothing... until the day of St. Damasus' death. The persecution that arose against him then forced him to return to the East in 385. From then on, he would reside in Bethlehem.

The vocation or the world

In his new home, St. Jerome dedicated himself to continuing the revision of the Latin biblical texts. His goal was now to translate the entire Old Testament into the language of Virgil. The work was more extensive, but appeared less difficult. In fact, the Greek version of the Seventy – the Septuagint – from which the translation would proceed, was an extremely reliable text, the most widely used by the early Church and the most respected, one would say almost sacred. There would be no major obstacles.

Our holy biblical scholar developed his craft by leafing through Origen's Hexapla,² which he used to compare the most highly regarded versions of the Old Testament. But as he did so, he became aware of many discrepancies between the Septuagint and the Hebrew.

However, he was not bothered enough to abandon the famous Greek version, limiting himself to a few corrections. He was racing toward the completion of the work, and only a grave event could stop him. And it was precisely that grave event that occurred: one morning the translator discovered that the pages containing the fruit of four years of effort – between 386 and 390 – had disappeared.³

Seeing this as a divine sign, he left the Version of the Seventy as a mere prop and resolved to heroically base himself solely on the Hebrew “originals.”

The saintly scholar heroically decided to base himself solely on the Hebrew “originals”, and his translation would replace the older Latin texts

Heroism? Yes, for he knew that half the world, or a world and a half, would rise up against him: he had already rejected the traditional Latin texts and now he would “disrespect” the venerable Septuagint Bible... In the eyes of his contemporaries, it was almost sacrilege.

Despite the general jeering, the translator embarked on what he knew to be his calling: in the year 392, he completed the Psalter and the Prophets; by 396, he completed the Historical Books – with the exception of Judges, revised until 400 – and Job; in 400, the Wisdom Books and the Pentateuch. Between 404 and 405, he would complete the Deuterocanonicals, as if carried on wings: he would translate the Book of Tobit in one day and Judith in one night. This set of translations began to supplant the ancient Latin texts and, due to its widespread dissemination, came to be known as the *Vulgate*.

Thus, despite the lack of human recognition for his work, the Stridonian left the entire Scriptures expertly translated. Later generations would be grateful to him, and rightly so. With the “true Hebrew,” St. Jerome restored

to Christians several messianic prophecies that were not understood in the Greek version, eliminated certain confusions, and silenced the mockery of the Jews who laughed at Christian translations.⁴ Let us add that, unlike many earlier versions, the Vulgate does not translate biblical passages word for word. Furthermore, transposed into Latin with the literary talent worthy of Cicero, its text was a pleasant read for the ever-sensitive ears of the Romans. Let us remember that figures like St. Augustine, and St. Jerome himself, took a long time to acquire a taste for the Sacred Scriptures because of this stylistic detail.⁵



“St. Jerome argues with the Doctors of the Law”, by Filippo Vitale - Academy of St. Luke, Rome

From Jerome to us

The consequence: the faithful approached the evergreen meadows of Revelation. The Vulgate text was the most copied in history and a favourite among those chosen for the press: its enormous diffusion is a dazzling reality.⁶ Spread throughout the world, in the Middle Ages it became the great

textbook of style and inspiration for writers, scholars, and wise men.

More than that, it was the version upon which the Holy Church solidified her doctrine through the councils. One of the decrees of Trent declares that “is to be considered authentic [...] the said old Vulgate edition, which has been approved by the Church itself through long usage for so many centuries [...] and that no one under any pretext whatsoever dare or presume to reject it.”⁷ Subsequently, a critical revision was made of it, the New Vulgate, promulgated in 1979 in the Apostolic Constitution *Scripturarum thesaurus* and used by the Latin Church in the Liturgy and official documents.

Most vernacular versions, moreover, were developed based on the work of St. Jerome. Thus, the Mystical Spouse of Christ hears the voice of her God from this translation, refutes heretics with it in hand, and, by reading it, teaches her children. It is probably the Bible you have at home...

A betrayal?

Finally, the painful question: if the translator is often a traitor, does not the Vulgate betray the Divine Inspirer of the sacred texts? If in Scripture even “the very structure of words envelops a mystery”⁸ and “from the meaning of one syllable sometimes an understanding about the truth of a dogma is formed,”⁹ how can we suppose that a translation justifies all the interpretations that two thousand years of exegesis have not yet been able to exhaust? Did not St. Jerome reduce the infinite greatness of God’s Revelation to human fallibility?

On the contrary, the ascetic of Bethlehem conferred security upon human weakness by granting it a reliable version of the Scriptures, and carried throughout the world, without leaving his cell, the seed of the Sacred Word that would blossom in the homilies, meditations, and prayers of so many men and women.

The indisputable authority of the Vulgate derives from a title held by its author. Not that of scholar, exegete, or linguist, nor that of biblical scholar, translator, or man of letters, but what we mentioned before Jerome’s name: Saint. Above all, what earned him the respect of generations was the fact that the Holy Church, always assisted by the Holy Spirit, took him as its own. Humanity rests peacefully upon the sacred pages, knowing that everyone could betray God, except a Saint... and, less still, His own Mystical Spouse. ✠



St. Jerome, by Carlo Crivelli - National Gallery, London

*Called the “Vulgate”,
St. Jerome’s text
spread throughout the
world, and was the
biblical version upon
which the Church
solidified her doctrine*

¹ ST. JEROME. Prólogo a los Libros de Josué y de Jueces. In: *Obras Completas*. Madrid: BAC, 2002, v.II, p.467.

² Composed by Origen between 228 and 240, this is the most important work of textual critique in Christian antiquity. It compared the Septuagint text with the Hebrew and other Greek versions of

the Old Testament in six parallel columns. Jerome made particular use of the fifth column, which presented the Version of the Seventy. (cf. HEXAPLA. In: HERIBAN, Jozef. *Dizionario terminologico-concettuale di scienze bibliche e ausiliare*. Roma: LAS, 2005, p.473-474).

³ Cf. BERNET, Anne. *Saint Jérôme*. Éditions: Clovis, 2002, p.345.

⁴ Cf. CARBAJOSA, Ignacio. “*Hebraica veritas versus Septuaginta auctoritatem*”. *Existe un texto canónico del Antiguo Testamento?* Estella: Verbo Divino, 2021, p.43-53.

⁵ Cf. ST. AUGUSTINE. *Confessions*. L.3, c.5, n.9.

⁶ Cf. BERZOSA, Alfonso Ropero. Versiones latinas. In: *Gran diccionario enciclopédico de la Biblia*. 7.ed. Barcelona: Clie, 2021, p.2603.

⁷ DH 1506.

⁸ ST. JEROME. Epistola LVII, n.5. In: *Obras Completas*. Madrid: BAC, 2013, v.Xa, p.569.

⁹ DH 2711.

The Crystal Defended by the Lion

“Your invectives, hurled from the same mouth with which you slandered Mary, will be for me a source of glory.”

St. Jerome thus concludes the first of the patristic treatises dedicated to Our Lady.

✠ José Manuel Gómez



The fourth century was an epoch of war, and of the worst kind there is: that which unfolds in times of peace. The persecution of the Christians by Roman paganism had ceased with the imperial edicts granting freedom to the Church. But then arose the threat of threats, crueller than fire, fetters, or beast: the threat of apparent security.

With it, a new danger arose for Christians. To be a member of the Church, which in the past had been considered so ignominious, became a source of prestige. Now, not only heroes willing to shed their blood for their Lord would enlist in Jesus' legions, but also opportunists eager to gain some of the world's filthy and deceitful caresses.

The worldly entered, and with them, the world's ideas. A host of new and heterodox doctrines began to ferment among the baptized.

Jerome and Helvidius

It was during this period that St. Jerome lived or – to be faithful to historical truth – fought.

After his passage through the desert of Chalcis in the Near East and his priestly ordination in Antioch, Eusebius Jerome arrived in Rome, where Pope St. Damasus appointed him as his secretary, as seen in the previous article.

Along with the numerous tasks he was to perform at the request of the

Roman Pontiff, the writings of a certain Helvidius, who argued that Our Lady's virginity was not perpetual, came to his attention. Using passages from Sacred Scripture taken out of context, Helvidius shamelessly asserted that, after the virginal birth of the God-Man, the Blessed Virgin had given birth to other children according to the flesh.

Faced with such an affront, many Christians urged St. Jerome, already a renowned exegete and champion against heresies, to destroy the arguments of that perverse author.

A piercing silence and explosive destruction

The rebuttal, however, was not immediate. Silence often wounds more than words, as St. Jerome penned with the power of his steel plume: “I was re-

quested by certain of the brethren not long ago to reply to a pamphlet written by one Helvidius. I have deferred doing so, not because it is a difficult matter to maintain the truth and refute an ignorant boor who has scarce known the first glimmer of learning, but because I was afraid my reply might make him appear worth defeating.”¹

*The Virgin's defender
attacked not only
the blasphemy, but
also the blasphemer,
demolishing the
edifice by routing
the constructor*



St. Jerome, by Alonso Sánchez Coello - Monastery of El Escorial (Spain)

Francisco Lecaros



When the refutation finally struck, not a stone was left standing of that fragile blasphemous edifice, so that “he who has never learned to speak may at length learn to hold his tongue.”²²

Thus was introduced the work *On the Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary*, the first of the patristic treatises dedicated to Our Lady.

The Firstborn was also the Only-begotten

In this treatise we encounter, firstly, a summary of Helvidius’ ideas. In his concern for the times to come, St. Jerome described and denounced them fully for posterity.

As mentioned above, the heretic – like the good heretic that he was – used several passages from the Bible. The Gospel says that Christ Jesus is the Firstborn of the Blessed Virgin (cf. Lk 2:7). This would be, in Helvidius’ almost infantile declaration, a clear allusion to other future children of Mary, because otherwise, the Evangelist would have used the word *only-begotten* – the only son – instead of *firstborn* – the first.

St. Jerome³ leaps into the fray with the weight of his invincible biblical erudition. Every only-begotten is also a firstborn, although not every firstborn is an only-begotten, since “firstborn” means not only the son followed by others, but also the one without a

predecessor. Accordingly, in the Holy Scriptures, the word *firstborn* is used to refer to both the first and the only son, as in the passage where God commands the redemption of the firstborn male children (cf. Ex 34:20). How could parents redeem their firstborn sons, since they did not yet know whether they would have any more? Perhaps it would be difficult – the Stridonian would conclude with devastatingly ironic logic – to ascertain this within the thirty-three or sixty-six days allotted for the said offering...

The Lord’s brothers

Another passage used by Helvidius to lend weight to his feeble theory is the one in which is said to the Lord: “Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see You” (Lk 8:20). For the heretic, this is another reference to the other sons of Jesus’ Mother.

“To this very thing, we reply, do not go about inventing lies.”²⁴ This recommendation of Jerome constitutes the introduction and key to the development of his rebuke. Continuing his explanation, the Saint further clarifies that the term *brother* has several connotations in Sacred Scripture. The first – and apparently the only one that reached Helvidius – is that of blood brother. But would Our Lord, on Calvary, have left His Mother in the care

of St. John (cf. Jn 19:26) if He had other brothers?

The second way of using the word “brother” is in reference to lineage. In this sense, all Jews are brothers because they have the same ancestry in common, as we can observe in several passages (cf. Dt 15:12; 17:14-15; Rom 9:3), but this does not make them all natural children of Mary Immaculate.

Brotherhood can also be defined by ties of affection. And in this sense, we are all children of this Virgin Mother who begot “the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29).

There is, however, a final interpretation of the term “brother”; that which alludes to a certain degree of kinship. Abraham, for example, called Lot his brother, even though he was his uncle (cf. Gn 13:8). Thus, those “brothers” of the Lord could indeed be His relatives, but not to the degree that Helvidius maliciously claimed against the evidence of so many other biblical passages.

The Lion of Judah and of Bethlehem

The invective of the Virgin’s defender was not only against the blasphemy, but also the blasphemer, aware that by demolishing the constructor, he undermined the whole construction. And this in thundering terms: “There are things which, in your extreme ignorance, you

had never read, and therefore you neglected the whole range of Scripture and employed your madness in outraging the Virgin, like the man [...] that if he could not have fame for good deeds, all men should give him credit for bad ones.”⁵ The rumbling resounds louder still: “Who, before you appeared, was acquainted with this blasphemy? Who thought the theory worth twopence? You have gained your desire, and have become notorious for crime.”⁶

An *ad hominem* argument? Perhaps, but more: by eliminating the cause of so many evil effects, the profile of those who, brandishing half a page of Sacred Scripture, would insolently attack a thousand others was stigmatized for posterity. After St. Jerome, “Helvidius” might serve as the disparaging appellation for those who express their personal opinion, echoing the worldliness of their time, in opposition to centuries of Apostolic Tradition. The first Pope rightly warned: “No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man” (2 Pt 1:20-21).

The forceful denunciation by the Lion of Bethlehem, as St. Jerome became known, may seem too fierce for ears accustomed to less categorical language... These we invite to consider the infinite variety and richness of Christ’s virtues reflected in the lives of the saints. Indeed, He not only preached the Beatitudes to the multitude, but He also rebuked the Pharisees; He not only laid His hands on children or touched lepers to cure them, but He also made a whip with which to expel the money changers from the Temple; He was the Lamb of God and the Lion of Judah.

The crystal and its wall

Finally, after refuting all the heretic’s sophisms and delivering a splendid



Our Lady Seat of Wisdom - private collection

The crystal of the perpetual virginity of Mary was upheld by the roaring of a lion, who built up an unshakable theological wall to defend it

eulogy on virginity – also defending that of St. Joseph⁷ – St. Jerome concludes by addressing Helvidius: “And because I think that, finding the truth too strong for you, you will turn to disparaging my life and abusing my character [...], I shall anticipate you. I assure you that I shall regard your railing as a high distinction, since the same lips that assail me have disparaged Mary, and I, a servant of the Lord, am favoured with the same barking eloquence as His Mother.”⁸

These final words of the holy polemicist reveal the motivation of his re-

buttal: his love of and devotion to the Blessed Virgin, for which he considered it an honour to be slandered by those who slandered the glorious Mother of God. Indeed, what flows from the entire treatise, a maiden voyage in the Marian seas, is a deep love of Our Lady. So deep that it combined incense with gunpowder, for indignation blazes forth from a heart afire with rapture and admiration.

With each paragraph, this wondrous crystal, delicate and sublime, through which the Sun of Justice shone forth to the world intact, without in the least diminishing purity of its pulchritude, is defended by the roaring of a lion. He was the first to uphold the Virgin’s standard and defend her with an unshakable theological wall.

He was in fact the first of many, for over the centuries, so much light and chastity would glare in the tainted eyes of still others, who would in turn take aim at the same stained-glass window with stones taken from the same isolated biblical passages.

Yet, with each attack from hell, the wall would only grow higher, magnificently framing the purest crystal of God. ✚

¹ ST. JEROME. De perpetua virginitate Beatae Mariæ. Adversus Helvidium, n.1. In: *Obras Completas*. Madrid: BAC, 2009, v.VIII, p.67.

² Idem, ibidem.

³ Cf. Idem, n.10, p.85-89.

⁴ Idem, n.12, p.91.

⁵ Idem, n.16, p.103.

⁶ Idem, n.17, p.105.

⁷ “You say that Mary did not continue a virgin: I claim still more, that Joseph himself on account of Mary was a virgin, so that from a virgin wedlock a virgin Son was born” (Idem, n.19, p.109).

⁸ Idem, n.22, p.115.



God's Voice Still Makes Itself Heard!

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

§104 In Sacred Scripture, the Church constantly finds her nourishment and her strength, for she welcomes it not as a human word, “but as what it really is, the word of God.”
“In the Sacred Books, the Father who is in Heaven comes lovingly to meet His children, and talks with them.”

As we read the Holy Gospels and are captivated by what they tell us about the God-Man, the following exclamation has probably arisen within us at some point: “What immense grace it must have been to live with Our Lord! What we would give to be with Him, to contemplate His gaze, to hear His divine words... If recording devices had existed in those days, with what holy eagerness we would have recorded His discourses, never more to forget them.”

God, knowing how necessary it was for all humanity to hear His voice throughout history, did in fact “record” His Word on a “device” that would reproduce it forever and ever, and throughout the world: the Sacred Scriptures.

Indeed, when we open the Bible and read the inspired words of the Holy Spirit, something more happens than when we hear a sound captured by a mere recorder. We hear not only what God said in the past, but His voice echoes in the present and is relevant now. It is as if He Himself were standing before each one of us, communicating with us.

This is why we ought to so deeply venerate the Holy Scriptures and read

their words with authentic love. For Jesus speaks to us now with the same love He showed His Apostles!

Neither day nor night should we allow the Word of God depart from our lips, and, as St. Athanasius ponders,¹ we should even know some passages by heart, such as the Psalms. St. Jerome,² in turn, recommends to St. Eustochia that she have the Scriptures in her hands when sleep finds her, so that her head would fall from fatigue upon the sacred page.

Our Lord affirmed in the Gospel: “Come to Me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28). And He repeats this invitation to us as well, calling us to rest our weary heads upon the Holy Books, just as we would upon His sacred breast!

Let us then cast our cares upon the Saviour (cf. 1 Pt 5:7) and lovingly study Divine Revelation for, as St. John Chrysostom ponders,³ whatever misfortune befalls us, in the Bible we will find the appropriate remedy, which puts all sorrow to flight. Then, however difficult and dark our situation may be, we can affirm with St. Therese:

“[When I take up Sacred Scripture,] everything seems luminous to me, a single word reveals infinite horizons to my soul, perfection seems easy to me, I see that it suffices to recognize one’s nothingness and to abandon oneself like a child in the arms of the Good Lord.”⁴ ✠

¹ Cf. ST. ATHANASIUS. *De virginitate*, n.12: PG 28, 266.

² Cf. ST. JEROME. *Epistola XXII*, n.17.

³ Cf. ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. *Homilias sobre o Gêneses*. Homilia XXIX, n.1.

⁴ ST. THERESE OF LISIEUX. *Letter 226*. To Fr. Roulland.

“Christ healing the sick”,
by Giusto de Menabuoi -
St. John the Baptist Baptistery,
Padua (Italy)





The Beginning of the Victory!

Blessed be the day Our Lady was born; blessed be the stars that saw her as a small child; blessed be the moment her parents saw the birth of the One who, while remaining ever Virgin, was called to be the Mother of the Saviour!

✠ **Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira**

Why do we celebrate someone's birthday? The reason is very simple: a person's birthday represents the moment they entered the world.

Every birth constitutes a favour, a grace from God, because every person – as much as they are conceived in original sin, and may additionally carry some family defect – is a creature of great value and represents a highly significant enrichment to humanity as a whole.

Thus, when we celebrate a person's birthday, we commemorate their entry into the world with all that is characteristic of them in terms of "primordial light," the virtues they are to practise, the riches of soul they possess, and even original sin and the defects they carry within themselves as something to be fought and overcome, which will result in an increase of glory.

***Conceived without sin
and full of gifts***

Applying this principle to the feast of Our Lady's Nativity, we are led to ask what enrichment She brought to humanity, and in what special capacity

should mankind celebrate her birthday?

Putting ourselves in this perspective, we are at a loss for words...

Indeed, Our Lady was conceived without original sin. Being a lily of incomparable beauty, free from any stain, her birth should bring joy not only to mankind, but also to all the angelic choirs, for it signifies that, in this exile, amidst fallen humanity, an immaculate creature appeared!

Furthermore, Mary Most Holy possessed all the natural gifts a woman could have. Our Lord gave her, according to the order of nature, a most

rich, precious, and priceless personality, and in this capacity, her presence among mankind represented a treasure of truly incalculable value.

Finally, with her we gain the treasures of graces that accompanied her and which are the greatest graces God has ever granted to anyone – immeasurable graces.

***"Blessed be the day that
saw her birth"***

We understand, then, that the most dazzling sunrise pales in comparison to the beauty of Our Lady's entry into the world. All the most magnificent natural phenomena that are held as something precious, extraordinary, vanish from sight; the most solemn entrance imaginable of a king or queen into their domains is as nothing in comparison.

The jubilation of all the Angels in Heaven, as well as that of many of the righteous who became aware of the event, and the feelings of joy that began to spread here and there among good soul – all of this must have greeted the blessed moment when Our Lady entered the world.

*The most dazzling
sunrise, the most
magnificent natural
phenomena are nothing
as compared to the
beauty of Our Lady's
entry into the world*

There is an expression from Job that I like to paraphrase, and it seems fitting to express this reality: “Blessed be the day that saw me born, blessed be the stars that saw me when I was little, blessed be the moment when my mother said, ‘A man is born’” (cf. Job 3:3)!

One could also say: “Blessed be the day that saw Our Lady born, blessed be the stars that shone upon her when She was little, blessed be the moment when her parents saw that the virginal creature called to be the Mother of the Saviour had been born!”

Our Lady bursts suddenly into souls...

The Nativity of Our Lady also inspires another thought in us.

The world was immersed in paganism. The situation at that time was similar to that of today: every vice prevailed, idolatry dominated the earth, abomination had penetrated the Jewish religion itself, which was the harbinger of the Catholic Religion; evil and the devil predominated everywhere.

But, at the moment decreed by God in His mercy, everything changed! He broke down the wall, and the downfall of the “order” set up by the devil began at the moment when it was least imaginable! Our Lady was born, the blessed root from which the Saviour of humanity would spring.

How often does something similar happen in our spiritual life! There are times when our soul is struggling, overwhelmed by problems, writhing and revolving in difficulties! We have no idea when the blessed day will come when an extraordinary grace, a great favour, will put an end to our torments, allowing us to make substantial progress.

Suddenly, there is a birth in a special sense of the word: Our Lady bursts into our soul. In the night of the greatest darkness, She appears and begins to dispel the difficulties that were

confronting us and, like a dawn in our spiritual life, She brings forth something new, something we could never have suspected.

...and into the world

There is another aspect as well. Our Lady seems absent from the world today. But if we consider that, from one moment to the next, She can begin to act, making her activity more constant, more continuous, more intense than it has been until now, with a view to establishing her Reign, it is likely that extraordinary miracles will occur that make us feel

her presence. In this way, there will be another sudden irruption of Our Lady in the world.

And this irruption may occur through our movement, with all its humanly poor and weak aspects, but which – like David facing Goliath – through faith, dedication, and the use of the tactics of RCR² must overthrow and crush the giant of the Revolution.

Such an action would be an irruption of Our Lady into history, a manifestation of her desire to triumph.

The walls we have torn down, the graces of which, despite our unworthiness, we have been channels – do they not also represent the manifestation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary’s will to establish her Reign through our actions?

This should give us great joy and hope, along with the certainty that Our Lady never abandons us. At the most difficult times, She visits us, her presence as it were bursting into our midst, resolving all our problems, healing our pain, giving us the combativeness and courage necessary to fulfil our duty to the end,

*Just as at the time
of her birth, Our
Lady will burst
into history yet a
second time, and
will establish her
Reign over the earth*



David Ayuso

Our Lady Help of Christians - Private collection

however arduous, and strengthening our arm in the fight against the adversary.

“Her children proclaimed her blessed”

There are historical indications to suggest that all the great souls who fought against the heretics, the great hammers of heresy that have appeared throughout the centuries, were personally chosen by her.

The raising up of these souls recalls something very beautiful portrayed on the coat of arms of the priests of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It depicts St. Michael the Archangel at the top and, just below, the Heart of Our Lady, surrounded by these words: “Her children arose and proclaimed her blessed.”

This presence of warriors who, like soldiers of St. Michael the Archangel, rise up armed to fight the enemy, proclaiming the Heart of Mary blessed, is this not also an irruption of Our Lady into history?

We must pray that we may be these iron warriors, indomitable, with an implacable hatred of the devil and his followers, of the Revolution and its works, destined for the greatest deeds, ready to carry out the most extreme feats of daring. It is this hatred of the Revolution that must fill the hearts of those who truly love Our Lady.

Let us ask Mary for this special grace: that we may be an irruption of her in today’s world, armed from

*We must ask Mary
for the grace to be
an irruption of her
in today’s world,
armed with a spirit
of combat for the
Holy Church’s glory*

head to toe with a fighting spirit, with implacable hostility to the Revolution, to definitively restore the Church’s glory, so tarnished at this time.

So that, when we die, the following words can be inscribed on each of our tombs: “This was a son of Mary, who rose up and proclaimed her blessed during a time of apostasy, humiliation and collapse of the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church.”

Influencing the destiny of humanity from her birth

Someone might say: “But what can a baby, who lacks the use of speech or reason, add to a society?”

This objection does not apply to Our Lady. Conceived without original sin and endowed with the use of reason from the first moment of her being, even from within her mother’s womb, She had the highest and most sublime thoughts, dwelling in the womb of St. Anne as in a true tabernacle.

We have indirect confirmation of this from what is recorded in the Gospel concerning St. John the Baptist. If the Precursor – who was not exempt from original sin, but freed from it before birth – leapt in his mother’s womb upon hearing Mary’s voice greeting St. Elizabeth (cf. Lk 1:41), could not the Mother of the Redeemer have known what was happening even in her infancy?

On account of the surpassing knowledge granted to her by the grace of God, from her mother’s womb Our Lady prayed for the coming of the Messiah and the defeat of sin. From that moment on, the lofty intention of becoming a servant of the Mother of the Saviour was formed in her spirit. In this way, Mary Most Holy influenced the destiny of humanity. Her presence on earth was already a source of grace for all who were close to her in her childhood and even before her birth.

Mário Shinoda



Dr. Plinio in May of 1991

The Gospel tells us that from Our Lord's tunic flowed a power capable of healing (cf. Lk 8:43-48). If this was so, then His Mother, the Vessel of Election, should also be a source of graces flowing forth for all.

Although only a small child, already at her birth, enormous graces began to dawn upon humanity. Her birth constituted the crushing of the devil, who realized that something in his sceptre had broken and would never be repaired. The victory of the Counter-Revolution began to assert itself.

Like an "aurora" of the moonlight

To conclude, let us remember Christmas Eve. This celebration has been repeated for centuries, and we always have the feeling that an enormous blessing descends from Heaven upon earth and that, in some way, the spiritual energies of all people are renewed. There is a true dawn, and for this reason, the Holy Night is unique in the year.

Now, since everything related to the Blessed Virgin has an intimate connection with that which concerns Our Lord, we must imagine that something similar occurs at the Nativity of Mary.

What similarity exists between these two nativities?

When we speak of the Nativity of Jesus, we remember the sunrise. And how beautiful it is to see the light that appears!

If Our Lord is symbolized by the sun, Our Lady is often compared to the moon. The rising of the moon does not have the glory of the sunrise, but how analogous it is! How beneficent it is, how gladdening, how stimulating and how comforting it is! This might give us an idea of what Our Lady's blessed birth was like.

As children of the Blessed Virgin – not by our merits, but by her will – when celebrating her birth, we can ask her for a special grace.

In private revelations made to many saints, it is said that Our Lady frequently descends into Purgatory, con-



"The Nativity of Mary", by Giotto di Bondone - Cappella degli Scrovegni, Padua (Italy)

Reproduction

The moonrise is similar in some way to that of the sun: beneficent, gladdening, and comforting, giving us an idea of what Our Lady's birth was like

soles the souls there, and takes a large number of them to Heaven.

This fact gives us some idea of what She does in the Church Militant. Her grace descends upon us and obtains for us a multitude of favours. And her birth is a propitious moment to ask her to grant us one of these favours. What should we ask for?

Let each of us recollect ourselves a little, concentrate and ask for what he

needs. But I suggest that the following grace be present, in a special way: that the Blessed Virgin establish with each of us a special covenant, a filial bond that is unique to our relationship with her, so that She takes us under her protection in a very particular way. And, in this capacity, may She heal us of the wound of soul that She most deems necessary to heal.

Sometimes it is not quite what we imagine, but something else. Whatever is most necessary for healing in our soul, may She grant us on this night of her nativity. ✠

Taken, with adaptations for the written language, from:
Conference. São Paulo, 8/9/1963

¹ Term coined by Dr. Plinio to designate the specific aspect of God that each soul is especially called to reflect and contemplate.

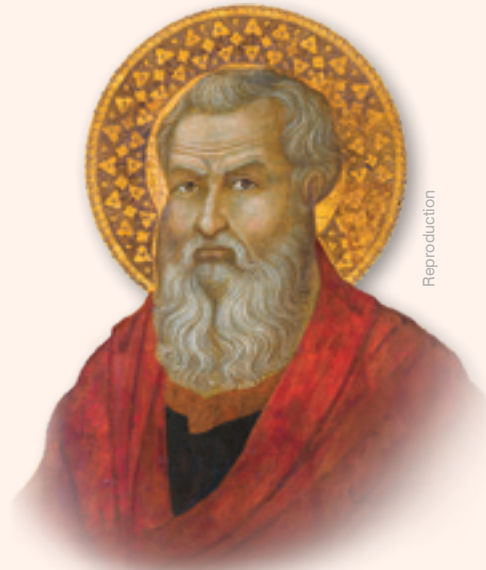
² Reference to the book *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, in which Dr. Plinio set out the main lines of his thought and action.

Confiscated by the Lord

One glance was enough to make the tax collector a true “gift from God”: Levi, the expert reckoner of earthly goods, would give way to Matthew, the Apostle and Evangelist of the Divine Master!



Sr. Maria Cecília Veas ✞



Reproduction

It is proper to a foundation to support the building without being considered or even seen; although indispensable, it remains hidden.

The foundations of the Church are the twelve Apostles (cf. Rv 21:14), whose exceptional virtue has moved the devotion of Catholics of all times. However, if the magnitude of a building is measured by its structures, how can we not glimpse an untold greatness in the Apostles? The Sacred Heart of Jesus turned His gaze on them with predilection, calling them to an intimate relationship (cf. Lk 6:12-16; Mk 3:13-19), He prayed to the Father for them (cf. Jn 17:9), He instructed and formed them, and it was upon them that He chose to build His immortal and holy Church (cf. Mt 16:18-19).

It can be said that the moral stature of the Apostles is still unfathomed by history. In an attempt to penetrate the mists that cover it, let us consider from among this chorus of privileged men one in particular, commonly known as simply one of the Evangelists: St. Matthew.

Who was Matthew?

Capernaum, a town on the border of Galilee, was a busy port due to the

continuous influx of people and merchandise from north and south, east and west. Many tax collectors were stationed there to collect the tributes demanded by the Roman Empire. They were called *publicans*, since they dealt with public affairs, a profession rarely carried out in those days without incurring sin...

In the exercise of his function, the publican had to pay the government the stipulated sum, but he kept the excess amount for himself, and dishonest extortion for personal gain was common. Tax collection was therefore held as “a shameless trade, rapine under a thin guise of legality,” which is why its agents were especially despised – indeed hated by the people, and considered to be criminal thieves.

In this category of men was Matthew, respectfully referred to by St. Luke (cf. Lk 5:27) and St. Mark (cf. Mk 2:14) only as Levi. Originally from Galilee, little is known about his ancestry, except that he was the son of Alphaeus. Everything suggests that he collected tolls from those who crossed the Lake of Gennesaret, as well as the imposts on goods that arrived there. Perhaps that is why the Gospel in Hebrew, when referring to him, uses the

expression *master of the passage* instead of the word *publican*.²

So Levi was hard at work at his trade when an event changed the course of his life.

A decisive moment in an exchange of glances

After healing a paralyzed man in one of Capernaum’s houses, Jesus went to the outskirts of the city, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. As He was preaching to the crowd that accompanied Him, “He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office, and He said to him, ‘Follow Me’” (Mk 2:14).

Jesus saw him! What look did the God-Man direct at that publican, at whom hardly anyone would deign to cast a glance? A truly divine look, penetrating, profound and overwhelming; filled with love, kindness and compassion. A restorative gaze whose mute language expressed more than the eloquence of many persuasive speeches. In fact, what Levi understood in an exchange of glances, had to be explained to the rich young man in a detailed piece of advice: “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven; and come, follow Me” (Mt 19:21).



These two words were enough for Levi: follow Me! And “he left everything, and rose and followed Him” (Lk 5:28). With what intonation of voice did Jesus pronounce this imperious call? What must have been going on inside that new disciple for him to renounce everything?

For the naturalistic mind, it is hard to understand the speed of a decision that on the surface seems impulsive and immature. But Levi had already been prepared by Providence since childhood. Not having found a cause to which he could devote himself entirely, “he tried his hand at collecting taxes, unconcerned with the societal contempt this would bring him.”³

Levi’s hope had been ignited by the people’s excitement over the wonders performed by Jesus in Galilee, and there is every reason to believe that he had joined the ranks of those who listened to the Master’s preaching. “If magnets and amber are said to have such power that they bind together rings, straw and herbs, how much

more could the Lord of all creatures draw to Himself those He wanted!”⁴

Generosity, readiness and courage

Such was the irresistible force emanating from the Master that Levi, once intent on amassing wealth through illegitimate profits, sacrificed all his ambitious plans in an instant and gave up his fortune. He did not bother to get rid of his possessions, he did not set about auctioning off his land and property, he did not even finalize the accounts in the telonium, caring little about the possible lawsuits that the Roman officials might bring against him...⁵ Grace had snatched him away!

An expert in calculating earthly values, he did not risk losing the priceless gift of grace offered to him, he did not hesitate between God and the world. In this we can glimpse the Apostle’s nobility of character, the heroism that made him willing to abandon the stability of his life and his great wealth to follow the Master into the unknown. He was a magnanimous soul, a “model

of a serious, august, intrepid and courageous man!”⁶

Many of the Holy Fathers appreciate the generosity with which Levi gave himself to the Lord and emphasize his praiseworthy readiness, the courage with which he faced obstacles and opposition, subduing even his passions, as well as his constancy in following Jesus, which led him to persevere in his first resolutions until the end of his days.

Having renounced everything, he even put on a feast for Our Lord as a token of his gratitude.

A feast for the Master

“Levi made Him a great feast in his house” (Lk 5:29).

The great celebrations of the time took place around the table. In the Gospel parable, the father offers a banquet to the prodigal son who returns (cf. Lk 15:23); here Levi, made a son of God, offers a banquet to the One who saved him from sin and death; if that father’s joy was great, Jesus’

What look did the God-Man direct at that publican? Such was the irresistible force emanating from the Master that Levi, once intent on amassing wealth through illegitimate profits, sacrificed all his ambitious plans in an instant

“The Calling of St. Matthew”, by Giusto de Menabuoi - Cathedral of Padua (Italy);
on the previous page, a painting of the Apostle by Ugolino di Nerio -
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



happiness was much greater when He saw the liberality of His new disciple. Without a doubt, among all the delights offered, none satisfied Him as much as Levi's good dispositions. Both their hearts were already beating in unison!

What absorbing converse was held at that banquet? What bonds were forged? Immortal resonances between Creator and creature, between Master and disciple, which echo throughout the centuries in the simplicity of the Gospel: "as He sat at table in the house" (Mt 9:10)...

Matthew means gift of God, and perhaps this is the representative name that the Lord gave him to mark his new life. In fact, he was no longer the same and, as an omen of his future apostolic labours, he invited his friends to the banquet, among other reasons to allow them to share in Jesus' company.

"I have stripped myself of the publican and put on Christ"

Seeing the Master and His disciples eating at table with sinners and publicans, the Pharisees and disciples of John the Baptist became indignant (cf. Mt 9:11, 14). Clinging to outdated criteria, they found it incomprehensible that the Saviour would condescend to seek out the lost sheep, and would exercise His office even in the intimacy of that banquet. This provided the occasion for Jesus to pronounce the reason for His earthly mission: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. [...] For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mt 9:12-13).

And in order to prove that Matthew had already begun the new life of grace that He was offering the world, Our Lord made it clear to those malicious hearts: "new wine must be put into fresh wineskins" (Lk 5:38).



With his characteristic simplicity and precision, Matthew drew up the foremost among the infinite grandeurs of Jesus, and left them to us in the first Gospel

St. Matthew writes his Gospel, "The Grandes Heures of Anne of Brittany" - National Library of France, Paris

As a renewed man, Matthew welcomed Jesus, the New Adam, into his home. In this sense, St. Ambrose⁷ piously describes the convert's dispositions at the time, which could be summarized as follows: "Behold, I am no longer a publican; I no longer carry within me the figure of Levi. I have stripped myself of him and put on Christ; I am fleeing from my old life! Listen to me, men whose minds are oppressed by sin. I too was wounded by such passions and I have found a Physician who lives in Heaven and pours out His medicine on earth. He alone was able to heal my wounds."

In this way the Master convoked another of those called to follow Him. And since He would only live a few

years in this world, at the very beginning of His public life He wanted to directly associate some of them with His saving mission. Among these chosen was St. Matthew.

Among the Lord's chosen

With the solemnity befitting God's works, Jesus withdrew to a mountaintop, where He spent the night in prayer. At daybreak, He called those He wanted, and chose twelve from among His disciples to remain with Him, whom He named Apostles (cf. Mk 3:13-15; Lk 6:12-13). He gave them the power to cast out demons and to cure every evil and disease; then He instructed them on their future ministry (cf. Mt 10).

Radical by nature and conviction, Matthew likely stood out for his idealism and generosity, which once again earned Jesus' favour, being chosen as one of His closest associates. He enjoyed the Lord's friendship! Nevertheless, the silence and discretion of this Saint reveal a peculiar unpretentiousness, typical of one who knew how to hide and humble himself, as can be seen in the Gospel he wrote, when he adds the appellation "publican" (10:3) when he is named in the list of the twelve Apostles. He was aware of his former state and knew himself to be the object of the Lord's mercy.

What relationship did he have with the Master? What was his role with the other Apostles? He never returned to his former office; so what did he do, for example, while the others fished? Mysteries and conjectures combine, as they do with all the Apostles. Unfortunately, history has not recorded further details about them. However, it is certain that, as a member of the Apostolic College, Matthew witnessed the most varied scenes in his contact with the Saviour; he was able to contemplate Him among the crowds

performing all sorts of miracles, in moments of solitude, in moments of intimacy, and at the height of the manifestation of His divine love, the Last Supper.

And if no word of this Apostle has passed into history, his was the honour of being the first to immortalize the Saviour's actions and instructions through the writing of the Gospel.

From fiscal calculations to compiling of the Redeemer's deeds

Tradition tells us that, after the Ascension of Our Lord, Matthew preached along with the other Apostles in the provinces of Judea and surrounding areas. Before dispersing throughout the world, many converted Jews and other Apostles begged the Saint to record the story of Jesus. He did so, drawing up the foremost of the Lord's great deeds and compiling them with his characteristic simplicity and precision. This, indeed, was an unprecedented collection of true riches!

Having accomplished this mission, he set out to evangelize new lands, and the last place he is recorded as having been was Ethiopia, one of the most difficult and inaccessible regions of the time. After a life filled with sacrifices and penance, coupled with cruel persecutions, the hour of eternity struck for him. Under the

orders of the perfidious Emperor Hircanus, he was killed on the very altar where he had just celebrated Holy Mass. Thus, he fulfilled the Master's call: "Follow Me!" Matthew followed Him in pain and complete immolation and would follow Him into glory, where that divine gaze that had confiscated him would never again be taken from him!

He thus left a luminous trail of generosity, sacrificial love, and radical-

ism for people of all time. He proved himself to be great in his giving and in his works because he had been loved and amply forgiven. Faithful to this first calling, he remained constant in following Jesus and earned the crown of glory.

Columns and foundations

St. Matthew, along with the other Apostles, is a beacon of light in the world, a patriarch of humanity in the spiritual and eternal order. Such inalienable prerogatives make him an exceptional figure.

Now, foundations alone do not make the building. It is in the same Christ that we were also chosen to be living stones of the Church; it is in Him that "the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph 2:21).

When, finally, the building up of the Church is complete, the time will have come for Our Lord Jesus Christ's definitive union with her. Then it will be said: "His Bride has made herself ready" (Rv 19:7). On the foundations, all the walls will have been raised, the columns fortified, the edifice completed! And a song will resound into eternity: "Come, 'number her towers' (Ps 48:12), contemplate her in her splendour, in her perfect stature. 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb' (Rv 19:9)." ✠



Francisco Lecaros

Martyrized on the very altar where he had just celebrated Holy Mass, thus Matthew fulfilled the Master's call: "Follow Me!"

"The Martyrdom of St. Matthew" - Augustinian Museum, Freiburg im Breisgau (Germany)

¹ ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. *Homilias sobre el Evangelio de San Mateo*. Homily XXX, Madrid: BAC, 1955, v.I, p.596.

² Cf. MAISTRE, Étienne. *Histoires scientifiques et édifiantes de chacun des grands et bienheureux Apôtres S. Philippe, S. Barthélemy, S. Matthieu, S.*

Thomas, S. Jacques-le-Mineur. Paris: F. Wattelier, 1870, p.155.

³ CLÁ DIAS, EP, João Scognamiglio. "Follow Me", a Call for Everyone. In: *New Insights on the Gospels*. Città del Vaticano-Nobleton: LEV; Heralds of the Gospel, 2013, v.II, p.136.

⁴ ST. JEROME. Comentario a Mateo. L.I, c.9, n.20. In: *Obras Completas*. Madrid: BAC, 2002, v.II, p.95.

⁵ Cf. MAISTRE, op. cit., p.158.

⁶ CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plínio. Sério, altaneiro e intrépido [Serious, Noble and

Intrepid]. In: *Dr. Plinio*. São Paulo. Year XVII. No.198 (Sept., 2014), p.2.

⁷ Cf. ST. AMBROSE. Tratado sobre el Evangelio de San Lucas. L.V, n.27. In: *Obras*. Madrid: BAC, 1966, v.I, p.243-244.



Under a Mother's Protection

Fundamental to the perseverance and the mission carried out by Dr. Plinio over the course of his life were the sacrifices and prayers of his mother, Dona Lucilia.

✠ Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP

Let us imagine that we have managed to climb the face of a mountain until reaching its summit, where we find an enormous nest with an eagle's nestling. Concealed behind a rock, we soon see the eagle returning to the nest from the hunt. In its claws is a quarry that it has brought to feed its young, which, not yet ready to fly, cannot stray from the nest or it will fall into the precipice.

At a certain point, however, the wings of the eaglet begin to develop. What does the eagle do? How does she train her fledgling? First she sets it on her back, grasped firmly onto her feathers, so that it can get a taste for the wind; then, she takes it in her own claws, lifts it up half a metre above the nest and drops it.

Feeling itself alone in the air, the eaglet, terrified, beats its wings clumsily, makes an effort, and falls into the nest. After several repetitions, the mother instinctively perceives that it is no longer dependent. Then, she takes it to a distant place and... releases it. When at last the young eaglet takes wing in its first flight and soars across the blue expanse, the mother eagle, if she could think, might say: "Mission accomplished: another eagle in the sky!"

"Will you be the son I have in the depths of my soul?"

This in fact is what Dona Lucilia did with Dr. Plinio: having been called to protect, develop, and even to enrich his innocence, bringing him to his plenitude as the eagle did the eaglet, she supported, educated, encouraged and helped him until she perceived him to be entirely master of his own actions. Only then was her mind at ease as to his formation, but not as to vigilance, for she still kept out a watchful eye: "What direction is he taking? Where is he headed?"

She manifested her expectations not only through her reprimands, but also by the way she treated him, which he would later define as "a contempla-

tive solicitude," imbued with the following sentiment:

"This is my son. I have reason to hope that he will turn out to be certain ways and certain other ways... I will play with him, surrounding him with my affection, protecting him and seeking in him the preliminary signs of my hope. To what extent will it be realized?" I felt myself spurred on by a hopeful enquiry, as from one who asked lovingly: 'My son, will you be who I have in the depths of my soul?'"

On another occasion, Dr. Plinio recalled: "Whatever she demanded of me was because the Law of God demanded it, and because God most high, most wise and most good would want things to be done in that manner. She wished for me to be as I should, not so that I might be a practical and useful son for her, but rather with the idea of having a son who would offer to God a sacrifice as it should be offered to Him."

She preferred to see him dead than gone astray

Although neither Dona Lucilia nor Dr. Plinio ever said as much to the author, it is clear that underlying her vigilance was not only the desire that he excel, but also the fear that her son, with the intelligence, aptitudes and distinction that were natural to him, would at some point become attracted to a career or to worldliness which would be the ruin of his virtue.

Called to protect the innocence of her son, bringing him to his plenitude as an eagle does with her eaglet, Dona Lucilia helped him until he was entirely master of his own actions

American eagle with its young



An upright and innocent soul, Dona Lucilia possessed a clear understanding of the damage done to humanity by original sin, and it pained her greatly to see any lack of fidelity. It was the internal struggle of her life, along with the notions gained from what she had heard of numerous cases in society. This is why she feared that someone would exert a noxious influence on the boy, and she sought to protect his innocence to the utmost. She would pray a great deal for him, begging the Sacred Heart of Jesus to deliver him from the paths of evil. Dr. Plinio's words confirm this:

"She had been a most solicitous mother regarding my health, but several times when I was a young boy, at the time when the character is in formation, she would say to me with great tenderness: 'I would rather see you dead than gone astray.' It was as much as to say: 'The times are bad and you are still quite young; nobody knows what a person is capable of when he is lost.' [...] She would have given her life to prevent my death! But she would have preferred my death to seeing me in a state of mortal sin or of rupture with the Church."

Beseeking graces for her son's perseverance

What strength was not added to the foundation of his faith and perseverance by the prayers of Dona Lucilia? One fact, which occurred repeatedly during Plinio's adolescence, permits us to affirm it with confidence: every time she entered the Shrine of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, close to her house, she went to pray in front of a beautiful set of sculptures representing the Child Jesus in the Temple debating with the doctors, flanked by Our Lady and St. Joseph. What did she request there?

Dona Lucilia never explained to him why she lingered before those statues; but, through discernment of spirits, looking into the depths of his mother's soul, Plinio understood that



Lúcio César Rodrigues

She implored special graces and gifts from the Holy Spirit for her son so that he might acquire the spirit of argumentation and of wisdom from Our Lord and thus emerge victorious in every dispute

The finding of the Child Jesus among the Doctors of the Law -
Sacred Heart of Jesus Shrine, São Paulo

she was praying for him! Indeed, at home, Dona Lucilia witnessed him as a young boy discussing religious themes with his cousins and uncles, so she asked special graces and gifts from the Holy Spirit for her son so that he might acquire the spirit of argumentation and of wisdom from Our Lord and emerge victorious in every dispute, whether with his family members or with his adversaries.

And that which she as his mother requested was granted! At a certain moment, owing to those intense prayers of Dona Lucilia, he must have received an infusion of operative graces which allowed him a share of the spirit of the combativeness of the Divine Redeemer, so as to become extremely upright, an invincible fighter against evil and a tireless propagator of the good.

Like a soothing and fragrant balm

It cannot be imagined how much Dona Lucilia prayed for Dr. Plinio... Always with much gentleness and respect. Years later, as an adult, on several occasions he would see her enter the room and draw close to him just

as he was about to fall sleep. Amidst the drowsiness that overcame him, he would notice that she was praying, beseeching Our Lady's support and help for him. Several decades later, Dr. Plinio would remember how this daily encounter would end:

"After I had already fallen asleep, I would awake to her caressing me and making the sign of the Cross on my forehead before going to bed. I perceived something of her lofty spiritual purview flowing over me like a soothing and fragrant balm, which anointed me and did me good, soaking into me as oil into paper."

Following this, at times, she herself would turn off the bedside lamp, leave the room, and he would sleep remembering her physiognomy. ✧

Taken, with slight adaptations, from:
CLÁ DIAS, EP, João Scognamiglio.
O dom de sabedoria na mente, vida e obra de [The Gift of Wisdom in the Mind, Life and Work of]
Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira.

Città del Vaticano-São Paulo: LEV;
Lumen Sapientiae, 2016, v.I, p.146-152

Learning About the Secret of Mary

The wonders of grace with which the Lord adorned His Blessed Mother have been the subject of continuous elucidations throughout history. And these Marian secrets were the theme of the 20th International Congress of Cooperators of the Heralds of the Gospel, held for two

separate groups between July 18 and 27, at the institution's house in Caieiras, São Paulo.

Eucharistic adoration, processional Rosaries, lectures, study circles, and the celebration of Holy Mass marked the days of blessed fellowship.



Photos: David Ayusso / Stephen Nami / Leandro Souza



Bragança Paulista Diocese a Hundred Years Old

The Diocese of Bragança Paulista, home to the main houses of the Heralds of the Gospel, celebrated its hundredth anniversary. The celebrations, carefully prepared by Diocesan Bishop Sérgio Aparecido Colombo (photo 12), began on July 24 with a solemn Mass at the

Cathedral of Our Lady of the Conception (photos 1-3). On July 27, the programme of events unfolded at the Dr. Fernando Costa Exhibition Park, featuring several musical performances, Eucharistic adoration (photos 4-6), a vocations fair (photos 10-11), and a closing Mass (photos 7-9).





Alain Patrick



Photos: Rogério Baldasso

Italy – The feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel was commemorated at the Church of Madonna del Carmine in Venice, with a procession and the celebration of Holy Mass, presided over by Metropolitan Patriarch Francesco Moraglia (photo 1). On July 11, the Church of San Benedetto in Piscinula in Rome honored its Patron Saint with a solemn Eucharist, followed by the blessing of medals of this great Patriarch of the West (photos 2 and 3).

Photos: Antoine Bolder



The Netherlands – On July 5, the Heralds of the Gospel provided their music for a Mass celebrated at St. Lambertus Church in the city of Eindhoven by Cardinal Willem Eijk, Archbishop of Utrecht, who crowned the Pilgrim Statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Following the Eucharist, the Rosary was recited in several languages and broadcast by Radio Maria to over eighty countries.

Ambrósio Ngulele



Photos: Inésio Abubacar

Mozambique – To mark the occasion of the Solemnity of St. Peter and St. Paul, on June 29, members of the Heralds joined the Goan community of Mozambique for a beautiful maritime procession (photo 1). In July, hundreds of faithful gathered at the institution's church in Maputo, still under construction, for an instructional talk given by Fr. Araújo Mazive, EP (photos 2 and 3).



Photos: David Ayuso

São Paulo (Brazil) – On July 13, Cardinal Odilo Pedro Scherer, Archbishop of São Paulo, presided over the solemn Eucharist blessing the altar of the Oratory of St. Philomena in the Jardim Pedra Branca district of the city of São Paulo, entrusted to the care of the Feminine Society of Apostolic Life, Regina Virginum. The building was generously donated to the sisters by Mara and Domingos Fernandes de Aguiar.



Photos: João Lucas Guimarães

Mogi das Cruzes (Brazil) – In this city of São Paulo State, the Cathedral of Sant'Ana celebrated the feast of its Patroness on July 26 with a procession through the city streets, followed by a solemn Eucharist presided over by Diocesan Bishop Pedro Luiz Stringhini. The choir and orchestra of the Major Seminary of the Clerical Society of Apostolic Life, Virgo Flos Carmeli, added their music to the commemorations.



Photos: Giovanna de Castro

São Paulo (Brazil) – The Pilgrim Statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary was carried in procession through the corridors of ExpoCatólica – the largest Catholic fair in the world, held this year from July 3-6, spreading Marian blessings to those present who were also able to watch a musical performance by the young seminarians of the the Virgo Flos Carmeli Society.



“I give you my covenant of peace”

In a little-known biblical episode, a man of integrity rose up against a flagrant transgression of the divine precepts, and was splendidly rewarded by the Lord.



✠ Bianca Maria dos Santos

There was among the people of Israel a fiery young man, in whose gaze Moses surely discerned a sublime calling. His name was Phinehas.

This man’s crystalline fidelity, the work of a lifetime, shone in a unique way in a little-known episode in the history of the chosen people, which nevertheless earned him a place of honour among the illustrious men praised by Sirach: there he is listed as

“the third in glory” (45:23a), counted among those who received the priestly dignity from the Lord.

Among the wicked, a handful of faithful

The Scriptures recount that, since the Israelites’ departure from Ramesses on the day after Passover (cf. Nm 33:3), God had continually shown his favour toward them, despite their being an unbelieving and rebellious

people. Indeed, the sacred text reveals that a wicked and insurgent faction was machinating virulently in their midst.

On the other hand, there were also among the people some faithful souls, zealous for the Law of the Lord and naturally closer to Moses, who played an important role in his victories over the prevailing iniquity. Among these was the one who “was zealous in the fear of the Lord” (Sir 45:23b).

Moab causes Israel to stumble

In the final moments of their glorious exodus from the land of Egypt, characterized by extraordinary phenomena in which faith and miracles walked side by side, the Israelites reached the steppes of Moab, at the gates of the Promised Land, to camp there. However, a brief period of rest was followed by a grave transgression. It was the last hour before the fulfilment of the promises, the final examination to be passed before receiving the long-awaited recompense.

Not long before, an enigmatic non-Jewish soothsayer named Balaam had passed by. He had been incited by the king of Moab to curse Israel, but the Lord miraculously prevented him and revealed to him His predilection for the Chosen People (cf. Nm 22–23). This time, Balaam dared to give the



Prevented by the Lord from cursing Israel, Balaam gave the king of Moab a wicked council: to infiltrate Midianite women among the Hebrews, who would lead them to the sin of the flesh and then to idolatry

The Angel of the Lord appears in Balaam’s path, by Joseph Anton Koch - Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg (Germany)

sovereign evil advice, through which he would be able to triumph over Israel: that he should infiltrate Midianite women among the Hebrews, who would seduce them to the sin of the flesh and then lead them to idolatry with their gods (cf. Nm 31:15-16).

Many indeed allowed themselves to be drawn into this infamy, forgetting the One who had saved them from the Pharaoh. These Midianite women then demanded that they consecrate themselves to Baal of Peor, and blinded by passion, they obliged.¹

Now, the Lord was watching over His own, and in the face of such sin, He was filled with wrath. With ardent desire for Israel to return to the right path, and considering them a stiff-necked people (cf. Dt 31:27), He saw fit to punish them with a terrible plague.

A lesson in intransigence

While many were dying from the plague, Moses gathered the leaders and judges of the people to convey instructions from the Lord to them. Before the entire assembly, one of the princes of the tribe of Simeon, named Zimri, rose up against Moses, saying, “You will no longer have me follow your tyrannical commands.”² And his audacity did not end with these words: in the sight of all, he brought into the camp a Midianite woman to whom he was illegitimately united.

Then Phinehas, considered one of the leading youths of the people, both as the son of the high priest Eleazar and nephew of Moses himself, and for his virtue and courage in hardship, resolved to avenge this outrage before Zimri’s infamy drew others to the same revolt. Filled with righteous anger and love for the Law (cf. 1 Mc 2:24-26), “he rose and left the congregation, and took a spear in his hand and went after the man of Israel into the inner room, and pierced both the man of Israel and the woman” (Nm 25:7-8), so that both perished with a single blow.



Magazine archive

Phinehas avenged the outrage against Moses before the example of Zimri led others into the same revolt. Filled with righteous anger, he took a spear and “went after the man of Israel into the inner room, and pierced both the man of Israel and the woman”

“Zimri and Cozbi are slain by Phinehas” - Engraving by David Martin (edited)

At that moment, the plague that had been raging among the Israelites ceased. Twenty-four thousand men had perished in the chastisement (cf. Nm 25:9).

“He has turned back my wrath from the people”

Appeased in His divine wrath, the Lord said to Moses: “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy. Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace; and it shall be to him, and to his descendants after him, the covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God, and made atonement for the people of Israel’” (Nm 25:11-13).

Thus shone the moral stature of the man upon whom the Most High had placed the promise made to Aaron and the tribe of Levi: “I am your portion

and your inheritance among the people of Israel” (Nm 18:20). And ardent love for God’s Law and steadfastness in the face of wickedness were forever rewarded.

After these events, war broke out against Midian, and Moses sent Phinehas as commander of the Israelite troops (cf. Nm 31:6). “The Lord was with him” (1 Chr 9:20)! Twelve thousand men, a thousand from each tribe of the Chosen People, decimated the cities of Moab. Among the slain were all the Midianite kings and Balaam. A new phase of Israel’s history began: having triumphed over their enemies and made atonement for their sins, they were finally to enter the Promised Land.

While he lived, Israel did not sin.

When, in a magnificent and mysterious way, the Lord called the great Moses to Himself, Phinehas, because of his proven and recognized virtue, became one of Joshua’s closest aides, as evidenced by his having been the

A USEFUL LESSON FOR THE SOUL

Pleasure is the bait presented by every vice to easily draw sensual souls to the hook of perdition. It is above all through impure pleasure that nature is dragged into evil, without self-control.

This is what happened on that occasion. Indeed, men who had prevailed over the enemy's weapons, who had shown iron to be weaker than their own strength, and who with their power had put the enemy army to flight, ended up wounded by feminine darts through pleasure. And those who had overcome men became hostages of women. [...]

What lesson can we draw from this account? This: that having learned what a great power for evil the disease of pleasure possesses, we ought to conduct our lives as far removed from it as possible, so that this disease – which resembles fire

that by its very proximity, ignites the flame of perversity – may find no entry in us.

This is what Solomon teaches in Wisdom when he says that one should not tread on hot coals with bare feet nor hide fire in one's bosom (cf. Prv 6:27-28), for it is within our power to remain free

from passion, as long as we stay away from that which inflames. But if, on the contrary, we come close enough to touch this burning fire, the flame of concupiscence will penetrate our interior, and then the burning of our feet will follow, and destruction in our bosom.

The Lord in the Gospel, with His own voice, so that we might stay far from this evil, cuts out the very root of passion – namely, the concupiscence that arises through sight – when He teaches that whoever permits passion to enter through the eyes opens the door to disease, against themselves (cf. Mt 5:28). Perverse passions, like a plague, once they have dominated the critical points, cease only with death. ✠

ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA.
The Life of Moses, c.XXVII,
n.297-298; 303-304



The same men who had prevailed over all the enemy's weapons became hostages of women

Samson and Dalilah,
by Francesco Morone -
Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan (Italy)

messenger of Joshua's orders to the tribes of Transjordan.

The Reubenites, Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh built an altar in their territory beyond the Jordan, intending it as a symbol of union with God and the other tribes. This attitude, however, was misinterpreted by the Israelites, and Joshua sent Phinehas and ten other leaders to inspect what they believed to be a deviation from the worship of the true God (cf. Jos 22:9-29). Enlightened about the reality, Phinehas told them: "Today we know that the Lord is in the midst of us, because you have not committed this treachery against the Lord; now you have saved the people

of Israel from the hand of the Lord" (Jos 22:31).

This was Phinehas' last intervention recorded in Scripture. As long as he and his descendants lived, Israel did not sin (cf. Jgs 2:7).

Integrity, intransigence, and restoration

The story of this man of God – which took place in the context of the Exodus and is perhaps incomprehensible to the present-day mentality – proves the value of integrity in God's eyes. When Phinehas' virtue was confronted with evil, and when exhortations to conversion were no longer of any avail, it developed into intransi-

gence and restored the order which had been shattered by sin. For this reason, he merited divine blessing and contentment: "And that has been reckoned to him as righteousness from generation to generation for ever" (Ps 106:31).

May Phinehas, from the heights of Heaven, intercede with God for the Church Militant and obtain for all its members the holiness necessary for iniquity to be eradicated from our hearts, making the earth a place of true peace under the rule of Jesus and Mary. ✠

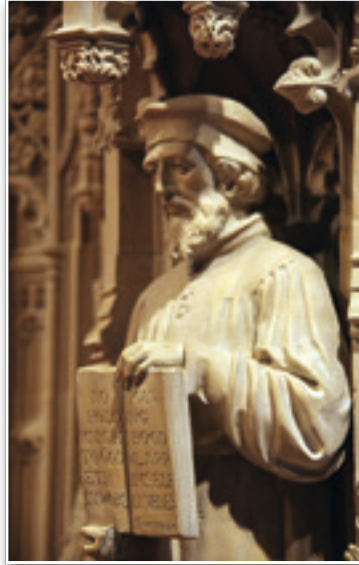
¹ Cf. FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS. *Jewish Antiquities*. L.IV, c.6, n.7-9.

² Idem, n.11.

...why the Bible is divided into chapters and verses?

“Divide et impera” was the motto of Roman authority throughout its existence. This ancient advice, however, applies not only to dividing the empire into regions, the army into phalanxes, or the enemy into factions, but also admirably to daily life: in dividing schedules, distinguishing concepts, delegating tasks...

Incredibly, the golden rule even applies to... the Word of God! It was with this conviction that Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury and Chancellor of the University of Paris in the early 13th century, divided the books of Holy Scripture into chapters. As a good professor and an even better prelate, he knew that the Bible is the written condensation of the Creator's Revelation of Himself



Tim Evanson (CC by-sa 2.0)

Stephen Langton - Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul, Washington D.C.

and that the words it contains, besides being sublime, are very numerous... Accordingly, we need to savour them little by little.

Years passed. The struggles intensified and the Sacred pages became weaponized. At the height of the clash with Protestantism, Robert Estienne brought greater precision and speed to the designation of sacred passages. Supported by the studies of the Dominican Hebraist Sante Pagnini, he published, in 1555, a Bible already divided into verses, just like the ones we have today.

The division into chapters and verses thus results both from the desire to hear the words of Revelation more clearly and from apologetic battles for their correct interpretation. ✦

...the origins of the liturgical use of incense?

In the more solemn liturgical celebrations, incense is commonly used. Placed on the embers of the censer, it spreads its pleasant aroma throughout the sacred space.

In its early days, the Church did not use incense to avoid suspicion of idolatry, as offering it to the gods was common among pagans. In the catacombs, however, Christians began to use it to perfume the area, as the place lacked sufficient ventilation. Finally, around the fourth century, the Church adopted it for major solemnities as a way of paying further homage to the true God.

Today, incense serves not only to add splendour to ceremonies, but also has other significations, such as expressing the act of direct adoration we render to the Blessed Sacrament, or

indirect adoration through liturgical objects related to the Redeemer: To express our veneration for the saints through their images; to revere the sacred ministers and even the faithful, by reason of their baptismal dignity. Furthermore, as a sacramental, when blessed, it serves as a vehicle for certain graces related to the Liturgy, protects against the action of the devil, and symbolizes the prayer that ascends to the throne of God.

Among other liturgical acts, it is burned at solemn Masses, during benediction with the Blessed Sacrament and in processions and funerals. ✦

Thurible with incense - Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary, Caieiras (Brazil)



Thiago Tamura

Two Attitudes... One Person?

Tenderly embracing a child and indignantly lashing out at a band of profiteers... Can two such radically opposite attitudes fit into the same soul, the same psychology, the same holiness?



✠ Fr. Louis Goyard, EP

Nothing could be more enchanting than the Gospel scene in which we find Our Lord Jesus Christ surrounded by children who want the Saviour to “lay His hands on them and pray” (Mt 19:13). The disciples, concerned for the Master’s tranquillity, try to send them away... However, Jesus rebukes them and calls the little ones to Him, blesses them by laying His hands on them and even embraces them. On this occasion was manifested that characteristic tenderness which popular piety portrays in the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a model of meekness and kindness.

In very different circumstances, the same Evangelists show us Our Lord wielding a rope whip fashioned by His own hands and driving the peddlers out of the Temple (cf. Jn 2:14-16), “with anger, grieved” (Mk 3:5). It is a striking scene: terrified quadrupeds, birds taking flight in confusion, coins scattered on the ground, fleeing vendors stumbling over overturned tables and benches, before the dumbfounded gaze of their customers, who, stunned, also make a hasty retreat...

In a solemn voice, Jesus declares: “My house shall be called a house of prayer; but you make it a den of robbers” (Mt 21:13).

But... can this really be the same Person? How can two such radically opposed ways of being fit into the

same soul, the same psychology, the same holiness?

* * *

St. Thomas¹ teaches that the human passions, considered in themselves, are merely a capacity for dynamism and are therefore neutral. They become agents of good or evil when man directs them towards a good or evil end, just as the same tool can perform a beneficial service or be used to commit a crime.

However, although the dynamism of passion is a motivational force for man, he must always remain the master of himself and of his actions. If he lets passion take over his conduct, he allows a reversal of roles: becoming the instrument of his own passions, which then dominate him and reduce him from ruler to the one ruled.

In these circumstances, he may become so overpowered by anger that, unable to control himself, he ends up venting his passion on his surroundings, neighbours or family members, who have nothing to do with the cause of his rage. He will be unilaterally dominated by anger at that moment, and there will be no room for compassion. Someone who, on the contrary, allows himself to be dominated by the passion of affection could become so blinded by it that he is unable to discern the evil that those in whom he has naively placed his trust are plotting against him.

One might consequently say that man is under the paradoxical obligation to deny any passion whatsoever – and consequently become an apathetic being – in order to avoid the risk of falling into imbalance. And no small number of people will call this state of apathy “equilibrium”... So what, then, should we prefer? How should we act? With passion or indifference?

* * *

We have the answer when we look at our supreme Archetype. Indeed, we find nothing of this inner conflict in Our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom all is perfection and therefore harmony. He does not have to choose between passion and apathy: His passions are always balanced. How is this explained?

Temperance is precisely the virtue called to “temper” – in other words, to moderate, to control – the dynamism of the passions. Just as a bridle holds back the impetus of a horse that is too fiery, temperance keeps the passions subdued to the will and intelligence, which is led by wisdom. It does not annul them, but keeps them on course, like the rudder on a ship, and never allows them to be anything but an instrument, used rationally. Thus, temperance prevents the passions from inverting the good order of things and dominating the man they are meant to serve.

Accordingly, we do not find Our Lord so attentive to the children that



He loses His gravity and seriousness; on the contrary, He dedicates Himself to the apostolate with all seriousness, doing them as much good as possible with a view to their salvation. And in using the whip against the money-changers, He never lost His composure: His eyes never bulged, nor did His face redden or His hair become dishevelled... Nothing could be further from His supreme and permanent equilibrium. The proof of this is in the verse following the expelling of the moneychangers, in St. Matthew's version: "The blind and the lame came to Him in the Temple, and He healed them" (21:14).

These are two attitudes, no doubt, but not two ways of being. Jesus, whether scourging a moneychanger or embracing a child, gives us the true example of balance in temperance, the root of which lies in loving God above all things. ✚



GFrehalter (CC by-sa 4.0)

¹ Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiae*. I-II, q.22, a.3; q.24, a.1-3.

Our Lord welcomes the children - Church of St. John, Bad Rodach (Germany); below, "Jesus expells the sellers from the Temple", by Giotto di Bondone - Cappella degli Scrovegni, Padua (Italy)





Immaculate and “Divine” Infant

What an enchanting Infant! Exempt from original sin, gifted with infused knowledge and the full use of reason from the moment She opened her eyes to reality, Mary understood all that happened around her.

Devoid of any sign of that puerile behaviour proper to the descendants of Adam, She was serious and solemn while also charming and graceful. Her innumerable qualities and gifts were revealed in all her movements, even her slightest gestures, for, like the light of the sun, the fullness of grace emanating from the Blessed Virgin could not be obscured.

Everything in Mary was “divine”, and inspired the perfect practice of virtue.

In the little Mary – her eyes, her eyebrows, her hair, her physiognomy, her vocal inflections – absolutely everything resembled the God Infant, albeit clothed with markedly feminine aspects. Her movements, her breathing, her smallest gestures revealed an intense divine presence which entranced those who saw her.

This is She whom only the Almighty could imagine! This is the little one who rules the immense Heart of God!

Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP.

*“Mary Most Holy: The Paradise of God
Revealed to Men”*