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Sunday, May 28

COMMENTARY ON PENTECOST

From the sermons of St Augustine

The happy day has dawned on us for which Holy Church makes her first radiant appearance to the eyes of faith and sets the hearts of believers on fire. It is the day in which we celebrate the sending of the Holy Spirit by our Lord Jesus Christ, after he had risen from the dead and ascended into glory. In the gospel it is written: *If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, rivers of living water shall flow from his heart.* The Evangelist explains these words by adding: *Jesus said this about the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive. For the Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified.* Now the glorification of Jesus took place when he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, but all was not yet accomplished. The Holy Spirit still had to be given; the one who made the promise had to send him. This is precisely what occurred at Pentecost.

After being in the company of his disciples for the forty days following his resurrection, the Lord ascended into heaven, and on the fiftieth day – the day we are now celebrating – he sent the Holy Spirit. The account is given in Scripture: *Suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and there appeared to them tongues like fire which separated and came to rest on each of them. And they began to speak in other tongues, as the Holy Spirit gave them power of utterance.* That wind cleansed the disciples' hearts, blowing away fleshly thoughts like so much chaff. The fire burnt up their unregenerate desires as if they were straw. The tongues in which they spoke as the Holy Spirit filled them were a foreshadowing of the Church's preaching of the Gospel in the tongues of all nations.

After the flood, in pride and defiance of the Lord, an impious generation erected a high tower and so brought about the division of the human race into many language groups, each with its own peculiar speech which was unintelligible to the rest of the world. At Pentecost, by contrast, the humble piety of believers brought all these diverse languages into the unity of the Church. What discord had scattered, love was to gather together. Like the limbs of a single body, the separated members of the human race would be restored to unity by being joined to Christ, their common head, and welded into the oneness of a holy body by the fire of love. Anyone therefore who rejects the gift of peace and withdraws from the fellowship of this unity cuts himself off from the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So then, my fellow members of Christ's body, you are the fruits of unity and children of peace. Keep this day with joy, celebrate it in freedom of spirit, for in you is fulfilled what was foreshadowed in those days when the Holy Spirit came. At that time whoever received the Holy Spirit spoke in many languages, individual though he was. Now in the same way unity itself speaks through all nations in every tongue. If you yourselves are established in that unity you have the Holy Spirit among you, and nothing can separate you from the Church of Christ which speaks in the language of every nation of the world.

Monday, May 29

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

From *America* magazine in March 2018

In 2018, Pope Francis decreed that “the Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church,” should be inscribed in the Roman Calendar on the Monday after Pentecost and be celebrated every year in churches throughout the world.

The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments announced this in a decree published by the Vatican on March 3, 2018 and signed by the congregation’s prefect, Cardinal Robert Sarah, and its secretary, Archbishop Arthur Roche. The pope, who has emphasized many times the importance of Mary in the church, approved this when he received the cardinal in a private audience.

A “memorial” is a lower-ranked feast day. Celebrations of feast days in the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church are distinguished according to their importance and named either as solemnities, feasts or memorials.

The decree, signed by the two Vatican prelates, said “the joyous veneration” given to the Mother of God by the contemporary church “in the light of reflection on the mystery of Christ and on his nature” cannot ignore “the Virgin Mary, who is both the Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church.”

It traced the history of this veneration down the centuries from the period of the early church as is reflected in the writing of St. Augustine (354-430) and St. Leo the Great, who was pope from 440-461. It recalled that St. Augustine said “Mary is the mother of the members of Christ, because with charity she cooperated in the rebirth of the faithful into the Church” while St. Leo said “the birth of the Head is also the birth of the body, thus indicating that Mary is at once Mother of Christ, the Son of God, and mother of the members of his Mystical Body, which is the Church.”

The Vatican prelates in the decree recalled that “as a caring guide to the emerging Church Mary had already begun her mission in the Upper Room, praying with the Apostles while awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit.” Then, in the course of the centuries, “Christian piety has honored Mary with various titles that are in many ways equivalent” such as “Mother of Disciples, of the Faithful, of Believers,” but also under the title “Mother of the Church” as is found in the texts of spiritual authors and the magisterium of Popes Benedict XIV and Leo XIII

All this laid the foundation that enabled St. Paul VI, at the conclusion of the Third Session of the Second Vatican Council, Nov. 21, 1964, to declare the Blessed Virgin Mary as “Mother of the Church, that is to say of all Christian people, the faithful as well as the pastors, who call her the most loving Mother.” Paul VI decreed at the same time that “the Mother of God should be further honored and invoked by the entire Christian people by this tenderest of titles.”

The authors of the decree recalled various initiatives by the Holy See and the local churches in the following decades that resulted in the establishment of a votive Mass in honor of “the blessed Mary Mother of the Church” (1975) that was subsequently inserted into the Roman Missal, as well as the publication of invocations and formularies.

The congregation’s decree laid down that “the memorial therefore is to appear in all Calendars and liturgical books for the celebration of Mass and of the Liturgy of the Hours,” and provide the relative liturgical texts for this purpose.

Tuesday, May 30

A COMMENTARY ON MARK 10:28-31

From the website of Fr. John McKinnon

Without necessarily having taken to heart the clear point that Jesus had been making, Peter turned the attention from the rich man to himself and the other disciples.

In Mark 10:28 Peter stepped in and said, “Look at us. We left everything and followed you.”

The unfolding narrative would show quite clearly the lack of clear self-knowledge reflected in Peter’s claim. He had not yet left behind his own self-reliance, or his need for prestige and position.

It was not clear from the storyline whether Peter was making his claim enthusiastically, contrasting himself and the disciples with the rich man, and being somewhat proud of their choice and generosity. His comment could also have hidden a deeper sense of doubt, a wondering what they would get out of it, an uncertainty about their entering the Kingdom and of experiencing salvation. Whatever about that, it would seem to have reflected his current assessment of their position: they were not at this stage experiencing life in the Kingdom – or he would not have needed even to voice his doubt.

In verses 29 – 30, Jesus answered him, “I tell you clearly, there is no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands on account of me and on account of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more in this world, homes, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and lands – with persecution – and endless life in the world to come.”

Jesus took Peter where he was, and began his reflection from there. It is interesting to note that among those things and people that the disciples had left behind, and then would receive back a hundredfold, no mention was made of wives or husbands. Jesus had already made the point that the two became one flesh, yoked together by God. It is also worthy of note that he omitted mention of receiving hundredfold fathers: he had also already made the point that in the Kingdom all were to be like children – there was no place for patriarchs.

Though Jesus also mentioned endless life in the world to come, the hundredfold would be experienced in this age. It would be a now experience.

Mark obviously had in mind the situation of his community of disciples. (Jesus’ disciples had probably not reached the hundredfold, even though they had each other – and they were encountering tensions there!) In Jesus’ mind the experience of the unity, affection and mutual commitment within the community of disciples would be immeasurably more bonding than the ties of natural family.

Peter’s observation would seem to indicate that such hundredfold had not become his own experience. Yet Peter was one of the community of disciples, companions of Jesus and consequently companions of each other. Why had he apparently missed out on the experience of the hundredfold?

Jesus had said that the hundredfold was the result of leaving all for his sake and the sake of the gospel. Peter had left all at the invitation of Jesus, but he was yet to see his leaving all as a response to the good news as proclaimed by Jesus.

Wednesday, May 31

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE VISITATION

From a 2016 Vatican press release

Pope Francis, on the Feast of the Visitation in 2016, urged Christians to serve other people, without delay or hesitation, saying if we learned how to reach out in this way, the world would be a very different place. During his homily at the morning Mass in the Santa Marta residence he used the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary for his reflections on the concept of a Christian at the service of others.

May 31st was the final day of the month dedicated to Mary and the Pope used the day's readings to illustrate Mary's courage, her helping hand and concern for others and, above all, her joy – a joy, he said, that fills our hearts and gives meaning and a new direction to our lives. Referring to Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth, Pope Francis said this is a liturgy full of joy that arrives like "a breath of fresh air" to fill our lives.

"Christians with a grimace or disgruntled expression on their faces, sad Christians, are a very ugly thing. It's really ugly, ugly, ugly. However, they are not fully Christian. They think they are Christians but they are not fully so. This is the Christian message. And in this atmosphere of joy that today's liturgy gives us like a gift, I would like to underline just two things: first, an attitude; second, a fact. The attitude is one of service or helping others."

The Pope pointed out how the gospel describes Mary as setting off immediately and without hesitation to visit her cousin, despite being pregnant and despite the risk of meeting robbers along the route. This young girl of 16 or 17, he said, was courageous by getting up straightaway and setting out on her journey.

"The courage of women. The courageous women who are present in the Church: they are like Mary. These women who bring up their families, these women who are responsible for rearing their children, who have to face so many hardships, so much pain, women who look after the sick.... Courageous: they get up and help other people. Serving others is a Christian sign. Whoever doesn't live to serve other people, doesn't serve to live. Serving others and being full of joy is the attitude that I would like to underline today. There is joy and also service towards others."

The second attitude whose importance was stressed by the Pope is reaching out and meeting other people. Referring once again to Mary's meeting with her cousin, he noted that the two kinswomen greeted each other with joy and their encounter was very festive.

In conclusion, Pope Francis said if we could learn these two things: to serve others and reach out to them, how much our world would change:

"Reaching out to others is another Christian sign. Persons who describes themselves as Christian and who are unable to reach out to others, to go and meet them are not totally Christian. Being of service and reaching out to others both require going out from themselves: going out to serve and meet others, to embrace another person. Through Mary's service towards others, through that encounter, our Lord's promise is renewed and makes it happen now, just as it did then. And it is really our Lord – as we heard during the first Reading: 'The Lord, your God, is in your midst' – the Lord is about helping other people, the Lord is about meeting other people."

Thursday, June 1

ST JUSTIN'S DOCTRINE REGARDING THE VIRGIN MARY

From Fr. Félix López, S.H.M. in *Home of the Mother* November 2014

What is St. Justin's doctrine regarding the Virgin Mary?

Jesus is the Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, virginally begotten in time by Mary. He states that, "Christ, the Son of God, first existed before the morning star and the moon, yet deigned to become Incarnate, and be born of this Virgin of the family of David." Thus, he affirms the dual nature of Christ, co-eternal God with the Father and true man, born of the Virgin Mary.

Justin is the first Christian author to place the Eve-Mary parallelism alongside that of Adam-Christ. Thus, he states in the Dialogue with Trypho, "Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary conceived faith and joy, when the angel Gabriel announced the good tidings to her that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her, and the power of the Highest would overshadow her: wherefore also the Holy One begotten of her is the Son of God."

Justin affirms the divine motherhood of Mary, even without using the term Theotokos which will eventually appear at the end of the 4th century and will be introduced into the Magisterium at the Council of Ephesus in 431: "For [Christ] called one of His disciples-- previously known by the name of Simon--Peter; since he recognized Him to be Christ the Son of God, by the revelation of His Father: and since we find it recorded in the memoirs of His apostles that He is the Son of God, and since we call Him the Son, we have understood that He proceeded before all creatures from the Father by His power and will (for He is addressed in the writings of the prophets in one way or another as Wisdom, and the Day, and the East, and a Sword, and a Stone, and a Rod, and Jacob, and Israel); and that He became man by the Virgin, in order that the disobedience which proceeded from the serpent might receive its destruction in the same manner in which it derived its origin."

In speaking of the Mother of Jesus, St. Justin always refers to the virginal nature of her motherhood. He presents the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies as proof of the truth of Christianity: "For things which were incredible and seemed impossible for men, these God predicted by the Spirit of prophecy as about to come to pass, in order that, when they came to pass, there might be no unbelief, but faith, because of their prediction."

In reference to the virginal conception, he cites the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14: "And hear again how Isaiah in express words foretold that He should be born of a virgin; for he spoke thus: 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bring forth a son, and they shall say for His name, "God with us." This, then, 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive,' signifies that a virgin should conceive without intercourse. For if she had had intercourse with any one whatever, she was no longer a virgin; but the power of God having come upon the virgin, overshadowed her, and caused her while yet a virgin to conceive."

Thus, we can conclude by saying that St. Justin, in the 2nd century, offers a synthesis of the essential affirmations about Christ and Mary from the Gospels. He presents Christ as pre-existing, equal to the Father, and born in time of the Virgin Mary, by the Holy Spirit, so let us ask Mary that, through her intercession, our heart may be filled with faith and joy by the power of the Holy Spirit

Friday, June 2

ADAM & EVE ATE A FIG, NOT AN APPLE

From a commentary by Dr. Brad Pitre

In ancient Jewish tradition the fig tree was a very significant symbol. If you go back to the Old Testament, there's one time that a fig tree gets mentioned. You know where it is? It's the book of Genesis, in the Garden of Eden. And although most Catholics, when we think about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—the tree of death—we always assume it's an apple tree, because it's an apple tree in all of the pictures, right? Um, guess what? The pictures aren't always right. There's never an apple tree that gets mentioned in Genesis. The only tree that gets mentioned is a fig tree. So in ancient Jewish tradition, they actually believed that the tree of knowledge of good and evil was not an apple tree, but a fig tree.

Go back to the passage in Genesis chapter 3. It's a description of the fall. It says:

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons. (Genesis 3:6-7)

That's an old English translation. Literally, they made themselves loin clothes—that's how the New American Bible translates it. Genesis 3, verse 6-7. Now, let me pause there for just a second. When I was growing up, my Maw Maw had a fig tree in her backyard. And let's just say, when we climb the fig tree, sometimes you get the oil of the leaves on you, and guess what? It would give you a wicked rash. Think about it for a second. Is that the kind of thing you want to make a loincloth out of? I'm thinking fig tree underwear is not a good idea.

So Adam and Eve are doing penance from day one. No sooner do they fall, they're doing penance. Now, the Jews knew this. They read the Scriptures very carefully, so they actually had a tradition that the reason Genesis mentions the fig leaves is because that was the tree that they had just eaten of.

And in fact, there's an ancient Jewish book—it's not in the Bible—it's called *The Life of Adam and Eve*. But it's from the first century AD. It reflects the beliefs of Jesus' time, and this is how it describes the fall of Eve:

At the very moment my eyes were open, I knew that I was naked of the righteousness with which I had been clothed. I looked for leaves, so that I might cover my shame, but I did not find any from the trees of paradise, except those of the fig tree only. And I took its leaves, and I made for myself skirts. They were from the same plants of which I ate. (Life of Adam and Eve 20:1, 4-5)

So now we've got something here. In Jewish tradition, the fig tree was associated with the tree of death—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And when Adam and Eve eat of it, they bring death upon themselves. They commit the first sin, and then they bring suffering and death into the world for all of their poor banished children.

And so on His way into Jerusalem for His Passion, Jesus sees the fig tree. And what does He say? "May no one ever eat of you again." Do you see it now? He curses it, because He's not just a new Solomon. He's not just the Messiah. He's not just coming to set up the new temple. He's also the new Adam. And He's come to undo the effects of the fall, to undo the effects of the first Adam. He doesn't want anybody to eat of the tree of death anymore. He doesn't want anybody to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, so He curses this fig tree as a symbol of what He's going to accomplish on the cross...when he undoes sin and its power, and death and its dominion.

Saturday, June 3

THE MARTYRS OF UGANDA

From the Catholic News Agency

St. Charles and many other martyrs for the faith died between November 15, 1885 and January 27, 1887 in Namugongo, Uganda. St. Charles and his companions were beatified in 1920 and canonized by Pope Paul VI in 1964.

In 1879 Catholicism began spreading in Uganda when the White Fathers, a congregation of priests founded by Cardinal Lavigerie, were peacefully received by King Mutesa of Uganda. The priests soon began preparing catechumens for baptism and before long a number of the young pages in the king's court had become Catholics.

However, on the death of Mutesa, his son Mwanga, a corrupt man who ritually engaged in pedophilic practices with the younger pages, took the throne. When King Mwanga had a visiting Anglican Bishop murdered, his chief page, Joseph Mukasa, a Catholic who went to great length to protect the younger boys from the king's lust, denounced the king's actions and was beheaded on November 15, 1885.

The 25-year-old Charles Lwanga, a man wholly dedicated to the Christian instruction of the younger boys, became the chief page, and just as forcibly protected them from the king's advances.

On the night of the martyrdom of Joseph Mukasa, realizing that their own lives were in danger, Lwanga and some of the other pages went to the White Fathers to receive baptism. Another 100 catechumens were baptized in the week following Joseph Mukasa's death.

The following May, King Mwanga learned that one of the boys was learning catechism. He was furious and ordered all the pages to be questioned to separate the Christians from the others. The Christians, 15 in all, between the ages of 13 and 25, stepped forward. The King asked them if they were willing to keep their faith. They answered in unison, "Until death!"

They were bound together and taken on a two-day walk to Namugongo where they were to be burned at the stake. On the way, Matthias Kalemba, one of the eldest boys, exclaimed, "God will rescue me. But you will not see how he does it, because he will take my soul and leave you only my body." The executioners cut him to pieces and left him to die alone on the road, which took at least three days. When they reached the site where they were to be burned, they were kept tied together for seven days while the executioners prepared the wood for the fire.

On June 3, 1886, the Feast of the Ascension, Charles Lwanga was separated from the others and burned at the stake. The executioners slowly burnt his feet until only the charred remained. Still alive, they promised him that they would let him go if he renounced his faith. He refused saying, "You are burning me, but it is as if you are pouring water over my body." He then continued to pray silently as they set him on fire. Just before the flames reached his heart, he looked up and said in a loud voice, "Katonda! – My God!" and died.

His companions were all burned together the same day all the while praying and singing hymns until they died.

There were 24 protomartyrs in all. The last of the protomartyrs, a young man named John Mary, was beheaded by King Mwanga on January 27, 1887.