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Sunday, June 4

COMMENTARY ON THE TRINITY BY GREGORY NAZIANZEN

From the writings of Gregory Nazianzen

To speak of the Godhead is, I know, like crossing the ocean on a raft, or like flying to the stars with wings of narrow span. Even heavenly beings are unable to speak of God's decrees or of his government of the world. But enlighten my mind and loosen my tongue, Spirit of God, and I will sound aloud the trumpet of truth, so that all who are united to God may rejoice with their whole heart.

There is one eternal God, uncaused and uncircumscribed by any being existing before him or yet to be. He is infinite, and all time is in his hands. He is the mighty Father of one mighty and noble Son. In no way does the birth of this Son resemble human birth, for God is spirit. The Word of God is another divine Person, but not another Godhead. He is the living seal of the Father, the only son of the only God. He is equal to the Father, so that although the Father always remains wholly the Father, the Son is the creator and ruler of this world and is the Father's power and wisdom.

Let us praise the Son first of all, venerating the blood that expiated our sins. He lost nothing of his divinity when he saved me, when like a good physician he stooped to my festering wounds. He was a mortal man, but he was also God. He was of the race of David, but Adam's creator. He who has no body clothed himself with flesh. He had a mother, but she was a virgin. He who is without bounds bound himself with the cords of our humanity. He was victim and high priest – yet he was God. He offered up his blood and cleansed the whole world. He was lifted up on the cross, but it was sin that was nailed to it. He became as one among the dead, but he rose from the dead, raising to life also many who had died before him. On the one hand, there was the poverty of his humanity; on the other, the riches of his divinity. Do not let what is human in the Son permit you wrongfully to detract from what is divine. For the sake of the divine, hold in the greatest honor the humanity which the immortal Son took upon himself for love of you.

My soul, why do you hold back? Sing praise to the Holy Spirit as well, lest your words tear asunder what is not separated by nature. Let us tremble before the great Spirit who also is God, through whom we have come to know God, who transforms us into God. He is the omnipotent bestower of diverse gifts and the giver of life both in heaven and on earth. He is the divine strength, proceeding from the Father and subject to no power. He is not the Son, for there is only one Son, but he shares equally in the glory of the Godhead.

In the one God are three pulsations that move the world. Through them I became a new and different person when I came out of the font, where my death was buried, into the light – a man restored to life from the dead. If God cleansed me so completely, then I must worship him with my whole being.

Monday, June 5

ST BONIFACE, BISHOP AND MARTYR

From *My Catholic Life* website

In the treasury of the cathedral of Fulda, Germany, there is a medieval Codex, a large, bound book of prayers and theological documents, which very likely belonged to Saint Boniface. The rough cover of the Codex is deeply sliced with cuts from a sword. A tradition dating back to the generations just after Saint Boniface's own time attests that he wielded this very book like a shield to ward off the blows of robbers who attacked him and a large band of missionaries in Northern Germany in 754. Our saint tried to protect himself, both metaphorically and literally, with the written truths of our faith. It was to no avail. Saint Boniface and fifty-two of his companions were slaughtered. Ransacking the baggage of the missionaries for treasure, the band of thieves found no gold vessels or silver plates but only sacred texts the unlettered men couldn't read. Thinking them worthless, they left these books on the forest floor, to be recovered later by local Christians. The Codex eventually made it into the Treasury at Fulda where it is found today. One of the earliest images of Saint Boniface, from a Sacramentary dating to 975, depicts the saint deflecting the blows of a sword with a large, thick book. The Codex is a second-class relic, giving silent witness to the final moments of a martyr.

Saint Boniface is known as the "Apostle of the Germans" and is buried in the crypt of Fulda Cathedral. However, his baptismal name was Winfrid, and he was born and raised in Anglo-Saxon England. He was from an educated family, entered a local monastery as a youth, and was ordained a priest at the age of thirty. In 716 Winfrid sailed to the continent to become a missionary to the peoples on the Baltic coast of today's Northern Germany. He was able to communicate with them because his Anglo-Saxon tongue was similar to the languages of the native Saxon and Teutonic tribes. Winfrid was among the first waves of those many Irish and Anglo-Saxon monks who saved what could be saved of Roman and Christian culture in Europe after the Roman Empire collapsed. Large migrations of Gothic peoples, mostly Arian Christians, pagans, or a confusing mix of the two, filled the vacuum created after Roman order disintegrated, and they needed to be inculcated in the faith to rebuild a superior version of the culture they had helped decimate.

Winfrid traveled to Rome the year after first arriving on the continent, where the pope renamed him Boniface and appointed him missionary Bishop of Germany. After this, he never returned to his home country. He set out to the north and proceeded to dig and lay the foundations of Europe as we know it. He organized dioceses, helped found monasteries, baptized thousands, pacified tribes, challenged tree-worshipping pagans, taught, preached, held at least one large Church Council, convinced more Anglo-Saxon monks to follow his lead, ordained priests, appointed bishops, stayed in regular contact with his superiors in Rome, and pushed the boundaries of Christianity to their northernmost limit. Boniface was indefatigable. He was in his late seventies, and still pushing to convert the unconverted, when he was surprised and slain in a remote wilderness.

Saint Boniface was well educated, and many of his letters and related correspondence survive. But he was, above all, a man of action. He was daring and fearless. He was a pathbreaker. His faith moved mountains and tossed them into the sea. His labors, combined with his great faith, are the stuff of legend. More incredibly, though, they are the stuff of truth.

Tuesday, June 6

THE STORYLINE OF THE BOOK OF TOBIT

From Lou Occhi on the *homelesscatholic.com* website

Tobit is, basically a short story about Tobit and his son Tobias and their struggles. We do not know the author of Tobit. We believe the story is a novella and we do accept it as divinely inspired. Many of the Jewish customs, traditions and morality are portrayed in the story.

Tobit, who was in exile in northern Israel, had been deported to Nineveh. There he experienced a string of misfortunes. He had large financial losses. One night, while sleeping outside, droppings from a bird's nest fell into his eyes and blinded him. Because of his financial losses and his blindness, he prayed that the Lord would take him. At the same time, a woman named Sarah was also praying for death because she had lost seven husbands on her wedding night. Each was killed by a demon named Asmodeus in the bridal chamber. God hears their prayers and sends the angel Raphael in human form to aid them both.

Tobit recalled that he had a large sum of money deposited in Medes. He tells his son Tobias to go and retrieve his deposit. Tobias tells Tobit that he has no idea where to go, but Tobit insists he go and gives him a document validating his deposit. Tobias went out looking for a young man to help him on his journey. He runs into Raphael and asks him if he knows his way around Medes. Raphael tells him he is very familiar with Medes and knows the way. So, with his father's blessing, Tobias leaves for Medes along with Raphael.

On the way, Tobias is sitting by a river when a large fish comes out of the water and tries to bite Tobias. Raphael tells Tobias to grab the fish by its gills and pull it out of the water. Then he tells Tobias to cut out its heart, liver and gall because they are useful. The fish is then used as a source of food on their journey.

When they reach Medes, Raphael tells Tobias that they will stay with a man named Raguel who is from the same tribe as Tobias' family. Raphael goes on to tell Tobias that Raguel has an only child, Sarah, and that he should ask Raguel for permission to marry her. Tobias objected because he knew that she had been given to seven husbands and they all died. Raphael tells him those deaths were the fault of an evil demon. He goes on to tell Tobias that he should burn a little piece of the fish's heart to drive the demon away and burn the fish's liver to act as a form of incense. He should also pray with Sarah for three days before consummating the marriage.

When they reach Raguel's house they are greeted as members of the family. Tobias asks Raguel to take Sarah as his wife. Raguel tries to talk Tobias out of the marriage but Tobias persists. Finally, Raguel submits even though he believes that Tobias will not survive the wedding night. Tobias along with Sarah burn the fish's heart and liver. They then pray together for three days. On the evening of the third day Tobias and Sarah enter into their marriage. Raguel orders one of his servants to go out and dig a grave for Tobias. In the morning, he is informed that Tobias is still alive. Raguel then tells his servant to go fill the grave before Tobias sees it.

Eventually Tobias retrieves the money owed his father and returns home with his wife. Raphael then instructs Tobias to rub the gall from the fish on his father's eyes. This causes the scales on Tobias eyes to fall off and his vision is restored.

Wednesday, June 7

WHY DO CATHOLICS PRAY FOR THE DEAD?

From the *busted halo* website

Praying for the dead can be a helpful part of the grieving process, but it's also part of Catholic tradition to pray for those who are no longer here on Earth with us. So, where did the practice come from?

The earliest Scriptural reference to prayers for the dead comes in the second book of Maccabees. The books of Maccabees were among the latest written books found in the Old Testament, and they recount the struggle of the Jewish people for freedom against the Seleucid Empire, around 100-200 years before the birth of Christ. As such, they are written from an Orthodox Jewish point of view. The second book of Maccabees tells how Judas Maccabee, the Jewish leader, led his troops into battle in 163 B.C. When the battle ended, he directed that the bodies of those Jews who had died to be buried. As soldiers prepared their slain comrades for burial, they discovered that each was wearing an amulet taken as booty from a pagan Temple. This violated the law of Deuteronomy and so Judas and his soldiers prayed that God would forgive the sin these men had committed (2 Maccabees 12:39-45). This is the first indication in the Bible of a belief that prayers offered by the living can help free the dead from any sin that would separate them from God in the life to come. It is echoed in the New Testament when Paul offers a prayer for a man named Onesiphorus who had died: "May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day" (2 Timothy 1:18). The cave-like tombs under the city of Rome, which we call catacombs, also bear evidence that members of the Roman Christian community gathered there to pray for their fellow followers of Christ who lay buried there. By the fourth century, prayers for the dead are mentioned in Christian literature as though they were already a longstanding custom.

The practice of praying for the dead is rooted first in Christian belief in the everlasting life promised in Jesus' teachings and foreshadowed by his disciples' experience that God had raised him from the dead. After death, even though separated from our earthly body, we yet continue a personal existence. It is as living persons that God invites us into a relationship whose life transcends death. Praying for the dead has further origins in our belief in the communion of saints. Members of this community who are living often assist each other in faith by prayers and other forms of spiritual support. Christians who have died continue to be members of the communion of saints. We believe that we can assist them by our prayers, and they can assist us by theirs.

Our prayers for the dead begin at the moment of death. Often family members will gather in prayer around the bedside of the person who has died. The Order of Christian Funerals includes a Vigil Service for the deceased, which can be held in the home, in the church, or in a funeral home chapel, the funeral Mass and the Rite of Committal (which generally takes place at the burial site). The prayers express hope that God will free the person who has died from any burden of sin and prepare a place for him or her in heaven. Death remains a mystery for us—a great unknown. Yet Christian language evokes a hopeful imagination in the presence of death, an assurance that our love, linked to Christ's love, can help bridge whatever barriers might keep those whom we love from fully enjoying the presence of a loving and life-giving God.

Thursday, June 8

THE COMMANDMENT OF LOVE

From Pope Francis' Angelus address on November 4, 2018

At the heart of today's Gospel passage from Mk 12, there is the commandment of love: *love of God and love of neighbor*. A scribe asks Jesus: "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus responds by quoting the profession of faith with which every Israelite opens and closes his day, and begins with the words: "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord" from Deuteronomy 6:4. In this manner Israel safeguards its faith in the fundamental reality of its whole creed: only one Lord exists and that Lord is 'ours' in the sense that he is bound to us by an indissoluble pact; he loved us, loves us, and will love us for ever. It is from this source, this love of God, that the two-fold commandment comes to us: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.... You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

In choosing these two Words addressed by God to his people and by putting them together, Jesus taught once and for all that love for God and love for neighbor are inseparable; moreover, they sustain one another. Even if set in a sequence, they are two sides of a single coin: experienced together they are a believer's strength! To love God is to live in him and for him, for what he is and for what he does. Our God is unmitigated *giving*; he is unlimited *forgiveness*; he is a *relationship* that promotes and fosters. Therefore, to love God means to invest our energies each day to be his assistants in the unmitigated service of our neighbor, in trying to forgive without limitations, and in cultivating relationships of communion and fraternity.

Mark the Evangelist does not bother to specify *who* the neighbor is, because a neighbor is a person whom I meet on the journey each day. It is not a matter of pre-selecting my neighbor; this is not Christian. To think my neighbor is the one I have chosen ahead of time is not Christian; it is pagan. Instead it is about having eyes to see and a heart to want what is good for him or her. If we practice seeing with Jesus' gaze, we will always be listening and be close to those in need. Of course our neighbor's needs require effective responses, but even beforehand they require sharing. With one look we can say that the hungry need not just a bowl of soup, but also a smile, to be listened to, and also a prayer, perhaps said together.

Today's Gospel passage invites us all to be directed not only toward the needs of our poorest brothers and sisters, but also above all to be attentive to their need for fraternal closeness, for a meaning to life, and for tenderness. This is a challenge for our Christian communities: it means avoiding the risk of being communities that have many initiatives but few relationships; the risk of being community 'service stations' but with little company, in the full and Christian sense of this term.

God, who is love, created us to love so that we can love others while remaining united with him. It would be misleading to claim to love our neighbor without loving God; and it would also be deceptive to claim to love God without loving our neighbor. The two dimensions of love, for God and for neighbor in their unity characterize the disciple of Christ. May the Virgin Mary help us to welcome and bear witness in everyday life to this luminous lesson.

Friday, June 9

JESUS REVEALS TO US WHAT GOD IS TRULY LIKE

From the Irish Jesuits' *Sacred Space* website

The truth, as Jesus once said, will make us free. In today's gospel reading from Mark 12, we see another effect of the truth - it brings us joy - "the large crowd was listening to him with delight". Jesus was telling them the truth about who he was, and they were delighted. Do I delight in the truth? Does it bring me joy? Do I taste its freedom?

The style of argument seen in today's gospel delights Jesus' original audience although it may seem strange to us. When the scribes teach that the Messiah is the son of David they seem to imply that he is inferior to David. Jesus argues that Psalm 110 (used during the coronation of a king) shows that the opposite is the case. In its opening verse David (its presumed author) writes that "The Lord" (God) speaks to "my lord" (the king). "My lord", or the Messiah, is therefore superior to David. There is even a hint of divine status, or at least of a divine relationship, in what follows: "Sit on my right hand".

Jesus is more than the son of David. The arguments throughout the gospel about the identity of Jesus may not help or nourish prayer too much. Suffice from this passage to express our faith in prayer that Jesus is Lord, the beloved son 'in whom the Father was well pleased.' He is Son of God, human and divine. In his love and to him we pray.

Jesus provoked people to think about who he really was. He did not have an identity crisis himself! God who was revealed in mysterious ways in the past is now being made known by the incarnate Word. Jesus reveals to us what God is truly like.

Who is Jesus for me? How would I introduce him to someone else? All titles are inadequate for him. Above all, he is the Son of God. Spending time with him is a means to knowing him more fully. There is an on-going invitation to form a deeper relationship with him.

Saturday, June 10

MARY AND THE CHURCH ARE ONE MOTHER

From Blessed Isaac of Stella's *Sermo 51*

The Son of God is the first-born of many brothers. Although by nature he is the only-begotten, by grace he has joined many to himself and made them one with him. For to those who receive him he has given the power to become the sons of God.

He became the Son of man and made many men sons of God, uniting them to himself by his love and power, so that they became as one. In themselves they are many by reason of their human descent, but in him they are one by divine rebirth.

The whole Christ and the unique Christ – the body and the head – are one: one because born of the same God in heaven, and of the same mother on earth. They are many sons, yet one son. Head and members are one son, yet, many sons; in the same way, Mary and the Church are one mother, yet more than one mother; one virgin, yet more than one virgin.

Both are mothers, both are virgins. Each conceives of the same Spirit, without concupiscence. Each gives birth to a child of God the Father, without sin. Without any sin, Mary gave birth to Christ the head for the sake of his body. By the forgiveness of every sin, the Church gave birth to the body, for the sake of its head. Each is Christ's mother, but neither gives birth to the whole Christ without the cooperation of the other.

In the inspired Scriptures, what is said in a universal sense of the virgin mother, the Church, is understood in an individual sense of the Virgin Mary, and what is said in a particular sense of the virgin mother Mary is rightly understood in a general sense of the virgin mother, the Church. When either is spoken of, the meaning can be understood of both, almost without qualification. In a way, every Christian is also believed to be a bride of God's Word, a mother of Christ, his daughter and sister, at once virginal and fruitful. These words are used in a universal sense of the Church, in a special sense of Mary, in a particular sense of the individual Christian. They are used by God's Wisdom in person, the Word of the Father.

This is why Scripture says: *I will dwell in the inheritance of the Lord*. The Lord's inheritance is, in a general sense, the Church; in a special sense, Mary; in an individual sense, the Christian. Christ dwelt for nine months in the tabernacle of Mary's womb. He dwells until the end of the ages in the tabernacle of the Church's faith. He will dwell for ever in the knowledge and love of each faithful soul.