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* Knights of Malta *

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Chancellor's Update

Celebrating Christmas Using a Favorite Parable

Some of the early Church Fathers related their views of this famous parable.

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Augustine tells us, "This man represents Adam, and stands for the human race. Jerusalem is that heavenly city of peace from whose happiness he has fallen. Humiliated, he came down, made wretched through sin, to Jericho, that is, to the world."

Basil continues, "For Jericho lies in the deep valley of Palestine; while Jerusalem is seated on a height, occupying the summit of a mountain. Man therefore comes from the heights to the depths, so that he is caught by the robbers who are wont to dwell in the wilderness. Hence: *And fell among robbers.*" Ambrose describes the robbers as "angels of the night, and of darkness, among whom he would not have fallen had he not, regardless of the divine commandment, exposed himself to them." Likewise, Bede says, "For had he not first through pride grown big within him, he would not have so easily fallen when tempted from without."

Augustine says that because the first man disobeyed God, "The devil and his angels stripped human kind; that is, deprived them of the adornments of virtue, and wounded them, that is, injuring in them the power of free will." Again Bede says, "They deprived him of the glory of the garment of immortality and innocence." Hence there follows: *Who also stripped him and having wounded him went away.*

Augustine continues, "They stripped man of immortality and, having wounded him, by persuading him to sin, left him half dead: for in the part of him which can know and understand God, man is alive; in the part however in which he has been weakened by sin, and overcome, he is dead. And this is the meaning of what follows: *Leaving him half dead.* He is not able to return to the eternal life he has lost. And so he lay there; unable of his own power to rise and seek a physician, God, to heal him."

Chrysostom tells us that Adam "lay there destitute of the means of salvation, pierced by the wounds of his sins; whom neither Aaron the Priest, passing by, could help by his sacrifice; for we read: *And it chanced that a certain priest... seeing him, passed by.* Not even his brother Moses, the Levite, could help by the law. So there follows: *In like manner also a levite... saw him, and passed by.*"

Bede describes this in detail. "The Priest and the Levite, who seeing the wounded man passed by, signify the priesthood and ministry of the Old Testament, when the wounds of the clean sick could only be pointed out by the decrees of the Law, but could not be cured by them; for it was impossible (as the Apostle says) that by the blood of calves and lambs or by the blood of goats, *sin should be taken away* (Heb. x. 4)."

But a certain Samaritan, being on his journey, came near him. Augustine describes the Samaritan as "remote from him by race, his neighbour by compassion." He also tells us that Jesus wanted us to identify Him as the Samaritan. "For Samaritan is interpreted to mean guardian. When they said to Him: *Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil* (John, viii. 48), while denying He had a devil, for He knew Himself to be the banisher of devils, He did not deny He was the Guardian of the weak." The Greek interpreter explains that Christ wanted "to make clear that neither the Priest nor the Levite, in both of whom was presupposed a knowledge of the Law, had fulfilled the intention of the Law, whereas it was for this He had come: to fulfill the purpose of the Law."

Ambrose tells us that because of compassion, "He came near us by the gift of His mercy. So we have: *And seeing him was moved with compassion.*" Augustine continues, "Seeing him lying there

powerless, without movement, He was moved by compassion, for He found no merit in him which gave him the right to be healed.”

And, going up to him, bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine. Augustine views the binding up of the wounds as the correction of sin. He sees oil as the comfort of good hope, through the pardon given to restore us to peace, and wine as the encouragement to work most fervently in the spirit. Chrysostom sees the Divine Physician healing our wounds with his Blood (wine) and Anointing (oil).

And, setting him upon his own beast, brought him to an inn and took care of him. Augustine believes that His own beast is His own Body, **confirming how He came to us**, namely, **the Incarnation of Christ**. Ambrose believes that placing us on His own beast means that He bears our sins and suffers for us. “By His assumption of our body He takes away the weakness of our flesh.”

Chrysostom believes that the inn is the Church, “which in the journey of this world receives the weary and those that are overcome by the weight of their sins; where, casting aside the burden of sin, the wearied traveler may rest, and rested is restored with healthful food. And this is what is meant by, *and took care of him*. Outside this inn is all that is evil and destructive; within is contained all peace and healthfulness.”

At the beginning of the last century the current innkeeper, Pope Leo XIII, in an encyclical reminded the current generation “from what an abyss Christ delivered mankind and to what a height He raised it. The human race, exiled and disinherited, had for ages been daily hurrying into ruin, involved in the terrible and numberless ills brought about by the sin of our first parents, nor was there any human hope of salvation, when Christ our Lord came down as the Savior from heaven. At the very beginning of the world God had promised Him as the conqueror of ‘the Serpent’, hence succeeding ages had eagerly looked forward to His coming. The prophets had long and clearly declared that all hope was in Him. The varying fortunes, the achievements, customs, laws, ceremonies and sacrifices of the Chosen People had distinctly and lucidly foreshadowed the truth, that the salvation of mankind was to be accomplished in Him who should be the Priest, Victim, Liberator, Prince of Peace, Teacher of all nations, Founder of an eternal kingdom. By all these titles, images and prophecies, differing in kind though like in meaning, He alone was designated who ‘for his exceeding charity wherewith he loved us’, gave Himself up for our salvation. **And so, when the fullness of time came in God’s divine Providence, the only-begotten Son of God became man**, and in behalf of mankind made most abundant satisfaction in His Blood to the outraged majesty of His Father, and by this infinite price He redeemed man for His own...When Jesus Christ had blotted out the handwriting of the decree that was against us, fastening it to the cross, at once God’s wrath was appeased, the primeval fetters of slavery were struck off from unhappy and erring man, God’s favor was won back, grace restored, the gates of heaven opened, the right to enter them revived, and the means afforded of doing so. Then man, as though awakening from a long-continued and deadly lethargy, beheld at length the light of the truth, for long ages desired, yet sought in vain. First of all, he realized that he was born to much higher and more glorious things than the frail and inconstant objects of sense which had hitherto formed the end of his thoughts and cares. He learnt that the meaning of human life, the supreme law, the end of all things was this: that we come from God and must return to Him...Men’s aims, life, habits and customs received a new direction. As the knowledge of the Redeemer spread far and wide and His power, which destroys ignorance and former vices, penetrated into the very life-blood of the nations, such a change came about that the face of the world was entirely altered by the creation of a Christian civilization. The remembrance of these events, venerable brethren, is full of infinite joy, but it also teaches us the lesson that we must both feel and render with our whole hearts gratitude to our divine Savior (Leo XIII, ‘Tametsi Futura Prospicientibus’, ‘on Jesus Christ Our Redeemer’, Nov. 1, 1900).”

Rejoice! Christ is born! Merry Christmas!

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