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# ST. BONAVENTURE

## THE TREE OF LIFE

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Bonaventure, [\*Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God; The Tree of Life; The Life of St. Francis\*](#), ed. Richard J. Payne, trans. Ewert Cousins, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978), 126–139.

### PART I - ON THE MYSTERY OF HIS ORIGIN

#### FIRST FRUIT: HIS DISTINGUISHED ORIGIN

##### *Jesus Begotten of God*

1. When you hear that Jesus is begotten of God, beware lest some inadequate thought of the flesh<sup>1</sup> appear before your mind's eye. Rather, with the vision of the dove and the eagle, believe simply and contemplate with penetrating gaze the following: From that Eternal Light which is at the same time measureless and most simple, most brilliant and most hidden, there emerges a coeternal, coequal and consubstantial splendor, who is the power and wisdom of the Father. In him the Father ordered all things from eternity; through him *he made the world* (Heb. 1:2) and governs and directs it to his own glory, partly by nature, partly by grace, partly by justice and partly by mercy, so that he leaves nothing in this world without order.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **“thought of the flesh”** – This is St. Paul's notion of “flesh” by which he means those “places” within us (it could be a memory of harsh and difficult things) that to this point have remained impervious to the word of grace and redemption. Those “parts” of us that continue to belong to our functionally unredeemed self-awareness.

<sup>2</sup> **“nothing in the world without order”** – In other words, this world belongs to God, not to us. Our “flesh” concludes habitually that the world is ours, belongs to us, and that it is up to us to make it do what we wish. In other words, the one thing in the world that defies “ordering” is human beings.

## *Jesus Prefigured*

2. At the beginning of the creation of nature, our first parents were placed in paradise; but they were driven out by the severity of God's decree because they ate of the forbidden tree. From that time his heavenly mercy has not ceased calling straying man back to the way of penance by giving hope of forgiveness and by promising that a Savior would come.<sup>3</sup> Lest such condescension on God's part should fail to effect our salvation<sup>4</sup> because of ignorance and ingratitude, he never ceased announcing, promising and prefiguring the coming of his Son in the five ages of history, through the patriarchs, judges, priests, kings and prophets, from Abel the Just to John the Baptist. Through many thousands of years, by many marvelous prophecies he stirred men's minds to faith<sup>5</sup> and inflamed their hearts with living desires.<sup>6</sup>

**Joachim of Fiore (c 1135-1202 CE)** – “The central doctrine of his three chief works, ‘Liber de Concordia Novi ac Veteris Testamenti’, ‘Expositio in Apocalypsim’, and ‘Psalterium decem Chordarum’, is a **Trinitarian conception of the whole of history, viewed in three great periods (‘status’)**. The first, characterized by the ‘Ordo conjugatorum’, was **the Age of the Father** in which mankind lived under the Law until the end of the OT dispensation; the second, characterized by the ‘Ordo clericorum’, is **the Age of the Son**, lived under Grace and covering the NT dispensation which Joachim calculated as forty-two generations of about thirty years each; the third, that of the ‘Ordo monachorum’ or ‘contemplantium’, is **the Age of**

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<sup>3</sup> “**promising that a Savior would come**” – Bonaventure articulates the essential reliance of the New Testament on the Old Testament – the latter being that which fully conditions the possibility of the former.

<sup>4</sup> “**fail to effect our salvation**” – The “ineffectualness” of salvation has its source in a person's refusal of it, in his or her culpable ignorance of God. Human beings were created to be relational, and especially in relationship with God. Therefore, God's offer of redemption to each of us restores that relationality – human beings, then, *must* cooperate in the grace offered them, because that cooperation is proof of effective redemption.

<sup>5</sup> “**stirred men's minds to faith**” – I recall what I learned from St. John Henry Newman years ago, that “faith” is a transformation of our merely human intellect when our intellect follows and serves what we love. In other words, faith is a transformation of our intellect – what it is able to understand – when we are filled with love for God. For example, we are far more likely to understand sufficiently a person when our love for them causes us to want to understand them. If we do not care for someone, or dislike or hate him or her, then our intellect gets distorted, skewed – it “wants” to find “reasons” why we don't care for him or her.

<sup>6</sup> “**inflamed their hearts with living desires**” – The Tree of Life is substantially committed to such “inflaming”, by which “flame” is meant one that purifies “killing desires” (we, step by step, lose our “taste” for killing desires) but also one that captures “were not our hearts burning within us?”.

**the Spirit**, to be lived in the liberty of the 'Spiritualis Intellectus' proceeding from the Old and New Testaments. This age would see the rise of new religious orders to convert the whole world and usher in the 'Ecclesia Spiritualis'. Joachim never advanced his doctrine of the third age to a point of danger to ecclesiastical authority, but his expectations concerning history had a far-reaching influence in the following centuries among groups who carried his ideas to revolutionary conclusions, notably certain \*Franciscans and \*Fratricelli. <sup>7</sup>

### *Jesus Sent from Heaven*<sup>1</sup>

3. Finally, the *fulness of time* (Gal. 4:4) had come. Just as man was formed from the earth on the sixth day by the power and wisdom of the divine hand, so at the beginning of the sixth age,<sup>8</sup> the Archangel Gabriel was sent to the Virgin. When she gave her consent to him, the Holy Spirit came upon her like a divine fire inflaming her soul and sanctifying her flesh in perfect purity. But the *power of the Most High overshadowed* her (Luke 1:35) so that she could endure such fire. By the action of that power, instantly his body was formed, his soul created, and at once both were united to the divinity in the Person of the Son, so that the same Person was God and man, with the properties of each nature maintained.<sup>9</sup>

Oh, if you could feel in some way<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., [\*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church\*](#) (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 883.

<sup>\*1</sup> Cf. Matt. 1:18–23; Luke 1:26–38.

<sup>8</sup> **"of the sixth Age"** – Analyzing human history and perceiving distinct "Ages", as perceived by some profound and exceptional appearing during such a Period of time, was popular at the time of Bonaventure. Most famously were the Ages articulated by the monk Joachim of Fiore

<sup>9</sup> **"the properties of each nature maintained"** – This careful expression of the unique constitution of the God-Man was given normative form at the **Council of Chalcedon (451 CE)**. **"Chalcedon, the Definition of.** The statement of the Catholic Faith made by the Council of Chalcedon of 451, and eventually accepted in both E. and W., except by the \*Oriental Orthodox Churches. It reaffirms the definitions of \*Nicaea and \*Constantinople, asserting them to be **a sufficient account of the orthodox faith about the Person of Christ**, but declares that the new errors of \*Nestorius and \*Eutyches must be formally repudiated." [F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 317.]

<sup>10</sup> **"if you could feel in some way"** – Bonaventure, as was St. Ignatius of Loyola in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, taught in the "School of the Affections." Our disordered affections distort our other powers of soul, causing us to imagine or to remember poorly. And when our images are poor, then our intellect which operates on those images becomes distorted also. See: Knuuttila, Simo, "Medieval Theories of the Emotions", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/medieval-emotions/>. "Bonaventure differed from these authors in relativizing the difference between sensory and intellectual moving powers and

the quality and intensity of that fire sent from heaven,  
 the refreshing coolness that accompanied it,  
 the consolation it imparted;  
 if you could realize the great exaltation of the Virgin Mother,  
 the ennobling of the human race,  
 the condescension of the divine majesty;  
 if you could hear the Virgin singing with joy;  
 if you could go with your Lady  
 into the mountainous region;  
 if you could see the sweet embrace  
 of the Virgin and the woman who had been sterile  
 and hear the greeting  
 in which the tiny servant recognized his Lord,  
 the herald his Judge  
 and the voice his Word,  
 then I am sure  
 you would sing in sweet tones  
 with the Blessed Virgin  
 that sacred hymn:  
*My soul magnifies the Lord ...*<sup>2</sup>  
 and with the tiny prophet<sup>11</sup>  
 you would exalt, rejoice and adore  
 the marvelous virginal conception!

*Jesus Born of Mary*<sup>3</sup>

4. Under the reign of Caesar Augustus, the *quiet silence* (Wisd. 18:14) of universal peace had brought such calm to an age<sup>12</sup> which had previously been sorely distressed

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attributing emotions to the intellectual soul in a proper sense and not merely metaphorically as was traditionally done. In addressing the soul of Christ in the third book of his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bonaventure argues that there were concupiscible and irascible parts in Christ's intellectual will as well as passions of joy and distress. Similar ideas were also put forward earlier in the so-called *Summa Halensis* (Bonaventure, *Sent.* III.16.2.1 (354); III.33.1.3 (717); see also Prentice 1957; Vaura 2017). Even though Bonaventure's account remained sketchy, it influenced the Franciscan view of the emotions of the will that came to be more systematically analyzed by John Duns Scotus."

<sup>2</sup> Luke 1:46.

<sup>11</sup> "the tiny prophet" – John the Baptist still in the womb of his mother Elizabeth.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Luke 2:1–18.

<sup>12</sup> "brought such calm to an age" – Recent research paints quite a different picture of the Pax Romana of Augustus. For the very few in the western world under the Roman Empire's control – only 15% had Roman citizenship; all the rest of the people were "owned" by others – there was pax. But the

that through his decree a census of the whole world could be taken. Under the guidance of divine providence, it happened that Joseph, the Virgin's husband, took to the town of Bethlehem the young girl of royal descent who was pregnant. When nine months had passed since his conception, the King of Peace *like a bridegroom from his bridal chamber* (cf. 1 Par. 22:9; Ps. 18:6), came forth from the virginal womb. He was brought forth into the light without any corruption just as he was conceived without any stain of lust. Although he was great and rich, he became small and poor for us. He chose to be born away from a home in a stable, to be wrapped in swaddling clothes, to be nourished by virginal milk and to lie in a manger between an ox and an ass.<sup>13</sup> Then "there shone upon us a day of new redemption, restoration of the past<sup>14</sup> and eternal happiness. Then throughout the whole world the heavens became honey-sweet."<sup>4</sup>

Now, then, my soul,  
embrace that divine manger;

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control of the Romans over the nations was regularly brutal, as for example the practice of crucifixion makes evident. It was not a peaceful world at all, but brutal and even extremely so.

**N.T. Wright** notes: "The horrible personal and physical aspects of crucifixion were matched by the social, communal, and political meaning. This is important not just as the "context" for our understanding of the Jesus's execution (as though the barbaric practice were just a dark backdrop to a theology produced from somewhere else), but as part of the very stuff of the theology itself. We might already have figured this out from the careful placing of Philippians 2.8b, *thanatou de staurou*, "even the death of the cross," at the dead center of the poem that some think antedates Paul himself. As we shall see later, the first half of that poem is a downward journey, down to the lowest place to which a human being could sink with regard to pain or shame, personal fate or public perception. **This was precisely the point. Those who crucified people did so because it was the sharpest and nastiest way of asserting their own absolute power and guaranteeing their victim's absolute degradation.** [Wright, N. T.. *The Day the Revolution Began* (pp. 54-55). HarperOne. Kindle Edition.]

<sup>13</sup> "**between an ox and an ass**" - This kind of imagining about the Nativity was famously the work of St. Francis of Assisi - this *devotion to the human life* (not just His incarnation and the passion and death) and the particularities of his actual human circumstances. This kind of contemplation is a way that the Incarnation "completes" its mission by becoming so fully within each of our human experiences (the world with which we interact through our senses).

<sup>14</sup> "**restoration of the past**" - A wonderful insight. We tend to think that reception of redemption - the "moment" of redemption changes things from that point forward. But what Bonaventure reminds is how an unmerited and profound grace given us now changes the way that we understand our past. Think of that Easter "Exultet" hymn that has it: "O happy fault / O necessary sin of Adam / that merited for us / so great a Savior."

<sup>\*4</sup> *Breviarium Romanum*, Officium nativitatis Domini, noc. 1, resp. 2.

press your lips upon and kiss the boy's feet.<sup>15</sup>  
Then in your mind  
keep the shepherds' watch,  
marvel at the assembling host of angels,  
join in the heavenly melody,  
singing with your voice and heart:  
*Glory to God in the highest  
and on earth peace  
to men of good will.*<sup>5</sup>

## SECOND FRUIT: THE HUMILITY OF HIS MODE OF LIFE

### *Jesus Conformed to His Forefathers*

5. On the eighth day the boy was circumcised and named Jesus (Luke 2:21). Thus, not delaying to pour out for you the price of his blood, he showed that he was your true Savior, promised to his forefathers by word and sign, and like them in everything except ignorance and sin. For this reason, he received the mark of circumcision so that coming and appearing *in the likeness of sinful flesh*, he might *condemn sin by sin* (Rom. 8:3) and become our salvation and eternal justice, taking his beginning from humility, which is the root and guardian of all virtues.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> “**kiss the boy's feet**” – Such could easily devolve into sentimentalism. But perhaps we should recall here St. Thomas, the Apostle, *had to touch* the resurrected Christ, so that he could be sure that Jesus was real, not a ghost.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 2:14.

<sup>16</sup> “**humility**” – In the doctrine of the Capital Sins, humility is the virtue that opposes Pride, the source of all sins.

HUMILITY (Lat. *humilitas*, from *humus*, ground). Originally denoting low estate and the cowed attitude likely to result from it, in Judaism and esp. in Christianity the word acquired more positive connotations. **Humility, understood as submissiveness before God, came to be regarded as a virtue, modelled on the example of Christ ‘who humbled himself and became obedient unto death’ (Phil. 2:8).** In both pagan and Judaeo-Christian usage it could be applied to the voluntary adoption of a posture of self-degradation, usually intended to reinforce an appeal for God's mercy and help. **In later Christian usage it came to mean primarily the virtue opposed to \*pride**, but for many centuries it could also be applied to outward gestures of self-abasement, such as bowing. Although humility has sometimes been seen as involving a refusal to regard oneself as superior to other people, St \*Thomas Aquinas, for instance, thought of it as meaning essentially submission to God and a consequent moderation of ambition to keep it within the bounds appointed for each individual by God; **this is compatible with recognizing that in certain ways one may be better endowed by God than someone else is (cf. Summa Theologiae, 2. 2. q. 161, a. 1 and a. 3).** In this sense, **humility has been seen as an aspect of truthfulness, neither exaggerating nor denigrating the truth of what one is.** [F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone,

*Why are you proud,  
dust and ashes?*<sup>6</sup>  
The innocent Lamb  
*who takes away the sins of the world*<sup>7</sup>  
does not shrink from the wound of circumcision.

But you,  
who are a sinner,  
while you pretend to be just,  
are fleeing  
from the remedy of eternal salvation,  
which you can never reach  
unless you are willing to follow  
the humble Savior.

*Jesus Shown to the Magi*<sup>8</sup>

6. When the Lord was born in Bethlehem of Judah, a star appeared to the Magi in the east and with its brightness showed them the way to the home of the humble King.

Do not now turn away  
from the brilliance of that star in the east  
which guides you.  
Become a companion of the holy kings;  
accept the testimony of the Jewish Scriptures  
about Christ  
and avert the evil  
of the treacherous king.  
With gold, frankincense and myrrh,  
venerate Christ the King  
as true God and man.  
Together with the first fruits of the Gentiles to be called to faith,  
adore, confess and praise<sup>17</sup>  
this humble God

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eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 809.]

<sup>6</sup> Ecclus. 10:9.

<sup>7</sup> John 1:29.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Matt. 2:1-12.

<sup>17</sup> “**adore, confess, and praise**” - St. Ignatius in the “Principle and Foundation” [SpEx 23] - “Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God....”



lying in a manger.  
And thus, warned in a dream  
not to follow Herod's pride,  
you will return to your country  
in the footsteps  
of the humble Christ.

*Jesus Submissive to the Law*<sup>9</sup>

7. It was not enough for the teacher of perfect humility, who was equal to the Father in all things, to submit himself to the humble Virgin. He must submit himself also to the Law, *that he might redeem those who were under the Law and free them from the slavery of corruption to the freedom of the glory of the sons of God* (Gal. 4:5; Rom. 8:21). He wished that his mother, although she was most pure, should observe the law of purification. And he wished that he himself, the redeemer of all men, should be redeemed as a firstborn son and should be presented to God in the temple and that an offering should be given for him in the presence of the just who were rejoicing.

Rejoice, then,  
with that blessed old man and the aged Anna;  
walk forth  
to meet the mother and Child.  
Let love overcome your bashfulness;  
let affection dispel your fear.  
Receive the Infant  
in your arms  
and say with the bride;  
*I took hold of him  
and would not let him go.*<sup>10</sup>  
Dance with the holy old man  
and sing with him:  
*Now dismiss your servant, Lord,  
according to your word in peace.*<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Luke 2:27.

<sup>10</sup> Cant. 3:4.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 2:29.



*Jesus Exiled from His Kingdom*<sup>12</sup>

8. It is fitting that perfect *humility* should be adorned and accompanied by three other virtues: *poverty* in fleeing from riches which are spurs to pride; *patience* in bearing insults with composure; *obedience* in following the bidding of others.<sup>18</sup> So, in God's design a higher providence allowed that, when the evil Herod sought to kill the tiny King, he was taken into Egypt as a pilgrim and pauper,<sup>19</sup> directed by a warning from heaven. In the children his own age who were killed because of him, he was killed and, as it were, slaughtered in each.<sup>20</sup> Finally, after Herod's death, he was brought back by divine command into the land of Judah; and growing in age and grace, he lived there with his parents and was subject to them. He never left them for a moment except when, at twelve years of age, he remained in Jerusalem, causing his mother much sorrow while she sought him and bringing her much joy when he was found.

Do not, then, leave the mother and Child  
as they flee into Egypt  
without accompanying them.  
With the beloved mother looking for her beloved Son,  
do not cease searching  
until you have found him.  
O, how you would weep  
if with devotion  
you could look upon so venerable a lady,  
so charming a girl,  
in a foreign country  
with so tender and handsome a little boy;  
or if you could hear the sweet complaint

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<sup>\*12</sup> Cf. Matt. 2:13-23.

<sup>18</sup> "**humility ... poverty ... patience ... obedience**" – I have italicized these four virtues that Bonaventure enjoins. In the forefront of Bonaventure's mind is the Exemplar (Jesus) but also the incandescent Example of St. Francis of Assisi.

<sup>19</sup> "**into Egypt**" – I learned recently that "Egypt" did not mean that Mary and Joseph and Jesus went now into the Nile delta. Egypt at the time controlled the land up remarkably near to Bethlehem. The boundary where Egyptian territory began was only some twenty to thirty kilometers south of Bethlehem.

<sup>20</sup> "**as it were, slaughtered in each [of the holy Innocents killed at Herod's order]**" – So, then, Jesus's relation to each of us is not solely as Exemplar *par excellence* – God's way of being a human being incarnate. Each person is born "in the image" of God, and therefore as a living "interpretation" of God in the world. The effectiveness and persuasiveness of that *image* becomes more when, over time, a person learns how to grow in the *likeness* of God, through the imitation of Christ. Throughout *The Tree of Life*, Bonaventure is in the most concrete of ways showing each of us how such a likeness is cultivated: what exactly Christlikeness looks like and does.

of the loving mother of God:  
*Son, why have you done this to us?*<sup>13</sup>  
as if she would say:  
Most beloved Son,  
how could you give such sorrow  
to your Mother,  
whom you love  
and who loves you  
so much?

### THIRD FRUIT: THE LOFTINESS OF HIS POWER

*Jesus, Heavenly Baptist*<sup>14</sup>

9. When the Savior reached the age of thirty, wishing to work out our salvation, he began first to act before he taught (cf. Acts 1:1). And beginning with baptism as the doorway of the sacraments and the foundation of virtues,<sup>21</sup> he wished to be baptized by John, in order to show us an example of perfect justice and to “confer regenerative power on water by contact with his most pure flesh.”<sup>15</sup>

You also, accompany him faithfully;  
and once regenerated in him,  
explore his secrets so that  
“on the banks of the Jordan  
you may discern  
the Father in the voice,  
the Son in the flesh  
and the Holy Spirit in the dove,  
and when the heaven of the Trinity

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<sup>\*13</sup> Luke 2:48.

<sup>\*14</sup> Cf. Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22.

<sup>21</sup> “**the foundation of the virtues**” – In my life’s experience of the Catholic Church, it was made very clear to me that I was expected to be part of the Sacramental life. However, I cannot recall even one homily/sermon (there must have been one or two, surely) that name a particular cardinal or theological virtue *as virtue*: defining the virtue; explaining how to cultivate it; describing the threats to that virtue and how to identify and overcome them, etc. Perhaps it should have been the Confessional that was the privileged place of teaching us about the virtues and how to cultivate them, but it never was that. It was more about how to “quit sinning” particular sins, which is very much different than being taught a particular human strength – a virtue – so that particular sins cease to lay hold of me.

<sup>\*15</sup> Bede, *In Lucam*, I, 3:21.

is opened to you,"<sup>16</sup>  
you will be taken up  
into God.<sup>22</sup>

*Jesus Tempted by the Enemy*<sup>17</sup>

10. Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil (Matt. 4:1). By humbly enduring the enemy's attacks, he would make us humble; and by winning a victory, he would make us courageous<sup>23</sup>. He firmly took up a life that was hard and solitary so that he might arouse the souls of the faithful<sup>24</sup> to strive toward perfection<sup>25</sup> and strengthen them to endure hardships.

Come now, disciple of Christ,  
search into the secrets of solitude  
with your loving teacher,  
so that having become a companion of wild beasts,  
you may become an imitator and sharer of  
the hidden silence,<sup>26</sup> the devout prayer, the daylong fasting

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<sup>16</sup> Pseudo-Anselm, *Meditationes*, 15.

A beautiful thought about how it is that we learn, such as in this particular scene – the Baptism – to identify each of the three Divine Persons. I recall how St. Thomas Aquinas inquires in *Summa Theologica* I, Question 43 – “How do we know that a particular Divine Person has been sent?”

<sup>22</sup> “**you will be taken up into God**” – Bonaventure most famously develops this idea of *ascent* in his *The Journey of the Soul into God*.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13.

<sup>23</sup> “**humble ... he would make us courageous**” – A life of humility means that one will be acquainted with fear, because the arrogant and pride-swollen people of the world are attracted to the destruction of people who are virtuous in ways specifically in contrast to them. Thus, a humble person needs to be courageous.

<sup>24</sup> “**so that he might rouse the souls**” – What makes that life “hard and solitary” is other people, who do not desire to be “aroused”, or who resent who is doing the arousing: “Who the hell does he think that he is?!”

<sup>25</sup> “**to strive towards perfection**” – Knowing what “perfection” means is difficult indeed, because we far too quickly assume that it is an ideal in relation to which we *confirm* our lives, rather than learning who actually we are, and our gifts and weaknesses, and then learning over time how to let God have us, so that God can deploy us as He knows best. “Perfection” is a process articulated famously in the three Ways of the spiritual life: the purgative way; the illuminative way; and the unitive way.

<sup>26</sup> “**an imitator and sharer of the hidden silence**” – A beautiful expression of the stillness that increasingly gathers in a reflective person, a person who almost never *reacts* to experiences, but who,

and the three encounters with the clever enemy.  
And so, you will learn  
to have recourse to him  
in every crisis of temptation  
because *we do not have a high priest  
who cannot have compassion on our infirmities,  
but one tried  
in all things as we are,  
except sin.*<sup>18</sup>

*Jesus Wonderful in His Miracles*

11. *He is the one who alone does marvelous things* (Ps. 71:18). He transforms the elements, multiplies the loaves of bread, walks upon the sea and calms the waves; he curbs the demons and puts them to flight; he cures the sick, cleanses the lepers and raises the dead; he restores sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the mute, the power to walk to the crippled, sensation and movement to the paralytics and those with withered limbs.<sup>27</sup>

To him our sinning conscience calls out  
like the faithful leper:  
*Lord, if you wish,  
you can make me clean.*<sup>19</sup>  
Now like the centurion:  
*Lord, my servant boy is lying at home  
paralyzed and is suffering intensely.*<sup>20</sup>  
Now like the woman of Canaan:  
*Have mercy on me,*

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because he or she lives at a depth where worldly concerns cannot get to, is able to consider serenely all experiences and to wonder what God is up to in them.

<sup>18</sup> Heb. 4:15.

<sup>27</sup> I remember being taught by St. Ephraim the Syrian to re-frame these “supernatural” powers of Jesus. When Jesus does these extraordinary things, He does them not so that we might get a glimpse of what God is like in the heavenly realms – a kind of “sneak peek”. No, everything that Jesus does is to teach us something that human beings long ago forgot; namely, who we were when God made the first of us and placed us in Paradise. In that beginning place human beings could do all of these things; these powers were “natural” to us.

<sup>19</sup> Luke 5:12; Matt. 8:2.

<sup>20</sup> Matt. 8:6.

*Son of David.*<sup>21</sup>  
Now like the woman with the issue of blood:  
*If I touch the hem of his garment,  
I will be cured.*<sup>22</sup>  
Now with Mary and Martha:  
*See, Lord,  
the one you love is ill.*<sup>23</sup>

*Jesus Transfigured*<sup>24</sup>

12. To strengthen the human spirit with hope of eternal reward, *Jesus took Peter, James and John up a high mountain by themselves* (Matt. 17:1). He revealed to them the mystery of the Trinity and foretold that he would be rejected in his passion. He showed the glory of his future resurrection in his transfiguration. The Law and the prophets gave testimony to him in the apparition of Moses and Elijah, the Father and the Holy Spirit in the voice and the cloud.

So, the soul devoted to Christ,  
strengthened in truth and borne to the summit of virtue,  
can faithfully say with Peter:  
*Lord, it is good for us to be here,*<sup>25</sup>  
in the serene enjoyment of contemplating you.  
When heavenly repose and ecstasy are given to the soul,  
it will hear *the secret words*  
*which man is not permitted to speak.*<sup>26</sup>

FOURTH FRUIT: THE PLENITUDE OF HIS PIETY

*Jesus, the Solicitous Shepherd*<sup>27</sup>

13. How great was this devoted shepherd's solicitous care for the lost sheep and how great his mercy, the Good Shepherd himself indicates with an affectionate

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<sup>\*21</sup> Matt. 15:22.

<sup>\*22</sup> Matt. 9:21.

<sup>\*23</sup> John 11:3.

<sup>\*24</sup> Cf. Matt. 17:1-8; Mark 9:1-13; Luke 9:28-36.

<sup>\*25</sup> Matt. 17:4.

<sup>\*26</sup> 2 Cor. 12:4.

<sup>\*27</sup> Cf. Luke 15:4-10; Matt. 18:12-14.

metaphor in the parable of the shepherd and the hundredth sheep that was lost, sought with much care, and finally found and joyfully brought back on his shoulders. He openly declares the same thing in an express statement when he says: "*The good shepherd gives his life for his sheep*" (John 10:11). In him is truly fulfilled the prophecy: *Like a shepherd he will feed his flock* (Isa. 40:11). In order to do this, he endured toil, anxiety and lack of food; he traveled through towns and villages preaching the kingdom of God in the midst of many dangers and the plotting of the Pharisees; and he passed the nights in watchful prayer. Fearless of the murmuring and scandal of the Pharisees, he was affable to the publicans, saying that he had come into the world for the sake of those who are sick (Matt. 9:12). He also extended fatherly affection to the repentant, showing them the open bosom of divine mercy. As witnesses to this I call upon and summon Matthew, Zacchaeus, the sinful woman who prostrated herself at his feet and the woman taken in adultery.<sup>28</sup>

Like Matthew, therefore  
follow this most devoted shepherd;  
like Zacchaeus  
receive him with hospitality;  
like the sinful woman  
anoint him with ointment  
and wash his feet with your tears,  
wipe them with your hair  
and caress them with your kisses,  
so that finally,  
with the woman presented to him for judgment,  
you may deserve to hear  
the sentence of forgiveness:  
*Has no one condemned you? Neither will I condemn you.  
Go, and sin no more.*<sup>29</sup>

*Jesus Bathed with Tears*<sup>30</sup>

14. To manifest the sweetness of supreme devotedness, the Fountain of all mercy, the good Jesus, wept for us in our misery not only once but many times.<sup>28</sup> First over

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<sup>28</sup> Matt. 9:9-13, 10:3; Luke 19:1-10, 7:36-50; John 8:3-11.

<sup>29</sup> John 8:10-11.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. John 11:35; Luke 19:41; Heb. 5:7.

<sup>28</sup> "wept for us ... many times" - Bonaventure, a Master in the School of the Affections, is working hard to get us to pay attention to the affective life of Jesus, not only so that we might know Jesus

Lazarus, then over the city and finally on the cross, a flood of tears streamed forth from those loving eyes for the expiation of all sins. The Savior wept abundantly, now deploring the misery of human weakness, now the darkness of a blind heart, now the depravity of obdurate<sup>29</sup> malice.

O hard heart,  
insane and impious,  
to be pitied as if bereft of true life,  
why do you rejoice and laugh  
like a madman  
in the midst of such misery  
while the Wisdom of the Father  
weeps over you?  
Consider your weeping physician and  
*make mourning as for an only son,  
a bitter lamentation;  
let tears stream down  
like a torrent  
day and night.  
Give yourself no rest,  
nor let the pupil of your eye be still.*<sup>31</sup>

*Jesus Acclaimed King of the World*<sup>32</sup>

15. After the raising of Lazarus and the pouring of the jar of ointment on Jesus' head, as the fragrance of his fame had already spread among the people, foreseeing that a crowd would meet him, he mounted an ass in order to give a remarkable example of humility in the midst of the applause of the people who came to him, cut down branches and strewed their garments in his way. Not forgetting compassion, when the crowd was singing a hymn of praise, he lamented over the destruction of the city.

Rise now,  
handmaid of the Savior, so that  
like one of the daughters of Jerusalem

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as an Idea only but as a fully human divine Person, but also so that we might wonder about the affects of Jesus, letting our own affections be attended to.

<sup>29</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* at "**obdurate**" - "Hardened in wrongdoing or sin; stubbornly impenitent; resistant or insensible to moral influence. *Obsolete.*" Also, "Hardened against persuasion, entreaty, the feeling of pity, etc.; obstinate, unyielding, relentless, hard-hearted."

<sup>31</sup> Jer. 6:26; Lam. 2:18.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Matt. 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-38; John 12:12-16



you may behold  
King Solomon in the honor  
which his mother the synagogue reverently offered him<sup>33</sup>  
as a symbol  
of the birth of the Church, so that  
with works of piety and triumphs of virtue –  
as if with olive branches and palms –  
you may follow  
the Lord of heaven and earth,  
sitting on the back of an ass.

*Jesus, Consecrated Bread*<sup>34</sup>

16. Among all the memorable events of Christ's life, the most worthy of remembrance is that last banquet, the most sacred supper. Here not only the paschal lamb was presented to be eaten but also the immaculate Lamb, *who takes away the sins of the world* (John 1:29). Under the appearance of bread *having all delight and the pleasantness of every taste* (Wisd. 16:20), he was given as food. In this banquet the marvelous sweetness of Christ's goodness shone forth when he dined at the same table and on the same plates with those poor disciples and the traitor Judas. The marvelous example of his humility shone forth when, girt with a towel, the King of Glory diligently washed the feet of the fishermen and even of his betrayer. The marvelous richness of his generosity was manifest when he gave to those first priests, and as a consequence to the whole Church and the world, his most sacred body and his true blood as food and drink so that what was soon to be a sacrifice pleasing to God and the priceless price of our redemption would be our viaticum and sustenance. Finally, the marvelous outpouring of his love shone forth when, *loving his own to the end* (John 13:1), he strengthened them in goodness with a gentle exhortation, especially forewarning Peter to be firm in faith and offering to John his breast as a pleasant and sacred place of rest.

O how marvelous are all these things,  
how full of sweetness,  
but only for that soul  
who, having been called to so distinguished a banquet,  
runs  
with all the ardor of his spirit  
so that he may cry out  
with the Prophet:  
*As the stag longs for the springs of water*

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Cant. 3:11.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Matt. 26:17–29; Mark 14:12–25; Luke 22:7–38; John 13–17.

so my soul longs for you,  
O God!<sup>35 30</sup>

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<sup>\*35</sup> Ps. 41:2.

<sup>30</sup> Bonaventure, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God; The Tree of Life; The Life of St. Francis*, ed. Richard J. Payne, trans. Ewert Cousins, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978), 126-139.