

+

## ST. BENEDICT

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU  
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault  
(Fontgombault, July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023)

*Judicantes...*  
You will judge.  
(Mt 19:28)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,  
My dearly beloved Sons,

**W**HEREAS WE BEAR, sometimes with much difficulty, the burden of the day, the burden of the times, of our times, and also the burden of a demanding walk to follow Christ's steps, we make our own the question Peter asks Jesus, "What therefore shall we have as a reward?"<sup>a</sup>

a. Mt 19:27.

The answer is unexpected, "In the regeneration, [...] you also shall sit on twelve seats, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."<sup>b</sup>

b. v. 28.

Judging is therefore given as a reward to him who has forsaken all things to follow Christ. Assuredly, the Lord must find many friends among the journalists and men of today. Pre-empting the promised reward, they judge indiscriminately. People give their opinion on everything without caring about the consequences of their words. Whereas society now rejects the objective criteria that are the foundations of natural moral law, thus egging on man to walk on the road leading to sin, the heart of man seems to harden. Paradoxically, the more libertine the assertions and ideologies promoted by society are, the more man pronounces self-righteous and merciless judgments, as if to give himself the illusion of a good conscience.

The Psalms are fully aware of the tension between truth and mercy. This tension cannot be solved, except in the just and merciful glance with which God considers man. As for man, he often discerns with difficulty, but he should remember that truth without mercy is harshness, whereas mercy without truth is weakness.

The members of the Church are not devoid of temptations under that respect, some yielding or having yielded to an implacable harshness, others to an unaccountable weakness. Let us draw a few lessons from the lives of holy monks who upheld the house of the Lord during their lives, by their examples as well as their teachings.

What was the glance with which these men considered, or consider, their own times? What were the criteria for judgment they used?

In monastic history, it is quite common to define monks as “crucified ones.” What a strange name!

Following Christ demands self-denial. That is the teaching of St. Paul to the Galatians: “And they that are Christ’s have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences.”<sup>a</sup>

a. *Gal* 5:24.

However, Christ was not raised on a cross out of asceticism, but for our salvation, manifesting that “greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”<sup>b</sup> If the execution on a cross was for all criminals the final end of a career of transgressions, on the contrary, it is for Christ the inextinguishable core from which radiates a grace of rebirth poured out on every man.

b. *Jn* 15:13.

The glance a Christian casts on the Cross doesn’t die on the Cross. It is diffused, it is diffracted towards those who receive an abundant salvation from it. It receives from the Cross a light of hope, a new life.

From the Cross, Christ glances at the world with truth and mercy. He who wants to be crucified with Christ is invited to make his own this glance, thus opening himself to compunction, “this mourning of the salvation lost by oneself or by others.”<sup>1</sup>

---

1. Fr. Irénée HAUSHERR, *Penthos, la doctrine de la componction dans l’Orient chrétien*, p. 50.

Should one marvel that this has been a common doctrine from the very beginning of monasticism? St. Basil affirms:

Weep with those who weep. [...] He who weeps hot tears on his neighbour's sins, heals himself as he wails for his brother.<sup>2</sup>

It is not so much by the ascetic side of his life, which is but a means, that a monk resembles Christ. He resembles Him by the part he takes to His glance of truth and mercy, a glance which is cast from the most awful of executions, and gives back to the world the hope of a passover towards eternity.

With such a gift, a monk may judge the world and bear it in his prayer. The Cross, the luminous shadow of which dazzles the world, is pregnant with the future. Crucified with Christ, monks are the protagonists of tomorrow's world, as history has shown many times.

In a homily pronounced on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Pope Benedict XVI taught:

The person who abandons himself totally in God's hands does not become God's puppet, a boring "yes man"; he does not lose his freedom. Only the person who entrusts himself totally to God finds true freedom, the great, creative immensity of the freedom of good.

The person who turns to God does not become smaller but greater, for through God and with God he becomes great, he becomes divine, he becomes truly himself. The person who puts himself in God's hands does not distance himself from others, withdrawing into his private salvation; on the contrary, it is only then that his heart truly awakens and he becomes a sensitive, hence, benevolent and open person.

The closer a person is to God, the closer he is to people.<sup>a</sup>

a. Homily,  
December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

These lines eminently apply to Mary. The fullness of grace with which God clothed her in her immaculate Conception is not grounds for her to despise her brothers in humanity. Since she is, according to St. Thomas Aquinas' affirmation, "by far the closest one to Christ,"<sup>b</sup> Mary is also the closest one to each man and woman.

b. *S. Th.*, III<sup>a</sup>,  
q. 27, a. 5, c.

---

2. ST. BASIL, *Homily for the Martyrdom of Juliet*, PG 31, 257 D.

In his monastery, a monk who seeks God is called to develop a closeness of compassion for his neighbour. Through his prayer, his given life, he works at divinizing his brothers and the world.

St. Gregory the Great tells us that towards the end of his life, St. Benedict saw the whole world collected under a single ray of sun. <sup>a</sup> His world, marked by invasions, cataclysms, plagues, was not in a much better shape than ours. And yet, it is truly under a single ray of light that it appeared in Benedict's eyes. In the eyes of the saints, the world is fraught with the weight of the grace that springs from the Cross and works in the hearts of men.

*a. Dialogues,*  
Bk. II, ch. 35.

Christ expects from His friends that they should make their own His glance of Crucified, that they should burn with the love of their neighbour. Thus, far from making compromises with the world, they will offer to it the splendour of truth and the riches of the gift of mercy.

Amen.

