

+ WHITSUNDAY

Pentecost Sunday, June 9, 2019

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Emitte spiritum tuum et creabuntur, et renovabis faciem terrae. Send forth thy spirit, and they shall be created: and thou shalt renew the face of the earth.*¹

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
My very Dear Sons,

A prominent French philosopher writing in the 20th century famously said about the century to come—speaking in a kind of secular prophetic mode—that it, the twenty-first century, “would be spiritual or it would not be at all”.² Thus far, in disproof of that prophecy, we see our new century imbedded in materialism, a technological materialism especially, that claims each day more our allegiance against the no less depressing general cultural background of the new paganism, and this very un-spiritual quality of it all seems quite likely to go on. It is true: there is always the small army of spiritual souls—I am thinking here especially of our Catholic Christians—who continue to carry the torch of the worship of the Father “in spirit and in truth” to which Our Lord alluded to in His conversation with the woman at Jacob’s well; but our civilization, once substantially if imperfectly attuned to spiritual values, lies now in a shipwreck of vulgar worldliness. What is to be done? What can we do? Will this century soon cease to be altogether, as André Malraux predicted?

To begin with we must remember that one soul that lifts itself up—always, of course, with the grace of God—one soul that lifts itself up lifts up the whole world. Numbers are not everything by any reckoning, and a single Saint can transform an entire generation. The danger at present, I think, is that we have become so distracted, both by the threats of a hostile political establishment that is ready to take away our religious liberty, our families, and common sense itself on the one hand, and, on the other, by such painful controversies within the Church herself, that we may lose contact with the life giving source of our souls which is the Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost.

For some Catholics, sometimes referred to as “cultural Catholics,” there is little in the Catholic Faith but a name. The world is their playground, and they simply wear the tag of “Catholic” or eventually confess to those around them that they were brought up that way. Other Catholics are serious about their Faith, but see it mostly under the guise of obligations to be fulfilled, obligations which are very real, but which do not constitute the marrow of the spiritual life, but only the foundations: there is something lacking too in that attitude. I suppose the great number of Catholics in America today fall somewhere in between those two groups: they do cherish the Faith and practice it more or less, but the infinite resources awaiting them in the spiritual life remain largely unknown. Thus, it is important that the few who have drunk more deeply of the grace of prayer serve as a leaven for the rest. We monks try to be something like that despite our countless imperfections.

¹ Ps. 103:30 (Douay-Reims).

² André Malraux (1901-1976).

The quest for true worship of the Father in spirit and truth is hinted at and expressed in many parables and mysterious sayings of the New Testament. In the Apocalypse the Lord Christ utters these telling words:

Behold, I stand at the gate, and knock. If any man shall hear my voice, and open to me the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.³

Of course, where the Son is found, there too is the Father and the Holy Spirit. To this today's Gospel speaks clearly:

If anyone love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him.⁴

This spiritual banquet that brings into the soul the Father and the Son introduces as well the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity. This is a grace beyond compare of the New Testament. This can happen to you. But we must search for God; we must be on a quest.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in a field: which a man having found hid, and for joy thereof goeth, and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again the kingdom of heaven is like to a merchant seeking good pearls: who when he had found one pearl of great price, went his way, and sold all that he had, and bought it.⁵

So there is this spiritual endeavor, the seeking of the treasure of the spiritual life. In a way this boils down to receiving a certain *unction*. The word "Christ" as we all well know means "the anointed one," like the kings of Judah in the Old Testament, who have received the royal anointing or unction. For Our Lord this unction is a pouring out upon Him of this Divine Unction which is the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. Wherefore he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the contrite of heart, to preach deliverance to the captives, and sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of reward.⁶

To be spiritual in the best sense is to participate in the unction of the Holy Ghost, to have an interior life of prayer, leading toward the secret treasure, the precious pearl of our participation in the very nature of God, as we read in the Second Epistle of Saint Peter:

By whom he hath given us most great and precious promises: that by these you may be made partakers of the divine nature: flying the corruption of that concupiscence which is in the world.⁷

³ Apoc. 3:20.

⁴ Jn 14:23.

⁵ Matt. 13:44-46.

⁶ Lk 4:18-19.

⁷ II Peter 1:4.

But there is incompatibility between this precious spiritual life of the soul and the corruption in the world, that is to say, not the world in the best sense—that of souls to be saved and of God’s beautiful creation—but the world in the negative sense of all that opposes God. We certainly face in our time a formidable and pervasive worldliness never been known.

Even if our twenty-first century does not fall into nothingness, even if it stays the course of its blind and hedonistic materialism, if *we* do not become spiritual, *we* will cease to be. A blind life of the brain is not an existence worthy of human beings. Let us prove the secular prophets wrong and seek the better things. “God is a spirit; and they that adore him, must adore him in spirit and in truth.”⁸ Our Lady of the Cenacle, Our Lady, Mother of the Church, pray for us. Amen. Alleluia.

⁸ Jn 4:24.