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For the Catholic Church, God's Revelation is found in Sacred Tradition, understood as God's Revealed Word handed down by the Living Teaching Authority established by Christ in the Church. That includes both Written Tradition (Scripture) and Unwritten Tradition received from Christ and handed down Orally by the Apostles and their Successors. The Church founded by Christ on Peter, and only that Church, has been Empowered by Christ to 'Interpret' His Teaching Authoritatively in His Name.

Scripture is *Inspired*; *Inspiration* really means that God Himself is the Chief Author of the Scriptures. He uses a Human Agent, in so marvelous a way that the Human writes what the Holy Spirit wants him to write, does so without Error, yet the Human Writer is Free, and keeps his own Style of Language. It is only because God is *Transcendent* that He can do this - insure Freedom from Error, while leaving the Human Free. To say He is Transcendent means that He is above and beyond all our Human Classifications and Categories.

Matthew writes his gospel account to give us the view of Jesus as the King. He records Jesus' authority in calling the disciples: "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19), and he also records more than any of the others about Jesus' teaching concerning God's kingdom and heavenly rule.

Considered one of the most important Catholic theologians and Bible commentators, Cornelius à Lapide's, S.J. writings on the Bible, created a Scripture Commentary so complete and scholarly that it was practically the universal commentary in use by Catholics for over 400 years. Fr. Lapide's most excellent commentaries have been widely known for successfully combining piety and practicality. Written during the time of the Counter Reformation, it includes plenty of apologetics. His vast knowledge is only equaled by his piety and holiness.

## Matthew 11: 1-20

Douay Rheims Version

*John sends his disciples to Christ, who upbraids the Jews for their incredulity, and calls to him such as are sensible of their burdens.*

1. And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he passed from thence, to teach and to preach in their cities.
2. Now when John had heard in prison the works of Christ: sending two of his disciples he said to him:
3. Art thou he that art to come, or look we for another?
4. And Jesus making answer said to them: Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen.
5. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the gospel preached to them.

therefore, any perish, they perish by their own fault, because they will not believe and obey John and Christ. Thus they may impute their ruin to themselves, and justify God, according to the words of Ps. li. "That Thou mayst be justified in Thy sayings, and overcome when Thou art judged." In a similar sense, the Apostle says to Timothy (1. Tim. iii.), "Great is the sacrament of piety, which was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit" (Vulg.), *i.e.*, was declared and shown to the world to be just, holy and wise, and that the work and mystery of the incarnation of the WORD was worthy of God. That this is the meaning is plain from Luke vii. 29, who thus relates the occasion of this parable, and by means of the preamble, as it were, sets forth the scope and intention of the parable. "And all the people and the publicans who heard him, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the lawyers despised the counsel of God against themselves, not being baptized of him." And presently He subjoins the parable of the boys piping and lamenting, as I have already expounded it.

S. Aug. (*lib. 2 de doct. Christ.*) expounds the passage as follows: *Wisdom is justified of her own sons*, because "the holy Apostles perceived that the kingdom of God did not consist in meat and drink, but in the equanimity of endurance, forasmuch as they were such as neither abundance lifted up, nor want depressed."

Lastly, S. Jerome in this passage, and S. Ambrose, remark that various Gr. *codices* read *Wisdom is justified by her works*. Because, says S. Jerome, "wisdom seeks not the testimony of the mouth, but of deeds."

**Verse 20-** *Then began He to upbraid, &c. Then* namely, when He sent the Apostles to preach throughout Galilee, and He preached by Himself, though with little fruit and few conversions. *He began o upbraid* the extreme ingratitude and obstinate wickedness of these cities, viz, those in which most of His mighty works, *i.e.*, His miracles, were done. These were the miracles by which He confirmed His teaching. And He upbraided the cities because after so many miracles, and so many exhortations, so many threats of hell, so many promises of the Kingdom of Heaven, they had not repented.

have sung unto you, and ye have not danced,' &c. The Jews who did not dance were forsaken. They knew not how to clap their hands. The Gentiles were called, who gave spiritual praise to God. Here is the glorious dancing of the wise, the dance which David danced. Therefore, in the sublimity of his spiritual dancing, he ascended to the throne of Christ, that he might hear and see the Lord saying to his Lord, 'Sit thou at My right hand.'"

**Verse 18-** *For John came neither eating, &c.* That is to sty, not eating, or living in pleasure, like other men, but living austerely, fasting, and feeding on locusts; that by this means he might arouse the Scribes to compunction, and affright them. Yet the Scribes say of him, *He hath a devil.* The Arabic has, *devils are with him.* That is, John was possessed by a devil, by whose power and energy he was sustained, so as to be able to lead so rigorous a life. Thus, the very austerity of John, which for their sakes he had lived, since from his purity and innocence it was not needed for his own sake, they attributed to a demon. Such was their extraordinary ingratitude and wickedness. Observe then, how Christ applies this parable. John's austere life is signified by the troop of boys lamenting. But Christ living less austerely, and conversing with the world more familiarly, is denoted by the chorus of boys who piped. The Scribes and Pharisees laughed at, derided both of them, because they wished to be free from any reprover of their pleasures and licentious mode of life.

**Verse 19-** *The Son of Man came eating, &c.* (at a common table, living after the manner of ordinary men, and conversing familiarly with them), *And they say (i.e., the Scribes and Pharisees in their obstinate wickedness), Behold a gluttonous man, &c.* John led an austere life in the desert, Christ led the ordinary life of men, that His affability might allure those whom John's austerity would terrify. For Christ came into this world in order that he might afford to all men a perfect example of humility and every other virtue, an example which every one might imitate in their several ranks and stations. But especially did He come that sinners might be converted from their sins to God. Wherefore it was necessary that He should converse with them, eat and drink with them, and thus draw them to love and follow Him. So S. Thomas. S. Aug. gives another reason (*Lib. 3, de Doctr. Chrtist. C. 12*). It was, that Christ might show in all such things, namely, food, drink, clothing, &c., that it is not the things themselves, but the inordinate love of using them, which is in fault. And so He taught that rich men may live religiously in their riches, and be saved.

*But wisdom is justified of her sons. Syr. of her servants.* To *justify* is used in two senses, viz., to *make just* and to *declare just*. The wisdom of God is *justified, i.e.,* is pronounced and declared just, unblameable, fully and entirely perfect, as she manifested herself in John and Christ, because she left nothing untried that would conduce to the salvation of men. That they might have a pattern of an austere life and penance, she gave them John. Again, lest many should be terrified by this austerity, and despair of virtue and salvation, she gave them in Christ an example of ordinary life and virtue. *Of her children,* namely, those who were desirous of virtue and wisdom, such as those who believed in Christ, and who heard and obeyed John. Therefore, the wisdom of God, which the proud Scribes and the foolish Jews despised in John and Christ, was justified, *i.e.,* honoured and praised by all the truly wise. If,

6. And blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in me.

7. And when they went their way, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: What went you out into the desert to see? a reed shaken with the wind?

8. But what went you out to see? a man clothed in soft garments? Behold they that are clothed in soft garments, are in the houses of kings.

9. But what went you out to see? A prophet? Yea I tell you, and more than a prophet.

10. For this is he of whom it is written: Behold I send my angel before my face, who shall prepare thy way before thee.

11. Amen I say to you, there hath not risen among them that are born of women a greater than John the Baptist: yet he that is the lesser in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

12. And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.

13. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John:

14. And if you will receive it, he is Elias that is to come.

15. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

16. But whereunto shall I esteem this generation to be like? It is like to children sitting in the market place.

17. Who crying to their companions say: We have piped to you, and you have not danced: we have lamented, and you have not mourned.

18. For John came neither eating nor drinking; and they say: He hath a devil.

19. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say: Behold a man that is a glutton and a wine drinker, a friend of publicans and sinners. And wisdom is justified by her children.

20. Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein were done the most of his miracles, for that they had not done penance.

21. Woe thee, Corozain, woe to thee, Bethsaida: for if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sackcloth and ashes.

22. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you.

23. And thou Capharnaum, shalt thou be exalted up to heaven? thou shalt go down even unto hell. For if in Sodom had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in thee, perhaps it had remained unto this day.

24. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee.

25. At that time Jesus answered and said: I confess to thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones.

26. Yea, Father: for so hath it seemed good in thy sight.

27. All things are delivered to me by my Father. And no one knoweth the Son but the Father: neither doth any one know the Father, but the Son, and he to whom it shall please the Son to reveal him.

28. Come to me all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you.

29. Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of me, because I am meek, and humble of heart: And you shall find rest to your souls.

30. For my yoke is sweet and my burden light.

**Verse 1-** *And it came to pass, &c. He passed from thence:* That means, He separated Himself from His Apostles, whom He sent to preach the Gospel by themselves, both that they might prepare the way for Christ who was about to follow them, and that they might make trial of themselves and their courage in this Mission, being separated from their Master. What the Apostles did when thus sent forth by Christ, S. Matthew is silent upon, but S. Luke relates it (ix. 6), and so does S. Mark (vi. 12).

*That they should teach and preach in their cities: i.e.,* in the cities of the Jews and the Galilæans, to whom He sent them. Note the Hebraism here. For the Heb. frequently leaves unexpressed the antecedent of the relative, or demonstrative pronoun, but leaves it to be understood from the circumstances of the case by the reader or hearer. There are similar instances to be found in Psalms xcix. 8, 2 Kings xvii. 24, &c.

**Verse 2-** *When John had heard in the prison, Vulg. in chains. When He had heard from his disciples,* as Luke says (vii. 18), from whence it is equally plain that there is here a hysteresis, and that what S. Matthew here relates concerning John, from the 2nd to the 20th verse, happened before the Mission of the Apostles, to which he himself referred.

*In chains, Syr. in the house of those who are bound,* that is when Herod had shut him up because he reprov'd his adultery with Herodias.

John then, a little before his martyrdom, sent these disciples to Christ in the thirty-second year of Christ's age, which was the second year of His preaching, when He was becoming famous by His doctrine and miracles, that they might learn from Himself that He was the very Messiah, or Christ, that when John was dead they might go to Him. For otherwise they might have made a schism from Christ, and preferred John as their master to Christ. For that they thought more highly of John than of Christ is plain from Matt. ix. 14. As therefore the runners in the Stadium hand on the lamp to the runner who succeeds them in the course, so did John—when he had fulfilled his office and ministry, resign it to Christ. And, as the dayspring dies away into the rising sun, so did John pale before Christ. For John was the morning star of the sun of righteousness. Wherefore, not only did he not envy Christ's rising glory when his own was setting, but rejoiced at it. Yea, he desired to set, that Christ might arise, for he was ambitious not of his own glory, but of God's and Christ's glory. Wherefore he said, "It behoveth Him to increase, but me to decrease."

**Verse 3-** *And saith, &c. He that should come, Gr. ὁ ἐρχόμενος,* the coming one, namely, that great Prophet, the Redeemer of Israel, the Saviour of the World, the Messiah promised by all the Prophets, and most ardently longed for by the Fathers, who at this time, now that the prophecies concerning Him are fulfilled, is by all

prophet, when he declares that I am the Messiah, and henceforth let him receive and worship Me as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. There is special reference to Christ's declaration that John is Elias. For this is mystical, and requires intelligence, as S. Jerome says. Christ was wont by this phrase to rouse the attention of His hearers to important subjects.

**Verse 16-** *To what shall I liken, &c. This generation* means the Scribes and Pharisees, who despised the counsel of God and the preaching and baptism of John.

*They are like unto boys, &c.* There was in that age, says Theophylact on the seventh chapter of S. Luke, and S. Cyril, a game of this description. Boys divided themselves into two parties, and made as it were two choirs. Thus they represented human life on a sort of stage. One party, like Heraclitus, were always lamenting; the other side were always, like Democritus, laughing, at it. By the one set all that we do was made the food for lamentation, by the other for jokes. They of the one choir kept wailing, those opposite to them played on pipes; but the choir which was wailing took no notice of the opposite choir, which was singing, neither, on the other hand, did the pipe-players take any notice of the mourners. And the lookers on heard like spectators at a comedy, but were neither moved by the wailing nor the dancing.

The meaning of the parable is plain from what follows. It is this: as though Christ said, "You may perceive in this generation of the Scribes and Pharisees something similar to the boyish games, as concerns the spectators who look on at their ease. For they cannot be induced to change their life and be converted, either by the example of the austere life of John, or by the less stern life of Christ." He likens the parable, as a whole, to the whole thing signified by it, and not a part to a part. Elegantly and wisely says S. Ambrose (*lib. 2, de Penitentia*)—Not that dancing which is the companion of pleasures and luxuries is here spoken of, but that whereby a man lifts himself on high, nor suffers the members to drag lazily along the ground. Thus S. Paul danced spiritually, when for our sakes he stretched himself out, and forgetting the things which were behind, and reaching forth unto those which were before, he strove for the prize of Christ. Thou likewise, when thou comest to baptism, be admonished to lift up thine hands, and to have feet that are swift to mount to things eternal. Dancing like this is the associate of faith, the companion of grace. This, then, is the mystery. We have sung unto you, as it were, the song of the New Testament, and ye have not danced—that is, ye have not lifted up your minds unto heavenly grace. We have lamented, and ye have not wept, *i.e.,* ye have not repented. There is an allusion to Ezek. xxxiii. 32: "Thou art unto them as a song of music which is very sweetly sung. And they hear thy words, but they will not do them."

*Allegorically, S. Ambrose (lib. 4, Epist. 30), "The Son of God hath said, 'We*

and promised Christ and His heavenly kingdom, by promising terrestrial good things, such as abundance of corn and wine and oil, and a rich and peaceful earthly kingdom like that of Solomon, which was a figure and a type of the celestial kingdom to be brought in by Christ. But John was the first who clearly and openly began to preach this heavenly kingdom of Christ, and to point out Christ as it were with his finger to the Jews.

Again the Old Testament which consists of the Law, or Pentateuch, and the Prophets, under which are the Hagiographical books, such as the Psalms, prophesied until John, that is, they taught the ignorant Jews not so much to love as to fear God, by the hope of temporal rewards, and to worship Him by means of sacrifices, and external rites and ceremonies, which were shadows and types of Christ. But John began to preach the new doctrines of repentance and the love of God, through hope in the kingdom of Heaven, and of obtaining celestial good things by means of internal acts of contrition, piety, and the worship of God, by which we are truly and perfectly justified through Christ.

Christ here compares and parallels prophecy with prophecy, *i.e.*, the doctrine of John's prophecy with the doctrine of the Law and the Prophets. For John was a mean between the Old and New Testaments, as it were the horizon of both, dividing and determining the New from the Old, as Salmeron says. He was the morning star of the Gospel who put an end to the shadows and the obscure night of the old Law, and ushered in the clear day of the new Law.

**Verse 14-** *And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, &c.* That is if ye wish to receive John, and to believe him, as ye ought to do. Whence the Syriac translates by the imperative—*If ye wish, receive ye.* For he shall be Elias unto you, because he being endowed with the spirit and power of Elias, shall convert you to God and Christ, in the same way that Elias shall convert your children and descendants at the end of the world by a like zeal and purity of life to the same Christ. Thus S. Jerome says, "John is Elias which is for to come, not because the same soul was in both, as the heretics think, but because they had the same grace of the Holy Spirit. John was girded as Elias was. Like Elias he lived in the desert. He suffered from Herodias as Elias did from Jezebel. And as Elias shall be the precursor of the Second Advent, so was John of the Lord when He came in the flesh to save us."

There is a reference to Mal. iv. 5, "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet." The Jews even to this day are eagerly expecting Elias from this prophecy of Malachi, that he may shew Christ unto them, and explain all the doubtful matters of the Law; and therefore they hold him in great account. This was why Christ compared and equalled John to him.

**Verse 15-** *He that hath ears to hear.* Gr. *of hearing, i.e.*, to understand and obey. The Arabic has, *hearing ears.* For the Heb., which has a deficiency of compound words, uses simple in the place of compound words, as *hear* instead of *obey*. The meaning is, He that hath a teachable and obedient mind, let him hear, understand and obey the things which I say, namely, let him believe John to be a prophet and more than a

looked for as coming. He alludes to the prophecy of the Patriarch Jacob, "The sceptre shall not be taken away from Judah," &c. Gen. xlix. 10.

From these words of John, Tertullian (*De Baptism, c. 10*) and Justin (*Quest. 38 ad Orthodox*) think that John doubted concerning Jesus whether He were the Christ or not, but falsely, for John had already seen the Spirit descending upon Him in the form of a dove, and had heard the Father's voice saying, This is my beloved Son. And John had already given the clearest testimony to Him, when he said, Behold the Lamb of God.

Others think that John did not doubt whether Jesus were the Christ, but only asked whether, after death, He would come into Limbus, and visit and deliver the Fathers who were detained there. So S. Jerome, "He did not say, Art Thou He who hast come, but art Thou He who wilt come? And the meaning is, Tell me, since I am about to descend into Hades, whether also I shall announce Thee to the shades below, as I have announced Thee in the upper world? Or, is it not fitting that the Son of God should taste of death, and wilt Thou send another for these mysteries?" So, too, S. Gregory. But this opinion is little apposite or probable.

I say, therefore, that John sends his disciples, and asks Jesus whether He be the Coming One, *i.e.*, the Messiah, not as doubting about Him, but because, being near death, he wished his hesitating disciples to be instructed concerning Him, that they might be led to Christ. So SS. Hil., Chrys., Cyril. Observe, too, the prudence of S. John. He in his own name asks Jesus if He be the Christ, because his disciples would not, of themselves, have dared to propose such a question. For he is the best physician who, to cure a sick man, acts as though he were sick himself, and takes nauseous medicine. So S. Paul says, "Who is weak, and I am not weak?"

**Verse 4-** *And Jesus answering, &c.* These miracles which ye have seen Me perform are the marks of the true Messiah, given by Isai. xxxv. 5, and lxi. 1. This is why S. Luke adds, *In the selfsame hour He healed many of their diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and to many that were blind He gave sight.* For neither Elijah, nor Elisha, nor any other prophet did so many and such great miracles as Christ. Wherefore S. Cyril (*lib. 2 Thesaur. c. 4*) says, "Christ, both by the greatness and the multitude of His miracles, shewed Himself to be the Messiah." You may add, by His beneficence. For although Moses shewed many miracles in the ten plagues of Egypt, yet did he not heal the Egyptians, but afflicted and slew them. But "Christ went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil." Wherefore His hands are said to be "versatile" (Cant. v. 14, Vulg.), that is, active in doing good to all; and "full of hyacinths" (Vulg.), *i.e.*, of heavenly works, miracles and kindnesses.

**Verse 5-** *The blind see*, &c. He alludes to Is. xxxv. 4. "Our God Himself shall come and save us." (Vulg.): "then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, &c." Also to Is. lxi. 1. *The poor have the Gospel preached*, &c. Theophylact and Euthym. take the verb *εὐαγγελίζονται*, actively, meaning, *the poor Apostles preach the Gospel*. But the verb is passive, and so the Syriac translates it. The meaning is, "I evangelize the poor, I preach the Gospel to them, and they receive it eagerly, though the rich reject it." He alludes to, indeed he quotes, Is. lxi. 1, "He hath sent me to announce to the meek," where the LXX., instead of *anavim*, *the meek*, *read anim*, *the poor*: and trans., *he hath sent me to evangelize the poor*, not the poor by necessity, but those who are poor in spirit, and consequently, meek and gentle. More simply, by *the poor*, you may understand such as the Apostles and the multitudes. For Christ preached to them that He might shew that the souls of the poor are equally precious before God with those of the rich; and therefore God made both equal in the Gospel. Dost thou then wish to imitate Christ? Teach the poor, guide, solace, help them.

**Verse 6-** *And blessed is he*, &c, *i.e.*, who shall not be offended at my lowly conversation. The Syriac is, *Blessed is he who shall not stumble at Me*. For as S. Greg. says (Horn. vi.), "I do indeed marvellous things, but I do not disdain to suffer shameful things." There is a tacit reference to the disciples of John, who were offended at His lowliness; and He intimates that he beheld the secrets of their hearts. So S. Jerome says, "He aims not at John, but at his disciples." And S. Hilary says, "Because the cross was about to be a stumbling block to many, Christ pronounced them blessed to whom His cross, His death, His burial, would bring no trial of their faith."

**Verse 7-** *And as they were going away*. (Gr. and Vulg.) That the multitude might not think that Christ was flattering John, and aiming at His favour, as S. Chrys. says, if He had praised him in the presence of his disciples: therefore He permitted them to depart, and then He praised him.

*Jesus began to say*, &c. *Shaken*, Gr. *σαλευόμενον*, *waving and fluctuating*, like a wave of the sea. By a similar metaphor we speak of the corn waving, when impelled to and fro by the wind. Christ would remove any suspicion which might arise among the people from this message of John, that he had changed his opinion concerning Christ—that whereas he had formerly thought him to be the Messiah, he had now changed his opinion, and had sent his disciples to interrogate Him, because he was in doubt about him. So Jesus, as it were said, "Suppose not, O ye Jews, that John thinks any other of Me than he thought before. For John is not a reed to be shaken backwards and forwards by the wind, that he should lightly assert a thing, and afterwards retract it on account of what men say. John is like an oak, which stands unmoved in faith and steadfastness against every blast, whether of those who praise or those who blame. What he before testified of Me, when he was at liberty, he testifies with equal fortitude now that he has been shut up by Herod in prison: and he has sent his disciples to Me that they themselves may see by My miracles that his testimony concerning Me was true."

*Tropologically, a reed*, is a light man, inconstant, tossed to and fro: at one time

who suffers the violence, and contributes to the profit of him who uses violence. An evil thing is done, and no one is blamed: violence is suffered, and religion is advanced. Whosoever shall do most violence to Christ shall be accounted most religious by Christ. We come upon the Lord in the way, for indeed He is the way, and after the manner of robbers, we endeavour to spoil Him of what is His. We desire to take His kingdom, His riches and His life. And He is so rich and so liberal that he does not resist. He does not deny, and after He has given all, He still possesses all." Afterwards he speaks of the manner and the weapons of this violence, saying, "We attack him, not with swords, nor staves, nor stones, but with meekness, good works, chastity. These are the weapons of our faith, by which we strive in our contest. But in order that we may be able to make use of these arms in doing violence, let us first use a certain violence to our own bodies, let us carry by storm the vices of our members, that we may obtain the rewards of valour. For to seize the Saviour's kingdom we must first reign in ourselves."

*And the violent*, &c. Those who invade the kingdom of Heaven in the sense in which I have just spoken. He alludes to an opulent city set upon a mountain, which must be stormed by great force, which is in fact stormed by soldiers who covet its riches. He alludes especially to the kingdom of Canaan, or the Promised Land, which the Hebrews under Joshua conquered by force of arms. This was a type of the kingdom of Heaven. In like manner Heaven is to be won by the sons of earth climbing up on high by their heavenly conversation. The empyrean sky is so lofty, so far above the earth, that were any one to live for 8000 years, and were every day to climb in perpendicular height a hundred thousand miles, yet would he not reach the top, as I have shewn on Gen. ii. 16. And because this is impossible to mortals, God has granted that what we cannot climb with corporeal feet we should reach by the affections of our minds.

In the life of S. Perpetua and her fellow-martyrs, we read that she was forewarned of her martyrdom in a dream. She beheld a golden ladder reaching from earth to heaven, which was hedged in and surrounded on all sides by knives and sharp swords. By this ladder they had to climb up to heaven. At its foot lay a horrible dragon who sought to hinder the mounting the ladder, and inviting his companions to follow him. When she had related her vision they all understood that they were to suffer martyrdom. And so indeed it befell. Thus let each believer consider that with his utmost energy he must struggle up to Heaven by means of a ladder hedged about with knives.

**Verse 13-** *For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied*, &c. This sentence is expressed more clearly in Luc. xvi. 16—*The Law and the prophets (i.e., prophesied), until John: since that time the Kingdom of God is preached and every one uses violence to it*. (Vulg.) The Law of Moses and all the Prophets prophesied up to the time of John: *i.e.*, darkly and by enigmas they foretold

law of grace, which we are always able to increase. Whence John the Baptist and all the old fathers received their grace from Christ and the new law.

*Symbolically*, S. Cæsarius says (*dialog.* 3), “The least, or the youngest of the Apostles was John the Evangelist, who is greater than John the Baptist, because the Apostle leant upon the bosom of Christ.”

**Verse 12-** *From the days of John the Baptist, &c.* This pertains to the praise of John, and shews that he was more than a prophet, because he first began to preach the kingdom of heaven. And so efficacious was his preaching joined to his holy life, that many who were baptised by him repented, and changed their course of life, and with great zeal strove for the kingdom of heaven. And now, I succeeding to John, promote this zeal by Myself and My Apostles, yea and will more and more promote it.

Wherefore *the kingdom of heaven now (βιάζεται, i.e.) suffers force, is invaded, is seized by force.* 1. Because men in vast multitudes, being stirred up by the preaching of John run to obtain it with zeal, with avidity, one pushing before another, as though it were some rare merchandise.

2. Because the kingdom is now compassed by all, not by natural instinct, as the Jews would maintain, but by the supernatural power of grace. The kingdom is, as it were, invaded, in such sort that sinners, publicans, harlots, Gentiles, by the fervour of their repentance, take it beforehand, as it were, seize it by force, away from the Pharisees and Jews, who thought that it belonged to them alone as the children of Abraham. It is as though He said, the Pharisees and Christians contend for the kingdom of Heaven, but the Christians seize it from the Pharisees by force. Whence SS. Hilary and Amb. say, “Christ is seized, since He, born among one sort of people, is chosen by others.” Amb. adds, “The Church has taken away the kingdom from the synagogue. Christ is my kingdom. The kingdom of Heaven is taken by force when Christ is denied by those of His own household, and is worshipped by the Gentiles. He is taken by force when he is rejected by the former, but cherished by the latter.”

3. Because for the kingdom of Heaven’s sake worldly men do violence to themselves by the cultivation of repentance, poverty, continence, mortification.

In the Lives of the Fathers there is related the vision of a certain anchorite who beheld that a disciple of his merited seven crowns in Heaven in a single night, because he had seven times bravely withstood evil thoughts. By this he perceived that as often as any one struggles against sinful thoughts and desires he merits a crown from God. For it is written, *The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.*

Beautifully does S. Ambrose comment on this passage, “We do violence to the Lord, not by compelling Him, but by weeping before Him, not by provoking by injuries, but by entreating with tears; not by blaspheming through pride, but by sorrowing through humility. O blessed violence which is not chastised with indignation, but is condoned in mercy—blessed violence, I say, which draws forth the goodness of Him

impelled by the words of flatterers, he asserts something: again being driven by detractors, he denies it, as a reed is blown in different directions by different winds. 2. A reed is one who is devoid of truth, virtue, and consistency, as a reed has no strength, or *stamina*. 3. A reed is he who has no fruit of good works to show, since a reed bears no fruit. 4. It is he who is delighted with, and feeds upon, the fluctuating pleasures of the world. For a reed is dry: yet it grows beside the waters. Whence it is called, “the river weed.” On this S. Austin writes piously and elegantly on the words of Ps. cxxxvii. 1. “Above the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept, when we remembered Sion.” (Vulg.) “The rivers of Babylon,” he says, “are all things which here are loved, and pass away. Sit above the rivers; sit not in the stream, nor under the stream. Behold in Babylon there are fair things to detain thee: let them not detain thee, let them not deceive thee.” Hear S. Greg. (*Hom.* vi. in *Evang.*) “What else but the carnal mind is signified by the reed? But such was not John, for favour could not flatter him, nor could the anger of any detraction make him harsh.”

Hear also S. Ambrose (*lib.* 5 in c. 7 *Luc.* v. 24): “The Lord denies that we must go forth into the desert—that is, into the world—lest we should think those are to be imitated by us who are of a carnal mind, whom, being obnoxious to the storms of this world, an unsettled life disquiets; who are rightly compared to a reed, in whom is no solid fruit of justice, men with their long hair, with forensic trappings, implicated in knotty points, sonorous with empty mouthings, with no benefit to themselves, but often with harm, follow after things inwardly worthless, outwardly specious. We are reeds when we are not rooted with any natural strength. If any light gale of prosperity blow upon us, we beat our neighbours with idle motion: we are useless to help, facile to injure. Reeds love rivers, as the fading and transitory things of the world delight us. If, however, anyone shall pluck up this reed from the earth, and strip off its useless parts—spoiling the old man with his deeds—and guide it by the hand of a scribe writing quickly, it begins to be no more a reed, but a pen, which impresses the precepts of the heavenly Scriptures on the hidden places of the mind, and writes them on the tables of the heart.”

Afterwards S. Ambrose adds, that Christ is the good reed of whom Isaiah prophesied (c. xlii.)—“A shaken reed he will not break,” (Vulg.)—because the flesh which sins had shaken He made firm by the power of the Resurrection. The good reed is the Flesh of Christ, which nailed the serpent’s head, and the enticements of worldly cupidity, to the gibbet of the Cross.

**Verse 8-** *But what went ye out, &c.* But John is not soft and delicate. He is not clothed in palatial garments, but in sackcloth of camels’ hair. For pleasures are the mistresses of flattery and lies, but hardness is the teacher of truth and sanctity.

**Verse 9-** *But what went ye out for to see? More than a prophet.* Syriac, *one more excellent than a prophet.* You may object that John himself denied that he was a prophet (Jo. i. 21). I reply, He said that out of humility, but in a true sense. For a prophet is, strictly speaking, one who foretells future events. But John did not foretell of Christ as about to come, but pointed to Him as present. He was therefore, rather the finger-post, as it were, than the prophet of Christ, and therefore Christ said that he was more than a prophet. In the next place, he, through the Divine Spirit, illustrated Christ, and knew the economy of Christ in the Flesh more clearly, fully, and perfectly than any of the prophets. 3. John was the angel, that is, the ambassador and precursor of Christ Himself, and immediately sent by Him, and that in His presence and before His face, according to the words of Malachi: "Behold I send My angel before Thy face, who shall prepare Thy way before Thee." (Vulg.) 4. He himself was altogether greater than all the prophets, as Christ asserts, verse

**Verse 10-** *For this is he of whom,* &c. Christ cites the words of Malachi iii. 1. See what I have there said. I have there collected the reasons and analogies why John is called an angel. And many indeed thought that he was not really a man, but an angel, as Eusebius shews (*lib. 1, De monst. c. 5*). hence *Auctor Imperfecti* on this place says, "Marvellous was he who surpassed in human nature the sanctity of angels, and by the grace of God obtained what by nature he had not."

**Verse 11-** *Verily I say unto you,* &c. Luke adds the word *prophet* (vii. 27): *There hath not arisen a greater prophet.* Whence Toletus from SS. Ambrose and Hilary observes that Jesus does not use the word *greater* of John absolutely, but as restricted by the word *prophet*. For the Apostles were greater, or certainly in every way the equals of John. But, on the contrary, I should say that by the expression *Prophet*, Christ leaves it to be understood that there had been no person who was greater than John, for the prophets were accounted in the olden time, and really were, the most holy of men. So that as none of the prophets were greater than John, it may be gathered that there was no one else who was greater.

Christ therefore tacitly here calls John the greatest of all men, for otherwise He would not conclude from thence that he was *more than a prophet*, which He proceeds to prove. This must be understood of the worthies of the Old Testament—that is to say, of all time prior to Christ. John, therefore, is not here compared with Christ Himself, or the Blessed Virgin, or the Apostles, who followed Christ and who (by reason of their Apostolic dignity) were not less than John, but rather indeed greater than he. You may say that Moses was greater than John, because it was said of him (Deut. xxxiv. 11), "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses." I reply, that it goes on, "Whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and the wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt." Which means, that there was no prophet like unto Moses in his familiar converse with God, and the power by which he smote Egypt with plagues. But in other things John was equal with, yea greater than, Moses and the rest of the prophets.

Besides other distinguishing characteristics and prerogatives of John, his spirit, prophetic office, life, and actions were more sublime than those of the other

prophets, as S. Jerome asserts, and S. Austin (*lib. 2, contr. advers. leg. et proph. c. 5*). For John was, as it were, a standing miracle in his conception, in the womb, in his birth, in his angelic life. He was conceived, by a miracle, of barren parents; by a miracle he recognized Christ in the womb; and saluted and adored him; by a miracle, when he was born he communicated universal gladness; by a miracle, at his circumcision he restored the use of speech to his dumb father; by a miracle, he went when a boy into the desert, and there lived like an angel all his life. Whence the Church sings of John—

"O boundlessly happy, of merit most lofty, Of purity snow-white, pollution thou hatest: O martyr most valiant, of deserts the lover, Of seers the greatest."

And so John has the crowns of virginity, prophecy, and martyrdom, in addition to the crown of a doctor.

*But he that is least,* &c. 1. The least of the blessed in heaven is greater, that is, more blessed and more perfect, more excellent and glorious than John, who was still a mortal traveller. Christ adds these words that He may stir up His hearers to follow after the blessedness of His salvation by means of the evangelic law which He himself brought in. For this is the Kingdom of Heaven from which Christ began and continued His preaching.

2. With greater propriety and force, you may say with S. Chrysostom and others, that Christ here opposes, and in one sense places Himself lower than John, but in other respects prefers Himself to John. He says, "I have declared that among those born of women there is not a greater in the Old Testament than John; but lest ye should think that he is the greatest of all, and the Messias, I add, that Christ, who is younger than John, is, nevertheless, greater than he." It is as though Christ said, "I, Christ, who in age, and in the opinion of the common people, am less than John in preaching, in the kingdom of Heaven am greater than he, because I so preach that I at the same time inspire grace, by which believers in Me may indeed attain this kingdom." Whence it seems that a comma should be placed after the word *least*, not after *kingdom of heaven*. In the Gr. Christ is here called *ὁ μικρότερος*, i.e., *less than, junior to* John. The Heb. would be *kaccaton*, or *the little one*, that is to say, *the least, the lowliest*, as Christ was when He said, "As for me, I am a worm and no man, the very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people." The comparative is often put for the superlative.

3. Our Maldonatus explains thus: *The less*, that is, the least Christian in the kingdom of Heaven, or the Church, which preaches and leads to the kingdom of Heaven is greater, that is, of higher dignity than John. Greater, I say, by reason of the status of the Church; and he is able to be greater from the nature of the Gospel, than John was. For the new law of Christ is the