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CHAPTER 20: 23-34

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.

Continuation of Matthew 20: 23-34

Verse 23. *And He saith to them, &c.* Christ here foretells the martyrdom of James and John. For S. James, preaching Christ more fervently than the other Apostles, first suffered martyrdom for Him, being slain by Herod with the sword. S. John also drank of this cup when he was plunged by Domitian, at Rome, before the Latin Gate, into a cauldron of boiling oil, and came forth renewed in strength; so that by a new miracle he was a martyr by living rather by dying.

Again, not only Prochorus, S. John's disciple, in his *Life of S. John* (the truth of which is rightly suspected by Baronius), but also S. Isidore declares that S. John really drank the cup of poison, but that he also drank it without harm; whence also he is generally represented in pictures holding a cup. And, lastly, we may say that the whole life of S. John was a continual martyrdom, for he lived a very long time after all the Apostles, to the year of our Lord 101; and this long absence from Christ, his beloved—after Whom he was continually longing—was a lengthened martyrdom to him, as it was

also to the Blessed Virgin, to whom he had been given as a son by Christ on the Cross.

Again, S. John underwent a special martyrdom while he stood with the Blessed Virgin by the Cross on Mount Calvary, and beheld Christ—his Life, Whom he loved more than his own life—suffering the bitter pains of the Cross for three hours.

Verse 23 (Continued)- *But to sit on my right hand, &c.* The Arians thought that it is here said that it was not in the power of Christ to give this, but of the Father, and consequently, that Christ was not equal (Greek, *ὁμοούσιος*) to the Father; but they are in error. For Christ is here putting an antithesis, not between Himself and the Father, but between James and John (who were ambitiously seeking the first place in His kingdom) and those to whom it of right belonged. The point of the argument lies in the word *you*, which is read in the Vulgate, though not in the Greek and other versions. Whence Remigius says: “It is not Mine to give to you—*i.e.*, to proud men, such as you are, but to the humble.” Again: It is not Mine to give to you as My kinsmen according to the flesh; for it is given not to the person, but to the life (as S. Jerome says), not from favour, but according to merit.

Mark, that Christ does not grant what these two ask for, that the rest of the Apostles may not be provoked through being excluded; nor does He refuse it, so as to make these two sad. So S. Jerome. “He said not, ‘Ye shall not sit there,’ that He might not discourage the two brethren; neither did He say, ‘Ye shall sit there,’ that He might not stir the others to anger;” but by holding up the prize before all, He might encourage all to strive for Him. So a just king, presiding over a contest instituted by him, if his kinsmen and friends should come to him and say, “Give us the prize,” justly makes answer—“ It is not mine to give the prize to you, but to those for whom it is prepared and decreed, namely, to those who strive in the contest and gain the mastery.”

Again it is clear from S. Luke xxii. 29, 30, that this kingdom is Christ’s to bestow. *I appoint unto you a kingdom as My Father hath appointed unto Me, that ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the Twelve tribes of Israel.* Christ, however, says here that it belongs rather to the Father, both because as man He was always subject to the Father, and also that by giving them a proper reason He might send them away from Himself and refer them to the Father, so that they might humble themselves before Him; and be prevented by shame from asking for it; and also lastly because as wisdom and works of wisdom are proper to the Son and works of goodness to the Holy Spirit, so works of power and providence, to which it belongs to predestinate men to the kingdom, are proper to the Father.

But to those for whom it is prepared of My Father.

The interpretation of Euthymius is narrow, who explains *those* as being Peter and Paul. Narrower still is the interpretation of Hilary who says that Moses and Elias are meant; for he thinks that the Transfiguration is alluded to in which Moses and Elias saw the glory of Christ in His kingdom and shared in it. Narrowest of all is the interpretation of S. Chrysostom, who says that the place on the right hand and on the left will be given to none; because no one, he says, can be exalted to the right hand of Christ, since He alone sits at the right hand of the Father. But these interpretations are too narrow, for Christ speaks generally of all the elect. Wherefore the highest places in the kingdom of Heaven are prepared by God for those who after striving most earnestly gain the victory. Wherefore by the right and left hand are to be understood pre-eminence in the kingdom, which will be granted to those who are first in humility, charity, patience, and zeal in preaching the Gospel. The Abbot Athanasius, we read, was caught up into Heaven and heard the choirs of the blessed singing the praises of God, and when he would join their company he heard a voice which said to him "no one enters here who has lived carelessly, go thy way, strive diligently, and despise the vanities of the world." It is also related of the holy Furseus (*Bede, Hist. Ang. lib. 3, cap. 19*) that he was caught up to Heaven and heard the angels and saints singing: "They shall go from strength to strength: unto the God of gods shall they appear in Sion." Let us advance therefore from strength to strength, and we shall ascend from glory to glory, from angels to Cherubim and Seraphim, from the lowest to the highest throne in Heaven.

Verse 24- *And when the ten heard it, &c.* You will ask how it was that the other Apostles heard the request of the two brethren. The most probable opinion is that of Francis Lucas, who says that Salome and her sons spoke privately with Christ, but that He answered so that the rest should hear what He said and understand from His answer what the two had asked for. For He knew that they were all suffering from the same disease of ambition, and He wished to heal them all. Also since they were infected with the same desire, they detected the desire of the others: for every one measures others by himself, and imagines that they have the same desires and ambition as himself.

The ten were not so much displeased at the ambition of James and John as troubled with the fear that they would be placed after them; for they too desired the first place; so dogs, though at other times friendly, are angry and snarl at each other when they are gnawing the same bone.

Ambition indeed begets envy, and envy begets anger in him who desires the same honour lest it be taken from him by another. S. Basil, in his homily against envy, mentions an effectual remedy against this vice, "not to set a high value on anything belonging to this world, such as wealth or glory; for he who has succeeded in subjecting all worldly things to his reason, and has devoted himself to the pursuit of the true beauty and honour, will be very far from esteeming any one happy, or to be envied on account of any worldly advantages; and he who is of such a spirit as never to admire anything belonging to this life will never be under the dominion of envy."

Divine Scriptures direct their aim, that our inward eye may be purged from that thing whatever it is which hinders us from beholding God."

Let the man, then, who is blinded by sin and concupiscence say, Grant me, O Lord, to see the baseness of sin, the vileness of concupiscence, the worthlessness of pleasure, the fierceness of hell-fire; the beauty of virtue, the blessedness of Paradise, the eternity of glory; so that I may despise all concupiscence, and aim at the practice of virtue.

Verse 34- *So Jesus had compassion on them.* S. Jerome says: "Jesus considering their ready will, rewards it by fully granting their desire. Whence He says in another place, *Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*"

And they followed Him. "These blind men," S. Chrysostom says, "as before this bounty they were persevering, so after receiving it they were not ungrateful." for, when healed, they offered a good service to Christ in following Him. For this is what God requires of thee—"to walk circumspectly (*Vulg., sollicitum*) with thy God."

Verse 31- *The multitude rebuked, &c.* That they being mean men should not disturb Christ, who perhaps was teaching; or delay Him on this journey. So Euthymius.

Mystically: S. Gregory (*Hom. 2, in Evang.*) understands by the multitude the crowds of carnal desires, which before Jesus comes to our heart, by their temptations dissipate our meditation, and drown the voice of the heart in prayer.

But they cried the more, &c. Because there was need of a louder cry that they might be heard by Christ above the noise of the crowd.

Morally. S. Augustine (*de Verb. Dom. Ser. 18*), explains it thus, “Every Christian who has begun to live well, and to despise the world, at the commencement of his new life has to endure the censures of cold Christians, but if he perseveres, those who at first hindered him will soon comply.” The fear of man then must be overcome by one who wishes to serve God. The first virtue of a Christian, as S. Jerome says, is to despise and to be despised.

S. Hilary says, “Faith, when it is called, is the more inflamed, and so in the midst of dangers it is secure, and in the midst of security, it is endangered.”

Verse 32- *And Jesus stood still, &c.* S. Jerome says, “Jesus stood still because they being blind could not see their way: about Jericho there were many pits, crags, and steep places, therefore the Lord stands still that they might come to Him.”

S. Gregory (*Hom. 2, in Evang.*) interprets *symbolically*, “to pass by is the property of the human nature, to stand still of the Divine. The Lord as He passed by heard the cry of the blind man, but when He restored his sight He stood still.

Anagogically, S. Augustine (*Lib. 1. quæst. Evang. c. 8*), “Faith in His temporal Incarnation prepares us for the understanding of things eternal; for things temporal pass by, but things eternal stand still.”

Verse 33- *And called them.* S. Jerome says. “He commands that they be called, that the multitude may not hinder them; and He asks what they would, that by their answer their necessity may be made clear, and His power be known in their healing.” *What will ye?* He was not ignorant of their desire, but though He knew it, He wills to hear their confession of it.

They say unto Him, &c. Nothing is naturally so much desired by man as to see; so that to see seems like life, and not to see like death and continual sorrow.

S. Augustine, writing on these words, says: “The whole object of life is the healing of the eyes of the heart so that we may behold. To this end the sacred mysteries are celebrated, the Word of God is preached, the moral exhortations of the Church are made—that is, those which pertain to the correction of morals, and to the renunciation of this world; not in word only, but by a change of life. To this end the

Verse 25- *Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles, &c.* Christ here does not find fault with the civil or ecclesiastical power which is exercised by princes and bishops, as the Anabaptists maintain; for this is needful in every commonwealth for good government. A tyrant does not care for the interests of those under him, but consults only his own advantage and honour. Whereas true princes seek the good of their subjects, and are the servants rather than the lords of the commonwealth, as Aristotle says.

And they that are great, &c. That is, they rule imperiously, and exercise an irresponsible power over those subject to them.

Verse 26- *It shall not be so among you, &c.* The Vulgate reads in verse 27, *will be your servant*, and with it agree the Syriac, Egyptian, and Æthiopic versions. In these words Christ teaches not so much the way and means by which a man may obtain the primacy in the Church as how one who is a primate ought to behave himself in the Church, namely as the least of all; and by setting before them this rule of humility He deters the Apostles from ambitiously seeking the chief place. It is plain that this is the meaning because this verse is in antithesis with the preceding: for He contrasts His own gentle, benignant and wholesome rule with the imperious and tyrannical authority that is exercised over the Gentiles. S. Gregory (*Pastor. part 2, c. 6*), teaches how a prelate ought to unite authority with gentleness, and act with authority against the refractory and with gentleness towards the obedient, “Let a ruler,” he says, “be a companion in humility to those who do well, but let him be firmly opposed with a righteous zeal against the faults of delinquents.”

At the same time Christ shows in these words by what way we ought to advance towards the highest place in Heaven, namely, by the way of humility. And for this reason the Pope prefers this title, *Servant of the servants of Christ*. This is what S. Peter, the Vicar of Christ taught the pastors of the Church, “Feed the flock of God, which is among you, &c. (1 *Epist. v. 2.*)

Likewise on account of this saying of Christ, S. Francis wished the prelates of his Order to be called ministers and brothers minor (minorite friars), both that he might employ the very words of the Gospel, which he had promised to observe, and that his disciples might learn by their very name that they had come to the school of Christ to learn humility. For Christ, the Teacher of humility, that He might give His disciples a perfect rule of humility said, “Whosoever will be chief among you let him be your minister, &c.”

Verse 28- Even as the Son of Man, &c. S. Francis Xavier furnished a rare example of this humility of Christ, and recalled it to this age when it had, as it were, gone out of fashion. For when he was appointed by the Pope Apostolic Legate of India, he would have no servant, although the Viceroy of the King of Portugal offered him several, and urged him to accept them; but he ministered to all, both in bodily and spiritual services. He used himself to hear the confessions of the sick, and comfort the sorrowful; he used to administer medicines to the sick, and cleanse their bodies and wash their bandages, and catechise the ignorant and children; and besides he used to attend to and feed the horses of his companions. and when some one said that these things were unworthy of an Apostolic Legate, he answered that there was nothing more worthy than Christian charity and humility which became all things to all men that it may gain all: which Christ through His whole life continually enjoined by word and deed. So that by this conduct he did not lose, but increased his authority. Moreover Christ himself while on earth had not even one servant, but made himself the servant of all. S Chrysostom (*Hom. 40, the Epis. to the Cors.*) says, "Listen to Paul; *these hands, he says, have ministered to my necessities and to them that were with me.* That teacher of the world, and man worthy of heaven, scrupled not to serve innumerable mortals; while you think it a disgrace unless you have your herds of servants in your train: not seeing that this is a great disgrace to you. God gave us hands and feet that we might do without servants. What is the use of crowds of servants?"

A ransom for many. Not as if Christ died only for the predestinated, as the heretics formerly called Predestinarians, and Calvin, in recent times, maintained: for that Christ suffered and died for all men S. Paul clearly teaches (*2 Cor. v. 14. and 1 S. John ii. 2*). The words *for most* are put *for all*, Euthymius says, because these all were not few but many. So *many* is taken for *all* in this chapter v. 16, and chapter xxvi. 28, and Romans v. 19, and elsewhere. Or *for many*; because although Christ died for all, and obtained for all and bestowed upon all means sufficient for salvation, yet the fruit of His death, and salvation in its completeness falls to the share of the just only and those who persevere until death in righteousness. So S. Jerome, Maldonatus and others.

Verse 29- And as they departed from Jericho. Christ was going from the city of Ephrem, through Jericho which lay between, to Jerusalem—to the death of the Cross. Jericho was distant from Jerusalem one hundred and fifty stadia, and from Ephem on the Jordan sixty stadia, according to Josephus. The journey to Jericho is easy and along a plain, but from Jericho to Jerusalem it is mountainous, steep and difficult. Jericho in Hebrew is derived from ירח, *the moon*, because it is of the form of the moon, or from סודור, *odour* or *scent*, because the balsam, a plant of very sweet odour, grows there.

Symbolically. Rabanus says that Jericho, which is interpreted "the moon," denotes the infirmity of our changefulness and mortality, and therefore these blind men were found there. Again S. Gregory (*Hom. 12, in Evangel.*) says, "Jericho is interpreted 'the moon,' and the moon in Scripture is put for the infirmity of the flesh. While therefore

our Creator is drawing nigh to Jericho, the blind man is returning to the light; because while Divinity takes upon itself the infirmity of our flesh, the human race regained the light which it had lost."

Mystically. Origen says, "By Jericho is understood the world into which Christ descended. Those who are in Jericho know not how to escape from the wisdom of the world, unless they see not Jesus only coming out of Jericho, but His disciples. This when they saw, great multitudes despised the world and all worldly things, that under the guidance of Christ they might go up to the Heavenly Jerusalem."

Verse 30- Behold two blind men, &c. This is the same history that S. Mark relates (chap. x. 46); he mentions only one blind man, Bartimæus. S. Augustine (*lib. 2 de cons. Evang. ch. 65*) says that there were two blind men, one of whom was very well known in that city; "for Bartimæus, the son of Timæus," he says, "had sunk from great wealth, and was now sitting, not only as blind, but as a beggar. For this reason then Mark chose to mention him alone, because the restoration of his sight procured fame to this miracle in proportion to the notoriety of the fact of his blindness."

Moreover, S. Augustine, Jansen, and others, are of opinion that this blind man was not the same as the one of whom S. Luke speaks, ch. xviii. 35, because S. Luke says that he was healed as they drew near to Jericho, while this one was healed as they came out. But since S. Luke's narrative agrees in all points with that of S. Matthew and S. Mark, we must suppose that it was one and the same blind man whose prayer to Christ for the restoration of his sight was not heard on account of the crowd, and Christ made as though He heard him not, that he might quicken his faith and hope, and then on the following day he repeated his prayer as Christ went out and obtained it. So S. Ambrose, Maldonatus, and others explain it.

Allegorically. Origen and S. Ambrose say that the two blind men were Judah and Israel, who before the coming of Christ were blind because they saw not the true Word which was contained in the law and the prophets. But Rabanus, with S. Augustine, says that they were the Jews and the Gentiles, for they were both ignorant of the way of salvation. But S. Chrysostom understands them of the Gentiles only, who are descended partly from Ham and partly from Japhet.

Tropologically, by the two blind men we may understand the two-fold blindness of the affections and of the understanding.

Have mercy on us, &c. That is, "O Messiah, of whom the prophets foretold that He should be born of David: it is a mark of the Messiah to have mercy on the miserable, and to give sight to the blind (Isaiah xxxv. 5). We believe that Thou art the Messiah; therefore give us sight that all may know that Thou art the Messiah, and may believe and worship Thee."