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MATTHEW 8: 20-34

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 Lapse'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. Lapse'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 8: 20-34

Verse 20- And Jesus said unto him, &c. *Nests*; the Greek has *κατασκηνώσεις*, i.e., shady coverts made by the boughs and leaves of trees. S. Cyprian (lib. 1. *ad Quirinum*, c. 11), and S. Augustine translate the word, *inns*.

The meaning is—common, worthless, and even noxious animals, such as foxes and birds of prey, have places of rest and shelter; but the Son of Man, He who was born of the Virgin, and made man, hath nothing of His own, not a cushion, or a bed, or a bench on which to rest His head.

Christ here detects and uncovers the latent ulcer of covetousness in the Scribe. It is as though He said to him, "Thou desirest to follow Me because thou seest Me pleasing to the people, because of the healing and benefits which I bestow upon them. Hence thou hopest, in following Me, to increase thy possessions, and pick up many gifts, as though I made Me and Mine rich by the Gospel. But thou art mistaken, for I, as it

omnipotence of God. The fire of hell is a supernatural instrument of the omnipotent God, hence by the will of God, it can operate in the most distant places.

When therefore they said to Christ, *Art thou come*, &c., they did not speak of the ancient, perpetual, irrevocable torment of hell fire, but they deprecated any new torment being inflicted upon them by Christ. This new torment was their expulsion from the bodies of those whom they were in the habit of possessing, as S. Chrysostom says, and their banishment to the prison-house of hell.

said with reference to anger, you may apply to all your other temptations. Temptation arises, it is the wind. Thou art troubled, it is the waves. Awake Christ and let Him speak with thee.”

Allegorically, Bede says: “The ship with its yard-arm is the tree of the Cross, by the help of which we who were sunk in the waves of the sea, proceed as Christ’s disciples to the privileges of the eternal country. For Christ says, ‘If any man will come after Me, let him take up the Cross and follow Me.’”

Anagogically, “Christ slept in the time of His Passion. The tempest arose which was stirred up by the blasts of the devil. The disciples awake the Lord, whose death they had witnessed, by desiring His Resurrection. He rises with a speedy Resurrection. He rebukes the wind—that is, the pride of the devil. He calms the tempest—that is, the insulting madness of the Jews. He chides His disciples, for He upbraided them for their incredulity after His Resurrection.”

And there was a great calm, for as S. Jerome says, “All creatures feel their Creator; and things which are senseless to us are sensible to Him.” Or, as Origen says, “It became Him who was so great to do great things.”

Verse 27- *And the men marvelled, saying, &c.* These men were not the disciples, but the sailors and others who were in the ship of Jesus, and in the other ships which accompanied it. For, as Origen says, “The disciples are never named but with the mark of distinction, *Apostles, or Disciples.*”

What manner of man. The Greek is *ποταπός*, which is not simply a particle of interrogation, but is uttered with an emphasis of wonder and admiration. “Who is this? He does not seem to be like other men, but a Being of a different race.”

Verse 28- *And when he was come to the other side, &c.* This miracle of healing the demoniac is given with greater fulness by S. Luke. The commentary, therefore, upon it will be given in S. Luke viii. 27-40.

Verse 29- *Hast thou come hither to torment us before the time?* From these words some have thought that the devils have not yet received the extreme punishment of their offences, and that they will not be condemned to be tormented in hell before the Day of Judgment. S. Hilary has been thought to be of this opinion, by saying (*Can. 8*), “It cried out, why should He grudge them their position? (in the demoniac) why should He attack them before the time of judgment?” The same opinion is by some ascribed to S. Irenæus, Justin, Lactantius, Eusebius, Nicephorus; but I have found nothing of the kind in their writings. And the words of S. Hilary do not bear that meaning, but only say what S. Matthew relates.

For it is certain from Scripture and the Fathers that the devils, from the beginning of the world were condemned as soon as they sinned, and were tormented in the fire of hell. For by that fire they are tormented, even when they are away from it, having gone forth from hell, and taken up their abode in the air. This is brought about by the

were, the Master of perfection, am poor and a lover of poverty Myself, and such I wish My disciples to be, that being free from the care of things temporal, they may be wholly at leisure for God and preaching.” When the Scribe heard this he was silent; and, being disappointed of his hope, withdrew himself from the eyes of Christ, as Matthew tacitly intimates. Thus S. Hilary, Theophylact, Euthymius, and S. Jerome explain. “Why,” says S. Jerome, “do you wish to follow Me for the sake of riches and worldly gain, when I have not even one little guest-chamber?”

Let religious, who unite themselves to God by the profession of poverty, imitate this example of Christ, and look for support to His Providence.

This passage also refutes the heresy of those who condemn voluntary poverty, which religious profess.

The originator of this heresy was a certain Lombard, named Desiderius, in the time of Pope Alexander IV., and another called William of Holy Love, in the same age, who are entirely confuted by SS. Thomas and Bonaventura. By an entirely opposite error, other heretics, called *Apostolici*, have falsely concluded from this passage, as S. Augustine testifies (*Hæres. 40*), that this absolute poverty is necessary for all men for salvation. From the same passage the Waldenses, or Poor Men of Lyons, and Wickliffe, have falsely argued that it is unlawful for bishops and priests to possess any property, but that they ought to live only on alms, because Christ did so. But Christ did so being perfect, and gave it as a counsel, not as a command necessary to salvation. Hence this error is denounced by many decrees of Councils.

From this passage it is also plain that poverty, and its very marrow and efficacy, consist in this—that a man should possess and affect nothing as though it were his own, but should keep his affections free for God alone, to serve Him. And it is not repugnant to this spirit, but conformable to it, to possess in common things necessary for life. And so, by a decree of the Council of Trent (Sess. 25, c. 3), all religious, except the Franciscans, are allowed to own even real property in common, that they may not be forced to beg, nor be anxious about supplies, nor become burdensome to the faithful. For even Christ and the Apostles had goods in common, of which Judas was the steward and dispenser, as appears from John xii. 6.

Son of Man. That is, Man sprung from man, as Christ constantly calls Himself, in His love of humility, because He who was God deigned for our sakes to become incarnate, and be made man.

But of what man is Christ the Son? First, by man, the heathen understood Joseph, whence they contended that he was begotten of Joseph, not conceived by the Holy Ghost, as S. Justin testifies (*Quæst. 66 ad Orthodoxos*). But this is contrary to Scripture and the Creeds.

2. Theophylact says, Christ is the Son of Man, *i.e.*, of the Virgin Mary, His mother; for man is common gender, and may be used of a male or a female, like the Greek *άνθρωπος*. But the addition in Greek of the masculine article shows that the word is here restricted to signify a male.

3. And more probably, others say, *Son of Man, i.e.*, of Abraham, or David; for to them it was promised that of their posterity the Messiah, or Christ, should be born.

4. Others, Christ is the *Son of Man, i.e.*, of men, as of the patriarchs and kings, from whom Matthew has deduced his genealogy.

5. And last, Christ is the *Son of Man, i.e.*, of Adam, because He, like all other men, was sprung from Adam. For Adam is called absolutely man, because he was the first man, and the parent of all other men. Hence Adam, in Hebrew, means man. There is a reference to Ezek. ii. 1. Ezekiel, who is a type of Christ, is called son of man, in Hebrew, *ben-adam, i.e., son of Adam*. Whence S. Gregory Nazianzen (*de Theolog. Orat.* 4) says, Christ is called Son of Adam, according to the Hebrew, not to show that He had a man for His father, but that through the Virgin Mary He derived His generation from Adam. For He willed to be born of Adam, that by this means He might repair the Fall of Adam and his posterity. Hence S. Augustine (lib. 2 *de Consens. Evang.* c. 1) says, “He commendeth unto us how mercifully He hath deigned to be of us, and, as it were, commending the mystery of His wonderful Incarnation, He often sounds this title (*Son of Man*) in our ears.”

Son of Man signifies more than man, because man can be created by God alone, as Adam was created; but *Son of Man* signifies sprung from Adam, the common parent, that first might be set forth the infinite humility of Christ, that He should deign to be sprung from a sinful man, and to receive in Himself his miseries and his mortality in that earthly body which He assumed. For Adam is derived from *Adama*, the *ground*, as *homo* from *humus, mortalis* from *mors*, “death.” (See what I have said on Ezek. ii. 1.) 2. There is shown the wonderful brotherhood and charity of Christ to men, whereby He willed to be born in Bethlehem, of the same common parent Adam, that He might become the Brother of all men, and akin to them in blood, that He might be closely grafted into human nature, and united to it, even to the whole company of mankind, by human generation and natural birth from man, after the manner which I explained on chap. i. 18, according to those words of Isaiah, “Unto us a Son is born, a Child is given.” *Son of Man* therefore denotes the perfect kindness, friendship, and condescension of Christ, and the blandishments of His love, by which He offers Himself to men as the *Son of Man*, as a Child to children, that with Him, as a most sweet Little One, as a most delightful Brother, they may take delight, and have pleasure, according to the words, “My delight is with the sons of men.” (Prov. viii.) Why dost thou fear, O man, to draw nigh to Jesus? Lo! He is the *Son of Man*. Why tremblest thou, O sinner, at the wrath of God? Come unto Jesus, the *Son of Man*, made a little Child for thee. In the whole world there is no Child so sweet—no son so dear. For “the *Son of Man* came to seek and to save that which was lost.” And “the *Son of Man* came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.” *Son of Man*, therefore, is the proper name of, or rather the name appropriated to Christ. It is the mark of His dignity, and of His love, the wonder of all ages, that the Only-Begotten Son of God should, for men, deign to become the *Son of Man*, and to have His converse with men, that He might teach them the

Tropologically, says the *Gloss*, Christ sleeps when we are negligent: but when faith revives He commands the winds and the waves.

Verse 26- *And he said unto them, Why are ye fearful, &c.* He said this before He had stilled the tempest, according to S. Matthew’s order in this place, though S. Mark and S. Luke mention it afterwards. It was fitting that the extreme terror of the disciples should be calmed before the raging of the sea, and that their waning faith should be strengthened that it might be rewarded by the cessation of the storm. So Jansen and others.

Of little faith. For ye do not seem perfectly to believe that I am God; and ye do not trust to My providential care, nor believe that whilst I am asleep I know of your peril, and will deliver you from it. So S. Chrysostom.

1. Faith here may be taken in the strict use of the word. Or,
2. for confidence, which is produced and sharpened by faith. On the other hand, little faith is the cause of little confidence. S. Luke gives the striking question of our Lord to them, *Where is your faith?* Hear S. Bernard:

“Though the world rages, though the enemy roars, though the flesh itself lusts against the spirit, yet will I put my trust in Thee.”

Then he arose. For rebuked, the Greek has *ἐπετίμησε* which corresponds to the Hebrew *נָגַע*. He chided, as the Arabic translates, *as a master does his servant*. Whence S. Mark says, according to the literal translation of the Greek, *He threatened the wind, and said unto the sea, Be silent, be muzzled.*

By these expressions is denoted the great violence by which the sea was tossed with the winds, such as no human power but only Divine, could make to cease. Here, therefore, Christ shows that He was God, since He, as their Master, commanded the winds and the sea.

Tropologically. Christ thought of, and invoked in the mind, commands the persecutors of the Church, and the temptations of the soul, as S. Augustine teaches: “Hast thou heard reviling? It is the wind. Art thou angry? It is the waves. For when the wind blows, the waves arise, the ship is in peril, thy heart is in danger, for thy heart is tossed by waves. When thou hearest reproach, thou desirest to vindicate thyself. Lo, thou art avenged, and yielding to another’s evil, thou hast shipwrecked thyself. And why is this? It is because Christ is asleep within thee. Thou hast forgotten Christ. Awake Him therefore; call Him to remembrance. Let Christ keep vigil within thee. And think thou upon Him. Why shouldst thou wish to be avenged? He hath cut thee off from vengeance by His cry upon the Gross, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’” And after some other remarks, S. Austin proceeds: “I will refrain from anger, and will return to the quiet of my heart. Christ commanded the sea, and there was a calm. What I have

of the pilot, it is tempestuous weather which does that. Any sort of a sailor can manage a ship in a gentle breeze, but for the confusion of a tempest the skill of the best captain is needed.”

The tempest therefore of the waves and winds is the temptation of pride, gluttony, lust, envy, and so on.

Let *him then* who is beaten by temptation do as sailors do in a storm. First they furl their sails, that the fury of the wind may not have so much power over the ship to hurry it to destruction. Thus let him who is tempted furl the sails of his pleasures, and give himself up to fasting and penance.

2. Sailors make for the open sea, that their ship may not strike against rocks. So let him who is tempted flee from the world and worldly things, and let him betake himself to God as a haven of refuge; and let him say with the Psalmist, “My soul refused comfort. I thought upon God and was refreshed.” (Ps. lxxvii.)

Sailors cast fittings and merchandise into the sea, that they may lighten the ship; so let the tempted unburden themselves by means of contrition and confession of the heavy weight of their sins, and lighten their minds. Hence doctors teach that they who are about to go on a voyage, especially a long and perilous one, ought to go to confession, that they may place themselves in a state of grace, as persons drawing nigh to the article of death, not once only, but in a manifold manner.

Lastly, a good captain, maintaining his courage, and having presence of mind, tries every way of escaping from the peril of the storm. Let the mind of him who is tempted do the same. A master of a ship, says S. Cyprian (*Tract. de Mortal.*) is proved by a storm, as a soldier is by a battle.

But he was asleep. This was voluntary, but at the same time natural sleep.

1. That the winds and storm might increase, so that Christ’s power and authority might be the more manifested by His quelling them.
2. “There is set forth,” says S. Ambrose, “the security of His power, that whilst all others were afraid He abode in calm serenity, so that when we are in any similar tribulation we might flee unto Him, and fix our hopes firmly upon Him, according to the saying in Proverbs xxviii. 1: “The righteous is bold as a lion.”

Moreover the pillow upon which, as S. Mark relates, Christ rested is mystically, 1. A good conscience. 2. Resignation to the will of God. 3. Confidence in God’s power and providence. For on this a believer rests, and as it were sleeps, in all adversities.

Origen (*Hom. 6 in Diversis*) says, Christ slept as to His body, but was awake as to His Deity. The sleep of Jonah when the rest who were in the ship were in peril was a type of this. See what I have there said. Moreover what kind of sleep this of Christ’s was, and wherein it differed from ours, see in Toletus, *Annotat.* 43, in 8. *cap. Luc.*

way of salvation, and redeem them by His Cross, and make them happy in heaven.

Ver. 21.—*And another of his disciples, &c.* This disciple was not one of the twelve Apostles, but some other person who was called by Christ to follow Him. We must supply from Luke ix. 59, that Christ previously said to this same person, *Follow me.* He did not refuse the call of Christ, but wished, after having discharged his debt of filial piety, to be more free to follow Him. So says the *Gloss.* From the answer of this disciple, given by S. Matthew, we may understand his questioning and vocation by Christ.

Lord. Reverently and obediently he speaks to Christ as desiring to do Him service; whereas the Scribe, with somewhat too much freedom, addressed Christ as *Teacher (magister).* The one was deservedly left, the other chosen. How much of evil was there in the Scribe? how much of good was there in this man? says S. Augustine. (*Serm. 9 de Verb. Domini.*)

Suffer me first, &c. Theophylact, and after him Franc. Lucas, think that his father was still living, and that he said in effect— “Suffer me to remain with my father, who is now an old man, that I may support him until he die. Then, having done what filial duty requires, I will follow Thee.” Thus he asked for a long furlough from the spiritual warfare.

S. Chrysostom and others expound more plainly and accurately that his father was already dead, and that Christ most opportunely and benignantly called him. As though he said, “Thy father is now deceased, *Follow Me.* I will be to thee a better Father. He had need of thy good offices, but thou hast need of Mine. He was the author of thy carnal life; I will give thee spiritual and eternal life.”

Clement of Alexandria, (*Stromat. lib. 2*) thinks that Philip, who was afterwards an Apostle, was the man to whom Christ said, *Suffer the dead to bury their dead.* But the objection to this is that Philip had been already called by Christ, and was following Him, as is plain from John i. 43. Unless you assume that Philip had been a follower of Christ before this, but, having heard that his father had departed this life, asked Christ’s permission to bury him, but did not obtain it. This would explain why he is here called a disciple by S. Matthew. *And another of his disciples.* And this seems very probable, especially as Clement relates the matter as certain.

Verse 22- *But Jesus saith, &c.* A second time Jesus calls him. Twice He saith, *Follow Me,* namely before his excusing himself, and afterwards because He effectually willed him to be His disciple. He puts aside the impediment which he alleged, and forbids him to return to bury his father. But He assigns most convincing reasons for His refusal. He says, *Suffer the dead to bury their dead.* Observe, Christ does not intend to condemn the burial of the dead, which is a work of mercy praised in the Book of Tobit.

But He wished to teach that when God calls He must immediately be obeyed. For God knows our hindrances, and when He calls us in them He wishes us to break them off, and He in effect promises us His grace and help to enable us to do so. Wherefore He lays it down that following the call of God is to be preferred even to the burial of our parents. That is, divine are to be preferred to human duties, religion to nature, God to man. Christ here plays upon the word *dead*. For first *the dead* signifies those who are spiritually dead, as unbelievers and those who are destitute of the grace of God. Thus SS. Chrysostom, Jerome, and Augustine. Afterwards by *dead* He means those who are corporeally dead. For as a body separated from the soul is dead, so a soul separated from God is dead. As the soul is the life of the body so is God the life of the soul, says S. Augustine. *Let the dead*, such as the Jews who reject belief in Me; let those who are steeped in sin and worldliness, *bury their own dead*, *i.e.*, those who are figuratively dead like themselves, or those of their own relations who are naturally dead, and, it may be, spiritually dead likewise. But as for thee, I would. have thee follow Me, who am the true Life, and live with Me here through My perfect grace, and in the world to come in perfect glory, and preach this Gospel to others, as Luke adds.

Hear S. Ambrose: “He is not allowed to go and bury his father, that thou mayest understand that human things must give way to Divine things.”

Tropologically. Christ signifies that they are dead, and busy themselves with dead things, who give up their minds to the wills and legacies of parents or relations. But to this His disciple He says, Thy destiny is to live for God, and as thou hast begun to be alive unto Him by grace, go on thus to live unto Him, and serve Him, the living God. And so leave to the dead and dying the things which are dead and about to die. Thus S. Jerome: “If the dead bury the dead, we ought to care not for the things which are dead, but for those which are alive, lest whilst we are anxious about the dead we too should be called dead.”

And S. Chrysostom says, “If it was forbidden to be absent from spiritual things, for the brief space of time needed for burying parents, weigh well the punishment of which they shall be counted worthy who are always absent from those things which are worthy of Christ, because they prefer the worthless and abject affairs of worldly business to things which are indeed necessary, and that even when none compels.

Luke adds (ix. 60), *But go thou and preach the kingdom of God*, namely, the way by which men may arrive at the kingdom of heaven—that is to say, by faith, and a life conformed to the Gospel which Christ has made known. As S. Augustine says (*di Verb. Domini, Serm. 7*), “When the Lord is preparing men for the Gospel, He will not receive any such excuses as have to do with fleshly and temporal affairs.” For, as S. Chrysostom says again, “It is far better to preach the kingdom of God, and rescue others from death, than to bury one who is dead and can be of no use, especially when there are other persons to discharge the office.” And S. Gregory speaks to the same purpose (lib. 19, *Moral. c. 14*) “Sometimes in our actions lesser good deeds are to be set aside, in favour of other things of greater usefulness. For who is ignorant

that it is indeed a good work to bury the dead, but that it is better to preach the Gospel?”

Verse 23- *And when he had gone up into a ship, &c.* The Vulgate has *navicula*, “a little ship,” because they were small boats, which were used for crossing the lake, and for fishing. S. Mark adds (iv. 36), *they received him as he was, i.e.*, as he was teaching the multitudes who were standing upon the shore.

Verse 24- *And, behold, there was a great tempest in the sea.* S. Luke adds, *the waves were filling the ship, and they were in jeopardy.* Bede and Strabus and the *Gloss* are of opinion that in this storm Christ’s ship alone was tossed, but not the other little ships which accompanied them, that Christ might show thereby that He was the Author of the storm arising, as well as of its being made to cease. But it is more correct to suppose that the other boats were also storm-tossed, for these boats were near, yea, close to Christ’s ship, that there might be shown the greater fury of the tempest, and the greater power of Christ in calming it. Moreover, God permitted this storm to arise from natural causes, such as vapours, and winds concurring with them, so that Christ raised and sent this storm. He did this—

1. That He might declare His power, and show that He is Lord of the sea as well as the land, says Origen. (*Hom. 6 in Diver.*) Hence the angel who appeared to S. John set his right foot upon the sea, as though commanding it. (Rev. x. 2.) For this angel represented Christ, as Bede, Richard of S. Victor, and others say.
2. That He might exercise His disciples in bearing, as well the persecutions of men as the storms and tempests of wind and rain which they must often experience in going about the world to evangelize it. So Theophylact. Whence also S. Chrysostom gives this reason, “that He might exercise the athletes of the world in temptations and terrors.”
3. That His disciples and the other passengers in the ship might, through the miracle of the quelled tempest, believe in Him that He was very and omnipotent God.

Tropologically, this tempest in the sea, says S. Chrysostom, was a type of the future trials of the Church. For the ship in the waves represents the Church and the soul in temptations, by which they are quickened and profited. For a life without trial is like a dead sea, as Seneca says (*Epist. 67*). And thus a man who is without temptation is like one who is in a swoon, or dead. Temptation rouses him up to exert his faculties, that he may vanquish it.

Again, as a tempest drives ships before it, that they may the more speedily arrive at their wished-for haven, so does temptation stimulate a man to greater zeal for virtue, whereby he may be borne on towards heaven. As Chrysologus says (*Ser. 20*), “It is not serene weather which proves the skill