

## Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent

### Homily of Bishop Barres

#### St. Agnes Cathedral

March 10, 2021

In the 5<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, we hear Jesus saying to his disciples: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”

Jesus is the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament. Jesus fulfills the law and the prophets through his teaching and through his entire Life, Death and Resurrection.

Nowhere do we see this biblical unity and truth more dramatically than in the Easter Vigil Scripture Readings, *Exultet* and Liturgical Prayers which we are already anticipating on this Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent.

A section (40-41) of Pope Benedict XVI’s Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* explains this intrinsic unity of the Old Testament and the New Testament referred to in Matthew 5 in a compelling and comprehensive way. Pope Benedict writes:

“The paschal mystery of Christ is in complete conformity... with the prophecies and the foreshadowings of the Scriptures; yet it presents clear aspects of discontinuity with regard to the institutions of the Old Testament.

41. These considerations show the unique importance of the Old Testament for Christians, while at the same time bringing out the *newness of Christological interpretation*. From apostolic times and in her living Tradition, the Church has stressed the unity of God’s plan in the two Testaments through the use of typology; this procedure is in no way arbitrary, but is intrinsic to the events related in the sacred text and thus involves the whole of Scripture. Typology “discerns in God’s works of the Old Covenant prefigurations of what he accomplished in the fullness of time in the person of his incarnate Son”.<sup>[135]</sup> Christians, then, read the Old Testament in the light of Christ crucified and risen. While typological interpretation manifests the inexhaustible content of the Old Testament from the standpoint of the New, we must not forget that the Old Testament retains its own inherent value as revelation, as our Lord himself reaffirmed (cf. *Mk* 12:29-31). Consequently, “the New Testament has to be read in the light of the Old. Early Christian catechesis made constant use of the

Old Testament (cf. *1 Cor* 5:6-8; *1 Cor* 10:1-11)".<sup>[136]</sup> For this reason the Synod Fathers stated that "the Jewish understanding of the Bible can prove helpful to Christians for their own understanding and study of the Scriptures".<sup>[137]</sup>

"The New Testament is hidden in the Old and the Old is made manifest in the New",<sup>[138]</sup> as Saint Augustine perceptively noted. It is important, therefore, that in both pastoral and academic settings the close relationship between the two Testaments be clearly brought out, in keeping with the dictum of Saint Gregory the Great that "what the Old Testament promised, the New Testament made visible; what the former announces in a hidden way, the latter openly proclaims as present. Therefore the Old Testament is a prophecy of the New Testament; and the best commentary on the Old Testament is the New Testament".<sup>[139]</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI explains the biblical theology, truth and principle that guide us as Catholics. All of our liturgical prayers are of course grounded and drenched in the Sacred Scriptures.

A section of the Easter Vigil Proclamation or *Exsultet* reveals the beautiful dance and unity between the Old Testament and New Testament and the wisdom of the phrase, *lex orandi, lex credendi* – as the Church prays, so she believes.

I conclude with a section of the *Exsultet* which illustrates this important biblical and liturgical principle and truth of our Catholic Faith.

It is truly right and just, with ardent love of mind and heart  
and with devoted service of our voice,  
to acclaim our God invisible, the almighty Father,  
and Jesus Christ, our Lord, his Son, his Only Begotten.

Who for our sake paid Adam's debt to the eternal Father,  
and, pouring out his own dear Blood,  
wiped clean the record of our ancient sinfulness.

These, then, are the feasts of Passover,  
in which is slain the Lamb, the one true Lamb,  
whose Blood anoints the doorposts of believers.

This is the night,  
when once you led our forebears, Israel's children,  
from slavery in Egypt  
and made them pass dry-shod through the Red Sea.

This is the night  
that with a pillar of fire  
banished the darkness of sin.

This is the night  
that even now, throughout the world,  
sets Christian believers apart from worldly vices  
and from the gloom of sin,  
leading them to grace  
and joining them to his holy ones.

This is the night,  
when Christ broke the prison-bars of death  
and rose victorious from the underworld.

Our birth would have been no gain,  
had we not been redeemed.

O wonder of your humble care for us!  
O love, O charity beyond all telling,  
to ransom a slave you gave away your Son!  
O truly necessary sin of Adam,  
destroyed completely by the Death of Christ!

O happy fault  
that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!

Just a reminder to our Catholic Faith Network audience, that we will in the near future be putting up our 2020 Pastoral Letter on Holy Week entitled, *The Great Week*. It is a very effective and inspirational analysis of the biblical, theological, liturgical and mission dimensions of our celebration of Holy Week. I encourage you to read it and pray it as we prepare for Holy Week. I am grateful to Fr. John McCartney for researching and writing it.