The Eagle's Gospel

"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31)

CHANCES ARE THAT WHEN WATCHING a college or professional football game you may see the following: A touchdown has just been scored and the offensive team lines up to kick the extra point. With all the TV cameras focused on the end zone a fan lifts up a sign which says: John 3:16 (*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"*).

Welcome to the Gospel according to St. John. The fan holding up the sign (probably an evangelical Christian) illustrates why Catholic biblical scholar Fr. Raymond Brown said: *"Without the Gospel of St. John, we would have a very tame Christianity."* Using this gospel as *lectio divina* or bible study during the Easter season can dramatically revivify us. In the words of Abbot Jeremy Driscoll, OSB of Mount Angel Abbey in Saint Benedict, Oregon:

"You are about to open up a treasure: a profound and enthralling Gospel that offers access to the person of Jesus. The whole is written so that, as the author says at the end, 'you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.' And in fact, that is the effect of a careful reading of this text with an open heart. The reader bends toward belief and begins to feel a new kind of life associated with encountering Jesus."

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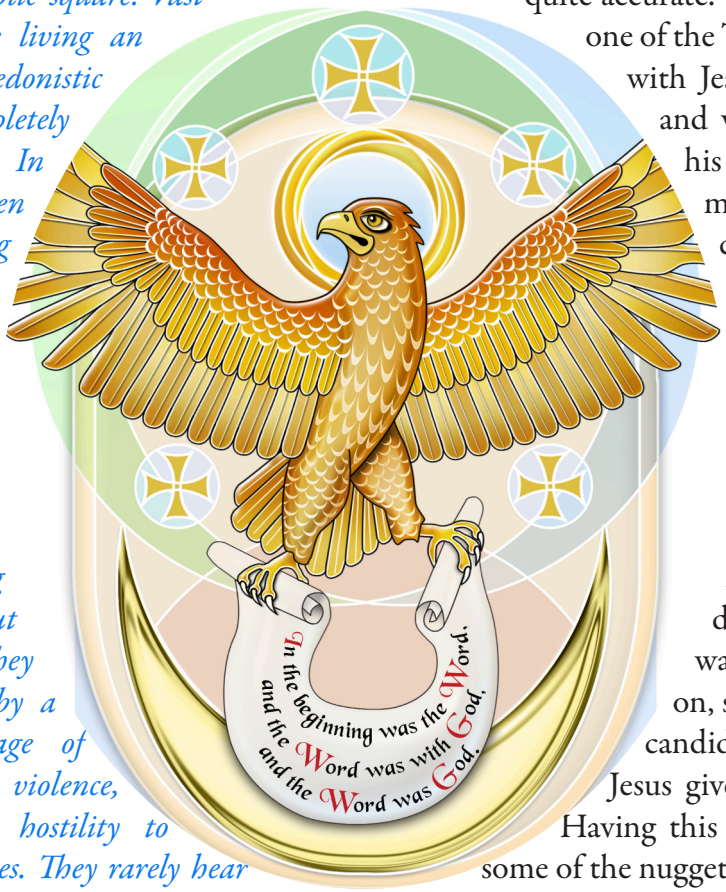
for. We are greatly challenged today in both the world and in the Church. As Catholic Scripture scholar Mary Healy states:

"Today we find ourselves in a cultural situation that is in some respects more like that faced by the early Christians that it has been at any time since. "There is growing hostility to Christianity and intense social pressure to keep our faith to ourselves and stay out of the public square. Vast numbers of people are living an essentially pagan, hedonistic lifestyle. Many are completely ignorant of the gospel... In some ways we face an even more challenging situation than did the early Christians. Many people today have been exposed to just enough Christianity to be inoculated against it. They think they know essentially everything there is to know about Jesus and the Church. They have been influenced by a constant media barrage of references to Christian violence, colonialism, hypocrisy, hostility to science and sexual crimes. They rarely hear anything about the vast amount of good Christians do. People formed in these circumstances are far more difficult to reach than those who have never heard of Jesus."



We have our work cut out for us. But, *nemo dat quod non habet*—You can't give what you don't have. Or, as Friedrich Nietzsche said, *"If you don't act like a person redeemed, how can you get me to believe in a Redeemer?"* That's where this gospel comes in. The whole stress is abiding in the person of Jesus. Some preliminaries:

This gospel has the power of eyewitness testimony. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) where the evangelist doesn't identify himself in the gospel, the author of this gospel makes an oblique reference to himself as the "Beloved Disciple." Tradition has always identified him as John the son of Zebedee. The Beloved Disciple is clearly an Israelite, whose knowledge of biblical feasts and institutions is detailed and whose familiarity with Palestinian geography is quite accurate. The Beloved Disciple is one of the Twelve who was present with Jesus at the Last Supper and with the Apostles after his resurrection. He is a member of the inner circle of disciples, the Apostolic "Big Three"— Peter, James, and John. All three have their names changed by Jesus signifying this importance. Peter has his own unique distinction and James was martyred very early on, so John seems the likely candidate. This closeness to Jesus gives it its unique power. Having this "treasure" let's look at some of the nuggets.

You will note that in the synoptic Gospels Jesus always speaks about the "Kingdom of God." For example, "The Kingdom of God is like a shepherd who seeks the lost sheep." In **this** gospel you have instead the "I am" discourses: *"I am the Good Shepherd..."*: attachment to the person of Jesus.

In His discourse with Nicodemus, Jesus tells him that in order to abide in Him one must be "born from above." Some translations use "again" and Nicodemus seems to think that Jesus is asking for a physical rebirth. Instead, the radical difference of this birth is emphasized. One becomes literally a new creature, an adopted son or daughter of His

Father. This birth from above is acquired by believing in Jesus and being born from above by water and the Spirit (Baptism).

In the Patristic era during the season of Lent three sections of this gospel were particularly used to prepare the catechumens for the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil.

- The Woman of Samaria (Jn 4)
- The healing of the man born blind (Jn 9)
- The raising of Lazarus. (Jn 11)

Jesus offers the Samaritan woman the "waters welling up to eternal life." Our culture offers us the quick fixes of materialism and sexual license which give us an immediate satisfaction but, like all addictions, eventually crash and leave us despondent. Do we reach for another "quick fix" or seek the "living water" that only Jesus can provide.

When Jesus healed the man born blind, this man not only regained his physical sight but came to see who Jesus really was. Do we see the real Jesus? Not the "woke" Jesus so popular even within the Church, but the Jesus of the Gospel? The "woke" Jesus can't give you eternal life. The real Jesus gives it. This man paid a price for seeing and believing in Jesus; He was expelled from the community. Are we willing to witness to Jesus to the point of suffering?

In raising Lazarus, Jesus said, "The one who believes in me, even if he die, still lives." In this gospel by believing in Jesus, abiding in Him by keeping his commandments and receiving the "Bread of Life," we have already in this life passed from death to life. A life that no one can take away. Only sin can destroy it.

The eagle is used as the symbol of this gospel because it literally soars aloft. This gospel can likewise raise us to the heavenly heights. Some excellent materials exist to help us: *The Ignatius Study Bible, The Catholic Scripture Commentary,* and *The Navarre Bible* constitute superb resources.

A person who then abides in Jesus becomes a light in the darkness. Because it is the light of Christ the darkness will never overcome it. Grace can never be contained. Saints John Marie Vianney, Padre Pio, and Thérèse of the Child Jesus never traveled or had our social media. Yet look at their effect. They abided in Jesus.

Time to soar like an eagle.