

Historic Commentary

(Fourth Sunday after Pentecost - Year A)



The Liturgy Letter

Commentary on Matthew 10:40-42 from Selected Church Fathers

[Thomas Aquinas' curated commentary on Matthew 10](#), from a 13th century document called the [Catena Aurea](#) that contains compiled verse by verse commentary on the Gospels from the patristics and others.

[Hilary of Poitiers](#): “He who receives a prophet because he is a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward.” He who receives a prophet receives him who dwells in the prophet, and he becomes worthy of a prophet’s reward by receiving the prophet because he is a prophet. And a like reward is allotted for receiving a righteous person. One who does this becomes righteous by honoring righteousness. In this way righteousness is attained through faith, taking on mercy as its duty. This happens when someone receives a righteous person and becomes a prophet himself by reason of his own reverence. He will receive the honor due to a righteous person and a prophet.

[Hilary of Poitiers](#): He teaches that no deed of a good conscience is useless. It is no crime for a believer to have hope that transcends another’s unbelief. For he foresaw that there would be many who glory merely in the name of apostleship but whose every action proves they are unworthy. They deceive and lie perpetually. And yet when we grant these people the favors that are due them because of their mere appearance of religiosity, he does not withhold from us the reward of doing his work and of hope. For even if they are the very least, that is, the worst sinners of all—for nothing is smaller than the “least”—nonetheless he decrees that we have duties toward them. These duties are light but not useless. They are represented by the phrase “cold water.” For honor is to be paid not to the sins of the individual but to his status as a disciple. He grants his reward to the faith of the one who gives, not to the deceitfulness of the one who receives.

Jerome: Jesus said, “He who receives you receives me.” But there are many false prophets and false preachers who perhaps make this doctrine difficult. He has also cured this stumbling block by saying, “He who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s reward.” Then again, someone may object and say, “I am prevented by poverty. My own lack prevents me from acting as a host.” Jesus eliminated this excuse, too, by the easily fulfilled command that we should offer a cup of cold water with our whole heart. He said “cold water” rather than “hot water” so that we could not object because of our poverty or lack of fuel for hot water. As I have mentioned before, the apostle gave a similar instruction to the Galatians: “Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches.”⁴⁵ He admonishes disciples to give refreshment to their teachers because before he had specified this, it was possible for anyone to plead poverty and avoid the instruction. He clears up this important doubt when he says, “God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” Paul means “If you plead poverty but know in your conscience that the case is otherwise, your excuse accomplishes nothing. You can disobey my admonitions, but be warned that you will reap exactly what you have sown.”

Chrysostom: And if thou art not aware how exceedingly amiss this is, look at it as among men, and then thou wilt fully know the greatness of the sin. As thus: if a servant of thine had been commanded by thee to go to another servant, who had money of thine, to receive it, and were to come back not only with empty hands, but also with spiteful usage; what wouldest thou not do to him that had wrought the insult? What penalty wouldest thou not exact, as though, after this, it were thyself that had been ill used? This reckoning do thou make in regard of God also; for truly it is He that sends the poor to us, and of His we give, if indeed we do give. But if, besides not giving, we also send them away insulted, consider how many bolts, how many thunders, that which we are doing deserves.

Duly considering then all these things, let us both bridle our tongue, and put away inhumanity, and let us stretch forth the hand to give alms, and not with money only, but with words also, let us relieve such as are in need; that we may both escape the punishment for reviling, and may inherit the kingdom which is for blessing and almsgiving, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might forever and ever. Amen.

Vs. 40 He who receiveth you, receiveth me.

A considerable portion of the world may be opposed to the disciples of Christ, and the confession of their faith may draw upon them universal hatred. Yet here is another consolation tending to excite a very great number of persons to treat them with kindness. Whatever is done to them, Christ does not hesitate to reckon as done to himself. This shows how dearly he loves them, when he places to his own account the kind offices which they have received. He is not speaking here about receiving the doctrine, but about receiving the men. The latter meaning, I admit, arises out of the former, but we must attend to the design of Christ. Perceiving that this was exceedingly adapted to support their weakness, he intended to assure them that, if anyone would receive them in a friendly manner, and do them kind offices, he would be as highly pleased as if their benevolence had been exercised towards his own person; and not only so, but that in such a sacrifice God the Father would smell a sweet savor, (Genesis 8:21.)

Vs 41. He who receiveth a prophet

He begins with the prophets, but at length comes down to the lowest rank, and embraces all his disciples. In this manner he commends all, without exception, who truly worship God and love the gospel. To receive a person in the name of a prophet, or in the name of a righteous man, means to do them good for the sake of honoring their doctrine, or of paying respect to piety. Though God enjoins us to perform offices of kindness to all mankind, yet he justly elevates his people to a higher rank, that they may be the objects of peculiar regard and esteem.

Shall receive a prophet's reward This clause is variously interpreted by commentators. Some think that it denotes a mutual compensation, or, in other words, that spiritual benefits are bestowed on the prophets of God instead of temporal benefits. But if this exposition is admitted, what shall we say is meant by the righteous man's reward? Others understand it to mean, that those who shall be kind to them will partake of the same reward which is laid up for prophets and righteous men. Some refer it to the intercourse of saints, and suppose it to mean, that as by our kind actions we give evidence that we are one body with the servants of Christ, so in this way we become partakers of all the blessings which Christ imparts to the members of his body.

I consider it simply as denoting the reward which corresponds to the rank of the person to whom kindness has been exercised; for Christ means that this will be a remarkable proof of the high estimation in which he holds his prophets, and indeed all his disciples. The greatness of the reward will make it evident, that not one kind office which was ever rendered to them has been forgotten.

By way of amplification, he promises a reward to the very meanest offices of kindness, such as giving them a cup of cold water, He gives the name of little ones not only to those who occupy the lowest place, or are held in least estimation in the Church, but to all his disciples, whom the pride of the world tramples under foot.