

made for the great purpose of self-sacrifice are only working for the selfish ends. . . . Is there anything we can learn of the world except to despise it? Can the world in any way be our teacher?

Rabboni, my Master, my Teacher—that was the cry of Magdalen, the model of all mankind, insomuch as she was a sinner and we are all sinners. . . . Rabboni, my Master! His first lesson is but a rehearsal of his last. Love of little things—little things perhaps to us, but great in the sight of God. May our Master then give us strength not to dread the sword, whatever it may be. May we not even seek peace, but only him. Whilst we are here below it is 'Jesus of Nazareth' and even 'Jesus of Golgotha' that we must seek. He is the *one* object of our love. It is he alone whom we desire, he for whom our hearts burn. For whom our eyes seek. Come, then, O Jesus of Nazareth and dwell within my heart. Set up thy tabernacle there, pitch thy tent. Make me a dwelling place for thee!

THE WORD MANIFEST

BY

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He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him and will manifest myself to him.—John 14, 21.



THE feast of the Nativity is the feast of the birth of the Word; his eternal generation in the bosom of the Father, his temporal birth; and his mystical birth in the souls of men, in which is involved their birth to divine life.

The Christmas liturgy is at different times concerned with each of these aspects of the Mystery.

Dominus dixit ad me. Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te, is the triumphal Introit to Midnight Mass.

Puer natus est nobis, et Filius datus est nobis, is the opening of the Third Mass, but it is Christ's mystical birth in us, and our birth in him, upon which the Church is most insistent.

Recensita nativitate, novitas natalis, nova nativitas, are phrases which recur continually, and the Postcommunion for the Third Mass, which is repeated daily as the commemoration, expresses the mystery concisely:

Grant we beseech thee, o Almighty God, that as the *new-born* Saviour of the world is the author of our *divine regeneration*, so also he himself may be the giver of immortality.

The Postcommunion for the Aurora Mass hints at the mode of this birth:

May this new birth set forth in this Sacrament ever renew us,

O Lord, whose wonderful birth did destroy the old man within us.

This new birth is effected in and through 'this Sacrament', the Holy Eucharist, which is at once Sacrament and Sacrifice. The same Incarnate Word appears upon the earth as appeared in the manger at Bethlehem. But here, the cradle to which he comes, is the Altar of Sacrifice; he at whose word he becomes present, is the sacrificing priest; the act whereby he is brought down is the continuation and commemoration of the death of the Cross, while the Holy Communion in which he is united to souls is the consummation of the sacrifice, a sacrificial banquet. Finally, this death, which is also a birth, is the source of all life, of all grace, of all regeneration, of all immortality, and so the Lessons for Christmas Night speak of the Redemption as already an accomplished fact. The Incarnation of the Word was directed to the Redemption, but the Redemption is the source and instrument of the perpetuation of that Incarnation, and its realisation in each individual man. *Mirabile mysterium.*

The Postcommunion for the Circumcision speaks of the 'mystery of this hidden birth'—*arcanae nativitatis mysterium.* It is a birth hidden from every point of view.

The eternal generation of the Word takes place within the abyss of the Trinity, which of its very nature is inaccessible to every created intelligence. All the operations of God *ad extra* proceed from the Blessed Trinity acting in unity, so that the plurality of Persons could never be discovered from these operations, though, once revealed, it can be traced in them. The mystery of the triune life could only be known if God himself deigned to reveal it, and even when known, it still remains a mystery of which the depths can never be sounded by the created intellect.

The temporal birth, too, was hidden from men. It took place in the middle of the night, and was revealed by heaven only to a few shepherds, who, while they may have realised that the Saviour of the world was born, cannot have known the miraculous nature of his coming. Joseph was the guardian of the secret of the Virgin Birth.

The mystical birth is even more hidden. Neither the regeneration of the soul in baptism nor the invisible mission of the Word when the soul grows in grace fall within the perception of the senses. The en-graced soul may sometimes 'feel' the presence of God within him, but such feelings are no guarantee of the fact of that Presence, which will very often exist without them.

But although Christmas is essentially the feast of the 'hidden

birth', the element of manifestation is there. By the mere act of appearing among men, God manifests himself to them, and the shepherds were witnesses of this manifestation. The Collect for the Aurora Mass prays that 'we who are bathed in the new light of the Incarnate Word may show forth in our works what shines forth in our minds by faith', and it is this aspect of the mystery which the Church emphasises in the feast of the Epiphany. Originally this was the Oriental equivalent of the Western feast of Christmas, but it has come to be as it were the consummation and completion of that mystery.

The Word was made flesh, and he was seen by the Jews in the persons of the Shepherds, and by the Gentiles in the persons of the Magi. Yet the light which shone upon them was only a passing flash, after which it was veiled and remained hidden for thirty years, nor do we know how much was revealed to them.

At the baptism of Jesus, the mystery of his Person was manifested to John, who saw the heavens opened and the Holy Ghost descending, while the Father's Voice said: 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased', but the revelation was apparently for John alone. At Cana the miracle performed by Jesus manifested to his disciples his supernatural power, and made them realise that he was not as the rest of men, while on Thabor he showed a glimpse of his glory to the chosen three. But in spite of this in his last talk before his death he had to complain: 'So long have I have been with you, and you have not known me', and he promised the manifestation of himself yet to be made, as the reward of those who kept his commandments, and thereby proved their love for him.

And so it becomes obvious that it is only too easy for the Light to be shining in the darkness, while the darkness does not see nor comprehend it. We may well have 'celebrated the mystery of the hidden birth of our Lord Jesus Christ' without having reached 'the vision of a mind that is purified' for which the Secret of the Circumcision prays. The vision of faith which we possessed at Christmas does not go far enough, so the Church, in the Collect for the Epiphany, prays that 'we who now know thee by faith, may be led to contemplate the beauty of thy Majesty'. The Epiphany is surely, therefore, the great feast of contemplation, of that experimental knowledge of God which he grants when the Three, having made their home in the soul—and still more when the soul has made them its home—begin to 'manifest themselves', to make the happy soul conscious of their presence, conscious of its own incorporation into their divine life, of its admission into their society. This is the light of the Gifts of Wisdom and Understanding, a light which is love and life, for it is the created

reflection of him who is the true light which enlightens and enkindles, the Word which breathes forth Love. *In lumine tuo videbimus lumen.*

But before the indwelling God can be known and perceived in this manner a great purity of mind and heart is necessary; the purification of the mind from sensible images, of the heart from all inordinate affections. Therefore in the Secret for the Circumcision the Church prays that 'through these gifts wherein we celebrate the hidden birth of Jesus Christ our Lord, *we may reach the clear vision of a mind that is purified*'. And again, in the Postcommunion for the Epiphany, 'Grant we beseech Thee, O Almighty God, that what we celebrate in solemn rite, *we may attain through the understanding of a mind that is purified*'. On the Vigil of the Epiphany we ask that 'the splendour of the coming feast *may illumine our hearts*' (Collect), and that God will enlighten his people and enkindle in their hearts the splendour of his grace (Postcommunion), while the Postcommunion for the Octave day combines the two requests and asks 'that we may discern with clear insight and receive with worthy affection the mystery in which thou wouldst have us participate'.

This manifestation is the free gift of God made to whom he wills, but he wills to make it to each one, if only we are prepared to receive it. Yet even this preparation is his doing: 'There is no doer but he' (Mother Julian). And the means whereby both the preparation for, and the realisation of the mystery are to be achieved, are the very mysteries themselves, which like the Sacraments contain the power to effect that which they signify. The Word who expresses both the Father and every creature is he by whom all things are made. He is the Mirror and Image of the Father, and also the light in which that Image is seen. He is the eternal Son, and it is in virtue of his human birth that men are born as sons of God. He is 'the author of these our gifts' (Secret for the Octave day): he 'who appeared in the substance of our mortal flesh restored us by the new light of his own immortality' (Preface) so that he is at once 'the author of our divine regeneration and the giver of immortality'. (Postcommunion, Sunday within Octave of Christmas). It is the wonderful birth of the Word which destroys the old man in us (Postcommunion, Aurora Mass), and it is this *admirabile commercium*, this 'sacred intercourse', whereby we are redeemed and made like to Him in whom our nature is united to the Godhead. (Cf. Secret, Midnight Mass.)

All this leads back to the essential reality of the mystery of the Incarnation. The Word, the Eternal Son and the manifestation of the Father within the Trinity, unites to himself a human nature and is born as man in order to manifest God to men and to enable them to be redeemed and born again and united to God. That is the mys-

tery in which 'he would have us partake' (Postcommunion, Octave day) which is 'celebrated in the Sacrifice of the Mass' (Secret, Circumcision), wherein is 'revealed, immolated and received' he to whom 'the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh were once offered' (Secret, Epiphany). It is the mystery of the adoption of sons, of his birth in us and our birth in him, of his incorporation into a human family, in order that we, in our turn, may be incorporated into the family of the blessed Trinity. And if sons, heirs also, heirs to all the riches of the divinity which consist in God's knowledge and love of himself. Therefore the Word Incarnate and the Father love the soul into which they have infused a love for themselves, and they manifest themselves to it, first in the light of faith, and gradually, if it responds to their advances, in the 'light of the Incarnate Word', which becomes ever more luminous until the shadows retire and that eternal day dawns in which it will see the beauty of the divine Majesty in the light of the Word, in the home of eternal light—*patriam claritatis aeternae*. (Collect, Vigil of the Epiphany.) Until that day dawns it will be above all in and through the Liturgy in which Christ renews his mysteries and reproduces in his mystical body—as a whole and in individual members—those aspects of his life and love which these feasts set forth, that this manifestation will take place.

O God, who hast illumined this most sacred night with the brightness of the true light: grant, we beseech thee, that we who have known the mysteries of that light on earth may also enjoy its happiness in heaven. Amen. (Collect for Midnight Mass.)

ADVENT THOUGHTS FOR MENTAL PRAYER

BY

A DOMINICAN OF HEADINGTON

1. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.* The Word of the Father uttered from all eternity. Adore him in the bosom of the Father . . . rejoice and exult in his infinite perfections, thank him that he is himself. . . . Humble ourselves and be glad that our poor, puny minds cannot comprehend him. . . . Love him with the love of the Father and the Holy Ghost. 'The Word is in your heart'—he deigns to make his heaven within us. The generation of the Word is going on in our souls at this very moment. . . . What a stupendous thought! Ask him to let us think of nothing else, care for nothing else, and to make our souls truly his heaven. . . .