

Life of the Spirit

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COME, LORD JESUS!

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'COME, Lord Jesus!' is the earnest prayer in the closing words of the last book of our Holy Scriptures. This, the only prophetic book of the New Testament, tells of a Kingdom founded by the Lamb that was slain, withal a Kingdom still looking to and yearning for a greater perfecting. We are the fortunate children of that Kingdom, privileged with the blessing of seeing the things that we see, and able in faith to cast our minds over the unfolding of God's plan through the ages, and so enabled to grasp something of the wonder of the Word-made-flesh and his dwelling amongst us. The Incarnation is the first and necessary step in God's redemptive plan. It prepared for and is a presage of a Second Coming which will mean a completion of God's plans and which will bring the world of men as well as the universality of creatures to the term which God has prepared for them. We who live 'last of all in these days' have our lives set between two poles. Everything, and the one thing necessary, in our lives, depends on the First Coming of our Lord, and is ordained unto a Second Coming. We can help ourselves, dispose ourselves better towards that Second Coming by reflection on the first and all that led up to it, or the long preparation of the Saviour's coming both in the course of world events and in the utterances of men of God who fulfilled God's purposes.

To help ourselves to see into God's purposes, let us take a great text of St Thomas¹ where he appears to step back to gaze at the large canvas of all God's accomplishments. He discerns three moments, that of creation, then re-creation by the redemptive Incarnation of our Lord, and finally, at

¹ Ia, 73, 1, 1um.

the end of time, the consummation or last aeon, when God will be 'all in all'. His way of setting out re-creation against creation is already suggested by the Prologue of St John which has as its background the opening verses of Genesis: 'in the beginning was the Word . . .' conjures up 'in the beginning God created . . .'. But we are concerned with more than verbal associations or resemblances. The first creation is in some sense *ordained to*, in some sense 'speaks of' the re-creation or coming on earth of the Saviour, who in turn furthers the advent of God's Kingdom by bringing nearer that consummation of all things. Such a way of contemplating reality brings out the supereminent dignity of the Word-made-flesh, for 'at the name of Jesus every knee should bend of those in heaven, on earth or under the earth, and every tongue confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father' (Philip. 2, 11). The pre-eminence of the Lord Jesus is in no way lessened because we hold that the Incarnation was 'for us men and for our salvation'; this last is very clearly the lesson of the Scriptures.

As we pass from a total view to elements in the historic fulfilment of God's purpose, let us specially note: 'the Lord [Yahweh] said to Abraham: leave your country, your kinsfolk and your father's house for the land which I will show you; I will make a great nation of you. I will bless them that bless you, and curse them that curse you. In you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.' (Gen. 12, 1-3.) This vocation-text opens that part of Israel's history which can be correlated with world events of the period, but (even more important) it is a key text for an essential understanding of the Old Testament. It is in the light of this text that we read all the subsequent history of the Chosen People.

They were a Chosen People because God chose, and God's choosing was shown in their significant history, in a Law that led to Christ (cf. Gal. 3, 24), and in a lasting charism of prophecy. Such was the greatness of God's favouring, despite countless human failings whose sorry tale fills so many pages of the Scriptures.

A further reading of Genesis emphasises the reality of God's choosing: 'I will establish my covenant between you and me, and your descendants after you throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant, that I may be a God to you and your descendants after you . . .' (cf. Gen. 17, 3-8). The memory of God's covenant lived on, so that the faithful in Israel grew progressively more conscious of their mission and responsibilities in the light of God's choosing: 'who is a God like to thee? . . . thou wilt send our sins down into the heart of the sea, thou wilt manifest thy good faith to Jacob and thy mercy to Abraham, as thou didst swear to our fathers from long time past' (Micheas 7, 18-20).

God's choosing, and Israel's mission, is manifested, first, in significant history. But, it might be said, all history is significant. It is. Over and above, and manifested to us by the light of faith, is a special God-given significance. The sacred history of the Chosen People is more particularly in the hands of God. Events that went to make up that history, and individual persons who figure in it can serve, under God, to convey yet another meaning beyond the immediately literal or literary sense of the human author. God's ordination of all is the basis or ground of these other, typical meanings. Types are wholly of the domain of faith. But we who do believe can look back confidently over the pages of Scripture, and by willing to remain in accord with the mind of the Church, can see how much in the Scripture points to the Lord Jesus and 'kindly Mother Church founded by the blood of Christ'. When reading the Scriptures thus we do but follow the usage of our Lord himself: 'as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that those who believe in him may not perish but may have life everlasting'. (John 3, 14-15.) St Paul too tells how 'Christ our pasch is sacrificed' (I Cor. 5, 7) and thus recalls the institution of the paschal lamb (Exodus 12). The children of Israel gathered manna in their desert wanderings, and we still sing '*panem de caelo praestitisti eis*', for the first giving of a food from heaven was a prefiguring of that gift of his Body and Blood in the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. We might dwell for

long on the treasures of typology¹ in the Scriptures, for the whole Old Testament prefigures the New. Types and figures continue to play their part after the coming of our Lord. Thus the multiplication of loaves and the changing of water into wine prepares for the institution of the Blessed Sacrament; and the resurrection of Lazarus or of the widow's son is a type of his own resurrection.

Great figures too stand out as types of Christ, be they Josue, David, Jeremias, etc. Each individually falls short of the Prototype, but when taken all together they can show some or something of the qualities which were in him who was perfect God and perfect man.

God's choosing of this people is further shown in that Law which, as St Paul clearly saw, is but to lead to Christ (Gal. 3, 24). At the heart of the Law is the famous 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord [Yahweh] our God is One . . . thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, strength . . .' (Deut. 6, 49). This fundamental Law was to fashion a people of God for centuries, until he should come not to destroy but to reiterate the greatest command and call upon his disciples to prove that love by keeping his commandments. That this divine education over the centuries was effective is shown by the very critics of our Lord who acknowledged which was the first and greatest command. And many who left all to follow Christ had been schooled and prepared in the paths of the Old Law, sometimes even strictly so, as with St Paul the quondam pharisee.

Still more strikingly, God's choosing is shown in the specifically messianic prophecies conveyed through prophets, for the most part (though not always) men of God who fashioned, spiritualised, shepherded in good days and bad. That such a grace of prophecy should be among the Chosen People was itself prophesied in a famous text of Deuteronomy (18, 18): 'I will raise them up a prophet from among

¹ including types and figures which we would not suspect, were it not that God had told us. Thus I Peter 3, 20, tells of baptism being prefigured by the waters of the flood. Cf. the astonishing text of our liturgy: 'Moses saw the bush unconsumed: we see in this thy glorious ever-abiding virginity, O holy Mother of God'.

(Lauds antiphon, Feast of the Circumcision.)

their brethren like unto thee; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.' The context (Deut. 18, 9-22) is a section of laws on the duty and authority of the prophet. The argument of the whole passage shows that the prophet is not so much an individual, but Moses's representative for the time being, whose office would be to supply guidance and advice whenever necessary. The context suggests rather a prophetic order than an individual prophet. The existence of such an institution and permanent channel of revelation (prefiguring the infallibility of the Church) was a mark distinguishing Israel from all other nations in antiquity. At the same time, this verse can be reasonably understood of an ideal prophet who should be 'like Moses' in a pre-eminent degree, one in whom the line of prophets should culminate, who himself should be supremely Prophet. The tradition of messianic interpretation can be traced back to Nathanael: 'He whom Moses wrote about in the Law . . . we have found, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth' (John 1, 45). Nathanael expresses his own and his contemporaries' beliefs.¹ It is appealed to by St Stephen (Acts 7, 37) and especially by St Peter: 'Jesus Christ, of whom God spoke by means of his holy prophets; for Moses said "The Lord your God shall raise up to you a prophet. . . ."' Subsequent Christian tradition firmly took up the text to show that Christ was Messias and Prophet.

As with types and figures, so too with individual messianic prophecies, the accumulative effect of the total can help to bring an unbeliever to faith, and can generate in the believer a profound wonder at all that has been effected by God in his moulding of history, in his choosing of a people, in his ceaseless pointing to his Divine Son who was to come, and who, our faith tells us, has come, and will come yet again. We look to that coming, and pray: 'Come, Lord Jesus!'

¹ that he should have Deuteronomy 18, 18 in mind (rather than Genesis 3, 15; 49, 15, Numbers 24, 17) is suggested by John 1, 21: 'Ho prophetes', i.e. *the* prophet waited at the period.