

### Epiphany III

Beloved in Christ, today our worship invites us to adore Christ – whose birth the Church has recently commemorated – through the proclamation of our own lives as living examples of His divine love.

Throughout the world the Gospel is proclaimed and universal salvation preached by Holy Church, a divine manifestation of the love of God for all mankind. It is also the unique means of salvation for this broken and self-deceived world in which we make our way towards heaven as men of Christian faith.

In today's epistle reading Saint Paul admonished believers not to be conceited in their faith since the Christian must be a leaven of salvation in the midst of the wider world of unbelievers. Still and all Paul urges that we be at peace with all with whom we live. This does not mean condoning errors, nor worse still, sharing in them. He urges, rather, that through our *conduct* we be honorable in the eyes of God and profit those whose hearts are open to truth.

But Paul also urges regarding those who wish us harm: *we are to overcome evil by good* – since vengeance is God's alone. The Gospel reading shows us why: our present world is passing away – it is *not* our permanent home, and in it we are constantly beset with suffering, the fruit of sin and man's self-deception. But it is in *this* world that God calls us all to *supernatural* hope, and *that* despite how wretched or far from Him we may be.

In Jesus' encounter with the centurion He taught the Jews something about the narrow-mindedness, self-righteous security of their deceived religious conviction: descent, affiliation and inheritance means *nothing* to God – it is *purity of heart, born of humility*, that characterizes the true child of salvation. Religion relying on the exact performance of outward ritual has no claim on *grace* for that is a divine gift freely given by God to *all* who seek Him in truth. We should note well that the centurion was *not* a member of the accepted religion even if he had shown himself favorable to it in different ways. No, it was not by inheritance but by the humble *faith* that an *outsider* vividly showed in the truth of *Christ*, that his servant was healed, at once, and from afar, a demonstration of Jesus' divinity. It was a silent, dramatic *reproach* to those who thought themselves justified by empty, external show.

Beloved, do we practice the charity and honesty urged by Saint Paul coupled to the humble confidence of this centurion, an outsider to accepted religion? Do we practice our faith by true interior conviction or by an empty, outward show? The time between Paul, the centurion and ourselves is as nothing in the life of God. We should do and be as they, for therein is found not

only the consolation of *true* religion, but its power for reformation and healing in our lives. It is to this *precisely* that we are called as Christians: humility, love and confidence in God such that by outward conduct we bear witness to the interior sovereignty of God, the sole power by which our broken world can be healed.

As we draw towards the Lenten season, let us consciously work to rekindle this divine and supernatural gift from God, for after life itself, we have no greater possession than our precious Christian faith. Let us ask Jesus and Mary to make our hearts supple to grace, thus becoming true witnesses to the world around us through the humble charity of our daily conduct. For in so doing we draw not only ourselves but others towards the glory for which we have all been created; and this is ever our duty: to share with the world our hope for the bliss of heaven, where with the angels and saints we will see the face of God unto the ages of ages.