

*And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.*

At the beginning of his Gospel Saint John places a marvelous prolog which the Church reads at the end of Holy Mass in the historical Roman Rite of the eucharistic liturgy. Christmas is an occasion on which we should stop and savor the profound doctrinal richness of this most famous piece of Holy Scripture.

The Word of God, the Logos, the very manifestation of the Wisdom of the almighty Creator, subsisting with the Father from all eternity, becomes the Revealer of the Father and the light of all men: all those who receive Him He delivers from the dark-ness of sin and its consequence – death. By the grace of this divine Word the Father causes men to be reborn to new life. This is the new and eternal life of the children of God.

The liturgy of this, the Third Mass of Christmas Day, insists particularly on the divine greatness of the Word Incarnate rather than the lowly condition of His human birth. This latter was a particular development of popular piety originating in the 12<sup>th</sup> century but little known before that time. The text of this Mass, as I said, the Third Mass of this day stresses this profound aspect of Christ' divine attributes. The magnificent and haunting chant, *Puer natus est nobis* which opens this liturgy sings, indeed, of the birth of a child, but one on whose shoulders rests a universal royalty and the salvation of all the world.

The Epistle reading, taken from the opening chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews (written, most likely for Jewish priests who, in the immediate persecution of the earliest Christian times, were longing for the exquisite and priestly liturgy of the Temple) – *Hebreus* puts forward a striking doctrinal exposition on the incomparable greatness of Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, the one and true High Priest, Whom God “hath appointed heir of all things, by Whom also He made the world: Who being the brightness of His glory and the figure of His substance, and upholding all things by the word of His power, make purgation of sins, sitteth on the right hand of the majesty on high.”

Together with the mystical prolog of St. John's Gospel, no better choice of readings could be made to show clearly the divine transcendence of Christ and the mission for which He descended into this world of darkness and sin and took upon Himself the yoke of our lowly nature.

Beloved, as we contemplate the crib with hearts full of wonder and love, it is necessary that we see there, by the eyes of faith, God's Son in His transcendent glory. “God, Who at different times and in different manners spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all in these days has spoken to us by His Son, Whom He has appointed heir of all these things, by Whom also He made the world.” The remembrance of these profound truths is necessary in order to rescue Christ from the sentimentality which continues to threaten the real meaning of Christmas and the joy it imparts to true Christian hearts.

Dearly beloved, we are graced in a particular way as Catholics on this day of joy. Not only do we kneel in hearts' submission before the eternal sovereignty of our New-Born King, we do so gathered at the altar of His Redemptive mercy. For even as we behold the fullness of His Divine majesty by faith in our hearts we are vividly reminded that this King is destined to another bed of wood than the that of His lowly manger: the ignominy of the Cross. It is for this reason that our Christmas crèche also includes our relic of the True Cross.

As Saint Paul reminds us, this child, born in our flesh of the Virgin Mary, had a singular purpose in His first Advent to men: He has come to make “purgation for man's sins.” We see the intimate connection between this feast and our eternal salvation when, during the sorrows of Holy Week the liturgy places before our eyes the Suffering Servant of Whom Isaiah spoke so explicitly some eight centuries before His birth. This child, Who brings us such joy, came into this world to day as a blood

ransom for the sins of all mankind. “For this was I born, for this have I come into the world.” The Wonder-Counselor and Prince of Peace is the lamb slain for man’s atonement.

The Incarnation of God is the very foundation of man’s redemption. God has come so that we might be saved from *ourselves*: our sins, our narrowness, our self-centeredness, from that stupidity which is the evil fruit of disobedience to the truth and the sovereignty of God.

At the Easter Vigil, Holy Church intones in solemn tones, *O felix culpa – oh happy fault* which despite the shocking prevarication of Adam and his descendants has merited for mankind such a wonderful Redeemer.

The grace of this redemption was born of gentle Mary in Bethlehem, yet its fruits are applied to us here today: Here in this very place we see brought together the true *ecclesia* which constitutes Christ’s Mystical Body in time and space. It is through the Catholic Church and her priesthood, and it alone, that the mission of redemption is engendered and brought to fruition.

Our foundation of Canons Regular bears these mysteries to heart in a particular way. For we are priests, or destined for that priesthood of Christ, whose sole purpose is the adoration of Christ’s divinity in maintaining the unchanging and unchangeable Revelation of God, *delivered once and for all in these latter times* through Jesus Christ, this humble child of Bethlehem, born unknown, in squalor and devoid of every human empowerment – this Divine Child Who reigns then – and ever – Creation’s Master and King.

To my brothers in community, if you would be priests faithful to the promises of your future ordination, you must study now to imitate this child before you: if you would ascend to the Altar and offer the most august sacrifice of His Redemption in the great Mystery which is the Holy Mass, you must learn of this Child to be meek and gentle of heart.

You must deepen your love of Christ by personal and constant prayer, the fruit of patience and humility. You must perfect your souls under God’s grace by an unfeigned moral rectitude and comportment that will draw souls – not to you – but to Him Whom you seek to serve – this Child of poverty, this King rich in the light that fadeth never.

Let us all, beloved of God, children of grace, offer ourselves on this glorious day, with renewed fervor, in profound allegiance to Jesus, our God and King. Let us join our souls to Mary, the *Theotokos* – the Godbearer – in a renewed union to Jesus’ Holy Catholic Church of which Our Lady, the Rod of Jesse, is Mother.

Dearly beloved, at this Christmas, in the two thousand and eleventh year of grace, let us vow to serve this gracious and fearful king, so jealous for our love and hearts devotion. Let us do so by fidelity in our life’s state, fidelity in charity, longsuffering in our crosses, humble in our acceptance of God’s providential designs for our lives. In this we will give witness to our ever increasing love for God and neighbor.

If all the ends of the earth have, indeed, seen the salvation of God, let us, as believing Christians, live with *conviction* what we believe in our hearts and profess through the majesty of our holy worship. Here, today, in body and soul, kneeling before the Crib and Altar, let us offer Him, the only gift we can: in the radiant glory of Christ’s majesty, let us give to Him the deepest love of our hearts.

May God grant each and everyone of you, your families, all those you love and all those for whom you pray His richest blessings and an abundance of His love in the coming new year of grace. And may the sweet Mother of God, the flower of our race, ever keep you safe within the folds of her arms.