

THE MESSAGE OF THE ROSARY

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THE REASON WHY

Many Catholics, especially intelligent and well-meaning friends of the liturgical revival, seem puzzled by the fact that in the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima the rosary played such a prominent part. Is not the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass more important? Holy Mass is the unbloody re-enactment of the Sacrifice of our salvation, the centre of divine worship, the source of grace from which we hope for a renewal of the world in Christ. Why was not more frequent attendance at Holy Mass urged by our blessed Mother? Yet, it is certain that any request or recommendation coming from our blessed Mother cannot but be the best. Mary, as the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, the Mother of the Saviour and the Mediatrix of all Graces, has no more ardent desire than to lead us to a fuller appreciation of the mysteries of our redemption, to a more abundant participation in their life-giving grace. If she attaches so much importance to the rosary, the reason can only be that the rosary is the most practical means to bring about these happy results. The rosary will lead us to the altar of sacrifice, to Holy Mass and Holy Communion, to a more intimate union with Jesus and a profounder grasp of the spirit of the Church.

Asking for the recitation of the rosary, Our Lady of Fatima asks for an intelligent, understanding recitation, and that calls for reflection on the prayers that compose it, the Sign of the Cross, the Creed, the Our Father and Hail Mary, the Glory be, prayers which are, so to say, a compendium of the doctrines of our holy Faith. Their frequent, thoughtful repetition cannot but fix them more deeply in our minds and help applying them to our lives. To these prayers are added the mysteries which recall the principal events in the life of Jesus and Mary; they are so to say beautiful lamps, white and crimson and gold, illuminating our road to heaven. Meditation on these mysteries is necessary for the proper recitation of the rosary. Our Lady of Fatima requests it particularly for the observance of the five first Saturdays. It is evidently her wish that we become familiar with the contents of these mysteries; learn their beautiful lesson for our own lives and their practical significance for the world at large.

To secure a speedier and more general fulfilment of this wish of our blessed Mother the following reflections have been written. They may be used as instructions or readings, especially on the occasion of the five first Saturday.

In our days, when an appalling ignorance of religion is widespread even among Catholics, when the spirit of the world surges up and down all the avenues of life, when there is so little understanding of the interior life, such general flight from the cross, such tragic forgetfulness of spiritual ideals and values, the rosary, with its mysteries, acts as an ever-present teacher of religion, as an inspiration and driving power for a life of living faith.

The rosary, far from interfering with the liturgical worship of the Church becomes its best support, inasmuch as it makes us lovers of Christ, and lovers of Christ will be drawn to the altar of His Eucharistic presence, sacrifice and Communion. As always, so it is true in this case: Through Mary to Jesus.

The Joyful Mysteries

These mysteries introduce us into the wise and loving designs of God, according to which the Saviour of men was to enter this world and to be prepared for His tremendous sacrifice of our salvation during the years of His infancy and hidden life. They hold up before us the ideal of the interior life, the life of prayer and holy desire, of intimate communication with God in our hearts and with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, of complete surrender to the dispensations of Divine Providence, of loving faithfulness in humble and lowly duties, of silent endurance in the many unseen trials of the soul that strives after perfection. Whatever may be the external circumstances of a man's life, even though it may be most active, a life of leadership and grand achievement, the spirit of the joyful mysteries is indispensable for it, if it is to be a holy life leading to God, our last end. Intimate contact with God is the hidden power plant that makes external activity fruitful for eternity.

THE ANNUNCIATION

A lovely scene opens the earthly history of the God-man. The grandest manifestation of God's power is about to

take place and Gabriel, the Power of God, is its herald. The Archangel Gabriel is sent to a virgin in the little town of Nazareth; her name is Mary and she is espoused to a man by the name of Joseph.

THE MESSAGE

The prince of heaven bows in reverence before the humble maiden as he greets her, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women." To be blessed among women meant but one thing for a Jewish maiden, and that was to be the mother of the Messiah. Precisely this is the burden of the Angel's message: Mary is the chosen one among all women to give to the world the promised Saviour. The very thought of it grips her with holy fear. But where God calls, there is nothing to fear. Gabriel assures Mary, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus." Yet Mary had taken the vow of virginity; how then shall this be done if God was pleased with her vow? Nothing is impossible with the Almighty God. He who created the first man without the help of father and mother, surely will know how to give the Saviour of the world a human nature without the co-operation of a human father. The Archangel continues, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore the Holy One to be born shall be called the Son of God,"

THE ANSWER

All is now clear to this blessed Virgin and her answer is a full and absolute surrender to the will of God, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to Thy word." In that very moment there was wrought in Mary the tremendous miracle of the Incarnation. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (Luke 1, 26-38). In this mystery of the Incarnation and the consequent divine motherhood of the Blessed Virgin lies the source of Mary's all-surpassing greatness. Whatever grace had been bestowed upon her before was to prepare her for it, and whatever grace and gift was added in succeeding years is the effect and fruit of what was begun at the Annunciation.

SPIRITUAL VESSEL

Mary is now a spiritual vessel, a vessel of the Holy Spirit, fashioned by Him, the Finger of God, with the skill of the Divine Artist and endowed by Him with all the jewellery of heaven. The Holy Spirit has deposited in her the treasure of the Most Blessed Trinity. He has overshadowed her and beneath His shadow the Son of the Eternal Father has taken up His abode within her. And so the Holy Spirit continues to overshadow her with His divine power and love, to protect and to guide her to ever greater heights of spirituality and holiness. According to St. Paul vessels are made by the potter for honourable and for common uses. The Immaculate Spouse of the Holy Spirit is the vessel made for the most exalted and glorious use that could be assigned to a human being. She is a vessel more precious than the chalice used at Holy Mass, although it is the same precious blood and body that rests in both; the chalice is made of lifeless material and contributes nothing to the substance of the blood of Christ which it contains, whereas Mary has given of her own substance to the substance of the body and blood of the Saviour. He is bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh, blood of her blood. She is a living chalice consecrated by the Holy Spirit Himself.

GROWING IN HOLINESS

Conscious of the great things which God has wrought in her, Mary cannot but be absorbed in never-ceasing, loving reflection on the love of God. Her thoughts and desires rise to the Father in heaven Who has granted her the privilege of calling Him Son, whom the Father has begotten from all eternity; all her love is given to the Eternal Son Who deigned to become her Child, and spiritual canticles well up in her heart to sing out her gratitude to the Holy Spirit who wrought these wonderful things in her. She is the singular vessel of devotion, the like of which is found neither in heaven nor on earth. In the shrine of her virginal womb the Eternal Son made the first act of His complete surrender to the will of the Father, that made Him obedient unto death and led Him to die on the cross as the victim of sin. Mary adds her surrender to that of her Divine Son, ever repeating through the attitude of her will the words she had spoken on the day of the Annunciation, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to Thy word." And so there rises to the throne of God from the living sanctuary of Mary's heart the incense of prayer and holy desires, undisturbed by the external conditions of her life.

GOD DWELLING IN US

In a true though limited sense we share in the greatness of our heavenly Mother. The same Holy Spirit that overshadowed her came down upon us in baptism and wrought wonderful things in our souls. With the Holy Spirit came the Father and the Son and took up their abode in us, and we were made spiritual vessels. The same Word of God that was made flesh in her is received by us in Holy Communion in the identical human nature which He received from His Virgin Mother. And when His sacramental presence ceases, He still remains in us through a wonderful communication of life and grace. We are Christ-bearers, temples of God. In this blessed fact lies the Christian's honour, the ever-present inspiration for a life of prayer and recollection.

HOLY LIFE

God has given Himself to us. After the example of Mary the full and unconditional surrender of ourselves to God must be the answer. Is it not natural that we should be ever mindful of that most precious possession of ours, the greatest distinction which has come to us, namely, that we possess and carry within ourselves the God in whose vision the angels and saints delight? Is it not reasonable that the same God should occupy all our attention? And where mind and will are absorbed in God, there our desire shall be that God's Will be done in us and through us. By doing the will of God we advance in God's love, and that is holiness. The will of God is our exaltation, our strength, consolation, and peace.

The example of our blessed Mother in this mystery leads us to the practice of the interior life. The habitual concentration of our thoughts on God and the wonderful things He has wrought in us will not unfit us for active work, but rather assist us to do it more perfectly because of the ever-present God. The practice of the interior life will make Christians different from men of the world with their thoughts and desires all centred on earthly things; the interior life gives constant evidence of faith in an unseen world, in spiritual ideals. Who will deny that this type of example is a crying need to counteract the materialism of our times? Our Lady of Fatima wishes to make us lovers of the interior life through the rosary.

THE VISITATION

Since the day of the Annunciation Mary was a living tabernacle. The Saviour of the world surveyed His work from the hiddenness of His abode. Even now He longed to be active, to save and sanctify souls, but for the present He could do it only through the co-operation of His holy Mother. But His love also burns in Mary's heart and soon it sends forth its first rays into the world. The Archangel had mentioned to Mary the condition of her kinswoman, Elizabeth; this now furnishes the occasion.

VISITING ELIZABETH

For the first time in the history of the chosen people the true Ark of the Covenant, harbouring within her bosom David's greatest Son and promised Messiah, moves on the highways of Palestine from Nazareth to the hill country of Juda on her way to Elizabeth. She enters the house with a greeting of peace; what else could it be, since she bore within herself the Prince of peace. He had come to give peace to all men of good will. Such a greeting on the lips of Mary is a prayer and Mary's prayers are always heard. Elizabeth in consequence is filled with the Holy Spirit and in His light recognizes the dignity of the Mother of God, feels the sanctifying power of Mary's yet unborn Child as her own offspring leaps with joy in her womb at the sound of Mary's voice. Filled with holy joy she exclaims, "Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me that the Mother of my Lord should come to me? For, behold, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the Infant in my womb leaped with joy. And blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord." Mary, blessed among all women, cannot but agree. Her heart is overflowing with grateful joy as she breaks forth into her Magnificat of praise and thanksgiving. Her soul must praise the Lord, her mind rejoice in her Saviour. God has chosen her, the humble maid of Nazareth, and done great things to her, so that all generations shall call her blessed. He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly, has filled the hungry with good things and the rich He has sent away empty. He has fulfilled the promises made to the fathers and sent the long-expected Messiah. And Mary remained with Elizabeth about three months (Luke 1, 39-56).

IN THE HOUSE OF ELIZABETH

For three months the house of Elizabeth presents us with an example of the most appealing charity on the part of Mary. Charity acts through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy; both were practised by the blessed Mother of God, but especially the latter. Notwithstanding the great hardships which a journey in those days meant, Mary resolutely set out on her way and then gave her kinswoman all the assistance she needed during the remaining weeks of her expectancy. Greater yet was the spiritual assistance Mary rendered Elizabeth. She knew herself to be the Mother of Christ and through her Divine Son wished to contribute to the sanctification of the world, first of all, to that of the holy precursor of Jesus. She wished to have others to share in her happiness and with her praise and give thanks to God for the great mystery He had wrought in her. In her humility, however, she could not bring herself to speak about it; in fact, she had not mentioned it in the beginning even to St. Joseph. But here with Elizabeth she was in the presence of a chosen soul, illumined by the Holy Spirit Himself as to what had happened, and so she could speak freely. Through the words of Elizabeth she had learned of the effect of her visit on the latter's child. If such was the effect of her first meeting with Elizabeth, the spiritual favours bestowed upon the latter and her child must have increased immeasurably during the three months of her sojourn. Intense gratitude filled the hearts of these two women, and Mary spoke also the mind of Elizabeth when in the Magnificat she poured out the sentiments of her grateful love. May we not suppose that it was the daily prayer of Mary and Elizabeth, and that it made the latter's home a sanctuary of piety, of peace, and holy joy? In such an atmosphere the members of the household could not but daily grow in virtue and holiness.

GIVING CHRIST TO THE POOR

We, too, bear God within us and it is through our cooperation that Jesus desires to save and sanctify souls. The manner of doing it, suggested by the mystery of the Visitation, is that of humble and loving service rendered to our fellow-men, for the sake of Christ. All around us are the poor, the distressed, the sick, the ignorant, the wayward, and forsaken; there is an immense field for the practice of the corporal as well as the spiritual works of mercy. But there is only one that can really and truly alleviate the sorrows of the heart and heal the wounds of the soul, and that is Jesus, the Saviour of the world. Christian charity must have for its ultimate end to bring Christ into the lives of our fellow-men, relatives, acquaintances, friends, and companions. Have we seriously tried to do this? Do we speak of Him to those in sorrow? Do we invite them, take them with us to Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist? Could we not by word and example encourage more frequent attendance at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and reception of Holy Communion? In the Blessed Eucharist, Jesus Himself will act as the good Samaritan; He will grant forgiveness of sin, strength and patience, peace, such as the world cannot give. Are we willing to take upon ourselves hardships in the practice of charity as Mary did in the mystery of the Visitation? Loving with the love of Christ and for the sake of Christ makes us generous.

The mystery also contains a very practical lesson for expectant mothers. The greatest act of charity they can do to their as yet unborn child is to take it into the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist, especially through the reception of Holy Communion.

CHARITY UNLIMITED

Indeed every act by which we prevent sin in our fellow-men, bring him closer to God and inspire him with a greater love of virtue, is an act of charity. St. Paul calls our attention to the well-nigh innumerable ways and manners in which such charity can be practised, and often with so much more effectiveness the less the act is recognized as such, and the more humble and inconspicuous it is. It is a wide field for the practice of charity to which the Apostle calls our attention when he writes, "Charity is patient, is kind; charity does not envy, is not pretentious, is not puffed up, is not ambitious, is not self-seeking, is not provoked; thinks no evil, does not rejoice over wickedness, but rejoices with the truth; bears with all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13, 4-7).

We were redeemed because God loved us, and it is our greatest privilege, through the practice of charity, to cooperate in the salvation and sanctification of souls. Our Blessed Mother gives the example. The rosary leads to the practice of charity and through charity to Jesus, in Whom alone there is salvation.

THE NATIVITY

The census to be taken up in Palestine, the consequent journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, the great crowds that occupied all available space in the town were the circumstances foreseen and ordained by Divine Providence to bring the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph to the stable in which, “While all things were in quiet silence and the night was in the midst of her course, Thy Almighty Word, O Lord, came from heaven, from Thy royal throne” (Introit of Sunday within Octave of Christmas).

THE HOLY NIGHT

“And Mary brought forth her firstborn Son and wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” All is silent around the stable; Mary and Joseph are the only representatives of mankind to pay homage to God made man by their faith and loving acceptance of the hardships and privations of poverty, freely chosen by the Lord of heaven and earth for Himself. Out on the plains shepherds are watching their flocks. “And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of God shone round about them, and they feared exceedingly.” The shepherds need not fear; the meaning of the wonderful things they behold is heavenly joy and peace to be offered to the world, for “Behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which shall be to all the people; for there has been born to you today in the town of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.” A sign is given them by which they will recognize this newborn Saviour. “You will find an Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” A multitude of heavenly spirits now appears above them high up in the air, singing words and melodies such as the world had never heard before, “Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth among men of good will.” Having delivered their message the angels return to heaven and the shepherds are again alone in the fields. But their mind is made up at once, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us. So they went with haste, and they found Mary and Joseph and the Babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen, they understood what had been told them concerning this child..

“And they returned glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen.” All people that heard the story marvelled, and “Mary kept in mind all these words, pondering them in her heart” (Luke 2, 1-20).

THE MOTHER OF GOD

Mary now beholds for the first time Him, whom she had conceived of the Holy Spirit; even His Infant features radiate the brightness of Eternal Light and the image of the Father’s substance. Like a ray of light He has entered this world without injury to His blessed Mother’s virginity. He, the mighty God, who has given to nature its laws, can also suspend them. Mary is now truly the Mother of God, the Virgin Mother of Christ. Holy Church has at all times believed this truth and vigorously asserted it against those who would deny it. Thus she speaks at the Council of Ephesus in the year 431: “If any one deny that the holy Virgin is the Mother of God, let him be anathema.” And the Second Council of Nice in 787 repeats, “We believe that Mary is really and truly the Mother of God, because she bore one of the persons of the Most Blessed Trinity, Jesus Christ, Our Lord, according to the flesh.” Let us rejoice and give thanks, for Mary the Mother of God is also our Mother.

THE MYSTERY PERPETUATED

The events of that holy night have passed into history; yet they live on, not only in commemoration, but in sacramental reality. The stable of Bethlehem in that silent holy night became the first Catholic church, harbouring the real presence of the God-Man; since then other Bethlehems have arisen, other mangers have been prepared, and the same Almighty Word of God, the first-born Son of the Virgin Mary, hidden beneath the species of bread and wine, comes down from heaven, from His royal throne. The mystery of this holy night has a still greater significance for us. Bethlehem means “house of bread,” and in the truest sense of the word a Catholic church is a Bethlehem, a house of bread, in which He who is the true bread of life gives Himself to the faithful in Holy Communion. If prayerful reflection upon this mystery should arouse in us the desire to have been present at Bethlehem with Mary and Joseph and the shepherds to adore the Infant in the manger, this desire, enlightened by faith, will take us to the altar; here we have the stable and the manger, here the permanent holy night. The flickering light of the sanctuary lamp takes the

place of the stars that twinkled their delight on the shepherds and the stable, the splendour of the liturgy at the solemn celebration of the sacred mysteries may well remind us of the brightness of God, that shone round about the shepherds, and those jubilant melodies sung by the angels.

RECEPTION GIVEN TO JESUS

The story of the birth of our Blessed Saviour illustrates the truth of St. John's statement that Jesus came into His own and His own did not receive Him. The rest of the life of Jesus and the history of the Church down to our day furnishes further evidence of this truth. The vast majority of those whom He came to save do not know Him; His teaching is not accepted, His Eucharistic presence not known or ignored. How much coldness and indifference is not shown to this mystery even by many of the members of the Church. Should we not endeavour to make up for this lack of faith and love by an ardent devotion to the Blessed Eucharist? How much more reason than the psalmist do we have to say with him, "I will compass Thine altar, O Lord, that I may hear the voice of praise and tell of all Thy wondrous works. I have loved the beauty of Thy house, O Lord, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth" (Ps. 25, 6-8). And when we leave the Eucharistic presence let us take with us the remembrance of our Emmanuel and like the shepherds praise and glorify God, giving testimony to the world around us of the peace and happiness that is found with Jesus.

MORE PRIESTS

The Eucharistic presence of Our Lord is inseparable from the priesthood. The priest, through the words of the consecration, brings down upon the altar the Son of the Eternal Father; in this fact, there lies a wonderful similarity between the mission of the blessed Mother and the office of the priest. Mary cannot but be eager to see the number of priests increased so that the mystery of Bethlehem may be perpetuated and spread throughout the world, that glory be given to God in the highest and men may find peace in Jesus, the Prince of peace. Catholic parents with a grateful appreciation of this mystery will feel proud to give their sons to the service of the altar, pray and work for an increase of priestly vocations.

The mystery of the Rosary leads us to Bethlehem of Juda and thence to the Bethlehems of the Catholic Church, scattered all over the world. He who lay in the manger as an Infant is present in the Blessed Eucharist as our High Priest, victim, bread of life. O come, let us adore Him, love Him the more, the less He is loved in the world. And let us not forget to pray for an increase of priestly vocations for the service of our Eucharistic Emmanuel. All this will console and delight our blessed Mother and be a source of untold blessings for the world.

THE PRESENTATION

Two events are commemorated in this mystery, the purification of our blessed mother and the presentation of Jesus. According to Jewish law a mother, after having given birth to a boy, was considered legally unclean for forty days. At the end of this period she had to present herself in the temple, if possible, to be declared clean. The ceremonies connected with this act called for a sacrifice of expiation for which a dove was used, and the burnt offering of a lamb. In the case of a poor mother a dove was substituted for the lamb, and so we read that Mary, being poor, offered a pair of turtle doves. The second event is the ransoming of Jesus. This ceremony was to keep alive the memory of the miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt. The last plague which God sent upon the Egyptians was the death of their firstborn sons, whereas the firstborn sons of the Israelites were saved. In memory of this event God ordained that the firstborn son of every Jewish family was to be dedicated to His service. However, soon after this God chose the tribe of Levi for the performance of all priestly functions. Since then the firstborn sons of all the other tribes had to be presented in the temple and to be ransomed from the original obligation by the payment of a fixed sum of money. Although it was not necessary that the child himself should be brought to the temple, this was generally done. It is in the observance of these two laws that we find Mary with her Infant Child in the temple.

MARY'S HUMILITY

Since the birth of Jesus had been miraculous, a virginal birth, Mary did not fall under the law. However, to claim

exemption would have necessitated revelation of this mystery, and that was not the will of God at the time. Grateful that her privilege thus could remain hidden, Mary humbly submits to this law like the other mothers of Israel. She is the handmaid of the Lord with no other desire but that the will of God should be done by her and in her.

PRESENTATION OF JESUS

The presentation of Jesus, though outwardly like that of all the other firstborn sons of the Jews, is yet totally different. For Jesus it is not a release from, but the first external consecration of Himself to, the priestly office. True, He will not act as a priest of the order of Levi, but He is priest and victim, first in the bloody sacrifice of the cross and then to the end of time in the Eucharistic sacrifice as priest of the order of Melchisedech. In fact, the priesthood of the Old Testament and all its sacrifices are but types and figures of His priesthood and sacrifice. Jesus, even as an Infant, has the full use of reason and, though not spoken audibly, the words of the prophet are in His heart, "Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not, but a body Thou has fitted to Me; in holocausts and sin-offerings Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, 'Behold I come . . . to do Thy will O God'" (Hebr. 10, 5-7).

A SIGN CONTRADICTED

There lived at the time in Jerusalem a holy old man by the name of Simeon. He had received from the Holy Spirit the assurance that he would not die before having seen the Messiah for whose coming he had prayed all his life. Simeon was in the temple as Mary and Joseph brought in the child Jesus and, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, he recognizes in Him at once the promised Saviour. He takes the Child into his arms, his heart overflowing with gratitude. Now he can die in peace, for his eyes have seen the light sent for the illumination of the Gentiles and the glory of Israel. But salvation will depend upon the attitude which men take toward this Child. And Simeon said to Mary His Mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be contradicted. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2, 25-35). It will be so because the cross of Christ shall be a folly to the Gentiles and a scandal to the Jews, but to those that are called the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1-23). So we, too, must take our stand with regard to Christ. Let it be one of loyal and generous service. Let us offer ourselves to Him in His own words, whatever the call may be, "Behold I come to do Thy will."

THE CHRISTIAN'S PRESENTATION

We, too, had our presentation when through Baptism we were cleansed from sin, incorporated into Christ and dedicated to the service of God. We repeated this consecration again and again during life, and that with particular solemnity on some outstanding occasions like the day of our first Holy Communion, the day of profession for Religious, the ordination day for priests. All these latter acts of consecration usually are made in connection with the Eucharistic Sacrifice; this illustrates our desire to unite our work and toil in God's service with that of our Divine High Priest and Victim for the accomplishment of His mission as well as our conviction that courage and strength to persevere on our sacrificial path flows from the Saviour's sacrifice.

CONSECRATED LIVES

What we should do in order to make our lives fruitful for our own salvation and that of others is suggested by the persons acting in this mystery of the Presentation. The example of Simeon points to continuous prayer. There can be no love of Christ without at least praying for the success of the cause of Christ. From Mary we learn to be humble and not to boast of our merits or of the good we do. We do no favour to God by living for God, but God does an exceedingly great favour to us by accepting our service. What we do we can do only through His grace and even after we have done all we could do we must look upon ourselves as useless servants who have done nothing but their duty. For the lover of Christ the wish, the example, the interests of Jesus are a command. Narrow selfishness has time and energy for amassing the goods of this world, for securing comfort and pleasure, but has neither for the advancement of the cause of Christ. This is the reason why the cause of Christ does not make better progress in the world. The Presentation suggests particularly to priests and Religious the spirit of joyous self-immolation. Their very state of life

is synonymous with it. They offered themselves on the day of their ordination or profession; they were called by name and they answered with a joyful *adsum*, present. Let them not be sorry for what they have done, nor take back what they have given, when in the course of time God takes them at their word and gives them to drink of the cup of suffering. The grain of wheat must give up its own life in order to live in the grains that grow from it.

The mystery of the Presentation thus understood leads to Jesus, Priest and Victim in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. It points to prayer, humility, the spirit of sacrifice and joyous self-immolation in the pursuance of the interests of God and souls. They are the means by which to overcome the selfishness and worldliness of men, the pleasure-seeking and flight from the cross that interfere so much with the following of Christ and the extension of His Kingdom. Also in our case it is true that, "This child is destined for the fall and for the rise of many," Our success, perseverance and salvation depend upon the attitude we take toward Jesus.

THE FINDING OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

According to the law every Israelite, beginning with the age of twelve, was bound to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the principal feasts, especially for Easter. Although Jesus most probably had made this pilgrimage more than once before, the one He made at the age of twelve is recorded in the Gospel, because it was the first time He made it as a "son of the law," that is, as one bound by law, and because of the extraordinary circumstances connected with it.

JESUS LOST

At the end of the customary celebrations Mary and Joseph set out on their return journey to Nazareth. Owing to the large crowds and to the custom that members of the same family would often travel in separate groups, it is easy to understand how Jesus could stay behind without either Mary or Joseph noticing His absence. It was only in the evening, when the groups arrived at the camping place previously agreed upon, and members of the family would meet again, that the loss of Jesus was discovered. Anxiously Mary and Joseph inquired with other groups and passers-by whether they had any knowledge of Jesus' whereabouts, but no information could be obtained. With hearts torn by grief they set out at once for Jerusalem and spent the whole following day in seeking Jesus.

JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

Without the knowledge of Mary and Joseph, Jesus had remained in the temple at Jerusalem. It had become a custom for doctors of the law to set themselves up in the temple halls, interpreting the law and answering questions for the benefit of any one who might be interested. On the occasion of the great feasts large crowds of people would gather around them, glad to have the opportunity to hear the famous teachers of Israel. Jesus had joined one of these groups. He soon aroused the attention of the doctors and the bystanders by the wisdom of His questions and answers as well as by the charm of His personality and speech.

QUESTIONS ASKED

We do not know what questions Jesus asked those learned men, but it would not seem far-fetched to suppose that they had to do with prophecies regarding the Messiah and the fulfilment of some of them within recent years. He may have put them through a little examination in contemporary history. Had they ever heard or did they remember the wonderful events that had taken place in Bethlehem about twelve years before this, a story told by shepherds, of angels appearing and announcing the birth of the Saviour? Did they know the story of a little boy being brought to the temple forty days later and of a holy old man by the name of Simeon who said some very striking things about the boy? And surely, they must remember those strange men coming from the East and inquiring in Jerusalem about the newborn King of the Jews! They themselves had directed those men to Bethlehem; did they follow up this strange event, especially when they heard about the massacre of so many little boys in Bethlehem and surroundings, because those Magi did not return to Herod? Could these events not have been the fulfilment of certain prophecies? Such and similar questions on the part of Jesus seem very likely in view of the purpose of this first public manifestation of Himself. He wished to make the leaders of Israel more observant of current events and to prepare them for His public

life to begin eighteen years later. But such questions must have kept those doctors of the law and the people in suspense and amazement. Other doctors and people were attracted and Jesus became the centre of a large crowd of people.

JESUS FOUND

It was in such environment that Mary and Joseph found Jesus. Their first reaction is unbounded joy; but then the Mother's tender heart is eager to know whether there had been any fault on her or Joseph's part that Jesus had been left behind. She asks, "Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold, Thy father and I have been seeking Thee sorrowing." No, there had been no fault on either her or Joseph's part, nor had Jesus Himself been guilty of any disobedience. But Jesus is not only the Son of Mary but also the Son of the Eternal Father, He is the God-Man and the Saviour, and the present event is part of His mission. And He said to them, "How is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" According to the Father's will the time had come to call the attention of the teachers and leaders of the people to truths and events which would help to direct them to Him in due time, provided they were of good will. That was doing the Father's business, and to that business He must attend above all others. Mary did not understand the full import of these words of Jesus, but she bowed in all humility to the will of God and she kept all these things carefully in her heart to ponder over them in years to come. Above all, she is happy that no estrangement has arisen between her and Jesus; He remains her loving Child. And He went down with them to Nazareth and was subject to them (Luke 2, 41-52).

SOULS IN DISTRESS

The mystery gives an answer to so many problems of distressed and sorrowful hearts. Fear and doubt and the sense of abandonment are not signs that things are going badly with us spiritually. Interior trials fall to the lot of all true lovers of God; they should not trick us into doing things which might bring on a real loss of God, through mortal sin. The sense of abandonment in particular is invaluable for the purification of the soul. It atones for sin by which in one way or other we have abandoned God, choosing our will in preference to His. But whilst we may thus experience intense mental pain, sorrow and discouragement, God is and acts within us. After a particularly violent temptation, when she had thought herself abandoned by God, St. Teresa asked Jesus where He had been during that time, and she received the answer that He had been right within her.

SEEKING JESUS

After the example of Mary and Joseph we must seek Jesus in such a situation. The fact that we are temples of God and the Holy Spirit dwells within us directs us to where He should be sought. Let us enter this temple of our souls and with unwavering faith and trust in the goodness of God humble ourselves, acknowledging ourselves unworthy of experiencing the sweetness of His presence. Let us adore the incomprehensible but always loving designs of Divine Providence, and by and by we shall feel peace return through the conviction that we have not lost Him, that He is still with us. He will speak to us as He spoke to the apostles during the storm on the lake, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" (Matt. 8,26).

And since Jesus abides with us in the Blessed Sacrament, we must seek Him also there. From the tabernacle He will speak to us of love and obedience unto death, direct our attention to the glory of the way of the cross that leads to the possession of eternal peace. We shall sense His love which allowed this trial to come upon us only to draw us closer to His Sacred Heart.

As we ourselves thus seek and find Jesus and in Him the peace of our souls, so we should be helpful to others in seeking and finding Jesus. Many souls there are, indeed, harassed by doubts and fears and despondency, sinners who in a weak moment yielded to their evil passions and now find out that it is a bitter and an evil thing to have forsaken the Lord; there are those separated brethren of ours outside the true Church, who feel the emptiness of their impoverished religion and seek the full truth of Christ that alone can satisfy the heart. They all need help.

Whether the sense of abandonment is a punishment or a trial, our reaction must be the same; we must seek Jesus with love and confidence. He will not be angry with the sinner forever, nor will He hide Himself forever from loving

souls, He, whose delight it is to be with the children of men. We shall find Him and sorrow shall be turned into joy. Through meditation on the mysteries of the rosary our Lady of Fatima directs our attention to the fountains of peace, and she will assist us in finding them in the Heart of her Divine Son through her own immaculate and motherly heart.

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