

UNIVERSITY OF ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE



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OUR LADY IN THE LITURGY

OUR LADY IN THE LITURGY

CONSIDERATIONS ON CERTAIN
FEASTS OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

BY

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PREFACE

NOT every feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary is treated of in this volume. The more important of them receive due notice, but for obvious reasons it has been necessary to select a few only of the multitude of those of lesser solemnity observed in various dioceses of the Church.

Among those which have been passed over are many feasts of modern origin, and one or two of greater antiquity, but of less interest to the general public than some of comparatively recent institution whose liturgy is more varied.

The author has relied chiefly upon the following sources of information: à Lapede, *Comment. in S. Scrip.*; Bened. XIV., *De Festis*; Guéranger, *Liturgical Year*; Vermeersch, *Meditations and Instructions on the B. Virgin*; Petitalot, *The Virgin Mother according to Theology*; Edersheim, *The Temple and its Services*.

The matter comprised in this book has already appeared in the shape of detached articles in the American periodical, the *Ave Maria*, whose editor has given cordial permission for publication in the present form.

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INTRODUCTORY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

THROUGHOUT this book the reader will find frequent mention of the varying formulas belonging to the Mass and Divine Office of Our Lady's feasts. The names by which these are commonly known may not be familiar to all; it will be well, therefore, to give an explanation of them in the present chapter.

First, with regard to the word 'Liturgy' itself: it has come to us from the East—the birthplace of Christianity. In its primary sense it denoted—as its original Greek form shows—any public work or duty. Hence it has come to mean in the language of the Church the order and form of the highest of all public duties—the solemn worship of God. By some writers the term Liturgy is restricted to that which concerns the Mass alone; but it is now generally used to denote the Divine Office as well. For, although the Mass is the highest act of worship and the centre of all public service of God, the Divine Office is so intimately connected with the Mass, as regards the formulas which compose it, that both together make up the official daily worship

arranged by the authority of the Church. The Mass is the daily Sacrifice, and the Office—the prescribed vocal prayer of the Church—is its complement. The most cursory examination of Missal and Breviary will show how constantly the identical prayers and praises proper to each particular day recur in both.

The Divine Office, which is carried out with solemnity in cathedrals (where it is possible) and in collegiate and monastic churches, is recited daily by all priests as well as by clerics who are in Subdeacon's orders, at least. It is divided into seven portions styled 'Hours.' Of these we need only refer to two—Vespers and Lauds; since of these alone shall we treat in the following pages. Vespers, as its name denotes, is the ancient 'evensong' of our forefathers, and is the Office more widely known among the laity. It consists of certain psalms and other portions of Scripture appropriate to the feast, with time-honoured hymns selected by the Church. Each psalm is usually preceded and followed by a short anthem, or—as it is technically styled—antiphon, a word derived from the Greek. The literal signification of the term is 'voice against voice'; it originated in the alternate singing of the full chorus with certain chosen singers—the latter rendering the words of the psalm, and the chorus repeating the antiphon after each verse. For many centuries it has been customary to restrict the antiphon to the beginning and end of each psalm.

A portion of Scripture known as the *capitulum* ('little chapter') follows the psalms; the hymn proper to the feast succeeds this, and is followed by a versicle ('little verse') with its appropriate response. The canticle of Our Lady, known, from its first Latin word, as the *Magnificat*, is then sung, accompanied by a suitable antiphon; the Collect, or prayer proper to the day, completes the formulas of Vespers.

Lauds, intended to be celebrated in the early hours of the morning, is similar in construction to Vespers; it has, however, its special psalms, hymn and versicle; the canticle of Zachary known as the *Benedictus*, stands in place of the *Magnificat*.

Besides the Vesper office which is sung on the eve of a feast, a second office similar to it is celebrated on the evening of the day itself; this is styled 'second Vespers.' It differs from first Vespers principally in the antiphon for the *Magnificat*. It may happen that the concurrence of an office of higher rank may interfere with the celebration of either first or second Vespers.

The varying portions of the liturgy of the Mass (not considering the Preface) are the Introit, Collect, Secret and Post-Communion Prayers, Lessons, Gradual, Tract, Alleluia-verse, Offertory and Communion-verses. Of each, a short explanation must now be given.

INTROIT.—In the earliest ages of the Church, this formula was unknown. The Mass of Holy Saturday still preserves the ancient form of the

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Mass, since it commences with the Litany followed by the repeated invocations: *Kyrie eleison*, &c. When peace was bestowed on the Church, and the sacred ceremonies might be amplified without fear of desecration, the Introit came into being. Its Latin title *Introitus* signifies 'entrance'; for it was formerly sung during the approach to the altar of the solemn procession of sacred ministers to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice. Originally it consisted of a psalm, with a special antiphon interpolated after each verse; the antiphon was often taken from the psalm itself, but sometimes another portion of Scripture or of a sacred hymn was employed. As in the case of the psalms of the Office, this antiphon is now restricted to the beginning and end of the psalm. Moreover, in the case of the Introit, the psalm has been curtailed to a single verse only, followed by the *Gloria Patri*.

COLLECT.—Cardinal Bona, a renowned exponent of the Liturgy, is of opinion that the name Collect signifies the gathering together ('collecting') in this prayer, as in a brief compendium, the teaching of the various portions of the liturgy of any particular day. The Collect is undoubtedly one of the most important of such formulas; it occurs not only in the Mass, but also in each 'hour' of the Divine Office.

SECRET AND POST-COMMUNION PRAYERS.—Nothing further need be said of these than that the former occurs immediately before the Preface, and the latter after the priest's Communion.

LESSONS.—Anciently there were several lessons from Holy Scripture read in every Mass. Except on certain ferial days they are now restricted to two; one, commonly called the Epistle, is usually taken from one of the Apostolic writings, though other portions of Scripture are often substituted; the other is always a portion of one of the Gospels.

GRADUAL.—This is always responsorial in form; that is, it is intended to be sung by cantors and chorus alternately. Its name is derived from the Latin word *gradus* ('steps'), as it was anciently sung while the deacon ascended the steps of the *ambo* ('pulpit') from which it was customary to chant the Gospel.

ALLELUIA-VERSE.—This follows immediately after the Gradual, and before the Gospel. Like the Gradual it is responsorial. During the forty days of the Easter festival there are two verses of this nature, the first taking the place of a Gradual.

TRACT.—From Septuagesima to Easter the joyful word Alleluia is suppressed; for, as Cardinal Bona explains, it is the expression of the never-ending gladness of the blessed in Heaven, and is therefore inappropriate during a season of mourning and penance. In its place, the Church sings the Tract, so called from the long-drawn out ('protracted') melody to which its words are wedded.

OFFERTORY-VERSE.—This, like the Introit, consisted in the early ages of a whole psalm with an antiphon between the verses. It was sung during the offering of bread and wine by the people present

at Mass. Since that custom is no longer followed, the Offertory-verse now consists of the former antiphon alone; unlike the Introit, it has preserved no vestige of its original psalm.

COMMUNION-VERSE.—This also was formerly the accompanying antiphon of a psalm sung during the distribution of Holy Communion; as in the case of the Offertory-verse, the psalm has long been discontinued.

If every sung Mass were celebrated as the Church directs, these various portions of the liturgy would be too familiar to Catholics to need explanation. Unfortunately it is not always possible, in countries such as our own, to provide for the singing of anything beyond the *Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Benedictus* and *Agnus Dei*; the formulas proper to each feast are consequently little known to the ordinary laity. They are, nevertheless, an integral part of the Mass, and it is of obligation that they should be read by the priest; Catholics will find their knowledge of the various festivals increased and their devotion nourished by the use at Mass of an English Missal in which all these portions are clearly set forth.

OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

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CHAPTER II

OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS—COMMEMORATION OF THE DIVINE MATERNITY

January 1st.

EPHESUS was in a frenzy of excitement and jubilation on the memorable evening of June 22nd, A.D. 431. The streets of the city were filled with dense crowds of citizens and with dwellers in the surrounding districts, all eagerly acclaiming the tidings of an important event which had been the object of their longing desire throughout that day. But the throng was thickest around the great church of St Mary. Bishops from distant countries, numbering at the day's close some two hundred, had sat in solemn conclave within that sacred building for many hours; they had assembled, under the presidency of one who represented Peter's Successor, to deliberate upon a matter which touched deeply every true son of the Catholic and Apostolic Church.

The dignity and glory of Mary, the Virgin Mother of Jesus, had been rashly assailed, and that by one of the foremost of the Church's pastors. Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, a bishop who had gained renown for eloquence and learn-

ing, had ventured to set forth strange views upon the doctrine of the Incarnation. According to his teaching, God had not been truly 'made man,' but merely dwelt in the Man Jesus Christ, 'as in a temple.' This error in its further development led to the inevitable conclusion that in Christ there were two sonships—one divine, the other human—since He was Son of God as well as Son of Mary. Consequently, in Our Lord—thus did Nestorius maintain—two entirely distinct persons existed, connected by a mere external or moral union. It followed from this that Mary could not be truly styled 'Mother of God.' She was entitled to be called 'Mother of Christ,' because her Son was the 'Anointed One'; but 'Mother of God' implied that she had given birth to the Divinity. 'Mary was but human,' he said, 'and God could not be born of a human creature.' The heresy of Nestorius had gained many adherents; for it was less difficult for the mind to conceive that a man might be filled with the power of God than that God should actually become man.

The matter was not one of mere terms: it involved important doctrines. On the proper solution of the question as to how the divine and human natures existed and worked together in the one Person of Jesus Christ depended the condition of the redemption of mankind; unless the Redeemer had been 'perfect God and perfect Man,' as St Athanasius styles Him, His sacrifice would have been ineffectual. The touchstone of the contro-

versy was the title 'Mother of God.' This was the point insisted upon by St Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria and the zealous opponent of the new heresy. 'As the mother of man,' he maintained, 'is the mother not simply of his body but of his entire person, notwithstanding that his soul comes from another source—as she gives birth not only to the body of man but to the whole complex individual, composed essentially of a true union of body and soul—so also the Blessed Virgin Mary, while she did not in any sense give birth to the Divinity, by which the Word is equal to the Father, is nevertheless truly and really the Mother of the Word, because the flesh of the Word was formed in her womb, and she brought into the world the Person of the Eternal Word, who was clothed with our nature.'*

No wonder that the people of Ephesus awaited with such eager longing the result of the Council's deliberations. Ephesus, according to one tradition, was Mary's city, wherein she had passed the years that followed upon the Ascension of Our Lord. There under the loving care of St John, she had dwelt until she returned to Jerusalem, there to give up her soul to her Creator. Even though this tradition is rejected by many writers, it is certain that Ephesus—perhaps on account of St John's sojourn there—claimed a close connexion with Our Lady. It was not that her devout clients doubted the truth that she was indeed Mother of God, but they desired to see her honour vindicated by the

* Alzog, *Church History*, i. 416.

solemn pronouncement of the representatives of the Church. That desire was amply fulfilled. Rapidly spread the tidings that the assembled Fathers had unanimously rejected the doctrine of Nestorius, and had confirmed the ancient Catholic belief that Mary was without doubt entitled to the designation 'Mother of God.' By this assertion of the dignity of the Virgin Mother they declared the true doctrine regarding the Incarnation.

If the excitement in Ephesus had been great during the hours of suspense, it was beyond measure intensified when the glad news had flown through the expectant crowds, and had speedily become known throughout the length and breadth of the city. Everywhere might be seen manifestations of abounding joy. Citizens who had remained within doors now joined the throngs in the streets; even noble ladies did not disdain to leave their homes in order to take part in the public manifestation of delight.

But it was at the close of the Council's sitting that the public enthusiasm reached its height. The crowds that surged round the scene of the deliberations were raised to a perfect ecstasy of joy at the moment when the Fathers of the Council were preparing to leave the church for their respective lodging-places in the city. A tumult of applause greeted their appearance; on all sides resounded joyous shouts in honour of the 'Mother of God' and of her faithful servants. Torches were lighted, clouds of incense arose, and with

every mark of honour and respect the orthodox defenders of the Faith were escorted to their residences in jubilant procession.

The joy which had greeted the declaration of the Fathers of the Council resounded from Ephesus throughout the Christian world. Orthodox believers rejoiced in the vindication, by the definition of the true doctrine of the Incarnation, of the glory and honour attaching to the Divine Maternity. It is probable that from this epoch dates the commemoration of the Blessed Virgin in the Christmas liturgy. In both Latin and Greek Churches the veneration due to the Mother began to be united with the supreme worship of her Son during the octave of Christmas. In the ancient calendar of the Roman Church a festival in honour of Our Lady was mentioned on the first of January, as well as the octave day of the Nativity; this no doubt accounts for an office of the Blessed Virgin placed on that day in the Antiphony of St Gregory. Up to the thirteenth century it was customary to celebrate a Mass in honour of Our Lady, as well as that of the octave, on the first day of the year. Hence it has come about that our present office is a combination of the two; it honours the Divine Maternity, while it celebrates the birth of Our Redeemer.

In the Greek Church, a similar commemoration of the Mother of God is made on the day after Christmas.

It is true that the first of January now bears the

title of the Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord; the designation, nevertheless, is not ancient. It is mentioned first towards the end of the sixth century, but it was probably not kept in Rome until three centuries later. It commemorates the circumcision of the Divine Infant on the eighth day after His birth, and may therefore be regarded as a continuation of the Christmas festival.

An examination of the Divine Office for this day will show how large a portion of the psalms, antiphons, and other formulas refer to the Divine Maternity. We give a translation of the ancient antiphons sung at Vespers with the psalms usually devoted to feasts of the Blessed Virgin.

1. 'O wondrous interchange! The Creator of Mankind, assuming a living Body, deigned to be born of a Virgin; and, becoming man without man's aid, bestowed on us His divinity.'

2. 'When Thou, in an unspeakable manner, wast born of a Virgin, the Scriptures were fulfilled. To save man, Thou camest down as dew upon the fleece. We praise Thee, O our God!'

3. 'In the bush seen by Moses, as burning yet unconsumed, we recognise the preservation of thy glorious virginity. O Mother of God, intercede for us!'

4. 'The Root of Jesse hath budded; the Star hath risen out of Jacob; a virgin hath brought forth the Saviour. O Lord our God, we praise Thee!'

5. 'Lo! Mary hath brought forth a Saviour unto us, whom John, seeing, exclaimed: Behold

the Lamb of God! Behold Him that taketh away the sins of the world! Alleluia.'

The extreme beauty of these antiphons, recalling as they do some of the Old Testament types of Our Lady—Gideon's Fleece, the Burning Bush—needs no comment.

Though the formulas of the Mass relate chiefly to the Nativity and the Circumcision, the Collect of the day is in honour of Mary. 'O God, who by the fruitful Virginitv of Blessed Mary, hast given to mankind the rewards of eternal salvation; grant, we beseech Thee, that we may experience her intercession, by whom we received the Author of Life, our Lord Jesus Christ, thy Son.'

The Post-Communion prayer, in like manner, pleads for us through her merits. 'May this communion, O Lord, cleanse us from sin: and by the intercession of Blessed Mary, the Virgin-Mother of God, make us partaker of thy heavenly remedy.'

In the antiphon for the Magnificat of the second vespers of the feast we have another beautiful allusion to the Divine Maternity. 'Great is the mystery of our inheritance! The womb of a most pure Virgin became the Temple of God. He is not defiled assuming to Himself Flesh from her. All nations shall come saying: Glory be to Thee, O Lord!'

The glowing words of the devout Abbot Guéranger, upon the Divine Maternity, may fittingly bring these considerations to a close.

'A Mother of God! It is the mystery whose

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fulfilment the world, without knowing it, was awaiting for four thousand years. It is the work which in God's eyes was incomparably greater than that of the creation of a million new worlds; for such a creation would cost Him nothing: He has but to speak, and all whatsoever He wills is made. But, that a creature should become Mother of God, He has had not only to suspend the laws of nature by making a Virgin Mother, but also to put Himself in a state of dependence upon the happy creature He chose for His Mother. He had to give her rights over Himself, and contract the obligation of certain duties towards her. He had to make her His Mother, and Himself her Son.

'It follows from all this that the blessings of the Incarnation, for which we are indebted to the love wherewith the Divine Word loved us, may and ought to be referred, though in an inferior degree, to Mary herself. If she be the Mother of God, it is because she consented to it; for God vouchsafed not only to ask her consent, but, moreover, to make the coming of His Son into this world depend upon her giving it. As this His Son, the Eternal Word, spoke His *Fiat* over chaos, and the answer to His Word was creation; so did Mary use the same word, *Fiat*:—"Let it be done unto me," she said. God heard her word, and immediately the Son of God descended into her virginal womb. After God then, it is to Mary, His ever-blessed Mother, that we are indebted for our Emmanuel.*

* *Liturgical Year, Christmas.* Vol. I. 412.

OUR LADY'S ESPOUSALS

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CHAPTER III

OUR LADY'S ESPOUSALS

January 23rd.

MARY, the little Maiden of Nazareth, had grown up to womanhood in her sacred retreat in the Temple at Jerusalem. All those years, from her entry into the sacred precincts at the age of three to the completion of her fourteenth year, had been spent under the care of the pious women who devoted themselves to the charge of the *almas*, under the direction of the priests. Tradition says that Joachim and Anna were both dead; Mary is said by the Koran, which contains many Arab traditions relating to her, to have been under the guardianship of Zachary, whose wife Elizabeth was a near relative. If such was the case, it would fall to Zachary to arrange for his young charge a suitable marriage.

When such a proposal was announced to Mary, we may imagine how great would be her consternation. St Gregory of Nyssa quotes an ancient tradition which tells that she strove for a time to excuse herself with great modesty from entering into the marriage state, entreating that she might

remain in the Temple buildings, free from all ties of family. Such a request would be sure to meet with much opposition on the part of her lawful guardians; for it was regarded by the Hebrews as a reproach to remain unmarried. Moreover, Mary was the last of her house, and the heiress to the possessions of her parents; what she desired, therefore, would bring about the extinction of her father's race—a signal misfortune in the eyes of the Jews.

That she had already bound herself by a vow of virginity would constitute no obstacle, even should she reveal the fact to her guardians; the law held as null any vow made by a young maiden without the consent of her parents. Mary's vow, therefore, could have been set aside, even if it had been made with the intention of keeping it in perpetuity. St Thomas, we may remark, is of opinion that it was merely conditional until she could make it perpetual after her marriage; but other authorities regard it as more probable that she had already vowed virginity in perpetuity, acting upon divine revelation. Even supposing Mary to have confided her secret to Zachary, or some other guardian, she had no power to refuse marriage should it be insisted upon. She could, therefore, do no more than trust herself to the loving will of God, Who would dispose of events in the way most pleasing to Him.

The designs of God in her regard were brought about through the steps taken by those who had charge of the young Virgin. A tradition accepted

by many of the Fathers relates that all the marriageable men of Mary's tribe and race were assembled, that one might be chosen as her husband; for according to the Law, no one might espouse an heiress except a man of the same lineage. Though many youths of suitable advantages appeared as claimants for her hand, they were passed over; the choice of Mary's guardians, directed by God, fell upon Joseph of Nazareth, a man of riper years, and of more resplendent virtues than all the rest. The choice was determined upon, says tradition, by the blossoming of Joseph's rod, when, together with those of the other suitors, it had been placed overnight within the Temple precincts. It is in allusion to this circumstance that St Joseph is represented in art holding a rod, from which a flower is springing forth. According to the ordinary usage of the Jews, the contract of marriage would be drawn up and signed by both bride and bridegroom—the latter having settled thus upon his future wife all his worldly goods. With a short benediction from the priest, the ceremony concluded. The actual marriage would be celebrated a few months later.

It was on a Wednesday in January that the ceremony took place; for the ordinary day for the marriage of a virgin was on the fourth day of the week, and the celebration of a feast in honour of these nuptials in the month of January points to the traditional time of the year. Jerusalem, the abode of the bride, was the appointed place, and

the house was probably one belonging to some relative or friend. A numerous body of young maidens, together with matrons in attendance on the bride, conducted her from her apartments to the house where the marriage was to take place. Youths bore over the head of the bride and her accompanying matrons a richly decorated canopy, others played instruments of music, and others lighted the way with torches—for it was evening. Money was scattered along the route for the poor, who raised their voices in blessings upon the union. The bystanders strewed palm branches in front of the bride, or sprinkled her garments with perfumes; and palms were borne in the procession. The bridegroom had his procession likewise.

In due time all met at the appointed place. Amid the acclamations of their friends, the bride and bridegroom were seated side by side under the canopy, and a ring was placed upon the bride's finger with the formula: 'Behold thou art my wife, according to the rite of Moses and of Israel.' Wine was poured into a cup and presented to them, with a benediction. While the married pair drank from it in turn, a canticle of benedictions was sung to God. The rest of the wine was poured out as a libation by the bridegroom, and the cup was broken so that it could be used no more.

Both Joseph and Mary would conform to the usual custom of wearing rich attire. The robe of the Blessed Virgin, still venerated at Chartres, which may have formed part of her marriage dress,

is of rich texture, elaborately embroidered with flowers in blue, white, violet, and gold. It was once treasured at Constantinople. Another tunic, of similar richness, was seen by the celebrated French traveller Chardin, in the seventeenth century, at Copis in Mingrelia (Transcaucasia); this also was reputed to be a robe of the Blessed Virgin. Our Lady's head would be crowned with a wreath of myrtle, under her amply flowing bridal veil; St Joseph would wear the transparent crystal diadem peculiar to bridegrooms of his nation.

It must have been immediately after the bridal ceremony, as St Thomas thinks, that both Joseph and Mary pronounced reciprocally their solemn vows of chastity. Such vows were not unknown among the Jews, though they generally originated in anger rather than piety. If a husband said to his wife, 'Thou art as my mother,' they must henceforth live in continency. In the case of Mary and Joseph, it is unnecessary to say, the vows were secret to all but God, and were dictated by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. After seven days of festivity and the offering of sacrifice, the bridal pair would be escorted by their friends on the first part of their homeward journey to their habitation at Nazareth.

It is interesting to note the difference of opinion manifested by various authorities as to the age of St Joseph at the time of the marriage. St Epiphanius gives it as eighty, but this view is not usually followed. Hebrew law forbade the union

of a very old man with a youthful bride, as altogether unbecoming; and neither St Joseph nor the priestly guardians of the young Virgin would have sought to contravene the law. Moreover, God desired to give Mary a protector of her virginity and of her honour, a helper and a breadwinner, and so old a man would not have been suitable. Others prefer the opinion which represents St Joseph as about fifty, since the majority of the Fathers speak of him as 'advanced in years.' It is striking, however, that in one of the earliest representations of him in art—a picture in the Catacombs in Rome, where he appears as guardian of the Virgin and Child in the scene of the Adoration of the Wise Men—he is depicted as quite a young man, almost a youth; this agrees better with the revelations granted to Mary of Agreda, the Spanish abbess, in which she learned that St Joseph was thirty-three years of age when he espoused Our Lady. St Jerome demonstrates, against some who maintained that St Joseph was a widower, that he always preserved his virginity, and this is the opinion adopted by the Church generally.

The present feast, that of Our Lady's Espousals, is not of very great antiquity. It originated with the growth of devotion to St Joseph, and dates from the fourteenth century only. A canon of the cathedral of Chartres left in his will a request that the chapter of that church should institute a solemn commemoration of St Joseph every year, honouring at the same time his holy Spouse.

John Gerson, the celebrated Chancellor of Paris University, himself a devout client of the foster father of Our Lord, composed an office in honour of the Espousals, as a means of carrying this desire into effect. The Office and feast were sanctioned by the Papal Legate, and January 23 fixed for the annual celebration. For a long period the festival seems to have been of a local character, but in course of time it began to be observed by certain religious Orders and to spread into other countries.

The Office composed by Gerson was not adopted for general use, even if it continued to be followed at Chartres, which is doubtful. Paul III in the sixteenth century granted to Franciscans the use of the liturgy proper to the Nativity of Our Lady, with the substitution of the word 'espousals' for 'nativity' throughout the Office. Benedict XIV, in his treatise on the 'Festivals of the Blessed Virgin,' says that Paul III approved of a proper Mass and Office for the feast, which he had charged a Dominican to draw up; if ever used, it does not seem to have been extended to all the churches in which this festival was kept, since the adapted Office is still in use. Although it was extended to many countries after the seventeenth century, and was adopted for the States of the Church by Pope Benedict XIII in 1725, the feast has never been inserted in the general calendar of the Church.

We may now take a glance at the liturgy of the festival, by which the Church commemorates the

sacred compact of marriage between the holy pair, and not the mere betrothal. The antiphons for Vespers, which are placed before and after each psalm, run thus in English :

1. 'This is the day of the Espousals of the glorious Virgin Mary, of the seed of Abraham, born of the tribe of Juda, of the noble race of David.'

2. 'To-day was espoused the Holy Virgin Mary, whose glorious life is the light of all the churches.'

3. 'Mary is illustrious because of her royal descent. The aid of her prayers we devoutly crave with heart and mind.'

4 'With mind and heart let us sing glory to Christ on this sacred solemnity of Mary, the most high Mother of God.'

5. 'Let us celebrate with joy the Espousals of Blessed Mary that she may intercede for us with our Lord Jesus Christ.'

The canticle *Magnificat* has a special antiphon for both first and second vespers :

1. 'Let us honour the Most worthy Espousals of the glorious Virgin Mary, who obtained the dignity of a mother without losing her virginal purity.'

2. 'Thy Espousals, O Virgin Mother of God, have announced joy to the whole world; for from thee arose the Sun of Justice, Christ our God, who, taking off the curse, hath bestowed blessing; and, defeating death, hath given us life everlasting.'

The appropriate nature of all these antiphons is at once apparent. The marriage of Our Lady was to render the virginal birth of our Redeemer free

from all imputation of evil on the part of an incredulous world; while it provided for her and the holy Child the loving guardianship of the 'just' Joseph, whom God in His providence had prepared for so high an office.

It is but fitting that St Joseph should have a share in the liturgy of a festival in which he is so intimately connected with his holy Spouse. Accordingly, an antiphon for both Vespers is added as a commemoration, and accompanied by a special Collect. They are as follows:

1. 'Joseph, arising from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took unto him his wife.' The allusion is to the anxiety of St Joseph when Mary was about to become a mother in spite of their mutual vow of chastity.

2. 'Behold a faithful and prudent servant, whom the Lord hath placed over His family.'

'May we be aided, we beseech Thee, O Lord, by the merits of the spouse of Thy Most Holy Mother; that what our strength cannot obtain may be granted to us by his intercession.'

The Introit of the Mass is *Salve, Sancta Parens*: 'Hail, Holy Mother, who didst bring forth the King, who for ever ruleth Heaven and earth.' The words are taken from one of the poems of Sedulius, written in the fifth century. This Introit is frequently used on the feasts of Our Lady.

The Collect runs thus: 'Bestow upon Thy servants, O Lord, we beseech Thee, the gift of Thy heavenly grace; that to those to whom the Blessed

Virgin's maternity hath been the beginning of salvation, the votive solemnity of her Espousals may bring an increase of peace.'

For the Epistle has been chosen a portion of the Book of Proverbs* which extols the predestination of Mary to her exalted dignity: 'The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways. . . , I was set up from eternity, and of old, before the earth was made. . . . Now, therefore, ye children, hear me blessed are they that keep my ways. . . . He that shall find me shall find life, and shall have salvation from the Lord.' The words originally spoken of Divine Wisdom are here applied to Mary. Pope Pius IX, in his Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, on the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, explains the reason thus: 'Borrowing the same terms in which the Sacred Scriptures speak of the Uncreated Wisdom and represent His eternal origin, the Church is accustomed to use them in the ecclesiastical Offices and in the sacred liturgy, and to apply them to the beginning of the Virgin—mysterious beginning, which God had foreseen and resolved upon in one and the same decree with the Incarnation of the Divine Wisdom.'

The Gradual celebrates the glorious maternity of Mary, which her bridal day calls to mind; it will be noticed on the feast of her Nativity.

The Gospel is that passage from St Matthew which recounts the trial and consolation of St Joseph, and the angel's prophecy of the future redemption by the Child who is to be born of Mary.

* ch, viii. 22.

The Offertory and Communion verses praise the fruitful virginity of the Maiden Mother.

While the feast of the Espousals ranks primarily as one of the festivals of Mary, it commemorates at the same time the dignity and glory of her spouse, St Joseph. As the husband of Mary, he became the reputed father of her Divine Son—the latter 'being, as it was supposed, the Son of Joseph.*' Indeed, the name of 'father' is given to him by the Evangelist: 'And His father and mother were wondering at those things which were spoken concerning Him.†' And one still greater dignified Him with that supreme title; Mary herself spoke of Joseph as father of Jesus: 'Behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing!‡' § As the Holy Gospels show, Joseph exercised toward the Son of God all a father's rights. Jesus was 'subject' to him, as the head of the Holy Family. To him God's designs were always made known—the imposition of the Holy Name of Jesus, and the commands to fly to Egypt, and to return thence.

The feast of the Espousals, which celebrates the beginning of his charge of the holiest of God's creatures and of the Infant God Himself, redounds to the praise of the foster father together with that of the Virgin Mother, and thus fulfils the design of the pious ecclesiastic to whom its institution is primarily due.

* St Luke iii. 23. † *Ibid.* ii. 33. § *Ibid.* ii. 48.

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THE PURIFICATION

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CHAPTER IV

THE PURIFICATION

February 2nd.

IN order to realise thoroughly the scene we are about to contemplate, let us imagine ourselves to have been privileged partakers in the services of the Temple at Jerusalem on a certain day more than nineteen hundred years ago.

Entering the precincts by the south-western gate, we find ourselves within a magnificent portico, consisting of a central nave whose gigantic pillars of graven marble rise to the height of 100 feet, with an aisle on either side supported by lesser columns—the whole erection extending to the length of some 900 feet. It is the Royal Porch, one of the splendid buildings with which Herod has enriched the outer courts of the Temple. Crowds are pacing its marble pavement in conversation; many groups are seated on the numerous marble benches built along the outer wall. We pass through the columns into the open space to the left hand, and find ourselves in the Court of the Gentiles. It is the outermost enclosure of the precincts; and, as its name implies, is open to

both Jew and Gentile, in common with the great portico we have just left. Its pavement of variegated marbles covers a space of some 750 feet square, which is now the scene of much movement and animation. Crowds of worshippers are making their way toward the Temple proper, yet the progress is most orderly; there is no confusion, no jostling. Custom has regulated that those entering the sacred buildings should proceed in one direction, and those leaving should pass round to the gates on the farther side of this court. For this is the only place of sacrifice for the whole nation; and worshippers are never wanting, even outside the great feasts when attendance is obligatory.

Following the stream of people, and ascending the flight of steps leading to the terrace from which all but Jews are excluded, we soon arrive at the entrance known as the Beautiful Gate. It is approached from the terrace by twelve low marble steps. The gate, a splendid erection, is closed at night by massive doors of brass, highly polished and richly engraved. Their weight is so immense that it needs the strength of twenty men to move them on their hinges. Passing through this portal, we enter the first of the inner enclosures—a square of 200 feet in extent, open to the sky, but surrounded by buildings. It is styled the Court of the Women; for, although both sexes may enter it, women are forbidden to advance beyond it. Around the walls are raised galleries, whence women may join in the worship carried on in the

Court of the Priests, where stands the altar of sacrifice.

A flight of fifteen steps leads from the farther end of this Court of the Women to another lofty gateway, opposite to the Beautiful Gate. It is the entrance to the Court of Israel, a narrow space which extends across the whole width of the Court of the Priests, from which it is divided by a low parapet wall. This entrance is known as the Gate of Nicanor. Outside it, at the top of the steps, all ceremonies of purification enjoined by the Law are carried out.

Some such service is about to take place now. Standing without the gate, in plain view of the worshippers in the court below, is a young mother, holding her babe in her arms; her husband, an elderly man, is by her side. The offering of incense is over, and this is the appointed hour for the legal purification of women after childbirth; on this account she is evidently awaiting the coming of one of the priests.

In due time a priest advances toward the mother from the inner court. He receives from her hand the 'poor's offering' which they have provided for sacrifice. The Law requires a lamb for a burnt-offering, and a dove for a sin-offering; but two doves will suffice for those who are unable to buy a lamb. The mother remains before the gate while her sacrifice is prepared and offered, and unites with it her prayers and thanksgivings. The great altar of sacrifice, built of unhewn stones, and standing in

the centre of the Court of Priests, within the gate, is the prominent object in view. It is about fifty feet square and fifteen high. Beyond it, towards the west, dimly seen through the haze of smoke which rises to the open sky from the three fires ever burning on the altar in readiness for sacrifice, is the lofty front of the Holy Place; it is of snowy marble, richly adorned and roofed with gold. Its entrance is closed by golden doors and veils of white, blue, scarlet, and purple. That building stirs the heart of every Israelite to reverent veneration. Within its innermost sanctuary—the Most Holy Place—none but the high priest may enter; and that only once in each year, to ‘sprinkle before the Lord’ the blood of atonement. Though no longer favoured with the visible manifestation of God’s presence as the Tabernacle and first Temple had been, the building is still regarded with awe as the chosen dwelling-place of Jehovah.

The sacrifice of purification over, the mother kneels before the priest to be sprinkled with lustral water, and to receive a special blessing when the appointed prayers have been said. But another offering is to follow. Tenderly the young mother lays her little son, her first-born child, in the arms of the priest, who lifts up the infant, as the Law requires, in oblation to God. The parents pay the five sicles prescribed for the ransom of the babe; and, after receiving another solemn blessing, they descend the steps to the court below.

From out of the throng of people, two figures

approach them. An aged man, bent with the weight of years, reverently accosts the mother, and receives into his arms, with manifest joy and gratitude, the little child. Tenderly he gazes upon it; and, looking up to heaven, prays and gives thanks. Then he replaces the babe in the mother's arms, with a fervent blessing. The other figure is that of a woman, far advanced in years; she, too, looks with evident delight mingled with reverence, upon the beautiful child, and adds her congratulations to the parents.

None of the personages in the scene just depicted would have attracted much notice from other worshippers in the Temple on that winter's morning. To the ordinary observer, it would appeal as an event of everyday occurrence; an artisan from some country village and his young spouse fulfil the requisite duties of religion, and accept the congratulations of their friends on the birth of a first-born son.

Yet what was it that had really taken place? The most momentous event that the Temple had ever witnessed. Prophets of God had revealed it ages before. Malachias, the last of the ancient seers, had solemnly declared: 'The Lord, whom you seek, . . . shall come to His Temple.'* Aggeus, long before, had spoken still more fully: 'The Desired of all nations shall come and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts . . . Great shall be the glory of this last house more than of the first, saith the Lord of hosts.'†

* ch. iii. 1.

† ch. ii. 8, 9.

Here was the fulfilment. As men reckoned, Jesus, the son of Joseph the carpenter, had been presented in the Temple according to the Law; and Mary, the young mother, had undergone the legal purification required of the daughters of Israel. What the Angels beheld in wondering awe was something infinitely more sublime. They saw God, made Man, taking possession of the Temple which had been built for His glory; and, by His coming, ratifying the solemn worship which daily, even hourly, ascended to heaven from those sacred courts. God returns once more to His holy house—the first place He honours with His presence when He leaves the stable which sheltered Him at His birth.

Yet what a mystery is here! Of all that crowd, but four persons recognize His dignity and office. Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna, alone penetrate into the hiddenness of the long-expected Messiah. He has been received—all unwittingly—by His priests, and by their representative presented to His Eternal Father. He has been recognized and praised by but two humble souls—the representatives of His chosen people,—who out of all that crowd are alone privileged thus to meet and acknowledge their Redeemer. Simeon, ardent lover of the Scriptures, and their diligent student, has long waited for this promised meeting; and, having seen his Lord, bids farewell to life. Anna, dwelling always in the sacred precincts, looking forward, anxiously, through a long life of prayer



and penance, for the redemption of Israel, having 'confessed to the Lord,' who thus reveals Himself, carries the glad tidings to other faithful ones. But the mysteries of this event are by no means exhausted. God deigns this day to obey the law imposed by Him upon His people. He causes Himself to be offered to the Father at the hands of the priesthood; He who is to redeem the world is Himself ransomed.

How great must have been the joy of Mary, as she stood in view of the altar of sacrifice and of the Most Holy Place, and offered to God her Divine Son, who, as the Angel had told her, was to 'save His people from their sins'! No place at that moment was so holy as her bosom, the resting-place of God. More spotless than the snowy marble of the all-holy sanctuary was the immaculate purity of her soul; brighter far than the dazzling sheen of its golden adornments, her wondrous graces. Yet she, all-pure and unsullied, comes to be purified. Thus do both Son and Mother preach to mankind by unparalleled example the worth of humility; in both is humiliation the road to glory. For Simeon, inspired by God, reveals in glad accents the dignity of Jesus, and the glory which sacrifice will win for the Virgin Mother.

It is not surprising that a festival in commemoration of such sublime mysteries as these should have been celebrated in the Church from time immemorial. So ancient, indeed, is this feast that no date has ever been discovered on which it was first

adopted by Western Christendom; liturgists, therefore, are forced to the conclusion that it is the earliest of all festivals of Our Lady, and must have been observed from the very beginning of Christianity.

Three distinct events are referred to by this celebration (1) Mary's Purification; (2) Our Lord's Presentation; (3) His Revelation of Himself to His people, represented by Simeon and Anna. This threefold character has led to variations in the title by which the feast is known in East and West respectively. In the Eastern Church it ranks as a festival of Our Lord; it is called the Presentation; but has also been known as *Hypante* ('The Meeting'), in allusion to the revelation to Simeon and Anna. The Western Church has always regarded it as a feast of Mary.

The liturgy celebrates each of the three mysteries in turn. The Office of Vespers gives most prominence to Mary's spotless virginity. The ancient antiphons for the psalms are those appointed for a similar use on the feast of the Circumcision; they have been already explained.

The *Capitulum* for Vespers and Lauds recounts in the words of the prophet the coming of the Lord to His Temple. The verse and response, as well as the *Magnificat* antiphon, refer to the third mystery of the day. The antiphon, however, contains an allusion to Mary's virginity as well: 'The old man carried the Child, but the Child guided the old man. A Virgin bore Him, and after childbirth

continued a Virgin. She adored Him whom she brought forth.'

In the Office of Lauds, and in the second Vespers, the liturgy is chiefly concerned with the revelation to Simeon.

The Mass of this festival has been preceded for more than a thousand years by the blessing of candles and procession which have gained for the day the title of 'Candlemas.' They commemorate the bearing in his arms by holy Simeon of the 'Light' that had arisen for 'the revelation of the Gentiles.' The prayers and antiphons are consequently concerned with that mystery.

The liturgy of the Mass is chiefly taken up with the subjects of the Presentation and Revelation. The Introit sings of the glory poured out upon the Temple by the visit of the Redeemer, and of His mercy in revealing Himself there: 'We have received Thy mercy, O God, in the midst of Thy Temple! . . . Great is the Lord, and exceedingly to be praised: in the city of our God, in His holy mountain.' The Gradual, sung between Epistle and Gospel, is an almost exact repetition of the Introit. The Tract, which follows, consists of the whole of the short canticle of Simeon. The Alleluia-verse, which takes the place of the Tract, should the feast occur before Septuagesima, is identical with the antiphon of the Magnificat at first vespers. The Communion verse also refers to the same favoured saint: 'Simeon received an answer from the Holy Ghost that he should not see

death till he beheld the Christ of the Lord.' Sung as it is after the priest's Communion, it appropriately reminds us that the same Lord whom Simeon received into his arms deigns to enter into our hearts in the Mystery of Love.

The Lesson is taken from the Prophet Malachias, and refers to the coming of the Messias to His Temple. The Gospel recounts the circumstances of that eventful day.* The Offertory verse alone concerns the Blessed Virgin particularly: 'Grace is spread on thy lips; therefore hath God blessed thee for ever and ever.'

The antiphon for the Magnificat at second Vespers unites the two mysteries of the Presentation and Revelation: 'This day, the Blessed Virgin Mary presented the Child Jesus in the Temple; and Simeon, full of the Holy Ghost, took him in his arms and blessed God for ever.'

It is in the Collect of the day, as is so often the case, that we find the whole spirit of this festival summed up. It expresses, in that clear and concise way common to the Church's formulas, the end that each Christian ought to have in view as the fruit of the celebration of this great feast—an ever increasing purity of soul, to render us worthy to be presented in the everlasting Temple above:

'O Almighty and Eternal God, we humbly beseech Thy divine Majesty that, as Thy only-begotten Son, in the substance of our flesh, was this day presented in the Temple, so we also may, with purified hearts, be presented unto Thee.'

* St Luke ii.

THE ANNUNCIATION

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CHAPTER V

THE ANNUNCIATION.

March 25th.

THE scene is the fairest, most beautiful garden ever seen on this earth. On all sides a surpassing wealth of verdure. Noble trees, crowned with bright foliage, lift their heads toward heaven; others of lower stature bend to earth, weighed down by luscious fruits of varied form and hue. Flowers everywhere stud the green earth with innumerable points of colour, under a brilliant sun shining in a cloudless sky. Peeping from lawn and bush and flowering plant, hiding in shady groves where fountains spray the moss with cooling breath, thousands of blossoms fill the air with delicious fragrance.

A woman moves amid these countless beauties, joying in the sights and sounds, and drinking in the sweetly scented air. Birds of many-tinted plumage flit from bough to bough, pouring forth liquid music from golden throats. Brute beasts, in vast variety, are there also. The huge lion gambols round the woman like some tame fawn at play; the tawny tiger, gliding through the undergrowth, draws near to feel her caressing touch upon his powerful neck; birds fly to her hand, and carol still their tuneful

songs. For fear has not yet penetrated into Paradise; all creation acknowledges mankind's uncontrolled dominion.

The woman, a virgin-bride, is faultless in form and feature. The Angels behold her soul all pure and spotless; for the image of her Creator shines there yet unblemished. And Angels are her constant visitors; the Lord of Angels, indeed, loves to hold converse with His creatures amid the verdant bowers and flower-decked groves of Eden.

A spirit-guest, even now, has come to salute that first peerless woman. Once he was the brightest of the Angels: Lucifer—'Light-Bearer'; now a spirit of light no longer. Driven from heaven and from the face of God by reason of his indomitable pride and envy, he appears in no beautiful shape. He has taken the form of one of the most loathsome reptiles—the serpent; no fitter emblem could he choose of his cunning and poisonous wickedness than this. He draws near. This creature, destined to supplant him and his followers in the glory he has lost, and already bountifully gifted by God, stirs his hatred. He will strike at his Maker through this beloved one.

The serpent speaks. Does the woman start with amazement? Does she wonder at this unwonted incident? Or is she so intimately surrounded by supernatural happenings that nothing, as yet, appeals to her as impossible with God? It may be so. The serpent addresses her, and the woman listens. A noble tree stands there, surpassing every other

in that region of manifold beauties; it is laden with richest fruit. He points it out to her and invites her to partake of its abundance. But the woman knows God's expressed will in its regard. Of every other fruit without exception she may freely eat, but not of that; such disobedience would bring death.

At her prompt refusal, the tempter plies her with arguments which reveal impatient denial of the divine right to prohibit and command, and contempt for this frail being who bears God's image. The woman lends an ear; curiosity urges her; what if his words are true? She will not die, he mockingly declares. The Almighty has deceived her. She may take and eat, and she will be as God, knowing good and evil.

What folly is hers! She trusts God's enemy, and mistrusts the God who made her and endowed her with all her gifts and graces. Self-love overcomes duty; gratitude is forgotten; the Creator's will is set at naught. The woman takes the forbidden fruit and eats; she tempts her husband as she has been tempted, and in that same moment sin enters into the Paradise of Pleasure,—sin, bringing in its train death and corruption, and shutting out the whole human race from the Paradise above.

What a dire change comes over the world in that dread moment! Man has rebelled against his Maker, and all creation, as a natural consequence, rebels against man, once its lord. The earth,

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formerly so prolific, refuses to yield her fruits unless man forces their growth by toil and sweat and pain. Beasts and birds, so docile while he enjoyed a state of innocence, fly from him now; the weak fear him, the strong seek to turn upon him and rend him. Man has chosen the part of God's enemy, and must share that enemy's eternal reprobation.

In a chamber of a humble carpenter's dwelling at Nazareth, four thousand years later, a Virgin-Bride is praying at the solemn midnight hour. Like her prophetic type, the first created woman, she too is wondrously endowed by her Creator. She alone of all mankind has been preserved intact from the stain of sin, which has hitherto defiled the soul of Eve's descendants as a consequence of her rebellion. Mary, like Eve at her creation, is immaculate in soul; she too enjoys, by reason of that purity and sinlessness, the closest union with her Maker; she too is dear to the Angels, who love to visit and protect and serve her 'whom the King desireth to honour.'

As she kneels there in the midnight stillness, a spirit-guest, in visible form, draws near to her, even as a spirit visited Eve in her innocence in Paradise. But this Angel is a spirit of light. He comes as the ambassador of the King of Heaven, in whose court he is one of the noblest princes. How great the contrast between the two interviews! How different the approach of the heaven-sent messenger

from that of the evil spirit to that other woman, four thousand years before! With what reverence and peaceful composure he enters the chamber! How lowly his attitude as he draws near! In accents of deepest respect he breathes a greeting,—for he, too, like his evil counterpart, first speaks. It is a salutation destined to live for ever: ‘Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: Blessed art thou among women.’*

How vastly different, too, is Mary’s reception of her guest from that exhibited by Eve! The latter listened eagerly to the lying promise of impossible honours, Godlike gifts, made by the tempter; she showed no fear or hesitation; she had no mistrust of the serpent, and was all the more easily led to mistrust God. Mary, on the contrary, while she hearkens to the Angel’s greeting, ‘is troubled at his saying.’ She thinks ‘with herself what manner of salutation this should be.’ She listens, but forbears to reply until the messenger has proved his divine mission. ‘Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found grace with God. Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son; and thou shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David, His father; and He shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end.’†

These are magnificent promises made to a

* St Luke i. 28.

† *Ibid.* i. 30, etc.

daughter of Juda. The long-expected Redeemer is to be born of her, and God has sent His Angel with the message. Yet Mary is not dazzled by the prospect of such unlooked-for glory. She has vowed her virginity to God; that vow cannot be broken by her will. In all submission and humility, therefore, she brings forward her doubt: 'How can this be?' How can virginity be reconciled with motherhood? Eve thought primarily of her own interests; she was impatient to grasp the honours held out by the lying spirit. Mary has a single eye to God's honour, and its maintenance by herself at whatever cost. Not even an Angel from heaven can shake her resolve to seek first what God desires. It is not that she presses forward her own will: she merely asks whether her vow of virginity is to be maintained or to be set aside by God's express command.

She has not long to wait to know the will of Heaven. She is to enjoy the unique happiness of being at one and the same time both Mother of God and Virgin of virgins,—peerless among them all. No sooner does she learn what God asks of her than her answer is prompt and unwavering: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to thy word.' The creature has given her consent, and the Creator at once takes possession of His human habitation; Mary becomes His Mother. She, the Woman predicted in the very hour of the fall of our first parents, begins her warfare with the serpent. He conquered Eve; he will be vanquished through Mary. At that supreme moment of the

Incarnation, all the prophecies of the coming Redeemer were fulfilled; at the Virgin's *Fiat*, 'the Word was made flesh'; the Messiah, 'the Desired of all nations,' began His reign upon our earth, in order to lead man back to the Paradise he had lost.

Ever since the fifth century at least, both Eastern and Western Churches have celebrated a festival in honour of the Annunciation. St Augustine gives it as an ancient tradition, coming down from Apostolic ages, that the Archangel Gabriel came with his message to Mary on March 25th, and hence the choice of that day for the keeping of the feast. So important has this solemnity been always reckoned that the Roman Church at a very early period, and the Greek Church somewhat later, set aside in its regard the ordinary custom of celebrating no festivals during Lent.

The Vesper antiphons relate the history of the great event which has rendered the day illustrious. They are wedded to the psalms consecrated by long use to the praises of the Blessed Virgin.

1. 'The Angel Gabriel was sent to Mary, a Virgin, espoused to Joseph.'

2. 'Hail, Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women.'

3. 'Fear not, Mary: thou hast found grace with God. Behold thou shalt conceive, and shalt bring forth a Son.'

4. 'And the Lord shall give unto Him the throne of David, His father; and He shall reign for ever.'

5. 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to thy word.'

Many of the sacred chants chosen for the Mass of this great festival are taken from Psalm xlv., so frequently used by the Church in praise of the Mother of God, since it is prophetic of the Incarnation,—the event celebrated on this day.

The Introit sings: 'All the rich among the people shall entreat thy countenance. After her shall virgins be brought to the King. Her neighbours shall be brought to thee in joy and gladness.' Then follows the first verse of the same psalm. Mary is here saluted as Queen of Angels and men, worthy of their united homage. It was her virginity which fitted her to become Mother of God, and it is this same holy virtue which will attract many thousands of ardent souls to follow her in the state of virginity.

The Collect prays: 'O God, by whose will, at the message of an Angel, Thy Word took flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, give ear to our humble petitions; and grant that we, who believe her to be truly the Mother of God, may be helped by her prayers.' The Church here teaches us to rest confidently in the power of Mary's intercession with her Son, true God and true Man—a power belonging to her divine maternity.

In the Lesson which stands in place of an Epistle we have the glorious prophecy by Isaias of the unique event which this feast commemorates. Speaking to the wicked King Achaz, who had

refused to accept a miraculous proof of God's continual defence of Jerusalem, the prophet announces to Juda the fact that 'a Virgin shall conceive and shall bear a Son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel.*' A portion of the same prophecy forms the Little Chapter of the Vesper Office.

From Septuagesima Sunday until Easter, the joyful Alleluia is suppressed in all the Offices of the Church, even on festivals. As this feast generally falls during the season of penance the Gradual which follows the Epistle is almost always succeeded by a Tract. Both Gradual and Tract for this day are taken from the 'bridal song,' Psalm xliv., which furnished the Introit.

'Grace is poured abroad in thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever,' are the opening words of the Gradual. Through the momentous consent uttered by Mary—'Be it done to me according to thy word,'—she became the channel of grace to mankind. 'Because of truth and meekness and justice; and thy right hand shall conduct thee wonderfully.' These words speak of the perfection of virtue in the soul of the Virgin of Nazareth, which attracted the Heavenly Spouse to choose her for His Bride. The Tract carries on the idea in its opening phrase: 'Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thine ear; for the King hath greatly desired thy beauty.' The remainder of the Tract is almost identical with the Introit.

The Gospel recounts the simple yet wondrous

* Isaias vii.

story of the interview between the Angel and Our Lady. For the minute particulars of the scene, as also for other events of the Sacred Infancy, known to Mary alone, St Luke, who is the only Evangelist to narrate them, must have been indebted to the Holy Virgin herself. This thought renders the narrative still more precious: 'At that time the Angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a Virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the Virgin's name was Mary. And the Angel, being come in, said unto her: Hail, full of grace; the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women. . . '*

An unwonted incident may be witnessed in every sung Mass on this festival. Celebrant and sacred ministers all kneel while the choir sings, '*Et incarnatus est . . . Et Homo factus est.*' The ceremony is observed in the Mass of this feast and that of Christmas Day only; it is a solemn act of worship paid to the Incarnate Son of God on the occasions of His taking flesh and of His birth into the world.

The prophecy contained in the Lesson is repeated in the Communion verse: 'Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel.' Particularly appropriate are these words, sung, as they are intended to be, during the distribution of Holy Communion; for the name Emmanuel, as St Matthew's Gospel tells us, signifies 'God with us'; and never is He in more

* St Luke i.

close union with His creatures than in the supreme moment of His sacramental visit.

The Post-Communion Prayer is that so familiar to us all in the frequently repeated Angelus; while it reminds us that those great mysteries of salvation—the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ—were the outcome of the event we commemorate on this festival, it prays that we may reap the fulness of the grace contained in each.

Such, in short, are some of the chief features of the history and the liturgy of this solemn feast. May the consideration of the mysteries it commemorates and of the glories it reveals fill us with a more sublime appreciation of God's unfailing mercy toward sinful man, while it increases our reverence for the Virgin Mother, and our confidence in her powerful help toward the attainment of salvation!

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THE SEVEN SORROWS

CHAPTER VI

THE SEVEN SORROWS

Friday after Passion Sunday.

IN the far-off days when Heli the priest judged Israel, a young Hebrew mother climbed the ascent to Shiloh, where the Tabernacle of the Lord then stood. In her arms she bore her little son; and in that holy spot, the appointed place of sacrifice, with prayers and oblations she dedicated him 'all the days of his life' to the Lord, presenting him to the priest to 'abide always there.*' That mother was Anna; the child was Samuel, who was destined to become a mighty prophet, the deliverer of God's people, their teacher and judge, and the founder of their kingdom. How generous that mother's sacrifice! Only a few years before, she had prayed in that same spot, with fervent desire and the outpouring of many tears, that God would grant her a man-child. Her prayer had been heard and answered; and now she returned to God, as she had vowed to do, the treasure He had bestowed.

Yet, however willingly and gratefully she made the sacrifice, it would have been contrary to nature not to have felt the pang caused by the loss of her

* 1. Kings i. and ii.

dearest possession. That little one, so fondly loved, was to be hers no longer. She would be unable to watch with a mother's delight the daily growth of his mental and bodily powers; he would grow up among strange scenes and unfamiliar faces, far away from her. She must renounce all a mother's privileges in his regard; no longer may she tend and care for him—nurse him in sickness, supply his childish wants, console him in his infantine sorrows, share the simple joys of later childhood, be in all things his dearest and most trusted confidante. All this and far more—a mother's heart alone can fathom the depth of that renunciation—was entailed in Anna's sacrifice. Yet so generous her offering that she could lift heart and voice in a canticle of thanksgiving to God, because He had blessed His handmaid, who had trusted in Him.

Samuel is a type of Christ. He had been born of a childless mother in answer to prayer: Jesus was the Son of a Virgin. Samuel was devoted from childhood to God's service: Jesus began in boyhood to be about His 'Father's business.' Samuel was the teacher of the aged Heli: Jesus taught the doctors in the Temple. As Samuel rescued his people from their enemies the Philistines, so also did Jesus deliver His people—and from a far more deadly foe. Samuel judged Israel only: Jesus will judge the whole world. Samuel founded an earthly kingdom: Jesus has established a kingdom which will endure for ever.

In like manner, Anna foreshadowed the Mother

of Jesus. Anna's name meant 'grace': Mary was 'full of grace.' Both mothers offered to God a canticle of praise and thanksgiving. Anna sang, 'My heart hath rejoiced in the Lord, . . . because I have joyed in thy salvation. There is none holy as the Lord is, . . . and there is none strong like our God. . . They that were full before have hired out themselves for bread; and the hungry are filled. The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich; He humbleth and He exalteth. He raiseth the needy from the dust, and lifteth the poor man from the dung-hill, that he may sit with princes, and hold the throne of glory.' What a striking foreshadowing of the *Magnificat*! 'My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. . . He that is mighty hath done great things to me, and holy is His name. . . He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble. . . .'

But Anna is a still more perfect type of Mary in her sacrifice of her beloved son. She offers him willingly to become the Saviour of his race; she deprives herself of the joy of his presence, that God may take him to dwell in His Tabernacle. Mary's offering is infinitely greater. She, too, accompanies her Son to the height of the mountain of sacrifice—up to Calvary, the little hill surrounded by greater ones, even as Shiloh stood among its guardian mountains. She offers Him to become the Saviour of the world, through the sacrifice of His sacred body—holy and undefiled—upon the altar of the Cross.

She gives back her Beloved to God, who gave Him to her, and who has decreed this incomparable sacrifice as the prelude to everlasting glory in the eternal Tabernacle on high.

Whatever may have been the keenness of Anna's sorrow at parting with her dear one, it cannot be compared with the anguish of Mary's soul in the hour of her sacrifice. 'To what shall I compare thee, . . . to what shall I equal thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Sion? For great as the sea is thy destruction. Who shall heal thee?''* Thus the prophet sang of old, and the Church applies the lament to the sorrowful Mother of Jesus. Her Son was God as well as man, and therefore the bond between them was more close and more sacred than that which united any other mother and son. His offering was to atone for all sin, and to restore man to God and to His loving friendship. In so far, Mary rejoiced in her sacrifice. Yet all the time her heart was torn with anguish; holy as He was, dear as He was to her, He had to sustain the greatest intensity of suffering that the devil or man (his agent) could invent. Because Jesus had to endure the deepest humiliation and the bitterest sufferings that the world had ever seen, or would ever see again, His Mother must needs share His anguish.

There is in this a mystery of which we must not lose sight. As Anna had accepted all the suffering which the birth of her son was to bring, so Mary

* Lament. Jerem. ii. 13

in a far higher and nobler spirit, accepted her lot. When she consented to become the Mother of Him who was to 'save His people from their sins,' she embraced whatever of joy or sorrow that office might entail. She was, indeed, to take a great part in the world's redemption. Not only did she furnish, by the power of the Holy Ghost, the body wherewith Jesus was to suffer, but she was destined by her office of Mother of the Redeemer to offer that great sacrifice in union with her Son. It is one way in which she brings about the fulfilment of the promise made by God in Eden when He told the tempter of the Woman's ultimate victory: 'She shall crush thy head.' Under the Tree of the Cross Mary was to undo the work of Eve under the tree in Paradise. As God waited for her consent before sending His Son to be born of her, so He desired her willing offering of that Son for the salvation of the human race. Therefore it is that Mary *stands* on Calvary, taking her part in that wondrous sacrifice. 'She stood,' says St Ambrose, 'gazing with maternal love on the wounds of her Son; and thus she stood, not waiting for her Jesus to die, but for the world to be saved.'*

It is not to be wondered at, seeing the close connection between the sufferings of Jesus and the compassion of Mary, that those Christians who have been drawn to the more assiduous contemplation of the former should have been attracted by the latter. Consequently Mary's sorrows have been

* In Lucam Cap. xxiii.

the cherished devotion of many holy souls in all ages. But, like other devotions in the Church, this also has been of gradual growth. By the early part of the thirteenth century it had taken sufficient hold upon pious Catholics to lead to the institution of a new religious Order—that of the Servites,—which had for its special aim the contemplation of Mary's dolours and the propagation of devotion to them.

The first mention of a feast in honour of Our Lady's Sorrows occurs in 1423, when the Council of Cologne, to make reparation for Hussite irreverences, instituted the festival of 'The Anguish and Sorrow of the Blessed Virgin Mary.' After that date, a similar feast began to be observed in other countries; it bore various titles—'The Compassion of Our Lady,' 'Our Lady of Pity,' etc. For the enumeration of the 'Seven Sorrows' was not general till a later date, although it is attributed to the Servite Order.

It was not until the eighteenth century that the feast, already celebrated in many churches on the Friday in Passion Week, was extended to the whole Church. Pope Benedict XIII accomplished this by a decree of April 22nd, 1727, adopting for the festival the title of 'The Seven Dolours of the Blessed Virgin Mary.' A second feast was established on the third Sunday of September by Pius VII. in 1814. It was the extension to the whole Church of that granted to the Servites in 1688. The Pope had found consolation in his five years of

captivity under Napoleon by the contemplation of Mary's sorrows, and the establishment of the festival was in thanksgiving.

Although the Lenten feast bears the same title as that in September, an examination of its liturgy will show that it honours chiefly the one special dolour of the presence of Our Lady under the Cross of Calvary. The Seven Sorrows—so called because the chief sufferings are recounted under seven heads, and not because they were limited to seven only—are: Simeon's prophecy of the sword of sorrow; the Flight into Egypt; the Three Days' Loss: the Meeting with Jesus bearing His Cross; Mary standing under the Cross; Mary receiving the sacred body of Jesus; the Burial of Our Lord.

The antiphons for the Offices of Vespers and Lauds are selected from the mystic Canticle of Canticles; they speak of Mary's desolation in the loss of her Beloved. It is worthy of note that the Vesper psalms are those appointed for the last days of Holy Week, and refer specially to the Passion. The antiphons, translated into English, run as follows:

1. 'I will go to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense.' (Calvary, although a place of bitter sorrow—myrrh,—is the mountain of sacrifice whose oblation rises to Heaven with a sweet odour.)

2. 'My beloved is white and ruddy; the hairs of his head are as the purple of the king bound in the channel.' (The allusion is to the delicate body made red with blood; the hair bound with its

thorny crown, from which streams of blood descend.)

3. 'Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou most beautiful of women? Whither is thy beloved turned aside?'

4. 'A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me; he shall abide between my breasts.' (The sacred body is to rest in the Mother's bosom; its wounds are a source of sorrow.)

5. 'Stay me up with flowers, compass me about with apples, because I languish with love.' (The Mother's intense love causes her soul to faint at sight of the sufferings of her dear one; without the support of grace—bringing sweetness and refreshment—she could not endure her lot.)

The *Capitulum* is taken from the vivid description of the Passion given in prophecy by Isaias ages before: 'Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? etc.'*

The hymn is that loving lament known as the *Stabat Mater*, from its first Latin words, *Stabat Mater dolorosa*—'The Mother stood all sorrowful.' This beautiful poem is divided among the Offices of Vespers, Matins, and Lauds; it also stands between the Epistle and Gospel of the Mass in the form of a sequence. Although so popular a hymn in the Catholic Church, its authorship has never been accurately determined; it dates from about the thirteenth century. Among the various writers to whom it has been ascribed, the most probable

* Chapter liii.

seems to be either Pope Innocent III. or the Franciscan, B. Jacopone de Todi.

The antiphon to the *Magnificat* recalls the prophecy of Simeon—the first of the dolours: 'Thine own soul [said Simeon to Mary] a sword shall pierce.'*

The Mass is that used by the Servite Order long before the feast was made universal. With the exception of the necessary changes consequent on the Lenten rite, it is nearly identical with that used on the September festival.

The Introit reveals its modern construction in having no psalm attached. It is taken from the Gospel describing the weeping women who stood in company with the Sorrowful Mother under the Cross of Calvary. 'There stood by the Cross of Jesus his Mother, and his Mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Salome, and Mary Magdalene.' Then, in place of a psalm, are the following words: 'Woman behold thy Son, said Jesus; to the disciple however, Behold thy Mother. *Gloria Patri*, etc.†

The Collect runs thus: 'O God in whose Passion, according to the Prophecy of Simeon, a sword of sorrow pierced the most sweet soul of the glorious Mary, Mother and Virgin, grant, in Thy mercy, that we who call to mind with veneration her transfixion and suffering, by the glorious merits and prayers of all the saints faithfully standing by the Cross interceding for us, may obtain the happy effects of Thy Passion!'

* St Luke ii. 35.

† St John xix. 25, etc.

The Lesson, in place of an Epistle, is from the Book of Judith. It recounts the glories of the valiant woman who became the deliverer of her people: 'Blessed art thou . . . above all women upon earth. . . The Lord . . . hath so magnified thy name this day, that thy praise shall not depart out of the mouth of men. Thou . . . hast prevented our ruin in the presence of our God.* For the Church regards Mary as associated closely with our Blessed Lord in the Redemption.

The Gradual compassionates Mary's woes: 'Thou art sorrowful and worthy of tears, O Virgin Mary, standing near the Cross of the Lord Jesus, thy Son, our Redeemer! O Virgin Mother of God, He whom the whole world doth not contain, beareth this punishment of the Cross; He the author of life being made Man.' Then follows the Tract: 'Holy Mary, the Queen of Heaven, and mistress of the world, stood by the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, full of sadness.' 'O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow!' The Sequence, *Stabat Mater*, follows.

The Gospel is St John's short account of the last moments of Jesus: 'Now there stood by the Cross of Jesus His Mother. . . . Woman, behold thy son. . . . To the disciple, Behold thy Mother. And from that hour the disciple took her to his own.'†

Under the Cross, Mary became the Mother of Mercy; therefore does the Offertory verse implore

* Judith xiii. 23 etc.

† St John xix. 25.

her loving intercession for sinners: 'Be mindful, O Virgin Mother of God, when thou standest in the sight of the Lord, to speak good things for us, that He may turn away His anger from us!'

The Communion verse is as follows: 'Happy senses of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which without dying deserved the palm of martyrdom beneath the Cross of Our Lord!' The peace of Mary's soul in that hour of anguish was maintained by her perfect resignation to the will of God. The Church points this out in the above verse, as a reminder to us that we must hope to obtain that peace of God through our participation in the sacred mysteries of the altar, the continuation of the Sacrifice of the Cross.

We may conclude with a short extract from the loving address to the Blessed Virgin from the pen of the devout Abbot Guéranger, in his notice of this feast: 'O Mother of Sorrows, we come before thee on this feast of thy Dolours, to offer thee our filial love. . . . What proofs hast thou not unceasingly given us of thy maternal tenderness, O Queen of Mercy, O Refuge of Sinners, O untiring Advocate for us in all our miseries! Deign, sweet Mother, to watch over us during these days of grace. Give us to feel and relish the Passion of thy Son. . . . Make us enter into all its mysteries, that so our souls, redeemed by the blood of thy Son, and helped by thy tears, may be thoroughly converted to the Lord, and persevere henceforward faithful in His service!'

* *Liturg. Year, Passiontide*, p. 175:

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MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

CHAPTER VII

MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

May 24th.

ASSUERUS, the mighty monarch of the Medes and Persians, who ruled over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia, was enthroned in royal state in the presence chamber of his palace at Shushan, the capital of his kingdom. His throne was of marble and gold, set with many costly gems; his robes of golden sheen glittered with countless jewels; upon his head was the diadem of royalty, and in his hand the sceptre of power. Around him stood his princes and councillors, and ministering to him were innumerable slaves and attendant warriors.

Into this scene of dazzling splendour a suppliant woman dares to penetrate unbidden. Esther, the beautiful Jewess, whom the King has raised from her low estate to queenly rank, is in sore distress. By the machinations of a cruel and crafty enemy, the whole Jewish race has been doomed to swift and sure destruction. Devoted love for her people has filled Esther with a courage unparalleled. Arrayed in her most splendid apparel—a Queen

'adorned with her jewels'—she makes her way, attended by two of her women, to the hall of state. It was her only resource. 'I will go in to the King,' she had said, 'against the law, not being called, and expose myself to death and to danger.'*

Trembling and faint with apprehension, she enters, her heart 'full of anguish and exceeding great fear.' But, though the King's anger was stirred, the sight of the beautiful queen pleased his eyes—'And God changed the King's spirit into mildness.' He held out to her the golden sceptre, and she drew near and kissed it. 'Fear not,' he said. 'Thou shalt not die.' 'What wilt thou, Queen Esther? What is thy request? If thou shouldst ask even one half of the kingdom, it shall be given to thee.' Her cause was won; for later on, when she interceded for the rescue of her nation from impending doom, her prayer was generously granted. The chosen people of God were saved from destruction, and the adversary overthrown and brought to shame; while, in memory of that signal deliverance, a solemn feast was henceforth celebrated every year by the Jews for all time.

How often has a Queen, raised from lowliness to a glory far higher than earth can give, ventured to intercede for the rescue of her people from danger and destruction! Mary, Queen of Heaven, has drawn near to the Eternal King, enthroned in majesty amid the dazzling splendours of His celestial courts, surrounded by His attendant

* Esther iv. 16, v. and xv.

princes and the warriors of His angelic hosts; with lowly importunity she has pleaded the cause of those in distress. And her beauty of soul has pleased the King, and He has granted her petition. The ever-glorious title under which we honour her —‘Help of Christians’—is a lasting memorial of such intercession.

In the early part of the sixteenth century, the Turks were deservedly regarded by the Christian peoples of Europe as the most formidable adversaries of the Faith. They possessed powerful forces both on land and sea, and wherever they gained the ascendancy they propagated by the sword the false religion of Mahomet; thus, both Christianity and civilisation disappeared in regions where they pushed their way as conquerors. No wonder, then, if Europe beheld with dismay the vast preparations made by Selim II, after he had seized Cyprus in 1571, to bring about, as he declared he would, the conquest of all the Western kingdoms.

The holy and powerful Pope who then sat in Peter’s Chair, St Pius V, alarmed at the prospect of a Mahometan invasion of Europe, called upon all Christian princes to take up arms against the common foe. His appeal was received with apathy, for the most part; so many excused themselves from taking part in the holy war, on account of the unsettled state of their own dominions, that but a comparatively small army could be raised to withstand the vast hordes of the infidel.

The Christian forces, numbering but twenty thousand men, with the addition of a small fleet, relied upon the blessing of the Vicar of Christ to bring success to their arms, and joined in battle with the Turks on October 7th, near the Island of Lepanto. The result was marvellous: the infidel forces, after losing thirty thousand in battle, made a hasty retreat, leaving behind them five thousand prisoners. From that hour their power declined.

But what was the strength behind the material arms of the victors? The Queen of Heaven had begged the salvation of her people from the destruction which threatened them. To her, as to a nursing mother, the faithful of Christ had been commended from the Cross whereon her Son was dying; to her, therefore, it belonged to beseech for them the clemency of the great King of Heaven and earth. The wondrous victory, far exceeding all human expectation, was ascribed to the intervention of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in answer to the unceasing prayers of Christians; for at the very hour of its occurrence the Roman confraternities, not to speak of other European peoples, were united in a public recitation of the Rosary to obtain help from Heaven in that hour of direst need. It was in perpetual memory of the grace thus bestowed that the Pope added to the Litany of Loreto the invocation, 'Help of Christians, pray for us!'

It was at a later age, and to the rescue of another Pius, and of the people who suffered in

sympathy with him, that the Help of Christians deigned to show no less compassionately her never-ceasing care for her children. In 1808 the victorious Napoleon occupied Rome with his troops; the Cardinals were forced to leave the city, and the Sovereign Pontiff, Pius VII, was required to renounce all claim to his temporal kingship. When the faithful steward of his Divine Master refused to betray his trust, the victor resolved to accomplish his ends by brute force. On July 6, 1809, the Pope was carried off from Rome as a prisoner, and remained for five years in captivity, subjected to outrage and contempt such as few Pontiffs have experienced since the primitive ages when Popes were usually martyrs.

Pope Pius never ceased to cry for help to her who is so constant in defence of the Church of Christ. True to her title, 'Help of Christians,' she brought about his release and triumphant return, contrary to all expectation, to his city of Rome. It was in gratitude for so manifest a bounty that the Pope instituted the feast in question, fixing its observance on May 24th, the day on which he again entered Rome, amid the acclamations of its people and the joy of Christendom. Thus, as Esther's courageous intervention for the salvation of her race was gratefully commemorated by the institution of a perpetually recurring festival, so the memory of Mary's loving aid is kept alive in a similar manner in the Christian Church for all ages.

We turn now to the liturgy of the feast we are considering. For the Office of Vespers no special antiphons are provided; those appointed for ordinary feasts of the Blessed Virgin, and the psalms they accompany, are used. It will be well to say a word or two in explanation of them, since we shall frequently meet with them in treating of other lesser feasts of Our Lady. They are as follows:

1. 'While the King was at his repose, my spikenard gave forth its odour of sweetness.' This, in common with the antiphons which follow, is taken from the Canticle of Canticles. As a whole, they 'form a series of pictures of Our Lady's relations with Our Lord,' says Father Taunton, in his 'Little Office of Our Lady.' 'This first one refers to the Incarnation. While the King [God the Son] was reposing in the unspeakable joy of the Eternal Father, He was attracted to earth by the immaculate soul of Mary, which, like spikenard, gave forth its odour.'

2. 'His left hand is under my head and his right hand embraces me.' This may be interpreted of the Divine Maternity; it suggests, as the same writer observes, 'the gracious vision of the Maiden Mother bearing in her arms her Son, who tenderly embraces her.'

3. 'I am black but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem! Therefore hath the King loved me and brought me into his innermost chamber.' Here is represented Mary under the Cross, her

beauty discoloured by grief; an object of the tender love of Jesus, because of her compassion for Him.

4. 'The winter is past, the rain is over and gone: arise, my love, and come away.' Mary is assumed into Heaven in reward for her faithfulness.

5. 'Thou art made beauteous and sweet in thy delights, O Holy Mother of God.' Mary is crowned in Heaven.

A special feature of the Office for this feast are the proper hymns for Vespers and Lauds. They very beautifully express the gratitude due to Our Lady for her ever-ready help in danger and difficulty. The Vesper hymn is more particularly concerned with the triumph wrought in the return of Pope Pius VII to his city after his years of exile. That for Lauds celebrates in more general terms Mary's power to put to flight all the enemies of the Church.

The antiphon to the *Magnificat* is also proper: 'Behold, Mary was our hope; to her have we fled for help, that she might deliver us; and she came to our aid.'

In the Mass, we have the familiar Introit, *Salve, Sancta Parens*—'Hail, Holy Mother'—so frequently sung on Our Lady's festivals.

The Collect begs for grace to fight against our spiritual adversaries with the help of our powerful Mother: 'O almighty and merciful God, who hast wonderfully provided perpetual succour for the defence of Christian people in the Most Blessed Virgin Mary; mercifully grant that, contending

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during life under the protection of such patronage, we may be enabled to gain the victory over the malignant enemy in death.'

In place of the Epistle we have a Lesson from the Book of Ecclesiasticus,* in which the praises of holy Wisdom are applied to the blessed Mother of God. After declaring the eternal decree of the creation of the Virgin Mother, the Lesson continues: 'And so was I established in Sion, and in the holy city likewise I rested; and my power was in Jerusalem.' Mary's power is almost boundless, now that she rests in the Jerusalem above—'established' there as the Queen of Angels and men.

According to the Paschal rite, with which the feast is usually celebrated, in place of the Gradual are sung two Alleluia verses. The first celebrates the restoration of peace between God and man through Mary: 'Alleluia. The Rod of Jesse hath brought forth its Flower; a Virgin hath conceived Him who is God and Man. God hath restored peace by uniting in Himself the lowest with the highest, Alleluia.' The second is the Angelic Salutation: 'Hail, Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women. Alleluia.' We are reminded of the words of praise offered to Judith when she had overthrown the enemy of her people: 'Blessed art thou. . . . above all women upon earth.'† It was but a prophecy of Mary's power in resisting all the enemies of God's people, and bringing their devices to nought.

* ch. xxiv.

† Judith xiii.

The Gospel speaks of the 'woman in the crowd' who lifted up her voice to bless the womb that bore Our Lord and the breasts that nourished Him. Jesus corroborates the praise offered to His Mother. 'Yea,' He says. His Mother is truly blessed even in having given birth to Him. He goes further and proclaims Mary as more blessed, because of her faith and holiness: 'Yea, rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.'* This Mary did; for the Evangelist records of her: 'His Mother kept all these words in her heart.'† The like praise was uttered by St Elizabeth in the Visitation: 'Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb. . . . And blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord.§ These are the two motives for which we honour Our Lady: because she is the Mother of the Word made Flesh, and because she is the purest and most perfect of all the children of God. And for these reasons also is she specially beloved by the Eternal Father, and is able to obtain from Him all that she asks. 'What wilt thou?' He says. 'What is thy request?' And He holds out to her the sceptre of power in loving condescension.

As an Offertory-verse we have again the salutation of the Angel joined to that of St Elizabeth, so familiar to every Catholic under the title of *Ave Maria*: 'Hail, Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with

* St Luke xi. † *Ibid.* ii, 51. § *Ibid.* i. 42.

thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb.' It would seem as though Holy Church wished to remind us that the lesson taught by the Gospel should never be lost sight of: Mary's power with God rests on her Divine Maternity and her own personal sanctity—higher in almost infinite degree than that of any saint or Angel. But we may find here another lesson also: that the 'Hail Mary' is a prayer dear to God. The victory of Lepanto, on account of which the title 'Help of Christians' was given to Our Lady, was won by the constant repetition of that prayer, as we have seen; nor can we doubt that the *Ave Maria* was often on the lips of the exiled Pius VII during his captivity.

The Communion verse is one frequently met with in the liturgy of Our Lady's lesser feasts: 'Blessed is the womb of the Virgin Mary, which bore the Son of the Eternal Father.' Here are the same words used by that woman of whom the Gospel speaks. It is after receiving that same Son of God under the sacramental species that we share in Mary's privilege of bearing within us God Himself, and become more precious in His sight. This is expressed in the Post-Communion Prayer: 'Be mindful, O Lord, of Thy people who are refreshed by the partaking of Thy body and blood; that by the help of Thy Holy Mother, they may be delivered from all evil and from every danger, and preserved in every good work.'

We have still to point out the fulfilment of the

type afforded by Esther, in the punishment of the enemies of God's people. We may read of it in the pages of history. With regard to the Turks, their power was for ever weakened at Lepanto; and, though they have since made efforts to humble the Christian arms, it has always been with less pride and with less copious forces, and the result has always been disastrous to themselves.

No less striking is the punishment meted out to the haughty Napoleon, who had impiously striven against the leader of the people of God, the Vicar of Christ on earth. He was not only cast down from his high estate, but forced to sign his abdication in the very palace of Fontainebleau in which he had kept the Pope a prisoner. Moreover, in expiation of the five years of Pius VII's captivity, Napoleon had to suffer a like punishment, and for the same length of time.

But Mary is Mother of Mercy, and the fallen Emperor was led, through her intercession we need not doubt, to apply to the Pope he had wronged for the restoration of the communion with Holy Church of which he had been deprived; and when his time came to depart this life, it was with the strength and consolation afforded to the dying Christian by the Sacraments. In this, no less than in the triumph of Pius VII, did the Blessed Virgin show herself to be the 'Help of Christians.'

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**O U R L A D Y O F
P E R P E T U A L S U C C O U R**

CHAPTER VIII

OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL SUCCOUR

Sunday nearest to the Feast of St John Bapt.

THE visitor to Rome, walking from St John Lateran to the Basilica of St Mary Major, passes on his way through the Via Merulana, a graceful little Gothic church—an unusual feature in Rome. It is that dedicated to St Alphonsus and served by the Redemptorist Fathers. If you enter the building at certain times, when there is anything like a concourse of people, you are at once attracted by a small painting, richly framed, enshrined high above the chief altar, and surrounded by burning lights whenever its shrouding curtains are drawn back. That picture is the cause of the institution of the feast of which we are about to treat.

It is scarcely necessary, since copies of the picture are so widely spread, to describe the Madonna of Perpetual Succour. It is enough to refer to its Byzantine style of execution, and the beauty of the somewhat archaic features of the Mother and Child. The accompanying Angels, as the Greek inscriptions testify, are St Michael and

St Gabriel. This little painting has a striking history.

Toward the end of the fifteenth century the Turks were bent on devastating the southern countries of Europe, and the inhabitants of those lands where the advent of the dreaded adversary was anticipated fled in terror to various places of refuge. Thus it came to pass that a pious merchant belonging to the island of Crete set sail for Italy, taking with him a sacred picture of Our Lady, toward which great devotion had existed in the island, and which was reputed to have been the means of bringing about miraculous cures. The very voyage was not without manifest signs of Our Lady's protecting care; for a fierce and dangerous tempest was calmed by the invocation of Mary Star of the Sea.

Arrived in Rome with his precious burden the good merchant fell grievously ill. Feeling his end approaching, he earnestly exhorted the people of the house in which he was lodging to take care that the picture should be placed in some public church, where it might receive the veneration that was its due. When he had passed away, those who had charge of the sacred picture clung to it with selfish desire, and forbore to carry out his injunction. Many were the visitations of God upon that family in punishment of their presumption. Yet, although Our Lady herself is said to have more than once appeared to those self-constituted custodians, and expressed her wish that the paint-

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ing should be placed in a church, they still delayed. At length, led by the fear of what their disobedience might bring upon them, they consented to relinquish their treasure. Our Lady had designated the spot where she wished it to be enshrined: between her own church and that of her beloved John. Thus it came to pass that in 1499 the picture was deposited in the care of the Hermits of St Augustin, in their church of St Matthew, situated in the Via Merulana, in the very position described by Our Lady in vision.

During the first century of its sojourn in the church of St Matthew, the reverence of the Roman people toward it continually increased, until the church became one of the most frequented shrines in the city. Rich offerings poured in; the church was beautified and enriched by the piety and munificence of Popes and Cardinals, and began to be regarded as the place of Mary's predilection. In the first translation of the painting to St Matthew's, the power of the Mother of God began to appear. A paralytic who touched the picture with faith and devotion was at once made whole. After that many other miracles from time to time witnessed to the efficacy of prayers offered before it. Devotion to the picture continued to be manifested, even though less conspicuously, in the three hundred years it remained in that church.

But evil days came; piety waned; the church fell into decay, and the religious who served it grew fewer in number until the monastery had to

be closed. One community after another held the church for a few years; and finally, between 1809 and 1815, when Bonaparte was in power, it was pulled down, and the Irish Augustinians who then were in possession removed to other monasteries. The chief ornaments of the church were taken to St John Lateran; the sacred picture, carried away by the exiled religious, was lost sight of during those eventful years, and the memory of the once famous shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour died away. But the picture was in God's keeping, and the history of its preservation and subsequent restoration to public honour is as striking as any of the wonders worked by its means.

An old lay brother of the dispersed community of Augustinians had found a home in the little monastery of St Maria in Posterula. During the years he lived there—between 1840 and 1853—a pious boy who frequented the church, Michael Marchi by name, became acquainted with the old man, and grew much attached to him. In one of the conversations in which the venerable brother was accustomed to relate his varied experiences, he spoke of the old church of St Matthew; and, taking the boy into a chapel within the monastery, he pointed out a dingy little picture which hung there. 'That picture was once venerated in the church I was speaking of,' he said. 'Many miracles have been wrought through it.' Often and often he would return to the same subject, striving to impress the boy with the real value of

the treasure. 'Do not forget what I tell you,' he would say. 'Bear in mind all that I have said about Our Lady's wonderful picture.'

The old man died; the boy, in course of time, became a Redemptorist. He had forgotten all about the forsaken picture, until one day a member of the same community, looking up the history of the church of St Matthew, came upon an account of the famous Madonna formerly venerated there. At once Father Marchi recalled the story of the lay brother, and recognised the identity of the picture in the old Augustinian house with that honoured in St Matthew's. Another circumstance brought the subject into prominent notice not long after. In 1863, Father Blosi, a Jesuit, was preaching a course of sermons upon Our Lady's shrines in Rome. Among them he included the church of St Matthew where, at Mary's own desire, her picture was enshrined and became greatly honoured. 'Would that some one here might discover that picture,' he exclaimed, 'and place it again in a church near its old home—between the Lateran and Liberian Basilicas! It may be that God has hidden the treasure from danger and will bring it back with the return of peace.'

These fervent words excited in the hearts of Father Marchi and his fellow-Redemptorists the desire of obtaining possession of the picture for their own church of St Alphonsus, which stood upon property belonging to the former church of

St Matthew. At their petition Pius IX directed that the picture should be given to them. Thus in 1866, nearly sixty years after its removal, the Madonna of Perpetual Succour was carried back in solemn procession to the same locality in which it had been honoured for at least three centuries.

No sooner was the picture brought to the light of day than Mary's power again began to show itself. Two striking miracles were wrought on the route of the procession which conducted it back in triumph. A sorrowing woman held up at a window a little boy of four, who was dying of gastric fever. Full of faith the woman cried: 'Good Mother, either cure him or take him with thee to Paradise!' Her prayer was heard: the child at once began to recover, and in a few days was well enough to be carried to the church in thanksgiving. The other case was that of a girl of eight, quite paralyzed. Her mother invoked Our Lady as the picture was borne past, and a partial cure immediately took place. After the erection of the picture in the church, the woman took the child there, and kneeling before the altar, begged of Mary a complete restoration to health. 'Holy Mary,' she cried, 'finish what you have begun!' And her prayer was heard.

Such marvels as these helped greatly to spread abroad the fame of the miraculous picture; and the cultus of Our Lady, under the title of Perpetual Succour, increased rapidly. Not only before her picture in Rome, but even by means of copies

of the painting Mary deigned to show her maternal love for those who appealed to her as her needy children. Thus the devotion to her under the new title became known and loved in many lands.

Nor was the power of the Mother of Perpetual Succour limited to the cure of bodily ailments. By her intercession diseases of the soul were driven away. Obstinate sinners, through the touch of the little picture, received the grace of contrition; long-standing animosities were healed, bad habits were overcome, virtues were implanted in the souls of many through the same means.

Struck by the devotion of Catholics and the results which followed its practice, Pius IX granted permission to the Redemptorist Fathers to celebrate a feast in honour of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, with proper Mass and Office, on the Sunday nearest to the festival of St John the Baptist. That day recalled the solemn coronation of the picture by the Canons of the Vatican Basilica on June 23rd, 1867.

The liturgy of the feast is well worth examination, and we will briefly sketch it here.

The antiphons for Vespers and Lauds are as follows :

1. 'Blessed art thou, O Virgin Mary, by the Lord, the most high God, above all women upon the earth.'

2. 'He that is mighty hath done great things to thee, O Mary; and His mercy is from generation unto generation, to them that fear Him.'

3. 'Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honour of our people.'

4. 'Through thee, O Immaculate Virgin, life which had been lost was given to us; who didst receive progeny from Heaven and didst bring forth the Saviour of the world!'

5 'Despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us from all dangers, O Holy Mother of God!'

The *capitulum* is taken from the Book of Proverbs.* The words there attributed to holy Wisdom are put into the mouth of Our Lady: 'Blessed is the man that heareth me, and that watcheth daily at my gates, and waiteth at the posts of my doors. He that shall find me, shall find life, and shall have salvation from the Lord.'

The hymn for Vespers is the *Ave Maris Stella*, common to most of Our Lady's festivals. For Lauds is used a beautiful proper hymn, which calls upon Mary for help in every necessity—when the soul is bound by sin, afflicted by troubles and sorrows, or agonising in the hour of death.

The antiphon for the *Magnificat* at second Vespers runs as follows: 'To thee do we fly, O Mary, our Life, our Sweetness, and our Hope! Help thou the people who are falling, yet who long to rise: thou who didst give birth, while Nature wondered, to thine own Divine Creator.'

In the liturgy of the Mass, the Introit is that so often met with on festivals of Our Lady; it is the

* ch. viii.

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joyful *Gaudeamus*: 'Let us all rejoice in the Lord, while we celebrate a festival in honour of Blessed Mary the Virgin, on whose solemnity the angels are joyful and extol the Son of God.' The psalm attached is the forty-fourth—the mystic nuptial canticle.

The Collect for Mass and Office is the following: 'O Almighty and merciful God, who hast given to us the picture of Thy Blessed Mother to be venerated under the special title of Perpetual Succour: grant, in Thy loving-kindness, that amid all the changes of our earthly course we may be defended by the never-failing protection of the same Immaculate Mary ever Virgin, so that we may deserve to attain to the rewards of Thy eternal redemption.'

The Lesson from Ecclesiasticus,* in place of an Epistle, celebrates the praises of holy Wisdom. Such praises are particularly appropriate to her who brought forth Him who is Divine Wisdom. How great the confidence in Mary's continual help expressed in such words as the following: 'I am the Mother of fair love and of fear and of knowledge and of holy hope. In me is all grace of the way and of the truth; in me is all hope of life and of virtue. . . . He that hearkeneth to me shall not be confounded; and they that work by me shall not sin.'

The Gradual praises the beauty of Mary's soul: 'Altogether beautiful and sweet art thou, O

* Chap. xxiv.

G

Daughter of Sion—fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array.* The latter words, expressive of the power with which God has endowed her, seem to have suggested the succeeding phrase, originally addressed to the triumphant Judith, that familiar type of Mary: 'The Lord hath blessed thee by His power, because by thee He hath brought our enemies to nought.'† Then follows the *Ave Maria*, in the form of Alleluia verse.

The Gospel recounts, in the words of St John, the scene under the cross of Calvary, when Jesus gave His Mother to be the Mother of all mankind—a never-failing helper and protector to her children.

The Offertory recalls the all-powerful influence of Our Lady with her Divine Son, now that she is ever in His presence amid the glory and delights of the courts of heaven. The words seem to have been suggested by the request of Mardochai to Esther of old, when he desired her to 'speak to the king,' and thus deliver her people from death. 'Be mindful, O Virgin Mother, to speak good things for us in the presence of God, that He may turn away His anger from us!'

The Communion verse earnestly begs the intercession of her who brought into the world the Redeemer, who has just been received by His people as the Food of their souls. 'O all-worthy Queen of the world, Mary, ever a Virgin, procure for us by thy

* Cantic. vi.

† Judith xiii. 22.

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intercession peace and salvation—thou who didst give birth to Christ, the Lord and Saviour of us all!’

Thus does the beautiful liturgy of this festival impress us with the importance of having unwearied confidence in the watchful care and powerful aid of our Mother in Heaven. The continual necessities of our bodily life should ever remind us of the like perpetual necessities of our souls. At any moment some enemy may strike us down, some misfortune overwhelm us; our constant need moves us to cry unceasingly for help. And how consoling the thought that we have in Mary a never-failing helper, ever ready to hasten to our assistance!

Our Lady is intimately associated with Christ our Lord in the work of redemption. St Paul points out to Jesus in glory ‘always living to make intercession for us.’* Our faith teaches us that as He lives in heaven to plead our cause for ever, the constant supplication of Mary is joined with His intercession. As we lift up our eyes ‘to the mountains from whence help shall come,’† we behold in spirit Mary by the side of Jesus, and to them we look for aid. She, the Virgin Mother, appeals confidently to the love of her Divine Son; and He, through love of her, cannot refuse her requests.

The ardent and inspiring words of St Bernard, that loving client of Mary, should ever ring in our

* Heb. vii. 25

† Ps. cxx.

ears: 'Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that any one who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, and sought thy intercession was left unaided.' For what is it that those words declare? The simple fact that Mary, the Virgin Immaculate, is to us all, sinners as well as saints, the Mother of Perpetual Succour.

THE VISITATION

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CHAPTER IX

THE VISITATION

July 2nd.

SOME unwonted event has stirred to their depths the representatives of the whole nation of Israel. King and people alike, after being raised to the highest pitch of religious exaltation, have been plunged into grief and consternation the most extreme. The day has been one of unexampled spiritual joy, the like of which the nation has not experienced since David received the royal crown. But joy has been turned into mourning with a suddenness that has filled all hearts with gloom and fear.

The Ark of God—token of His abiding presence with His people—though long before restored to its lawful custodians by the enemies of the people of God, after dire calamities had moved them thereto, had remained in seclusion. On the heights of Cariathiarim ('Town of the Woods') that Ark had been securely guarded in the house of the faithful Israelite Abinadab by himself and his sons. Wars and tumults had swept over the land below;

but on that lofty platform and in shelter of its woods, peace had reigned supreme. Now wars had ceased; victory was with David and his army. Jerusalem had become the 'City of David,' the centre of his rule; and the man after God's own heart had resolved to bring the sacred Ark in triumph to the Tabernacle he had prepared for it upon the mountain, near to his own palace.

Assembling, therefore, 'those that were in the flower of their age out of all his countrymen, and out of the whole land,' to quote Josephus, the King, in royal state accompanied by thirty thousand of his chosen warriors had led the great procession up the wooded heights to the platform of rock, high above the sea, where the Ark had been reverently guarded for some seventy years (as a modern writer computes) in Abinadab's house. The sacred records give no indication of the presence of priests or levites with the vast concourse; indeed, from the words of David addressed to the priests later (I. Paral., xv, 13), it would seem that their absence was thought to have led to the calamity which befell the assemblage.

The sacred symbol was placed upon a new cart drawn by oxen, under the care of two sons of Abinadab, in a fashion similar to that in which it had been originally conveyed to Cariathiarim long before. It may be that this was a civil and not religious procession, and that the priests and levites were to receive charge of the Ark at the gates of the city. The great concourse set forth in

due order. Multitudes thronged the steep mountain pathway with every demonstration of rejoicing. Hymns arose from countless voices; while trumpet and cymbal awoke the mountain echoes. The victorious King himself deemed it a privilege to sweep the harp strings in honour of so unwonted a celebration. Thus the monster procession passed slowly down through the green valley to the lower level, and along the rough road leading to the city, with its alternate risings and descents. All rejoiced that God's presence was to be once more vouchsafed to His people in the midst of their new capital, whence sacrifices, prayer and praise might ascend to Heaven with due order and solemnity.

But suddenly a shout of horror is heard. The music dies away; the voice of praise is hushed; joy gives place to fear and dismay. The news of a terrible disaster flies from mouth to mouth. God is angry. His hand has fallen heavily in correction. The oxen stumbled,—so they say who were nearest to the Ark; the cart lurched dangerously aside. Oza, one of Abinadab's sons, regardless of his lack of priestly rank, in a rash moment stretched out his hand to touch the Ark and steady it; and lo! God had struck him dead.

Consternation seizes upon the whole assembly. It may be that God is wroth not only on account of Oza's sacrilege, but because of the unworthy mode in which the Ark has been conveyed; for on the shoulders of priests alone, supported on its golden staves, He had commanded it always to be carried. So the terrified and grief-stricken King fears to

bring the Ark further, lest some new disaster should afflict him and his people. The dwelling of Obed-Edom, a righteous levite, is hard by; into his keeping shall the sacred treasure be given. Priests, no doubt, are summoned to the spot and with due reverence the Ark is borne thither. The multitudes disperse in awe-struck silence. David and his warriors climb the heights of the City of David, and once again the Ark's golden splendours are hidden in the seclusion of a lowly dwelling-house.

Three months later, and a rumour which had long begun to be noised abroad grew louder: Obed-Edom, honoured guardian of the Ark, had been bountifully blessed. For 'the Lord,' says the Sacred Text, 'blessed Obed-Edom and all that he had, because of the Ark of God.' And so once more, with still greater pomp, 'David went and brought away the Ark . . . into the City of David with joy.'*

Thousands of years later, the neighbourhood of the scene just depicted witnessed an event of still more solemn import. A few miles only to the south-west of the ancient Cariathiarim, and nearer still to the house of Obed-Edom in which the Ark abode for the space of three months, rises the stony height in the midst of a valley known to-day by the name of 'St. John's Mount.' On its summit is the little village of Ain Karim, to which tradition points as the abode of Zachary and Elizabeth, the parents of the Baptist.

* 2 Kings vi.

Mary, the lowly Virgin of Nazareth, at the bidding of tender charity, had no sooner received her message from on high, and the tidings of her kinswoman's good fortune, than she travelled in haste to Zachary's house, to congratulate Elizabeth on the approaching birth of a child. We may well believe that Mary, under the guardianship of her spouse Joseph, after accomplishing the three days' journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem, would pause at the holy city, whose very gates they must almost pass, to pay her devotions in the Temple; another day would see them at their destination.

To the eye of man, no pomp or outward glory characterized the progress of that lowly pair on their errand of joyous charity. Yet here was renewed, but with infinitely greater splendour, the solemn procession already described. Joseph and Mary are true descendants of David's royal house. The typical Ark of the Old Covenant is replaced by the true Ark of the New—the Immaculate Mother, who bears within her the living testimony of God's merciful alliance with His people. The mystic presence of Jehovah, enshrined in a cloud over the gold propitiatory, has given place to the corporeal presence of the Son of God, hidden in Mary's womb.

For escort, this more than regal progress has myriads of the princes of heaven, courtiers of the King Eternal. In serried ranks the Angels press round the shrine of their Lord and Master, invisible though they be to men, and with ravishing

strains of angelic music celebrate His praises. On shining wing they sweep exultant round,—adoring, thanking, magnifying God, now that He deigns to dwell amongst men.

The house of the pious levite of old afforded shelter to the Ark of the Covenant; so in the later age of which we are speaking another member of the same priestly tribe receives within his humble dwelling this more honourable Ark—God's Mother. Intense as must have been the joy and gratitude of Obed-Edom and his household because of the privilege bestowed upon them, it could not compare with the rapture with which Zachary and Elizabeth were filled at the advent of so incomparable a guest as Mary.

The results of that later event were so overpowering that it is difficult to realize their marvellous greatness. Blessings streamed down in plentitude upon those who gave hospitality to the Ark of old, but mightier far the blessings poured out upon the household of Zachary. No sooner is the voice of the Spouse of the Holy Ghost heard in gentle salutation than the Divine Spirit Himself fills the soul of Elizabeth, and in prophetic accents she welcomes her guest as the Blessed among women, because she was to bring forth the Most Blessed One. At the same time the recognition of the immense grace bestowed gives rise to deep humility. 'Whence is this to me,' she cries, 'that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?'

* St Luke i. 42.

But greater far the grace conferred upon the unborn Baptist. The presence of the Redeemer works a stupendous change in the soul of the infant, until that moment stained with the sin of Adam. At the salutation of Mary, the power of the Divine Guest hidden within her is exercised in cleansing His future forerunner from every stain.

Nor does the manifestation of the Holy Ghost stop here; for it is He who breathes through the lips of Mary that sublime song of thankful joy, the *Magnificat*, whose strains mingle the praises of the Most High with prophetic promises of the future glory of the singer. May we not believe that the dumb Zachary also participated in this outpouring of the Spirit? His lips were closed then; but they were to open, after the birth of his richly gifted son, with the inspired words of a canticle second only to Mary's in majestic beauty.

If blessings so abundant accompanied Mary at the first passing of her feet over Zachary's threshold, how richly endowed must that household have become during the three months of the happy sojourn there of the living Ark of God!

No feast seems to have been celebrated in honour of the mystery of the Visitation in the Latin Church earlier than the thirteenth century; for the first mention of such a festival occurs in the statutes of Le Mans in 1247. The Friars Minor, always distinguished for their tender devotion to Our Lady, had begun to observe this feast in 1263.

But it was not long before it became more generally popular; and in the following century that which had been a matter of more or less private devotion on the part of certain churches and religious Orders was made binding upon all.

It was during that disastrous period when the Church was rent by the Great Schism of the West that the thoughts of the Sovereign Pontiff turned toward Mary the Help of Christians. The comfort and benediction which she had brought to the house of Zachary were greatly needed by the whole Church. From her hands the afflicted Pope firmly hoped to obtain succour and sanctification for the people of God. Urban VI. accordingly approved of a decree in April, 1389, establishing the festival of the Visitation throughout the Western Church. The death of the Pontiff, before its promulgation, delayed the matter for a time; but his successor, Boniface IX., issued the decree in the following November. When the schism—thanks, as we may well believe, to Mary's intercession—was happily brought to an end, the feast was confirmed by the lawful Pope, and has ever since been observed.

In remembrance of his return from Gaeta and the deliverance of Rome from the enemies of the Papacy on this feast in 1849, Pius IX. raised the Visitation to a festival of higher rank in the calendar. It has always been celebrated on July 2nd, although the event it commemorates must have taken place some months before the birth of St John on June 24th. The reluctance toward estab-

lishing feasts during Lent was doubtless the reason for the choice of a later date. July 2nd would coincide with the termination of Our Lady's sojourn in Zachary's house, and this fact had probably much to do with fixing the time of the celebration.

The antiphons used in the Divine Office appointed for the festival are taken from the narrative of events given by St. Luke in his Gospel. Those for Vespers may be given here in an English translation :

1. 'Mary, rising up, went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda.'

2. 'Mary entered into the house of Zachary and saluted Elizabeth.'

3. 'When Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb, and she was filled with the Holy Ghost. Alleluia.'

4. 'Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb.'

5. 'For, behold, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Alleluia.'

The five psalms to which these antiphons are attached are those always sung on feasts of the Blessed Virgin; the chapter and the hymn are also those common to her festivals. The *Magnificat*, the beautiful canticle first heard at the Visitation, has been sung in the evening Office of the Church for many centuries. It is accompanied on this day by a special antiphon: 'Blessed art thou, O Mary, who hast believed! Those things shall be accom-

plished in thee which were told thee by the Lord. Alleluia.' The words are practically identical with those spoken by Elizabeth under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, when with prophetic ardour—for she could not have learned it by human means—she recalled to Mary's mind the embassy of the Angel and his message to her.

The Collect, which is used in all the Offices peculiar to the feast, runs as follows: 'We beseech Thee, O Lord, to bestow on Thy servants the gift of heavenly grace; that as in the childbirth of the Blessed Virgin our salvation began, so from the votive solemnity of her Visitation we may obtain an increase of peace.'

The Introit of the Mass is the familiar one: 'Hail, Holy Mother, who didst bring forth the King, who for ever ruleth heaven and earth!'

The psalm is that usually appointed for feasts of the Blessed Virgin: 'My heart hath uttered a good word: I speak my works to the King.' The mind instinctively turns to the *Magnificat* the 'good word' of praise and thanksgiving uttered by the Virgin Mother to the Heavenly King on this day.

The lesson from the Canticle of Canticles beautifully predicts the joyous progress of Mary over the hills of Juda as a harbinger of grace: 'Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come. For the winter is now past; . . . the flowers have appeared in our land. . . Show me thy face; let thy voice sound in my ears.'*

* Cantic. ii.

The Gospel gives St. Luke's narrative of the events of the day. The remaining portions of the liturgy of the Mass occur on many other festivals of Our Lady.

Mary's Visitation has its special message to us, who live surrounded by so many who have no reverence for her or, it may be, regard her with something of contempt. We need the presence of her whom we love to invoke as 'Ark of the Covenant,' in order to benefit by God's choicest graces. It is through her hands that He still delights to bless His people. Let us entreat her to come to our aid. Let us never cease to cry to that most loving of mothers to succour us and all who need her so sorely; to comfort and protect us. In her presence heresy cannot flourish; under her smile our barren hearts will blossom into a myriad flowers of grace.

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OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL

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CHAPTER X

OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL

July 16th.

INNUMERABLE are the Biblical memories which cluster round the lofty heights of 'Carmel by the Sea,'* that beautiful mountain which rises at its highest point to some 1780 feet above the Mediterranean, on the western coast of Palestine. It served as a type of fruitfulness and loveliness, and deservedly so; for its name, signifying in Hebrew 'garden,' or 'planted vineyard,' is still borne out by the luxuriant growth of its wooded dales in flowers of brilliant hues and verdant shrubs and plants. 'Thy head is like Carmel. . . How beautiful art thou, and how comely!'+ is the description of the Spouse in the inspired Cantic. Isaias alludes to the typical beauties of Carmel and Sharon. Amos laments: 'The beautiful places of the shepherds have mourned, and the top of Carmel is withered.'‡

But that which has given to Mount Carmel its lasting renown is the sojourn upon it of the great Prophet Elias, and the wonders he there worked

* Jerem. xlvi. 18. † Cantic. vii. 5. ‡ Amos i. 2.

by his prayers. It was on Carmel that fire descended from heaven to consume his sacrifice, thus at the same time manifesting the power of the One God and confounding the worshippers of Baal. From its heights the servant of Elias beheld, in answer to the protracted prayer of the man of God, the 'little cloud' arising out of the sea, as large as the palm of a man's hand; it was the announcement of the coming of the long-desired rain, after three years of famine and drought.

The memory of the great prophet procured for Carmel, in the language of the neighbouring people, the title of *Djebel Mar Elias* ('Mountain of St. Elias'); and his reputed grotto, still used as a mosque by the Mussulmans, is dedicated to El Khodr ('The living one'), as they designate the prophet. It has been stated with much show of truth that from the far-off days of Elias, Eliseus, and the 'sons of the prophets,' the solitudes of Carmel have been a favourite resort for recluses. However this may be, it is certain that there were Christian anchorites living on the mountain at a very early date. Express mention is made, as far back as the sixth century, of a monastery there, dedicated to Eliseus the prophet.

Though there are records of earlier hermits and cenobites upon Carmel and round about it, the Carmelite friars, who claim Elias as their father and founder, as his statue in St. Peter's at Rome testifies, are generally reputed to have been formed into a distinct religious Order about the end of the

twelfth century, and to have received their first Rule from Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem, about 1212, at the petition of St. Brocard, their superior at the time. The holy lives of the friars attracted many disciples. From Carmel the Order was soon extended to Europe, the Crusaders bringing back members to found houses in other countries. The first of these foundations is said to have been in England, in which the Order was especially to flourish in after ages.

Simon, a Kentish recluse, who obtained the surname of Stock because he had taken as his dwelling the hollow stock, or trunk, of a large oak tree, joined the recently arrived Carmelites in 1212, after twenty years of eremitical life. He rose to great distinction in the Order; and after spending six years in Palestine, where his grotto on Mount Carmel is still pointed out, became eventually General of the Carmelites in 1245.

The cloud which appeared in the sky over Mount Carmel, in response to the prayer of Elias, has been regarded by some of the Fathers of the Church as a type of the Blessed Virgin, who bore within her, as a cloud contains water, the abundance of every grace. A tradition that some kind of revelation of the dignity of the coming Mother of God was made to the prophet, is cherished by the Carmelite Order. Whether this be accepted or not, it is certain that the Carmelites have ever had a special devotion to Mary. They claim to have borne from the earliest ages of Christianity the title of 'Bro-

thers of the Blessed Virgin.' The Chapel of Our Lady, belonging to the 'Latin hermits called the Brothers of Carmel,' is mentioned by a writer of the first half of the thirteenth century; and whenever, during the vicissitudes of their history, the friars have regained a footing on the sacred mountain, after many dispersions by the Mussulmans, they have always dedicated to Mary their monastery and church.

It was but natural, therefore, that St. Simon Stock should not only cherish a fervent devotion to Our Lady in his own heart, but should endeavour to spread it abroad. After his elevation to the generalship of his Order, he was praying one day to his Heavenly Patroness for a visible sign of her favour, and received at her hands in a vision vouchsafed to him, as Carmelite tradition maintains, the sacred badge of the Scapular, which she desired should be worn by all her devout clients as a symbol of their association with the Carmelite Order, regarded by her with particular affection. The Scapular, it may be remarked, forms a portion of the recognized habit of the older Orders of monks and friars. St Benedict prescribes it in his Rule (written in the sixth century) as the working dress of his monks. Originally it was a kind of blouse reaching to the knees, having holes for the arms, but no sleeves, and with a hood attached. With the ancient monks it replaced, during manual labour in the fields and elsewhere, the *cuculla*, or cowl, a more ample garment with large

sleeves and a hood, which constituted the monk's full-dress costume. Its name is derived from the Latin word *scapulæ* (the shoulders), because the garment depended from the shoulders. In later ages, its form became changed into a long, broad strip falling over the tunic before and behind, and connected over each shoulder.

The bestowal of the Carmelite Scapular upon any one is the grant to the person in question of a portion of the religious habit of the Order, and marks such a one as an associate. This was evidently the purpose St. Simon had in view in clothing devout Christians with the Scapular; and the same idea is apparent in a later age, in the formal institution of the Confraternity,—whose very name, be it remarked, designates an association of *fratres* in a brotherhood. The fact is shown also in the formula used in admitting a member to the Confraternity. 'Sanctify this habit, which, for love of Thee and of Thy Virgin Mother of Mount Carmel, thy servant is to wear,' is the prayer by which the Scapular is blessed. 'Receive this blessed habit,' says the priest who imposes it upon the shoulders of the person in question; then, in conclusion, the new *confrater* is formally admitted to a share in all the spiritual goods of the Order.

The devotion set on foot by St. Simon Stock has increased throughout the centuries that have passed. The Scapular of Mount Carmel is now one of the most popular means of expressing devotion to the Blessed Virgin and of obtaining a greater

share in her intercession. The wearing of the Scapular, which St. Simon first inculcated, became in course of time the outward sign of special dedication to the honour of the Mother of God; people of every rank and degree hastened to clothe themselves with the livery of the clients of Mary, and the Church expressed her solemn approbation by granting rich indulgences to the Confraternity which eventually came into being.

It is not our purpose here to dwell upon the blessings and privileges of the Confraternity in question. It might seem, at first sight, beyond our scope to speak of it at all, if a little reflection did not show that the feast of which we are treating originated from the devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel which has grown up through the ages, and of which the Scapular is the outward token. The feast is a solemn expression of the gratitude due to Mary for all the favours for which the Christian world has to thank her, especially those which spring from association with her beloved Order of Mount Carmel.

Carmelite tradition has preserved the 16th of July as the actual date of the apparition of Our Lady to St. Simon Stock. Since the year 1387, or thereabouts (a little more than a century after the event), a feast has been annually celebrated in honour of Our Lady by the Order which has always regarded her as its Heavenly Patroness and Protectress. Pope Sixtus V., in the sixteenth century, gave to it official approbation.

The festival (or 'Commemoration,' as it is officially styled) of Our Lady of Mount Carmel gradually extended to various dioceses and countries. Spain began to observe it in 1674; Austria followed in 1675; Portugal received it in 1679. When in 1725 it was adopted in the Papal States, it was certain to be extended before long to the Church Universal. This, in fact, happened a year later, when Pope Benedict XIII. placed it upon the general calendar. It remained for Leo XIII. to add the finishing touch to this solemn Commemoration, by extending to it the distinguished privilege of the Portiuncula Indulgence, hitherto peculiar to the Franciscan feast of Our Lady of the Angels. By this privilege the faithful may gain a plenary indulgence for each visit made to a Carmelite church on the 16th of July, after Confession and Holy Communion, if they pray there for some space of time for the Pope's intentions.

It will be interesting to turn now to the liturgy proper to the feast we are considering. Although much of it is taken from what is known as the *Commune*, or common Office of the Blessed Virgin, there is often a striking appropriateness which is worthy of remark; other portions are peculiar to the feast.

The Vesper and Lauds antiphons are from the *Commune*. As these were explained in the article on the feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, it is unnecessary to repeat here what was there said.

The *Capitulum* refers to the eternal predestina-

tion of Mary: 'From the beginning, and before the world, was I created, and unto the world to come I shall not cease to me, and in the holy dwelling-place I have ministered before Him.* All ages have had an interest in Mary,—those which preceded her, in announcing her coming; those which followed in honouring and loving her. In recalling the universal expectation of her birth into the world, we are reminded of the Carmelite tradition of the prophetic vision of the future Mother of God vouchsafed to the Prophet Elias, and of his longing expectation of her advent.

The Vesper hymn is the beautiful *Ave Maris Stella*; it is familiar to all Catholics under its English form:

Hail, thou Star of Ocean, portal of the sky,
Ever-Virgin Mother of the Lord most High!

How brightly shone that Star from the heights of Carmel, over the sea that washes the foot of the mountain, during those centuries which witnessed the loving honour paid to Mary by her faithful Brothers of Carmel! Though dimmed by the mists of schism and error which so sadly shroud the glory of the Church in that holiest of lands, that Star has not ceased to shine from Carmel. In the fine Carmelite convent still enthroned upon the sacred mountain, reverent honour is daily paid as of yore to her whom the Order cherishes with undying love.

* Ecclus. xxiv.

The Collect used in Mass and Office is proper to the festival: 'O God, who hast honoured the Carmelite Order with the particular title of the Most Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, and Thy Mother, mercifully grant that, protected by her prayers, whose Commemoration we this day celebrate with a solemn Office, we may deserve to arrive at joys everlasting!'

The antiphon to the *Magnificat* is one frequently occurring on minor feasts of Our Lady: 'Holy Mary, succour the miserable, help the faint-hearted, comfort those who weep, pray for the people plead for the clergy, intercede for women dedicated to God; may all who celebrate thy solemn Commemoration experience thy help.'

For the second Vespers of the feast a proper antiphon is provided. It applies to Our Lady in a mystical sense the glories and beauties of Mount Carmel and the other noted charms of Palestine—Lebanon and Sharon. 'The glory of Libanus is given to her; the beauty of Carmel and Saron.* Lebanon, the mighty mountain, is the type of grandeur and power; Carmel and the Vale of Sharon—the former bright with flowers and verdure, the latter traditional for its fertility—ore figures of Mary's abundant graces, and of her ability to enrich her clients in their need.

In the Mass, the Introit is that already explained when treating of the feast of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. The Lesson in place of Epistle, as

* Isaias xxxv. 2.

well as the Offertory Verse, are identical with those of the same feast. With regard to the former, however, we may notice a peculiar appropriateness to the present festival. 'As the vine, I have brought forth a pleasant odour.' All who are engrafted into this vine by becoming associated to Our Lady's Confraternity, being closely united with her, draw from that union the sweet odour of many graces. 'I am the Mother of fair love and of fear and of knowledge and of holy hope. In me is all grace of the way and of the truth. In me is all hope of life and of virtue.' * She, the Mother of the Faithful, distributes to them the spiritual treasures which help them to draw nearer to God.

The Gradual is that appointed for the festival of Our Lady Help of Christians, and has been already explained. The Alleluia verse is proper: 'Through thee, O Immaculate Virgin, life which had been lost was given to us; who didst receive progeny from heaven, and didst bring forth for the world a Saviour.'

The Gospel is that short one, used on many of Our Lady's feasts, and recounts the words of 'a certain woman from the crowd' with regard to the blessedness of Christ's Mother. Those praises are now echoed throughout the Christian world. The blessedness pronounced by Our Lord on all 'who hear the word of God and keep it' † is shared by those who obey the parting word of Jesus on the Cross, and accept in a special sense His Holy

* *Ecclus. xxiv.*† *St Luke xi.*

Mother as their own, by the close union of the Confraternity of the Scapular.

The Communion verse is special to this feast: 'O Mary, most worthy Queen of the world, ever Virgin, intercede for our peace and salvation, who didst bring forth Christ our Lord, the Saviour of all mankind!' It will be noticed here, as in all the festivals of the Blessed Virgin, that after Communion the liturgy naturally turns upon the Divine Maternity of Mary; for the nourishment just imparted to our souls through the reception of the Body and Blood of the Saviour of the world, is the prominent thought placed before our minds. Yet, since Mary gave to us that sacred humanity, we cannot lose sight of her in our worship of her Blessed Son. Therefore, while we adore the Son within us, we beg the prayers of the Mother, that peace and salvation may be ours,—peace in the midst of the turmoil of the world, and salvation at the last.

It is in this sense that the Post-Communion prayer once more asks for Our Lady's continual help: 'We beseech Thee, O Lord, that the venerable intercession of thy glorious Mother Mary, ever a Virgin, may assist us; that it may mercifully unite us in accord, whom it has loaded with perpetual benefits!' In the concluding words is an apparent allusion to the Confraternity to which is chiefly owing the institution of this solemn Commemoration. Through it the Christian world has undoubtedly reaped innumerable blessings and

graces. The mystic Carmel, like the fertile mountain so often celebrated in inspired canticle and prophecy, has been to men 'the garden of the Lord' * in the midst of the desert of the world; to it we may adapt those words of the Lesson of the Mass: 'Come over to me, all ye that desire me, and be filled with my fruits; for my spirit is sweet above honey. . . They that work by me shall not sin.'

* Isaias li. 3.

THE ASSUMPTION

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CHAPTER XI

THE ASSUMPTION.

August 15th.

KING DAVID gave great joy to the people of Israel on the day that he transferred the Ark of the Covenant from the house of Obed-Edom to the Tabernacle erected for its reception near to his own palace on the heights of his new capital, Jerusalem. The King himself took part in the event with enthusiastic fervour; a concourse of warriors formed a guard of honour; more than eight hundred priests and levites, robed in white linen, assembled to fulfil their part in the sacred function; a mighty throng of the ancients of Israel and of the people of the land, gathered together from all sides, were there to swell the ranks of the great procession.

In due order the assembly moved onward toward the city. The people rent the air with shouts of joy; levites, skilled in music, drew sweet melodies from psaltery and harp; the crash of cymbals, and the loud tones of the trumpets sounded by the priests in front of the Ark, contributed to 'the joyful noise' which David had decreed should 'resound

on high.* Thus, amid jubilant cries from the vast crowd, and the strains of music and sacred song, the Ark, swathed in its purple coverings, was borne along on the shoulders of appointed priests, high above the surrounding crowds,—mystic symbol of the ever-present God, the watchful guardian of His chosen people.

Among the throng of levites are the chief singers in the service of the Tabernacle. Their voices are soon heard in glad acclaim, as they intone a hymn of praise which the King—who ‘set singers before the altar, and by their voices . . . made sweet melody’†—had composed in honour of this eventful day. That psalm, it is reasonably believed, is still sung in the Divine Office of the Christian Church: the joyous *Domini est terra*,—‘The earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof.’‡

At length the city gate is reached, and the hymn changes in character. ‘Lift up your gates, O ye princes; and be ye lifted up, O eternal gates: and the King of Glory shall enter in.’ Thus cry the chorus of singers. From within, one single voice chants the interrogation: ‘Who is this King of Glory?’—‘The Lord who is strong and mighty: the Lord mighty in battle,’ is the loud response. Yet once again the question is repeated from within: ‘Who is this King of Glory?’ The answer rises toward heaven in triumphant chorus: ‘The Lord of hosts, He is the King of Glory.’ Then the gates are opened, and the glad concourse sweeps through

* 1 Paral. xv. 16.

† Ecclus. xlvii. 11.

‡ Ps. xxiii

into the city and onward to the Tabernacle on the hill. Where the Ark should rest, there would God manifest His presence in the cloud over the golden propitiatory; therefore did King and people rejoice with a great joy, because God was deigning to dwell once more among them, in order to receive their daily solemn service of sacrifice and praise.

The scene just described was prophetic of the glorious Ascension of our Blessed Lord, when, leading in His train a host of redeemed souls, He passed in triumph through the gates of His heavenly city,—‘that Jerusalem which is above.’ Fittingly, on that festival, therefore, does the Church make use in her liturgy of the psalm sung by the levites of old, and call upon the princes of Heaven to welcome the Lord of Glory on His solemn entry into His celestial kingdom.

But it may be regarded in a secondary sense as applicable to the triumph of the dearest and most perfect of creatures—God’s Mother. After her Son’s Ascension, she was left in this world to console and strengthen the infant Church. But the time had come when the divine decree summoned her from earth. Her exile was to come to an end; she was to be once more united with her Beloved One, and that for ever, in bliss that should know no end.

Since the fall, Adam’s descendants had been condemned to submit to that stern decree: ‘Dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return.’* ‘In

* Genesis iii. 19.

Adam all die,'* says St. Paul. The Blessed Mother, therefore, was not exempt from the universal law; yet death came to her in unusual guise. Immaculate, as she was, from the first instant of her existence, death had no terrors for her; it came not in punishment, but rather as a boon for which she sighed; for it was the means by which she was to be united for ever with her Son and her God in His heavenly kingdom.

There were many reasons why it was fitting that Mary should pass away from this world by death. The first was this. Her Son, the second Adam, had submitted to death, that He might win life for men; His Mother, of all creatures most conformed to His example, must therefore imitate Him by dying. Another reason is to be found in the fact that she was given to mankind by Our Lord on the Cross to be their true Mother. Now, a mother's chief duties toward her children are to nourish, educate, and protect. Mary nourishes her spiritual children by the graces she wins for them; she educates by her example, teaching them constant obedience to God's will; she protects them in life and in death. One prominent virtue which she teaches us is a glad conformity with the decree which calls upon all of us to submit to death; her most potent protection is that afforded to us in that dread hour.

The destined time arrived, then, when the Immaculate Virgin Mother was to leave this land of

* 1 Cor. xv. 22.

exile for the courts of Heaven Tradition tells that St. Peter and most of his colleagues, the Apostles, together with many of their disciples, watched around her couch at that last hour; and when the pure spirit had fled they bore the sacred body of that beloved Mother to the tomb prepared for its reception near the Garden of Gethsemani, and there laid it to rest. For three days angelic voices were heard chanting songs of joy and gladness at that tomb. One Apostle, St. Thomas, had been absent from Jerusalem; and, arriving after the burial, grieved much that he had lost the privilege of beholding for the last time, in company with his brethren, the features of her whom all revered and loved next only to their Divine Master Himself. To console him, the tomb was opened, that he might look upon and venerate the sacred remains; but it was found to be empty. Heavenly odours filled it, indeed; but no trace was left of Mary's virginal body.

What, then, had taken place? Something foreshadowed ages before by the carrying up of the Ark to Jerusalem, with all the pomp and circumstance of David's solemn procession. In a very real sense Mary was the Ark of God. The Ark of old was formed of incorruptible wood; the Mother whose pure bosom had been the dwelling-place of God's Only-Begotten Son was always free from the taint of corruption wrought by Adam's transgression. The material Ark was overlaid both within and without with pure gold; Mary's interior life was

resplendent with every virtue. Of her the psalmist sings: 'The glory of the King's daughter is within in golden borders, clothed round about with varieties.*' Her life in the eyes of men, moreover, was a perfect example of holiness; she was 'the Queen . . . in gilded clothing.'

That 23rd psalm, applied by the Church to Christ's glorious Ascension, may be fittingly adapted, as we have said, to Mary's entry into the courts of Heaven. For as she had been in closest union with her Son on earth, conformed with Him in every virtue, she was to become conformed with Him also in His triumph after death. God would not suffer His 'holy One to see corruption' in the tomb. After three days He would raise her to immortal life, and His Angels would bear her to realms of bliss.

How far more magnificent that progress than the transfer of the material Ark of old! In place of David, King of the earthly Jerusalem, the 'Prince of the Kings of the earth' † is foremost in welcoming her to the Tabernacle prepared for her. No guard of honour composed of mere earthly warriors, however noble and distinguished, is worthy to escort her: hosts of radiant Angels fill the expanse of Heaven to do her honour. In place of the feeble strains of earthly melodies from human lips, the canticles of Heaven resound, poured forth by angelic voices. Instead of harp and psaltery and golden cymbal, are heard celestial harmonies of ravishing sweetness.

* Ps. xlv. 15.

† Apoc. i. 5.

'Lift up your gates, O ye princes; and be ye lifted up, O eternal gates!' Such is the triumphant hymn of cohorts of Angels soaring up from earth. They bear a far more precious burden than the priests who bore the Ark,—the Mother Immaculate, who gave to the Son of God His human body.

'Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights?''* cry the guardians of the golden ramparts of Heaven. We may imagine the joyful response: 'This is Mary, full of grace, and blessed among women. This is she whom all generations shall call blessed.' Then, addressing her whom they bear aloft, they exclaim in accents of deepest reverence: 'How beautiful art thou! . . . How beautiful art thou! Thou art all fair, . . . and there is not a spot in thee.'† 'The King shall greatly desire thy beauty.'‡

How loving and how joyful the welcome of the Eternal King! 'Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one and come. For winter is now past; the rain is over and gone; the flowers have appeared. . . Show me thy face, let thy voice sound in my ears; for thy voice is sweet, and thy face comely.'§ Then on, through the eternal gates the glittering concourse passed, even to the throne of the Great King. 'And a throne was set for the King's mother, and she sat on his right hand.'** Thence she never ceases to petition her Divine Son for us, her erring children.

* Cantic. viii. 5; † *Ibid.* iv. 7. ‡ Ps. xlv. 12.

§ Cantic. ii. 10, etc.

** 3 Kings ii. 19.

The festival of the glorious Assumption into Heaven of the Mother of God is, as might well be expected, of ancient origin. It was kept in Jerusalem as early as the fifth century. Ancient records testify that before the seventh century it was observed in Rome. It was the custom to celebrate the fifteenth day of August in the Eternal City by a solemn procession in honour of the Blessed Virgin; this custom dates from the time of Pope St. Sergius (687-710); it lasted for nearly a thousand years. The 15th of August, however, was not universally adopted for the celebration of the feast: in the East and in Gaul it was at one time kept in January.

As the Assumption is regarded as the most solemn of all Our Lady's festivals, since it celebrates the culminating point of her glory and greatness, it is preceded, like feasts of the highest rank, by a vigil and fast, and followed by an octave.

A glance at the liturgy shows that the antiphons for the Offices of Vespers and Lauds are proper to the feast. The last three only are taken from Holy Scripture, the others being specially composed for the festival. A translation may here be given of these antiphons.

1. 'Mary is taken up into Heaven, the Angels rejoice, and bless the Lord with songs of praise.'

2. 'The Virgin Mary is taken up into the bridal chamber of Heaven, where the King of Kings sitteth on His starry throne.'

3. 'We run after the odour of thine ointments.'

The maidens have loved thee exceedingly.' (The virtues of Mary attract earnest souls, just as a sweet perfume delights the senses.)

4. 'Blessed art thou, O daughter, by the Lord! For by thee we have partaken of the Fruit of Life.'

5. 'Fair and beautiful art thou, O daughter of Jerusalem; terrible as an army in battle array!'

Chapter and hymn at each of the two Offices are those common to most feasts of Our Lady. The versicle and response are proper:

V. 'The Holy Mother of God is lifted up on high.'

R. 'Above the choirs of Angels to the Heavenly kingdom.'

The antiphon for the *Magnificat* is very striking: 'Virgin most prudent, whither goest thou, rosy as the dawn? Daughter of Sion, all beautiful and sweet art thou; fair as the moon, chosen as the sun.'

The liturgy of the Mass is proper to this feast. The Introit is a song of triumphant joy: 'Let us all rejoice in the Lord, celebrating a festival day in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, for whose Assumption the angels rejoice and give praise to the Son of God.' The psalm attached to it is that in which the Incarnation is foretold: 'My heart hath uttered a good word; I speak my works to the King.'* It is, as already pointed out, the bridal song of the union of the divine and human nature in the birth of Christ; fittingly, therefore, does it

* Ps. xliv.

form part of the liturgy of this feast, since Mary was the means whereby that sublime union was accomplished.

The Collect asks for mercy toward sinners, through Mary's intercession: 'Pardon, we beseech Thee, O Lord, the sins of Thy servants; that we, who are not able to please Thee by our deeds, may be saved by the intercession of the Mother of Thy Son.' It may seem somewhat strange that no immediate reference is made to the Assumption. The fact is that the chief prayer of the day was originally that said in Rome at the commencement of the procession once customary there. It runs as follows: 'It behoves us to honour, O Lord, the solemnity of this day, whereon the Holy Mother of God suffered temporal death; yet she could not be held by the bonds of death, who of her own flesh brought forth Our Lord, Thy Son Incarnate.'

The Epistle is a passage from Ecclesiasticus,* prophetic of the graces which were to shine in the soul of the Immaculate Virgin and her consequent exaltation: 'In all things I sought rest, and I shall abide in the inheritance of the Lord. . . . He that made me rested in my tabernacle. . . . And so was I established in Sion, and in the holy city likewise I rested, and my power was in Jerusalem.' The words recall the circumstances already alluded to, of the triumphant carrying of the Ark to David's city; they were literally fulfilled in the assumption of Our Lady to the realms of bliss.

* *Ecclus.* xxiv. 11.

The text goes on to compare Mary with the cedar, the cypress, a palm tree, a rose plant in Jericho, a fair olive tree, a plane tree by the water. Her example is likened to the sweet odours of cinnamon, balsam, and myrrh.

The Gradual is from the same psalm which supplies the Introit. It sings of the perfections of Mary which led the King of Kings to choose her for His bride. 'Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thine ear; for the King hath greatly desired thy beauty,' are the concluding words of this magnificent anthem. The Alleluia verse speaks of joy in Heaven: 'Alleluia! Mary is assumed into Heaven. The host of Angels rejoiceth.'

The Gospel seems at first sight to have little bearing upon the feast. It relates the visit of Our Lord to the house of the sisters Martha and Mary, and the different way in which each entertained Him. Mary is praised for having chosen the better part, in sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to His teaching. The two sisters represent the active and contemplative life. Our Lady combined both in a perfect degree; she ministered to His wants like Martha; and, like that other Mary, listened to His words, keeping them in her heart. It is true of her that she 'hath chosen the better part.'* She has received her reward already, in body as well as in soul, for her perfect acceptance of God's will.

The Offertory speaks again of the joy of the Angels, so often alluded to on this glad day. 'Mary

* St Luke x. 42.

is taken up to Heaven; the Angels rejoice and bless the Lord with songs of praise. Alleluia.' The Communion verse expresses the gladness of the Church in the reunion of Mother and Son, in reward of Mary's fidelity: 'Mary hath chosen for herself the better part, which shall not be taken from her for ever.'

This great festival, while it gladdens our hearts because of the glimpses it gives us of the glory of our Mother and Queen, speaks to us in accents of encouragement and consolation. During this earthly pilgrimage, sorrows, and troubles will press upon us; but if, like her, we unite our sufferings with those of Christ our Lord, they become changed by the power of His Cross into blessings. Sometimes, it may be, we grow faint and weary with the struggle against sin; if we but call upon our Heavenly Advocate, she will gain fresh strength for us. To her we trust for that precious grace of final perseverance. Our fidelity will be rewarded one day, in the measure which God shall see fit, by a share in Mary's bliss. One day, if only we be faithful, those jewelled gates of Heaven—those 'eternal gates'—will roll back for us; and for us, sinners though we may have been in the past, the Angels will 'rejoice, and give praise to the Son of God.'

**THE MOST PURE
HEART OF MARY**

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CHAPTER XII

THE MOST PURE HEART OF MARY

It is sometimes hard for us to realise the true dignity of our Blessed Lady, and the honour due to her as a consequence of her greatness. The expressions of the saints in her regard seem at times exaggerated; we shrink from using them. Yet they do not surpass the praises bestowed or the titles conferred upon her by the Church, who applies to her those telling words of the Book of Wisdom*: *Speculum sine macula Dei majestatis*—'Unspotted mirror of God's majesty'; and again, in the Litany of Loreto, calls her: *Speculum Justitiæ*—'Mirror of Justice.' In each case, the Church clearly teaches that Mary, far beyond any other creature of God, is a reflection of His infinite purity, sanctity, and love.

The Incarnation was the bringing of God's infinite perfections within the reach of man. When the Eternal took human nature, God was revealed to mankind as the model of perfection at which man was to aim. Jesus Christ, in his every word

* Chap. vii. 26

and action, made visible the sanctity of the All-Holy God. When He said, 'Learn of Me,' He was pointing out the way in which His followers were to obey that precept: 'Be you therefore perfect, as also your Heavenly Father is perfect.'*

And as Our Lord reveals the perfections of God, Mary, in her turn, thanks to her Son's Redemption, repeats in her created humanity the graces which shone in that Divine Son. No other can ever reflect so clearly as she the splendours of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; for no other has been so entirely exempted from the natural tendency toward sin which is the woeful birthright of Adam's descendants. Mary alone was privileged, during the thousands of years that followed on the Fall, to come into being as immaculate as our first mother Eve, and as wholly pleasing to her Creator. That purity was never sullied; and hence she is worthily styled 'the unspotted mirror of God's majesty, and the image of His goodness.'

The feast we are considering is in honour of the Most Pure Heart of Mary. The heart has ever been regarded as the most noble of the bodily organs. In the Sacred Heart of Jesus we honour the source of His all-embracing love for His creatures—the symbol of everything that is loving and attractive in His Sacred Humanity: for it was His Heart that moved Him to sacrifice Himself for us. In the Heart of Mary we behold the symbol of her wondrous graces, of her close and perfect union

* St Matthew v. 48.

with God, and of her perfect and undying love for her children. That Heart of Mary was truly a worthy temple of the Holy Ghost, Who deigns to dwell with men. Never for an instant was it at variance with His designs; but, full of grace from the first, was preserved pure and stainless until her glorious Assumption into Heaven.

St Bernardine of Siena, who had been born on the feast of her Nativity, and was ever a loving son of Mary, has left in one of his sermons some glowing words in praise of her Most Pure Heart, which it will be well to give here in an English dress; for they express most beautifully and devoutly the claims of that Heart to our reverent honour.

Filled with humility at the thought of the greatness of the Virgin Mother predestined from all eternity to bring forth the Redeemer, the saint shrinks from uttering her praises with 'polluted lips.' 'How can a being so wretched as I,' he cries, 'speak of the wonders of her heart, when the tongue of an Angel is unworthy?' Then commenting upon those words of Our Lord, 'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good,' he continues: 'From that heart, as from a furnace of divine love, the Blessed Virgin brought forth good words—words of most ardent charity. . . . For as from a furnace of fire nothing can come forth except vehement heat, so from the heart of Christ's Mother no word could proceed that was not burning with the ardour

of the love of God. Seven words only—words of wondrous meaning and power—are recorded as spoken by her. Twice she addressed the Angel; twice she spoke to Elizabeth; twice to her Son; once to the servants at the marriage feast.* Those seven occasions of which the Gospel speaks are interpreted by the saint as producing so many external flames of love from the glowing heart of Mary.

When she said to the Angel, 'How shall this be done, because I know not man?' the love which prompted the words was that ardent desire to preserve immaculate the purity with which God had endowed her. That she was destined to give birth to 'the Son of the Most High,' who was to possess 'the throne of David His father,' and 'reign in the house of Jacob for ever,'† in a kingdom that should never end, was a thought that filled her with the fear of losing the virginity she treasured. But the assurance that her fear was groundless gave birth to a fervent act of more perfect love when, with entire abandonment to the divine will, she exclaimed: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord! Be it done to me according to thy word.' When she saluted Elizabeth, and rejoiced with her because of the approaching birth of the son who had been promised, Our Lady's heart shone with the flame of sympathising charity. When the inspired words of the *Magnificat* poured forth from her lips, they were the expression of her jubilant gratitude to God

* *Serm. 9. de Visitatione.*

† St Luke i. 32.

for His bounty toward her—the leaping forth of the flame of thankful love. That poignant lament, ‘Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing,’* revealed a love whose flame was fed by suffering. The trusting petition, ‘They have no wine,’ spoken at the marriage at Cana, was the effect of a loving compassion for those in need; the admonition to the servants, ‘Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye,’† witnessed to the all dominating love of God which filled the heart of Mary, and, because of its unfailing confidence in His goodness was powerful in obtaining His help.

The devotion to the Heart of Mary, which was the joy of St Bernardine in the fifteenth century, increased with the ages; by the seventeenth it had grown into a recognised corollary of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. To a holy priest of France, Father Eudes Mézerai, the Church is indebted for its final development. Father Eudes had founded two religious Congregations—the Society of Jesus and Mary, composed of missionary preachers, commonly known as Eudists; and the Order of Charity and Refuge, for the benefit of fallen women. Both associations were dedicated by him to the Heart of Mary. The most noted missionary in the France of his time, he lost no opportunity in striving to spread his favourite devotion everywhere. All classes of devout Catholics became

* *Ibid.* ii. 48.

† St John ii. 5.

fired with his enthusiasm, from the lowliest of the lowly, to the Queen-Mother, Anne of Austria.

In 1668, Father Eudes obtained leave for the celebration, by his own Congregation, of a feast in honour of the Most Pure Heart of Mary, and himself drew up the Mass and Office. The devotion met with all the opposition which had been raised up at an earlier period against that paid to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. But many religious Orders helped in spreading it through the Church, notably the Friars Minor of France. The first formal recognition by the Holy See came from Pope Pius VII—for Father Eudes had received permission for the festival from the Papal Legate only. That Pope granted leave for the celebration of the feast to the Clerks Regular of the Mother of God; and from that time many churches and Orders obtained permission for a like privilege. The devotion had become so general in the pontificate of Pius IX that the festival was extended to all churches desirous of celebrating it, a proper Office and Mass being granted at the same time. This was in 1855. The feast is kept at various times in the year by different churches. By some it is observed in May; by others on the third Sunday after Pentecost; by others again during the Assumption octave.

In speaking of the growth of devotion to the Heart of Mary, we cannot omit a brief reference to one of the most prominent examples of the results flowing from its practice. The rector of the

Church of Our Lady of Victories in Paris, the Abbé Desgenettes, was appointed to that parish on the cessation of the Revolution of 1830. He found it in a most destitute state. The church was almost deserted, even on the greatest festivals. No Sacraments were allowed to be administered in the parish, even to the dying, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he was able to obtain permission in case of the latter class, and then only on condition of wearing secular dress and conducting everything with absolute secrecy. For four years he strove to bring back souls to God, but with little success. Saying Mass at Our Lady's altar one day, his heart heavy with the thought of the uselessness of his efforts, he seemed to hear a voice say: 'Consecrate your parish to the Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary.' The result was the establishment of a Confraternity of prayer under that title.

The devotion spread rapidly, and the Confraternity of the Heart of Mary, for the conversion of sinners, was soon extended to the whole of France. Pius IX saw in its institution the effect of the inspiration of God. Sinners were reclaimed, tepid Christians made fervent; the services of the church more numerous, frequented, the Sacraments more generally received; faith, which had seemed dead, revived. At the present time the Archconfraternity numbers some millions of members, its affiliated confraternities throughout the world being as many as 20,000. The visitor to the

splendid church in Paris must needs be struck by the concourse of devout worshippers almost always to be found there; by the numberless votive tapers always burning before the image of Mary; and, above all, by the countless tablets of white marble—recording in their golden inscriptions instances of Mary's never-failing help—which form a precious lining to the interior walls of a sanctuary, more than ever worthy of its title—Our Lady of Victories.

Turning now to the liturgy of the feast we are considering, we find many items of remarkable beauty and fitness. A translation of the very striking antiphons, sung with the ordinary psalms of the Blessed Virgin in the Vesper Office, will be acceptable. It will be noticed that they are all taken from the Canticle of Canticles, and celebrate the graces of the mystic Bride of the Heavenly Spouse; as applied to Our Lady, they praise the interior perfections of her Pure Heart.

1. 'Draw me; we will run after thee to the odour of thy ointments.'

2. 'My Beloved speaketh to me: Arise, make haste, my love!'

3. 'Stay me up with flowers, compass me about with apples because I languish with love.'

4. 'I adjure you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, that you wake not the beloved till she please.'

5. 'I sleep, and my heart watcheth.'

The antiphon to the *Magnificat* is taken from

the canticle of Anna, the mother of Samuel, one of the striking types of Mary in the Old Testament: 'My heart hath rejoiced in the Lord, and my horn is exalted in my God, because I have joyed in thy salvation.'*

For the second Vespers an antiphon taken from the *Magnificat* itself is substituted for the foregoing. 'My heart hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.'

The Introit of the Mass is taken from Psalm xliv; it speaks of the glories of the heart of the Daughter of the Eternal King, who calls souls after her in the path of purity: 'All the glory of the King's daughter is within, in golden borders, clothed round about with varieties. After her shall virgins be brought to the King.'

The Collect of the day runs thus: 'O Almighty and Everlasting God, who didst prepare in the heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary a worthy habitation for the Holy Spirit, mercifully grant that we who devoutly celebrate a festival in honour of that Most Pure Heart may be enabled to live according to Thy Heart.'

The Lesson from the Canticle of Canticles speaks to us of the perfection of charity which animated the Heart of Mary: 'Put me as a seal upon thy heart. . . . For love is strong as death. . . . Many waters cannot quench charity, neither can the floods drown it. If a man should give all the substance of his house for love, he shall despise it as nothing.'†

* 1 Kings ii. 1.

† Chap. viii. 6.

The Gradual begins with the praise of Wisdom, applied to Mary, Spouse of Divine Wisdom: 'No defiled thing cometh into her. For she is the brightness of eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty, and the image of His goodness.'* Then follows the loving declaration of the Bride in the Canticles, as to her delight in purity: 'I to my beloved, and my beloved to me, who feedeth among the lilies.' †

The Alleluia verse cries out in the fervent words of praise and joy, uttered by Mary in her *Magnificat*: 'Alleluia! Alleluia! My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. Alleluia!'

The Gospel has evidently been chosen for its concluding words; for it is that which relates the finding of Our Lord in the Temple by His Holy Mother and St Joseph. To her appealing query, 'Son, why hast Thou done so to us?' He answers: 'How is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?' Then He accompanied them, a docile Child as ever, to Nazareth, 'and was subject to them. And his Mother kept all these words in her heart.' ‡

For the Offertory verse, the Church employs the glowing praises addressed by Joachim the high priest to the victorious Judith—that striking type of the Mother of God: 'For thou hast done manfully, and thy heart has been strengthened; there-

* Wisd. vii. 25, etc. † Cantic ii. 16.

‡ St Luke ii. 48, etc.

fore the hand of the Lord hath strengthened thee, and thou shalt be blessed for ever.' *

The Communion verse, while it recalls the close union between Mary's Pure Heart and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, appropriately refers to the union between the soul of the communicant and the divine Guest just received under the Sacramental Species; 'I sat down under his shadow, whom I desired; and his fruit was sweet to my palate.' †

In Holy Communion the faithful receive a foretaste of the lasting joys of Heaven; for He whom they receive as the food of their souls is the delight of the redeemed. Therefore, we pray thus in the Post-Communion: 'We who have been refreshed with divine gifts humbly beseech Thee, O Lord, that, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the feast of whose Most Pure Heart we are now celebrating we may be delivered from present dangers, and attain to the joys of eternal life.'

A comprehensive glance at the liturgy of this festival will show that the Church desires to place before the minds of her children for their imitation the various graces which adorned the Heart of Mary, and which Our Lord delights to behold in the hearts of His faithful servants.

Thus the Vesper antiphons speak of the resolute following of Christ in all virtues, and of the resultant union with Him in perfect charity. Joy in God's service is the burden of the *Magnificat* anti-

* Judith xv. 11.

† Cantic. ii. 3.

phons. The Introit extols chastity, of which Mary is the model for all who are called to follow her in a life of virginity. The Lesson speaks of the strength and fortitude which true love of God produces in the soul; no storm or stress of interior or exterior trials can quench that ardour. In the Gradual, purity of soul is praised, and its consequent joy and happiness is the burden of the Alleluia verse. The reward of fidelity to God's service — His never-failing support here, and eternal blessedness hereafter—is set forth in the Offertory verse. In the Communion verse is portrayed that absolute resignation to God's will which was so perfect a feature of Mary's interior life, and must be the aim of all true lovers of her Divine Son.

The fruit of our meditations on this festival should be a closer imitation of Jesus and Mary, which will show itself in a greater appreciation of entire purity of heart and life. It is this purity which will render our souls a more pleasing abode for the Holy Spirit. 'Know you not,' says St Paul to the Corinthians, 'that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God? And you are not your own. For you are bought with a great price. Glorify and bear God in your body.'*

* I Cor. vi. 19, 20

**THE NATIVITY OF
THE B. VIRGIN**

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CHAPTER XIII

THE NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

September 8th.

IN the 'paradise of pleasure' which the Creator prepared for the first of His creatures there was every delight that could satisfy the human heart. Trees 'fair to behold' afforded a grateful shade; some were adorned with rich foliage, others were brilliant with blossom, or laden with luscious fruit. Flowers of every hue abounded amid the verdure; cooling fountains refreshed the senses. Beasts roamed there in endless variety; birds flitted from bough to bough, or disported themselves in the sunny air, enriching the scene by their glittering plumage, or filling the shady groves with unceasing song. Everywhere there was colour, sound and movement.

These and a thousand other delights were all for one end. When everything had been prepared—when order and beauty reigned throughout that paradise, and 'God saw that it was good'—then, as the climax of His mighty work, He created man to use and enjoy all these riches and splendours.

'The Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul. . . . And the Lord God took man and put him into the paradise of pleasure, to dress it and keep it.'

Man's body, it is true, came from the earth; but that which raised him above the brute creation—his immortal soul—came directly from God. 'God created man incorruptible, and to the image of His own likeness He made him.'* In the moment of creation, His Maker lavished upon that first man countless gifts of nature and grace. With what delight did the Angels regard man! How richly adorned was his immortal soul! Sanctifying grace possessed it wholly; a chaste purity reigned therein; no tendency contrary to God's will had sullied it; brilliant was the reflection of the holiness of the Divine Creator that shone there.

This gifted being, for the moment, was solitary among the rest of creatures. Birds and beasts and all other living things in Eden had mates of their several kinds; man, though lord of all he saw, had no 'help like unto himself.' Yet Adam had within him the principle of life. God had bestowed upon him, unlike the rest of creation, the privilege of being the sole earthly source whence the great human family should spring. From his body God would form the companion who should, together with him, rule all other creatures of earth, and

* Wisdom ii. 23.

people the world with a race of beings like to themselves.

Adam sleeps and wakes again, and lo! a creature is with him of kindred nature—the 'help like unto himself,' whose body God has formed from Adam's substance; she shares all Adam's natural gifts, and she has received from her Creator an immortal soul to fit her for her high destiny. Upon that first bridegroom and his bride God, whose delight it had been to fill their souls with every grace, bestowed a plenteous benediction. 'And God saw all the things that He had made, and they were very good.'*

How glorious would this world have been had the innocent happiness of that paradise continued unsullied! But it was not to last. The one condition of its permanence was the absence of sin. It was this which rendered so glorious not only the souls but the bodies also of our first parents; it was this which affected the whole of creation. When Adam and Eve disobeyed, consciously and wilfully, the express command of God, the intimate union between earth and heaven was dissolved. Paradise was lost to mankind; the brute beasts turned against man; the very earth renounced subjection to him. But, worst of all, man's lower nature rebelled against the restraint of reason and sought to have the mastery.

Sin sullied everything here below. But its greatest evil, beyond the infinite dishonour it in-

* Gen. i. 31.

flicted upon the All-Holy Creator, was that its results were in a way endless. The stain which sin had imprinted upon the souls of that first father and mother, the deprivation of such wondrous gifts of nature and grace which followed close upon its track, did not affect those two beings merely: their posterity were condemned to inherit their shame. Henceforth, every child of Adam, from the first moment of his existence as a human being, was to bear the mark of his father's transgression.

Yet, though all looked dark, there was a gleam of light behind the cloud. To the infernal serpent God had said: 'She [the woman] shall crush thy head.'* Although he had seemed victorious, it was not always to be thus. A day would come when the weaker of the two he had conquered should eventually rise superior to him in power and strength. A daughter of Eve was to frustrate his wiles, to 'crush his head.' When ages had rolled by, at last the appointed hour dawned which God had decreed should witness Satan's discomfiture. The wonders of the primal creation were repeated in one human soul; or, to speak more truly, the prophetic splendours of the unsullied innocence of our first parents saw their fulfilment in Mary, the Virgin predestined to become the Mother of the Word Incarnate.

In the description of the creation recorded in the Book of Genesis, we may discern a prophecy of

* Gen. iii. 15.

God's dealings with this the most favoured of His creatures. Adam was made from the slime of the earth, but God breathed into him an immortal soul; moreover, that first man was the one human source of all mankind, since God had placed in his body the elements of the body of his spouse. All this may be applied to the creation of Mary. She is a daughter of earth, yet raised to a far closer nearness to God than that first of creatures. From her body was to be formed that of her Redeemer. The illustrious Dom Guéranger, in his 'Liturgical Year,' thus beautifully alludes to this fact: 'As God, He places in her provisionally what He wills to take from her hereafter. For, as Man, He will receive from her, together with His sacred body, everything that children naturally inherit from their parents: such dispositions and qualities as arise from the physical complexion — features, ways, habits acquired by imitation or by early education. Such is the ineffable condescension of Him who, knowing all things by infused science, condescends to pass, like us, through the apprenticeship of life. Jesus is to have no earthly father; He will therefore receive more from His Mother than could any other son.'*

Mary is, if we may say so, a new creation, because from her willed to be born the Author of Life, who gives the true life of grace to His creatures. It was imperative, therefore, for the honour of her Divine Son that she should be

* *Lit. Year.* Time after Pent. Vol. v. 182.

entirely free from the taint inherited by all others from our first parents. This immense and unique privilege we celebrate in the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, but her birthday shares in the joy which her immunity from stain awakens in the heart of every true Christian. It is because she was always immaculate that her entrance into this world was entirely joyful. The soul of that little infant was God's 'paradise of pleasure' again renewed. Its perfections rendered it a fit temple for the Ever Blessed Trinity, adorned by the Holy Ghost with His choicest graces.

We know little that is authentic of Mary's human ancestry. The tradition of some twelve centuries has delivered the names of her parents as Joachim and Anne. Apocryphal writings give details relating to Mary's birth, which, while they cannot be accepted as altogether credible, nevertheless contain, doubtless, fragments of early and accurate traditions on the subject. They tell of an elderly couple, suffering the reproach of barrenness—so dire a misfortune in the eyes of God's ancient people; of their fervent prayer for offspring, and the gift of a daughter in response. According to some authorities, Mary's birthplace was at Nazareth; but a well established tradition that it was at Jerusalem is as old as the seventh century.

If we follow the opinion maintained by some that the genealogy given by St Luke is that of Our Lady herself—although, for reasons not necessary

to state here, it is not the view supported by the majority of commentators—we have another proof, added to those from other sources, that Mary's ancestry was royal as well as priestly. But it is not because she is descended from kings and saints that her birthday is held in honour, but because she was the true daughter of the All-Holy, born in grace and purity.

It is not wonderful, therefore, considering all these reasons, that the Christian Church should celebrate a festival in honour of the birth into this world of the Mother of Christ. In this she emphasizes the fact of Mary's entire freedom from stain. The birthday of the saints is that on which they first see the light of eternal day in the kingdom of bliss; the feasts of martyrs, for example, are often referred to as their *natalitia* (birthday). These are the days on which the Church rejoices, rather than on those which saw the entry into a sinful world of beings tainted by original sin. There are, however, two exceptions: festivals are celebrated in honour of the birth of the Immaculate Virgin, and that of the Forerunner of Christ; for the latter was cleansed from stain in his mother's womb by the power of the unborn Saviour, and by means of the salutation of the Virgin-Mother.

It is impossible to ascertain with any certainty the date of the institution of the feast of Mary's Nativity. Some have claimed for it a French

origin as far back as the fifth century of the Christian era. But, although the festival may have been celebrated in certain churches and on different days from very early times, Pope Benedict XIV is of opinion that it was not until the seventh century that it was kept in Rome. The first mention of its authoritative observance in France is in a list of feasts drawn up in 871; it is, however, possible that it may have been celebrated earlier.

In 1245, Innocent IV, in the first Council of Lyons, established for the whole Church the celebration of an Octave to the festival of Our Lady's Nativity. This decree was in fulfilment of a vow which the Pontiff and his fellow-cardinals had made during nineteen months of anxiety as to the election of a successor to Celestine IV, during which time the Emperor Frederick II had intrigued to prolong the vacancy of the Holy See.

Turning to the liturgy of the festival, we find some beautiful proper antiphons appointed for the Offices of Vespers and Lauds. The psalms, hymns and other formulas, except those to be noted hereafter, are taken from those common to many other feasts of Our Lady. We give a translation of the antiphons in question:

1. 'This is the birthday of the glorious Virgin Mary, of the children of Abraham, born of the tribe of Juda, of the noble race of David.'

2. 'To-day is the nativity of the holy Virgin Mary, whose glorious life is the light of all the churches.'

3. 'Mary is illustrious because of her royal descent; with heart and mind we most devoutly crave the help of her prayers.'

4. 'With heart and mind let us sing glory to Christ on this sacred solemnity of Mary the highly exalted Mother of God.'

5. 'Let us celebrate with joy the birthday of Blessed Mary, that she may intercede for us with our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Frequently, in the different Offices of the feast, the words of the second of these antiphons recur in the shape of a verse and response. The following is the antiphon for the *Magnificat*: 'Let us celebrate the most honourable birth of the glorious Virgin Mary, who obtained the dignity of a mother without prejudice to her virginal purity.' That appointed for the *Benedictus* at Lauds, celebrates in similar terms Mary's Divine Maternity and perpetual virginity.

The liturgy of the Mass has much that is proper to the festival. The Introit is the salutation composed by the Christian poet, Sedulius: 'Hail, Holy Mother, who didst bring forth the King who rules heaven and earth for ever!' . . . 'My heart hath uttered a good word,' says the psalm, 'I speak my works to the King.' The heart of the Spouse of the Holy Ghost was ever turned towards her Heavenly King in praise and love.

The Collect asks for an increase of that peace which came to Bethlehem through Mary. It is worthy of note that Our Lady was born during the

second period of universal peace which characterized the reign of Augustus, and Our Lord during the third; this fact renders the Collect more strikingly appropriate. It runs as follows: 'Grant to Thy servants, we beseech Thee, O Lord, the gift of heavenly grace; that for those to whom the Blessed Virgin's maternity was the beginning of salvation, the votive solemnity of her nativity may procure an increase of peace.'

For the Epistle the Church has appointed the Lesson from the Book of Proverbs, so often used with reference to Our Lady. In it are applied to Mary praises spoken of holy Wisdom, and exhortations pointing out the way of life. 'Now, therefore, ye children hear me. Blessed are they that keep my ways. . . . He that shall find me shall find life, and shall have salvation from the Lord.* The little Virgin is born into this world to be an example to all, and from her cradle she begins to teach the way of salvation.

The Gradual is in praise of Mary's virginal motherhood: 'Thou art blessed and venerable, O Virgin Mary, who, without any violation of purity, wert found the Mother of our Saviour! O Virgin-Mother of God, He whom the whole world is unable to contain, being made man, enclosed Himself in thy womb. Alleluia! Thou art happy, O Holy Virgin Mary and most worthy of all praise, because from thee arose the Sun of Justice, Christ our God. Alleluia!' It was in view of her divine maternity

* Prov. viii. 22 etc.

that Our Lady was preserved from stain, and her birthday rendered joyful and glorious.

The Gospel, taken from that of St Matthew,* recounts the genealogy of Christ through St Joseph, His reputed father. It closes with the memorable words which always redound to the glory of the Virgin-Mother: 'Mary, of whom was born Jesus.'

The Offertory, in like manner extols the same mystery, the contemplation of which should draw us nearer to Jesus and Mary: 'Thou art blessed, O Virgin Mary, who didst bear the Creator of all things! Thou didst bring forth Him who made thee, and thou remainest for ever a virgin.'

The Communion reminds us that we owe the coming to us of Our Lord in His Sacrament to the holy one whose birthday we are keeping: 'Blessed is the womb of the Virgin Mary, which bore the Son of the Eternal Father.'

The joy which is the dominant characteristic of this feast is expressed very beautifully in the ancient antiphon to the *Magnificat* for the second Vespers, with which both Eastern and Western Churches conclude the Divine Office of the day. With a translation of it we will bring our considerations to a close: 'Thy birth, O Virgin-Mother of God, brought joy to the whole world; for out of thee arose the Sun of Justice, Christ our God; who, taking off the curse, hath bestowed blessing; and, defeating death, hath given us life everlasting.'

* Chap. i.

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OUR LADY OF MERCY

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CHAPTER XIV

OUR LADY OF MERCY

September 24th.

THIS festival, like that of July 16, owes its origin to the establishment of a particular religious Order. By the end of the seventh century the whole of the north coast of Africa was in the possession of Moslems. The predominating race was Arab, with a mixture of African blood. In 710 a small band, bent on pillage, crossed the narrow strait which separated Africa from Spain, and landed at the place now called Gibraltar. The fertility of the continent filled them with envy, and led later to an invasion of Spain, which was so successful that, after about four years of striving, the whole peninsula, with the exception of the northern mountainous districts, had been subjugated. Thus a Christian country became a prey to Mahometanism and continued in such subjection for centuries.

It was due to the unconquered northern districts, where the mountains had served as a refuge for Christians and a barrier against invasion, that Spain at length recovered her liberty. The formation of the kingdoms of Leon, Castile, Aragon, and

Navarre, was due to the freedom of the north from Moslem rule. Pushing their way down, Christian armies eventually succeeded in driving the infidels farther south. By the eleventh century the Arabs, the first conquerors, had been in turn subdued by the Moors, whom they had summoned to their aid from Africa, and these latter held the kingdom of Granada until, in the fifteenth century, the Moslem power was finally broken.

Although deprived of the greater part of their former possessions in Spain, the Moslems still continued to hold here and there portions of the country. Thus Valencia belonged to them from 1101, when they gained possession of it for the second time, until James I of Aragon compelled them to relinquish it in 1238. The Balearic Isles also were occupied by them, and proved a valuable centre for piratical expeditions.

Under such circumstances, Spain was often harassed by her former conquerors, who, though not strong enough to resume their ancient sway, were sufficiently formidable to cause anxiety. One of the chief means by which they continued to trouble Spain was the capture of Christians, whom they sold into slavery in Africa and elsewhere. In the thirteenth century this was perhaps the greatest of the evils which they were able to inflict, and one which was easily accomplished through their proximity to the coast, and the possession of so important a position as Valencia.

Such was the state of things when a young

French noble of holy life came to the court of the King of Aragon at Barcelona, to fill the position of tutor to one of the young princes. Touched with pity at the thought of the wretched fate of Christians condemned to serve as slaves to the infidels, Peter Nolasco was moved, whenever an opportunity occurred, to spend the greater part of his substance upon the redemption of such unfortunates. He had been distinguished from childhood for a tender charity toward the poor and afflicted, and now his whole heart went out to the miserable victims of so abominable a traffic. He spared no effort in persuading others to contribute alms toward so worthy an object; and the more fervently he practised this special work of charity, the more devoted did he become.

His compassion at length inspired him with the design of the establishment of a religious Order whose members should make the ransom of such captives their chief aim. About twenty years earlier, such an institute had actually been set on foot in France, and had received Papal approbation, together with the title of 'Trinitarian.' But its religious were more concerned with the East than with Spain.

Peter's project met with much opposition, but his pious efforts were to receive unlooked-for aid. Raymond of Pennafort, the illustrious Dominican, who was confessor to King James of Aragon, was also Peter's spiritual guide. Our Lady appeared in vision on the same night to

the King, Peter Nolasco, and Raymund, and declared her wish for the foundation of such an Order as Peter had conceived and had already told them of. This paved the way to the carrying out of the design. Both the King and Raymund lent their aid,—the former obtaining Papal approbation of the new institute. On the feast of St Lawrence, 1223, Peter and three companions took vows as first members of the Order, which was eventually styled 'The Royal Military Order of Our Lady of Mercy for the Redemption of Captives.'

In the beginning the Order comprised knights and friars, though the latter were always more numerous. The knights were to guard the coasts against the Moslems, and to join the others in choir when not thus occupied. The chief duty of the friars was to collect alms for funds to buy back Christian slaves from their infidel masters. St. Peter Nolasco was the first Grand Master, but he never became a priest. For some time the superior was always taken from the knights, until the Holy See ordained that he should always be a priest, from that time—during the fourteenth century—the knights became fewer, and eventually passed into other military orders.

The habit was white, to remind the friars of the chastity demanded by their state; but King James decreed that the royal arms of Aragon should be embroidered on the breast. The King set apart a portion of his palace at Barcelona for the first monastery of the Order, and generously built a

large house for its members later on, when their numbers had rapidly increased. Besides the ordinary vows of religion, the friars added a fourth, by which they bound themselves to give up their own liberty, should it be necessary, by taking the place of the captives they desired to ransom. In the carrying out of their primary duty, they were often successful in the conversion of Moslems to Christianity.

Although the Order never seems to have become so widespread as that of the Trinitarians, since it flourished chiefly in Spanish territory, it possessed many houses in Spain and Sicily, and even in Spanish America; and in its time did great service to religion. Though the primitive austerities of the early friars became relaxed in the course of its history, they were renewed by more than one fervent reform; the most important of these took place in the sixteenth century.

At the present day, although its work has changed in character with the change of circumstances, the Order is still labouring for souls in different parts of the world. While a certain number of these religious are to be found in Europe, their convents are more numerous in Latin America. Venezuela, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Ecuador, and Uruguay, each possesses one or more houses.

The festival which we are considering was at first confined to the religious establishments of the

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Order. It dates from 1615, when the Holy See first granted its observance by a special Office and Mass, in recognition of the great work done for Christianity, during the preceding centuries, by the Order of Mercy. It was not long, however, before this permission was extended to the whole of Spain; this was effected in 1680, and twenty years later France obtained the same privilege. In 1696, a decree of Pope Innocent XII. extended the feast to the whole Church.

Although Christian slavery, as regards the body, is altogether a thing of the past, slavery of the intellect to error, and of the will to sin, is no less widespread now than it was in the days when this festival was first established. Then, as now, the intercession of the Mother of Mercy was needed for the ransom of captive souls, more than for the deliverance of prisoners from slavery under the yoke of the Moslem. That this is the chief object of the feast is evident from the Collect which has been drawn up for use in its Office, and which we shall presently consider.

There is another aspect of this festival which we may briefly touch upon here. When, in 1827, the noble Irishwoman, Catherine MacAuley, would provide relief for those ignorant of the truths of Faith, and for those enduring bodily suffering in any of its forms, she placed under the invocation of Our Lady of Mercy the Order of women which she was enabled to establish. Her valiant daughters, spread through many lands, have freely given

themselves in servitude to the poor and wretched. To rescue their fellow-beings from the evils which oppress them, to instruct the ignorant, to comfort the afflicted, to soothe the bed of suffering, to visit the prisoner, to spend herself in the exercise of every form of external charity,—such is the glorious vocation of the Sister of Mercy. Not without reason, then, did the foundress of that institute choose this day as its patronal festival.

In the appointed liturgy there is little that is different in form from that of other feasts of Our Lady; yet much of it will bear a particular application. The antiphons for Vespers and Lauds are those which we have already considered on the feast of Mary Help of Christians. Their reference to Our Lady's part in the Incarnation, to her share in the Passion of her Divine Son, and to the glory and dignity which she now enjoys in heaven as a consequence of such association with Our Lord, make them equally suitable for this feast. For, on account of her faithful service of God, she has earned a title to His loving condescension in the granting of her petitions. Like Abigail of old, who went to meet David with the offering of costly gifts, to appease his just anger and to rescue her churlish husband from impending disaster (1 Kings, xxv.), and thereby gained favour in the sight of the outraged King, so Mary's intercession, precious in God's sight, must needs prevail to turn away His wrath from men.

In the beautiful hymn, *Ave Maris Stella*, after

congratulating Mary upon the glorious privileges of her divine maternity and perpetual virginity, and begging for the strengthening of that peace between God and man which she won by her consent to become the Mother of the Redeemer, the Church sings in a strain appropriate to this festival:

Break the captive's fetters ;
 Light on blindness pour ;
 All our ills expelling,
 Every bliss implore.

There is a striking versicle with its response, in which we may read an allusion to the power which Mary is able to afford against the enemies of the Christian name, and against all adversaries of the people of God—'Vouchsafe that I may praise thee, O Virgin sanctified! Give me strength against thine enemies.' Then follows that beautiful antiphon which accompanies the *Magnificat* on so many and such varied feasts of Our Lady, and yet is so eminently appropriate to each: 'Holy Mary, be thou help to the helpless, courage to the fearful, comfort to the sorrowful. Pray for the people, plead for the clergy, intercede for all women vowed to God. Let all who celebrate thy holy feast-day experience thine aid.' Here we are reminded of the needs of prisoners, of the sick and sorrowful, and of all in affliction; and are encouraged to pray both for the people who need help, and for all those, whether priests or religious women, who have devoted their lives to the service of their brethren.

The Mass, with the exception of the special Collect, is that common to many feasts of the Blessed Virgin, yet in many portions we may discover a striking application to this festival. The Introit is the familiar *Salve, Sancta Parens*—‘Hail, Holy Mother, who didst bring forth the King who rules heaven and earth for ever!’ We have a powerful advocate in the Mother of the Everlasting King, whose rule is unlimited and whose power is infinite. Solomon said to his suppliant mother: ‘My mother, ask; for I must not turn away thy face.’* Christ our Lord is an infinitely more loving Son than Solomon, and infinitely more mighty. In the appended psalm, we seem to hear Mary’s voice reassuring us of her ability to help us: ‘My heart hath uttered a good word; I speak of my works to the King.’† She has only to remind Him of her faithful service to Him, and her prayer is granted without delay.

The Collect runs thus: ‘O God, who, by the most glorious Mother of Thy Son, didst vouchsafe to increase Thy Church by a new Order for the deliverance of the faithful of Christ from the power of pagans; grant, we beseech Thee, that, by the merits and intercession of her whom we piously venerate as the foundress of so great a work, we may be delivered from all sins and from the captivity of the devil.’ Here it is to be noted that the Church no longer prays for the deliverance of Christian captives, but for the liberation of souls

* 3 Kings, ii. 20.

† Ps. xlv.

from a direr fate and a far more deadly enemy. The noble work of the Order of Ransom is fittingly commemorated, as deserving the lasting gratitude of the people of God. But its primitive task has been accomplished, now that the Moslem power is broken; henceforth it is the duty of all to lend aid in the deliverance of captives from the chains of sin, and from servitude to the enemy of their salvation.

The Lesson, in place of Epistle, is that which has already claimed our attention on the feast of Mary Help of Christians; nothing need be added to the explanation given in that connection, since it applies equally to the present occasion.

The Gradual celebrates the perpetual virginity of the Mother of God, which is the source of all her greatness and of her unfailing influence with her Divine Son: 'Blessed art thou, O Virgin Mary, and worthy of veneration; for without any violation of purity thou didst become the Mother of our Saviour! O Virgin Mother of God, He whom the whole world is unable to contain, enclosed Himself in thy womb when made Man. Alleluia! After childbirth thou didst remain a pure Virgin; O Mother of God, intercede for us! Alleluia!'

The short Gospel was commented upon on the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The Offertory verse is supplied by the Angelic Salutation, which sums up Mary's claims to blessedness and greatness: 'Hail Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb.'

The secret Collect which follows is deserving of comment from its appropriateness. 'Through Thy mercy, O Lord, and by the intercession of Blessed Mary, ever a Virgin, may this oblation procure for us present and perpetual prosperity and peace!' Jesus, our Lord, offers Himself in the Holy Sacrifice as the Ransom of sinners and Mary unites herself with His oblation, as she did heretofore under the Cross.

The Communion verse is that familiar one, which at the moment of the ineffable union between the Creator and His creature recalls the memory of the Divine Maternity: 'Blessed is the womb of the Virgin Mary, which bore the Son of the Eternal Father!'

The Post-Communion Collect prays: 'Having received, O Lord, these helps to our salvation, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may be ever protected by the patronage of Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, in whose honour we have made these offerings to Thy majesty.'

What a joy should it be to the faithful to call to mind the millions of wretched Christian slaves whose chains have fallen off at Mary's prayers, and whose bodies have been rescued thereby from the tyrannous yoke of the infidel, while their souls were delivered from the danger of apostasy! What joy, too, to think of the still greater number of those whom in her motherly love she has rescued, in later ages, from everlasting slavery! May she ever exercise her queenly power in regard to suffer-

ing humanity! Our prayer to her on this festival should be: 'Show thyself a Mother, O Mary! and hasten to our aid. Despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us, . . . O ever-glorious and Blessed Virgin!'

THE MOST HOLY ROSARY

CHAPTER XV

THE MOST HOLY ROSARY

First Sunday of October.

HIGH on its mountain stronghold, the little Eastern city, beleaguered by the Assyrian host in the valley below, had long held out bravely, hoping against hope. But water had failed, for the enemy had cut off their supplies; and the men of Bethulia had been on the point of surrendering the city, when confidence, for the time being, had returned. Judith, the beautiful and rich young widow of their townsman Manasses, strong in the strength of prayer, had betaken herself to the hostile camp, with a serving maid for sole escort, bent upon carrying out some project, they knew not what, for their relief. In five days, she had led them to hope, the Lord would 'Look down upon His people Israel.' 'Let nothing else be done but to pray for me to the Lord our God,'* were almost her parting words. So for the prescribed time they had given themselves to prayer and fasting, while the guard upon the ramparts kept diligent watch upon the camp below. No sign had come to show whether

* Judith viii. 33.

Judith's embassy had failed or prospered; the fifth day had dawned since, arrayed in her festal attire and adorned with jewels, she had passed, silent and prayerful, through the gate and down the valley, as night was giving place to day; yet no tidings had reached those anxious watchers.

Night fell on that fifth day, and all hope seemed gone. On the morrow they would carry out their former resolution of delivering up their city to the besiegers. 'For it is better,' they had said, 'that being captives we should live and bless the Lord, than that we should die and be a reproach to all flesh, after we have seen our wives and our infants die before our eyes. . . Deliver now the city into the hand of the army, . . . that our end may be short by the edge of the sword, which is made longer by the drought of thirst.'*

But in the dead of night the garrison is aroused by the joyous cry, out of the darkness, of a woman's voice: 'Open the gates, for God is with us, who hath shown His power in Israel.'† They recognize Judith, and, with hope newborn, they summon the ancients of the city; while all the people, young and old, hearing the glad tidings, flock to welcome her. Torches are kindled; and in their glow Judith, the gleam of victory in her eyes, holds up to their gaze the head of the leader of their enemies, whom she has slain that night. 'Praise ye the Lord, our God,' is her cry, 'who hath not forsaken them that hope in Him.'‡

* Judith vii. 16, 17.

† *Ibid.* xiii. 13.

‡ *Ibid.* xiii. 17

Then as she narrates to wonder-stricken ears the events of those days of anxiety and peril, and tells how God had delivered their foe into her hands, loud acclamations rise in her honour; 'and Ozias, the prince of the people of Israel,' cries aloud: 'Blessed art thou, O daughter, by the Lord the most high God, above all women upon the earth! Blessed be the Lord, . . . because He hath so magnified thy name this day that thy praise shall not depart out of the mouth of men.' *

Judith, the deliverer of her people, is a type of one greater than she; the enthusiastic praises uttered by Ozias were to find their perfect fulfilment in a later age, and in a far nobler person. It was through a Woman—Mary, the Virgin-Mother—that God willed to bring about the salvation of the human race. God had promised that the Woman should 'crush' the head of the infernal Serpent; this Mary did when she gave birth to the Redeemer of mankind. His power was crushed, but he was not altogether destroyed; he still continues, and will to the end continue, to wage war against the people of God. But in the Virgin-Mother God has given to men a powerful helper and deliverer.

Judith rescued her people from one peril only; Mary is continually enabling mankind to triumph over the enemy of God and of man. 'Thou alone hast destroyed all heresies throughout the world,' sings the Church in praise of her; through her in-

* *Ibid.* xiii. 23, etc.

tercession, and the assertion of her prerogatives, error has always been overcome.

But in a still more evident way the Blessed Virgin has been the helper of the Church and of the Christian peoples, when the arms of infidel hosts have threatened to destroy the Christian name. Thus when in 1571 the Turks seemed destined to obtain the mastery of Europe, and only a comparatively small army could be raised to resist their immense forces, a marvellous victory was granted to the Christians in the Gulf of Lepanto, where they had engaged in battle with the infidel. For, when the Turks seemed to be gaining the advantage with the help of a favourable wind, there was a sudden change; the wind dropped, and enabled the Christians to inflict upon their adversaries the terrible defeat already described in the chapter dealing with the feast of Our Lady, Help of Christians. Pope St Pius V., who had received a miraculous intimation of the great victory at the moment it was accomplished, declared it to be the result of the united prayers of the faithful assembled in their churches to beg the help of the Mother of God in the dire need of the Church and her children. He accordingly ordered the event to be annually commemorated by a feast in honour of Our Lady of Victory.

Later Popes celebrated in a similar way the intervention of the Blessed Virgin when Christians were sore pressed by the infidel. Thus, in 1683, Innocent XI extended to the whole Church the

festival of the Holy Name of Mary, hitherto kept in certain localities only, in thanksgiving for the wonderful victory gained over the Turks at Vienna, when 74,000 Christian soldiers, through their confidence in the help of God and the prayers of Mary, completely vanquished 200,000 of the enemy. Clement XI, in 1716, acted similarly as regards the extension of the Feast of the Rosary in gratitude for a notable defeat of the Turks in Hungary.

But there is a special feature in the overthrow of enemies, be they spiritual or material, through the assistance of the Blessed Virgin: although the victory is gained by the power of her prayers to God, those prayers are due to the invocations addressed to her by Christian peoples in their distress. Mary is the leader of the combatants, but her arms are peaceful; they are those of fervent, persevering prayer. Moreover, there is one special kind of prayer which seems more than any other to have gained Mary's ready help, and that is the prayer which we call the Rosary.

It is not necessary here to enter into a minute explanation of what the Rosary is, or when it originated; it is sufficiently familiar to every practical Catholic to render detailed description superfluous. As to its origin, tradition records that in its present form it was first used by St Dominic in his spiritual campaign against the Albigenses. It was then that Mary first showed her power in conjunction with the united prayers of

faithful Catholics who together invoked her aid. By means of the prayer of the Rosary, said to have been diligently preached by St Dominic, the heresy was completely stamped out, and France delivered from a dire foe.

Those other victories to which we have already alluded, although apparently due to material arms, were in reality brought about by the same means as the spiritual victories of St Dominic. For the engagement at Lepanto took place while the Rosary confraternities in Rome and throughout the world were fervently praying for Mary's help. It was this fact that led to the change of the original title of 'St. Mary of Victory' to that of 'Our Lady of the Rosary' in the designation of the commemorative festival. The later victory over the Turks in Hungary was ascribed by Clement XI to the same cause.

The Popes already cited were not the first to call the attention of Christians to the efficacy of this form of prayer. Pope Urban IV, in the thirteenth century, had declared that it procured daily advantages to the faithful; Sixtus IV, in the fifteenth, said that it not only gave due honour to God and the Blessed Virgin, but was also particularly efficacious in averting the dangers with which the world was constantly threatened. Leo X, in the sixteenth, spoke of its power in opposing false teachers and their heresies; and Julius III, in the same century, styled it the glory of the Roman Church.

But it was reserved for our own times to witness a still more ardent champion of the Rosary in the late Pope Leo XIII. From 1883, when he issued his first Encyclical on the subject—*Supremi Apostolatus*—until his death in 1903, he continued by frequently repeated exhortations to the bishops of the Catholic world to impress upon Christians the power of the Rosary to combat the evils which oppress the Church in our days. To that great Pontiff is due the raising of the festival to higher rank, with a proper Office and Mass, the addition in the Litany of the invocation, 'Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, pray for us,' and the institution of the solemn celebration throughout the Church of the month of October with its daily public recitation of the Rosary in all cathedrals and parish churches.

Pope Leo, again and again in his Apostolic Letters on the subject, recalled the triumphs gained through the devout use of this simple yet powerful means of obtaining Mary's help. In these days of trial, and of the persecution of the Church and her head, the Pontiff relied upon the same heavenly Advocate who had shown her power with God in other days to come to his aid once more. The apparent delay in the obtaining of the graces asked for never discouraged him; for he was confident that the revival of faith, resulting from frequent meditation upon its mysteries, would render Christians more and more worthy of the favours daily solicited.

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The liturgy of a festival so prominently brought forward by Pope Leo XIII is well deserving of attention. The Order of Preachers had long enjoyed the privilege of a special Mass and Office, in recognition of the part taken by Dominicans in the spread of the devotion. From the formulas of their service books the Church has taken a large share of the proper Office of the feast, in the shape of antiphons, hymns, and responsories.

In the Vesper antiphons are many evident allusions to Judith, one of the striking types of Our Lady in the Old Testament dispensation. These are easily recognizable. In an English translation, the antiphons run as follows:

1. 'Who is this, beautiful as a dove, like a rose planted by the brooks of water?'

2. 'It is the mighty Virgin, like the tower of David; a thousand bucklers hang upon it, all the armour of valiant men.'

3. 'Hail, Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women.'

4. 'The Lord hath blessed thee by His power, because by thee He hath brought our enemies to nought.'

5. 'The daughters of Sion saw her adorned with the flowers of roses, and declared her most blessed.'

Throughout the Office, as in these antiphons, the idea of power in protecting her clients is associated with sweetness, beauty, and charm, as typified by the queen of flowers. The very name of the devo-

tion originated in the offering of the prescribed prayers to Mary as so many chaplets of roses; hence the allusion to those blossoms. The same figure occurs in the Chapter, which is adapted from Ecclesiasticus: 'In me is all grace of the way and of the truth; in me is all hope of life and of virtue. I have flowered forth like a rose planted by the brooks of water.'*

A striking feature of the hymns is the commemoration in them of the three divisions of the mysteries of the Rosary. Thus in that appointed for the Vesper Office, the Joyful Mysteries are celebrated; at Matins, or Night Office, the Sorrowful; at Lauds, the Glorious. At the second Vespers all three divisions are summarized. There is in this arrangement an appropriateness which may not be evident at first sight. Evening is suggestive of quietude, and the calm joy of the early childhood of Our Lord is fittingly chosen as the subject of contemplation; night is typical of mourning and sorrow; daybreak speaks of the renewal of light, and its Office celebrates Christ's Resurrection and the glories attendant upon it.

In the Mass we have the joyous Introit already noticed on the Feast of the Assumption. The Collect is familiar from its frequent repetition in English when the Rosary is publicly recited: 'O God, whose only-begotten Son, by His life, death, and resurrection, hath purchased for us the rewards of eternal life; grant, we beseech Thee, that,

* Ecclus. xxiv. 25; xxxix. 17.

meditating upon these mysteries in the Most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we may imitate what they contain, and obtain what they promise.'

The Epistle is represented by a lesson from the Book of Proverbs, frequently used on festivals of Our Lady. The words, 'Hear instruction and be wise, and refuse it not,'* are suggestive of the teaching power of the Rosary. 'Blessed is the man that heareth me, and that watcheth daily at my gates,' may be taken as a promise of reward for our daily practice of this devotion, which keeps us in our Heavenly Mother's presence.

The Gradual is identical with that of the Assumption. It proclaims the virtues which won for Mary the love of the Eternal King. The Alleluia verse is proper to this feast, and celebrates the unrivalled nobility of Our Lady's descent: 'Alleluia! It is a festival of the glorious Virgin Mary of the seed of Abraham; sprung from the tribe of Juda, from David's renowned lineage. Alleluia!' It was fitting that to incomparable virtues should be added the distinction of royal ancestry, to render the chosen Mother of God still more illustrious in the eyes of the world.

The Gospel is the passage from St Luke† which describes the coming of the Archangel on his embassy to Mary. It is worthy of note that his salutation, 'Hail, full of grace,' with the addition of the name of Mary, together with the words of

* Prov. viii. 33, etc.

† Chap. i.

St Elizabeth—'Blessed is the fruit of thy womb,'—and the holy name of Jesus, constituted the 'Hail Mary' as it was known when the Rosary was instituted; the concluding words as we have them were added at a later period. This Gospel, therefore, is entirely appropriate to the feast.

The Offertory is identical with the Chapter at Vespers, already noticed. The Communion verse likens the Christian virtues to fragrant and choice flowers; the heart that has received its God in the Holy Sacrament has been endowed with the divine Source of all virtue, and Our Lord will expect His visit to be fruitful in results. 'Flower ye forth like the lily, and yield ye a sweet smell, and bring forth leaves in grace; sound forth a canticle of praise, and bless ye the Lord in His works.*' The Post-Communion prayer asks for grace to carry out this exhortation: 'Help us, we beseech Thee, O Lord, through the prayers of Thy Most Holy Mother, the feast of whose Rosary we are now celebrating, that we may experience the virtue of the mysteries on which we meditate, and obtain the effect of the Sacrament which we have received.'

The fruit of the worthy celebration of this festival is a more intimate union with Our Lord and His Blessed Mother. We cannot keep the feast fervently without being drawn more closely to the loving practice of the devotion it commemorates; while by the regular recitation of the Rosary and meditation on its mysteries we may hope for the

* Ecclus. xxxix. 19.

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result indicated by Pope Leo XIII in his Encyclical of 1892: 'If we tread the paths consecrated by the blood of Christ our Lord and by the tears of Mary, we are sure to attain without difficulty to a participation in their heavenly glory.'

THE PRESENTATION

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CHAPTER XVI

THE PRESENTATION

November 21st.

THE Temple on Mount Sion is crowded with worshippers coming and going. The Court of the Women, a large enclosed space, two hundred feet square, contains the main body; beyond the Nicanor Gate, toward the west, in the Court of Israel, are male worshippers. Pharisees, with phylacteries bound on their foreheads or arms, displaying texts of Scripture; Scribes from the city; working men from country districts—all are fulfilling their duty of prayer in union with the sacrifices continually being offered on the great brazen altar in the centre of the Priests' Court, only a few feet farther to the west.

Many men remain with the female members of their family in the lower court; for women are never allowed to advance beyond it. Raised galleries round the walls of this space contain other women, among them the virgins known as *almas*, who are spending their earlier years under the tuition of the priests, and in charge of devout

women of riper age, who by reason of widowhood or some such cause are free from worldly cares, and choose to dwell within the Temple precincts for their remaining span of life.

These *almas* of the Temple are considered by many reliable authorities to have existed from very early times in the history of God's people. Some recognised them in the band of women who, led by Mary, the sister of Moses, sang the canticle of thanksgiving on the eastern shore of the Red Sea, after the Israelites had crossed dryshod in their flight from Egyptian slavery; for that Mary is held by St Gregory of Nyssa and St Ambrose to have remained a virgin and thus a fit leader of the choir of virgins. The 'women that watched at the door of the tabernacle,' who gave their mirrors to form material for the lavers of the sanctuary,* and 'the virgins that were shut up,' who flocked round the high-priest Onias when the Temple was threatened with desecration,† are also thought by able commentators to have belonged to these maidens, who, though not dedicated to God in perpetual virginity, were regarded as worthy of special reverence while they remained attached to the House of God.

On the particular November day of which we speak, among the throng of worshippers are an aged man of dignified mien, and a woman also advanced in years, evidently his wife. In her arms the latter bears a beautiful little child, almost an infant. The man is Joachim of Nazareth, a

* Exod. xxxviii. 8.

† 2 Machab. iii. 19.

member of the royal house of David; his wife, Anne, is also of the same illustrious descent.

The royal line had long been set aside. Herod the Idumean, was occupying the throne of Judea, by favour of the Roman conquerors. Jealous of David's descendants, and fearing the prophecies which foretold to the ancient dynasty a lasting reign, he had striven to put to death any members of the royal house that might still survive. Joachim and Anne, probably owing to their obscure condition and residence in the unimportant town of Nazareth, far away from any connection with the court of the tyrant, escaped his cruelty.

In answer to the fervent prayers of this devout couple, God had granted to them a daughter in their old age; and now they had come, like Elcana and Anna of old, to 'lend to the Lord' the infant He had bestowed upon them. She was to be trained in the Temple, with the other *almas*, growing to maidenhood in the shadow of the sanctuary.

As they advance toward the Nicanor Gate, where the offering of their little daughter is to take place, the child slips down from her mother's arms, and, clasping Anne's outstretched hand with baby fingers, slowly paces by her side. When they reach the flight of fifteen steps which lead to the lofty entrance of the more sacred precincts, the child leaves her mother's side and alone, unaided, climbs the steps and stands before the gate. For this is no ordinary child; God has His designs in

her regard. This unparalleled maturity of action in one so young seems destined to show to all who witness it God's nearness to her. The Holy Ghost has taken her under His care from her infancy, and He alone will lead and guide her.

When Joachim and Anne have also ascended the steps, the gate is opened to receive the offering from the hand of the former; and the priest who accepts it offers sacrifice for them. Tradition tells that it was Zachary, afterwards father of Christ's Precursor, who ministered for the little company composed of Joachim and his friends on that day. Such, in the designs of God, may have been the case, but there is no direct evidence of the fact.

After the offering of sacrifice came the oblation of the little child. If we may credit a Mahometan tradition embodied in the Koran, Anne presented her beloved child to the priest with the words: 'I come to offer you the gift which God has bestowed upon me.' The priest then received the little one into his charge, to be placed in the care of some pious matron. Another tradition relates that this was another Anne—the same who later shared the privilege of holy Simeon and recognised the Infant Saviour at His presentation in the Temple. Whatever may be thought of the authenticity of such traditions, there is nothing improbable in them. Almighty God rules all circumstances, and He may have directed these.

The ceremony was brought to a conclusion by the benediction pronounced by the priest over all

who had taken part in the presentation of the child; and we may well believe that some of the neighbours and friends of the pious couple would bear them company in so important an event. Stretching out his hands over the worshippers, the priest invoked upon them the blessing of the God of Israel in the traditional formula. Joachim and those who were with him bowed low, placing their hands over their eyes; for such was the Jewish custom when receiving a blessing. No one would look upon the hand stretched over them, because the priest was God's representative; and to him, in that solemn moment, were applied the words of the Lord to Moses: 'Man shall not see Me and live.'*

Then taking leave of their dear one, Joachim and Anne departed, leaving the little Mary in the house of God. There she was to remain in seclusion for twelve years, taking part in all the solemn worship daily carried out there—weaving and embroidering priestly vestments, fulfilling the daily duties required of the *almas*, and above all drinking in the priests' instructions in the Law of God, and pondering devoutly upon the Sacred Scriptures.

How close must have been the union of that holy child with her Lord during those years of hiddenness! We know not how far God deigned to make known to her His eternal decrees in her regard, but we may be sure that during those years of retreat she would often meditate upon the prophecies

* Exod. xxxiii. 20.

which told of the Redeemer who was to come, and would pour forth ardent prayers that His advent might not be long delayed. In the sacrifices at which she daily assisted, she would behold the type of the great Sacrifice foretold in the Sacred Writings; she would recognise, in the spotless lamb offered morning and evening, the Holy One of whom Isaias spoke: 'He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer.'* It is a pious belief that Mary in those early years consecrated herself to God by a vow of perpetual virginity. Thus, dwelling in God's presence, guarded by angels, she was being prepared by the Holy Ghost for her high destiny—
—that of Mother of the Incarnate Word.

The presentation of Mary in the Temple and her residence therein rest upon an ancient and reliable tradition, and are maintained by numerous Fathers of the Church. A festival in honour of the event is mentioned in the most ancient Greek menologies extant. Although the feast was not celebrated in the West at so early a period, there is undoubted evidence that the fact of the presentation was believed and honoured in the Western Church as early as the fifth century. In the time of the Crusades, a church was erected by Christians over the portion of the Temple buildings which tradition pointed out as the site of Mary's dwelling-place; this locality is now enclosed in the Mosque of

* Isa. liii. 7.

Omar, which stands on the ground once occupied by the Temple.

The feast of Mary's Presentation was first celebrated in the West in 1372, when Gregory XI established it for the Roman Court. Before it was generally observed in the Church, it was kept by many of the English Benedictine monasteries. Sixtus V placed the festival in the Roman Breviary in 1585; but it had already become pretty general when St Pius V wishing to diminish the number of Offices in the universal calendar, suppressed this one, together with several others. Since its reinstatement by Pope Sixtus, it has gradually become a favourite occasion for the renewal of vows by various religious Orders, in memory of Our Lady's voluntary consecration of herself to God in the Temple of old.

The liturgy of this festival has little that is proper to the occasion. In Vespers and Lauds, the Office is that of ordinary feasts of Our Lady, with the exception of the Collect and, in the case of Vespers, a proper antiphon for the *Magnificat*: 'O Blessed Mother of God, Mary, ever Virgin, none but thee hath ever been wholly pleasing to our Lord Jesus Christ! Alleluia.'

The Mass, in like manner, is taken altogether from the Common of the Blessed Virgin, although certain portions have a striking application to the festival.

The Introit is that which celebrates the Divine Maternity: 'Hail, Holy Mother, who didst bring

forth the King, who rules heaven and earth for ever!' In the appended psalm we may see an allusion to the mystery we are celebrating: 'My heart hath uttered a good word: I speak my works to the King.' That she might be a more worthy Mother to the King of Heaven, Mary uttered that 'good word' when she consecrated her whole life and all her deeds to Him by the vow of virginity, taken during her abode in the sanctuary.

The Collect runs thus: 'O God, who wert pleased that the Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, the habitation of the Holy Ghost, should on this day be presented in the Temple; grant, we beseech Thee, that, by her intercession, we may deserve to be presented in the temple of Thy glory.' Mary, who dwelt in the Temple on earth—the purest and holiest creature within those precincts sacred to God's worship—has already merited an eternal dwelling-place for both soul and body in the presence of her Lord in the Heavenly Jerusalem. We trust to her powerful prayers to win a place for us also in that same abode of joy and bliss.

The Lesson is one already familiar, from its frequent use on Our Lady's feasts. It has, however, a special application to this day. 'In the holy dwelling-place I have ministered before him.' The words recall the devout service of that tender Virgin when she like the child Samuel of old, 'ministered to the Lord' by her prayers and oblations in God's house. 'And so was I established in Sion, and in the holy city likewise I rested, and my

power was in Jerusalem. And I took root in an honourable people,*—by her perpetual vow, becoming fixed among those most worthy of honour, the virgins whom she leads to God.

'Thou art blessed and venerable, O Virgin Mary,' sings the Gradual, 'who, without any violation of purity, wert found the Mother of our Saviour! O Virgin Mother of God, He whom the whole world is not able to contain, being made Man, inclosed Himself in thy womb.' Mary's vow, far from preventing her from becoming the Mother of the Redeemer, prepared her for that immense dignity. The Alleluia verse continues the same strain: 'Alleluia. After childbirth thou didst remain a pure Virgin. O Mother of God, intercede for us!'

The Gospel is that which records the praises uttered by 'a certain woman in the crowd,' in honour of Christ's Mother; while the Offertory and Communion verse are both familiar; the former is the *Ave Maria*, and the latter the frequently recurring 'Blessed is the womb,' already noticed more than once.

In conclusion, we will unite with the devout Abbot Guéranger † in the prayer he addresses to Mary on this festival: 'Deign [O Mary] to bless especially those privileged souls who, by the grace of their vocation, are even here below dwellers in the house of the Lord. . . . But is not every Christian, by reason of his baptism, an indweller and a member of the Church, God's true sanctuary,

* Ecclus. xxiv. 15, etc. † *Lit. Year.* Time after Pent.. vi. 355.

prefigured by that of Moriah? May we, through thy intercession, follow thee so closely in thy Presentation, even here in the land of shadows, that we may deserve to be presented after thee to the Most High in the temple of His glory.'

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

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CHAPTER XVII

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

December 8th.

IN the neighbourhood of his father's house at Ephra, Gedeon, son of Joas, of the tribe of Manasses, is threshing and cleansing wheat. He is labouring secretly and silently. He is not using the threshing floor; he drives no oxen. Sheltered by a spreading tree, he is cleansing his corn in a wine-press, to escape observation; for Israel has for seven years been grievously oppressed by the Madianites, and the enemy may at any moment surprise Gedeon and carry off the fruits of his toil. Suddenly he is aware of a stranger seated under the tree. The unlooked-for visitor salutes him with words which sound inappropriate. 'The Lord is with thee, O most valiant of men!' he says. Gedeon, greatly astonished, replies: 'If the Lord be with us, why have these evils fallen upon us?' He tells of all the trials and indignities to which his nation has been subjected; and adds sorrowfully: 'And now the Lord hath forsaken us.' But the answer is altogether unexpected. 'Go in this

thy strength,' says the strange visitor, 'and thou shalt deliver Israel out of the hand of Madian. Know that I have sent thee.' But Gedeon still doubts. 'I beseech thee, my lord,' he asks, 'wherewith shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the meanest in Manasses, and I am the least in my father's house.' The stranger replies in tones of authority: 'I will be with thee, and thou shalt cut off Madian as one man.' Then, by wondrous signs, the visitor reveals to Gedeon his true character; and Gedeon cries in fear and trembling: 'Alas, my Lord God: for I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face!' His fears are calmed by the gracious answer: 'Peace be with thee. Fear not: thou shalt not die.'

When, in obedience to the divine command, Gedeon had assembled the men of his own tribe and others from Aser, Zabulon, and Nephthali, he begged of God yet further signs of His will—more, perhaps, to encourage his followers to act manfully than to dispel any doubt on his own part. 'If Thou wilt save Israel by my hand as Thou hast said, I will put this fleece of wool on the floor: if there be dew on the fleece only, and it be dry on all the ground beside, I shall know that by my hand, as Thou hast said, Thou wilt deliver Israel. And it was so. And rising before day, wringing the fleece, he filled a vessel with the dew.'

One more proof he presumed to ask from God: 'Let not Thy wrath be kindled against me if I try once more, seeking a sign in the fleece. I pray

that the fleece only may be dry, and all the ground wet with dew. And God did that night as he had requested, and it was dry on the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.*

The mission of the Angel of the Lord to Gedeon foreshadows in a striking way, as regards many of its circumstances, another angelic embassy many centuries later. A lowly Maiden, hidden in the seclusion of a poor cottage at Nazareth, is suddenly aware of a like heavenly visitor. His salutation is: 'The Lord is with thee.' His object is the deliverance of God's people from a powerful and cruel enemy, who has long oppressed them. He promises the certain help of God, if the recipient of the divine embassy will carry out God's designs. In the later scene, as in the earlier, the chosen agent humbly professes personal unworthiness. The same consoling words are spoken: 'Fear not!'

But a still more striking type of Mary is to be found in the wonders wrought by means of the fleece. It is a type frequently used by the Fathers, and for that reason alone would command our appreciation. But it has a higher authority still. It has been adopted by the Church in her liturgy; for one of the antiphons for the feast of the Circumcision thus refers to the Incarnation: 'When Thou wast born ineffably of the Virgin, the Scriptures were fulfilled. As dew upon the fleece, Thou didst come to save mankind. O Lord our God, we bless and praise Thee!'

* Judges vi. *passim*.

In the antiphon, the fleece is taken to represent Mary, whom the Holy Ghost overshadowed at the Incarnation, and who gave birth to the Son of God. There is however another fulfilment of the prophetic sign and one which refers more especially to Mary than to our Blessed Lord. In both miracles connected with the fleece of Gedeon we may see a foreshadowing of the unique privilege bestowed upon her who was to be the Mother of the Word Incarnate—her Immaculate Conception.

The fleece filled with dew in copious measure speaks to us of the all-pure soul of the Virgin, completely sanctified from the first moment of her existence by the plenitude of the grace wherewith God had endowed her. All other human creatures, since the first man and woman, had come into being devoid of sanctifying grace; their state of soul was represented by the parched soil upon which the fleece lay. Mary alone was worthy to hear the angelic salutation: 'Hail full of grace!'

The dry fleece is a type of the same privilege regarded from another point of view. The copious dew upon the earth around represents the flood of iniquity which inundated all souls through the fall of Adam and Eve. The fleece was untouched by moisture; in like manner the soul of God's chosen Mother was altogether free from the taint which affected all other descendants of the first created pair. The ever-present dominion of sanctifying grace and the freedom from original sin in the soul of Mary constitutes the privilege which we style her Immaculate Conception.

In the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, in which Pope Pius IX defined the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, the Sovereign Pontiff speaks of God's eternal decree that the Mother destined to give birth to His Divine Son should be endowed with His choicest gifts, as a sign of His special predilection. 'He poured out upon her,' says the Pope, 'more abundantly than upon any angelic spirit or heavenly saint, the plenitude of His graces in the most marvellous profusion. Being entirely exempt from the slavery of sin, she was endowed with a perfection of innocence and holiness so great that no greater can be imagined after that of God Himself—so great that God alone is able to fathom its immensity. For it was fitting that a Mother so worthy of veneration should be resplendent with the highest sanctity, and that she should be entirely preserved from the taint of even original sin, in order to triumph the more completely over the old serpent; since God the Father had determined to give to her as her Child that only-begotten Son, equal to Himself, whom He loved as Himself, and whom He had begotten of His own bosom, so that He should be at one and the same time the Son of God and the Son of the Virgin.'

Although there are proofs innumerable that the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception has been constantly believed in the Church, for many ages it was not regarded as an express article of the faith which all Catholics were bound to accept. It was not until 1854 that Pius IX, yielding to the

ardent desires of Christian nations, solemnly declared it to be part of the original deposit of faith. 'The doctrine,' said the definition, 'which holds that the Blessed Virgin Mary in the first instant of her conception was, by the special favour and privilege of Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, preserved exempt from all stain of original sin, has been revealed by God, and is therefore to be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful.'

It is impossible to realise, however imperfectly, the height of the dignity to which Our Lady was raised by her Divine Maternity without being struck by the absolute fitness of the prerogative bestowed upon her in her Immaculate Conception. The Word of God was to take flesh from her; had her nature been in the slightest degree defiled by sin, the taint would have rendered her unworthy of so close a union. It is inconceivable that a body which had ever been under the dominion of the devil should become the abode of the All-Holy God.

But, apart from this, God owed it to His justice, His truth, His power and His love that Mary should enjoy her unique privilege. Justice demanded that, as the first Eve had received in her creation all the riches and endowments of a soul in perfect union with its Creator, the second Eve, destined to repair the fault of the first, should be no less liberally dowered. Eve was immaculate in her creation, therefore Mary must needs be

immaculate also. God had given His word that the Woman should eventually triumph over the serpent; He had said: 'She shall crush thy head.'* God's truth is shown in the complete fulfilment of this promise by the preservation of Mary from the effects of Eve's transgression. In like manner His power is manifest in the humiliation of His enemy; and His love toward the human race, and toward Our Lady in particular, in so generously enriching His human Mother.

For centuries before the solemn definition of the dogma, a feast was celebrated in honour of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. In the East it can be traced back as far as the sixth century; in the eighth it was kept in Spain, and by the ninth had been introduced into the Church of Naples. In parts of England it was observed in 1066; and St Anselm, when Archbishop of Canterbury, extended it to the whole island. France adopted the festival a little later, after it had been carried from England to Normandy. In 1049 it was sanctioned in Germany, in a council at which Pope St Leo IX was present. Finally, Pope Sixtus IV established the feast in Rome in 1476.

Various changes have been made from time to time in the liturgy by which this festival is honoured; indeed, different churches and religious Orders had their special formulas. But in 1863 Pius IX issued a proper Mass and Office for the

* Gen. iii 15.

whole Church, abolishing by the same decree all others. It will be well to glance at some of the more prominent features of these.

The beautiful antiphons for Vespers celebrate the spotless purity of Mary, and the glory it has won for her with God:

1. 'Thou art all fair, O Mary, and the stain of original sin is not in thee!'

2. 'Thy garment is white as snow, and thy face as the sun.'

3. 'Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honour of our people.' (These words of praise were addressed to Judith,* one of the types of Our Lady, after she had delivered her nation from the enemy that oppressed them; they celebrate, with regard to Mary, her victory over the serpent.)

4. 'Blessed art thou, O Virgin Mary, by the Lord the most high God, above all women upon earth!'+ (These words have the same origin as the foregoing).

5. 'Draw us, O Immaculate Virgin! We will run after thee to the odour of thy ointments.'

The versicle, which occurs frequently throughout the Office of the feast, recalls the victory of Our Lady over the enemy of mankind:

'To-day is the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.'

'The Virgin whose foot crushed the head of the serpent.'

* Judith xv. 10.

† *Ibid.* xiii. 23.

The antiphon of the *Magnificat* is taken from the canticle itself; it celebrates the immense graces conferred upon Mary by God:

'All generations shall call me blessed, because He that is mighty hath done great things in me.'

The Introit of the Mass, like that of some other modern Offices, is not taken from the psalm which follows it, but from another part of Scripture. In this case it has been selected from the prophecy of Isaias.* The words of exultation are put into the mouth of Our Lady: 'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, and my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation; and with the robe of justice He hath covered me, as a bride adorned with her jewels.' Then follows the first verse of Psalm xxix: 'I will extol Thee, O Lord; for Thou hast upheld me, and hast not made my enemies to rejoice over me.' Here, as in so many other portions of the liturgy of the festival, Our Lady is represented as pouring forth grateful thanks for her unique privilege.

The Collect runs thus: 'O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin didst prepare a worthy dwelling-place for Thy Divine Son; grant, we beseech Thee, that, as by the foreseen merits of the death of this Thy Son, Thou didst preserve her from every stain of sin, we also, through her intercession, may be cleansed from our sins and united with Thee.' In this we have a summary of the teaching of the festival. Because Mary was

* ch. lxi. 10

to become the dwelling-place of God, she was preserved from all stain. We also are destined to be closely united with Him even here on earth. 'You are the temple of God. . . . The Spirit of God, dwelleth in you,'* says St Paul. And purity of heart is necessary for us too, if we desire this union to continue.

The Epistle is taken from the Book of Proverbs; it speaks of the existence of Divine Wisdom from all eternity. The Church has always interpreted this passage of Our Lord and of His Mother, since the Mother and Son are united in the eternal decree of the Incarnation of God the Son. Of Mary, therefore, it may be said: 'The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways, . . . I was set up from eternity, and of old before the earth was made.' The Epistle ends with those impressive words: 'He that shall find me shall find life, and shall have salvation from the Lord.†

In the Gradual the Church returns again to the type of Mary presented by Judith; the words used are those with which the ancients of her native city greeted Judith after her defeat of their enemy: 'Blessed art thou [O Virgin Mary] by the Lord, the most high God, above all women upon the earth! Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honour of our people.'‡ The words are literally true of the Blessed Virgin alone. She is the glory of heaven,

* 1 Corinth, iii. 16. † Prov. viii. 22, etc.

‡ Judith xiii. 23; xv. 10.

the joy of the Church of God, the honour of the human race.

The Alleluia verse which follows gives the reason for which so great praises are due: 'Alleluia. Thou art all fair, O Mary, and the stain original is not in thee! Alleluia.'

In the Gospel* we are able to find an illusion to the privilege of the Immaculate Conception. It recounts the salutation of the Angel addressed to Mary, in which she is styled 'full of grace.' This means that Mary possessed that of which sin had deprived Eve. It means that not only did she possess grace, but was even then filled with it, so that she was already resplendent with the perfection of purity. The Angel goes on to style Our Lady 'Blessed . . . among women'; since she alone has never been under the dominion of the serpent, but has been raised up to conquer him through her Divine Maternity.

With equal appropriateness, the Church has chosen for the Offertory verse the first part of the Angelic Salutation: '*Ave Maria, gratia plena; Dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus. Alleluia.*'

The Communion verse applies to Mary the words of David in praise of the City of God: 'Glorious things are said of thee, O Mary!' The words which follow give the reason of the glory of this mystic city in whom God was pleased to take up His abode: 'For He that is mighty hath done great things in thee.'

* St Luke i. 26, etc.

The words of the triumphant antiphon for the Second Vespers of this feast, placed before and after the joyous canticle of the *Magnificat*, will bring to a fitting close these thoughts on Our Lady's Immaculate Conception: 'This day there went forth a branch from the root of Jesse; this day was Mary conceived without any stain of sin; this day was the head of the old serpent crushed by her. Alleluia.'

OUR LADY'S EXPECTATION

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

CHAPTER XVIII

OUR LADY'S EXPECTATION

December 18th.

IN the humble cottage of Joseph the carpenter of Nazareth preparations are being made for a journey. The Roman Emperor, Augustus, has decreed that throughout the whole empire and the territories of its allied nations there shall be a general census of the people. Herod's kingdom of Judea, therefore, comes under the decree; the head of every family must in consequence betake himself to the place where his ancestors originally settled. Joseph, a member of the royal house of David, whose ancestral home is Bethlehem, the little city of Juda, must needs travel thither to be enrolled among his townsmen. His young spouse, Mary, is to accompany him.

There may have been reasons in the natural order which called for Mary's presence at Bethlehem; perhaps because she was the last scion of another branch of David's line; perhaps because it was Joseph's intention to make a home at Bethlehem. However this may be, it is certain that God had higher and more important reasons for the

journey; He had His designs, and we may well believe that they were known to Mary, through His inspirations. For she was within a few days of giving birth to a Child, and that Child the Holy One, promised by God's Angel, nine months ago. 'He shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David his father . . . and of his kingdom there shall be no end'* thus did the Angel speak, Moreover the prophet Micheas had said: 'Thou, Bethlehem, Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda: out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel.'† Mary's Son must therefore be born in the ancient city whence David came; He is to be known as the Son of David, and His birth is to be registered there by foreign officials, as a testimony that the sceptre has departed from Juda, and the time has come for the 'expectation of the nations' to appear. In another way are the ancient prophecies to be fulfilled. Through the circumstances of the birth of the Divine Child in Bethlehem, he will be born in absolute poverty and obscurity. 'O Expectation of Israel,' cried Jeremias, ages before, 'the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why wilt thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man turning in to lodge? Why wilt thou be as a wandering man, as a mighty man that cannot save.'‡

In ready obedience to God's decree, made known through unworthy representatives, Joseph and

* St Luke i. 32, 33.

† Mich. v. 2.

‡ Jerem. xiv. 8.

Mary patiently set out on their long and fatiguing journey. Three days and more they have to traverse the rough roads. It is December, when in the mountainous districts of Palestine west wind bringing rain and snow is often to be looked for. Their preparations have been of the simplest. Though others of their rank might strive to travel in a style befitting their noble descent, they choose to appear in the guise of the poor, and thus are destined to meet with no consideration when they reach their journey's end. Mary is unfit to travel on foot, but Joseph guides the humble beast upon which she is seated. They are silent for the most part. In spite of the excitement and tumult inseparable from a frequented road at such a time, these holy ones pray much to God, but speak little to men; for they are both very near to God during these days.

What are the thoughts which fill the heart of the Maiden-Mother at such a holy time? No mortal mind can hope to penetrate into their fathomless depths. Yet may we in all humility strive to realise in some degree the mysteries of those days of ardent longing.

For the past nine months Mary's life had been one of closest union with Jesus—bodily as well as spiritual. The Supreme Good, Who is the happiness of heaven, rested and worked within her; hence her life was almost the same as that enjoyed by the blessed in Heaven. Consequently, it was a life of deepest recollection; all the powers of her

soul were occupied with the Incarnate God: she saw ever more and more with His eyes, loved with His Heart, united her will with His. How pure, how ardent her love for the God she bore within her; how deep her joy in the possession of Him, and how keen her desire to look upon His Face! 'Seek ye the Lord and be strengthened: seek His Face evermore'* sings the Psalmist. Such yearning for the Face of God is more especially present in souls that are holiest and therefore more desirous of Him. Thus David sings: 'As the hart panteth after the fountains of waters, so my soul panteth after thee, O God. My soul hath thirsted after the strong, living God: when shall I come and appear before the face of God?'

Mary was soon to be privileged to gaze upon that Face, for which all the ages had been looking in ardent desire. She was to see it in all the beauty of infancy and the grace of childhood, and to her it would be at the same time the Face of God and that of the Son of her womb. Its unveiling was to be the dawn of peace to men; the angels longed for it, that God's will regarding the salvation of fallen man might be accomplished; the Eternal Father, if we may say so, desired to behold His created Image. For all these reasons, Mary longed more and more eagerly for the fulfilment of her hopes as each hour brought it nearer. Yet her outward aspect told nothing of the sublime movements of her holy soul; while she bore within her

* Ps. civ. 4.

† Ps.xli. 2, 3.

the Author of all things, for whom her heart was beating with love, adoration, and desire, her face gave no indication of this, and the world had no suspicion that such marvels were taking place in secret. How great and glorious her nature, that she could bear thus easily so many and such immense favours from God! Sublime, indeed, is the mystery of Our Lady's Expectation!

It is not wonderful that the Church should celebrate a festival in honour of this mystery; yet, in a certain sense, it is a modern feast. It was not until the 18th century that it began, under its present title, to be kept in Rome, and from thence spread to various parts of Christendom. But in its origin it is far more ancient. The Bishops who sat in the Council of Toledo, in 656, were deeply sensible of the incongruity of celebrating the festival of the Annunciation—in which the Church honours the Incarnation of the Word—on the 25th of March. For it must necessarily happen that at times that date must fall during the days devoted to the solemn consideration of Our Lord's Passion, when the feast cannot be kept; and its transfer to Paschal Time, in such case, seemed equally out of harmony with the liturgy. The Fathers of the council, therefore, decreed its celebration in Spain eight days before Christmas, to serve as a fitting preparation for Our Lord's Nativity.

At a later period Spain conformed to the universal custom, and kept the Annunciation on

March 25th; yet, since the December festival had become established in the devotion of the people, it was necessary to preserve it in the calendar. This was done by changing its title, and thus originated the feast of Our Lady's Expectation. Its occurrence during the Advent season, when the liturgy is so expressive of the Church's longing for the coming of the Redeemer, made the consideration of Mary's desire an appropriate devotion for that time; thus the feast grew in appreciation throughout other Christian countries. It was introduced into the Roman States by Pope Benedict XIII in 1725, and by the end of that century was practically observed everywhere, although not formally adopted into the general calendar.

In Spain it has always been kept with much solemnity. It is the custom to have a High Mass in many of the churches there at a very early hour every morning during the octave; at this Mass, women who are expecting to become mothers are careful to assist, in order that thus honouring Our Lady's Maternity they may obtain a blessing for themselves through her intercession. The conquest of Granada from the Moors on December 18th, 1499, gave still greater popularity to the feast in Spain.

The liturgy for this festival is strongly impressed with the spirit of the Advent season; even a cursory examination is sufficient to show its beauty and appropriateness. We will now take a glance at the most striking portions. The antiphons for

the psalms at Vespers are identically the same as those appointed for the feast of the Annunciation, which were explained in a previous chapter.

The *capitulum* is part of that touching prophecy of Isaias concerning the Virgin Mother: 'There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him.'* The rod of Jesse is interpreted of the Blessed Virgin, a descendant of Jesse, David's father. 'It is thou,' says a father of the eighth century, addressing Mary 'whom Isaias eloquent among the eloquent, saluted in advance as the stem of Jesse from which should spring the flower which is Christ, and by which vices should be rooted out, and the divine knowledge planted in the field of souls.'*

The *Magnificat* antiphon is an adaptation of the words of St Gabriel addressed to Mary: 'The Holy Ghost will descend upon thee, O Mary: fear not, thou shalt have in thy womb the Son of God. Alleluia.'

In the second Vespers this antiphon gives way to an ancient and beautiful one, which has caused the feast to be sometimes called 'Our Lady of O.' The 'O' antiphons, we may remark, are those arranged for the *Magnificat* on the seven days preceding Christmas Eve; each begins with a title of Our Blessed Lord: 'O Wisdom,' 'O King of the Nations,' 'O Emmanuel,' &c. That of our Lady, used on this feast, runs thus: 'O Virgin of Virgins,

* Isa xi. 1, 2.

† St Tarasius, *De Praesentat. Deiparæ*

how shall that be? for never was there one like to thee, or will there ever be. Ye daughters of Jerusalem, why look ye wondering at me? What ye behold is a divine mystery.'

The Introit of the Mass is a magnificent appeal for the hastening of the advent of the Messiah; it is taken from the prophecy of Isaias: 'Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just One: let the earth be opened and bud forth a Saviour.* Earth and heaven both take part in the coming of the Saviour; the dew of heaven makes fruitful the most gracious child of earth—Mary the Virgin—and Jesus, Son of God, becomes Man. Appropriate is the psalm that follows: 'The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of his hands.†

The Collect for Mass and Office is that proper to the feast of the Annunciation: 'O God, who didst will that at the message of an angel thy Word should take flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary; grant to thy suppliants that we who believe her to be truly the Mother of God, may be helped by her intercession.'

The Lesson in place of Epistle is also from Isaias; it is that wonderful prophecy of the virginal birth of the God-Man: 'Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God. . . . Hear ye, therefore, O house of David . . . the Lord Himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a

* Isa. xlv. 8.

† Ps. xviii.

Son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel.* The significance of that title is given by St Matthew in his Gospel: 'Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.' †

The Gradual is taken from the 23rd psalm, which is prophetic of the Messiah. 'Lift up your gates, O ye princes; and be ye lifted up, O eternal gates, and the King of glory shall enter in.' The gates of Heaven are to be uplifted that the King may pass through them to enter this world which He is to conquer for Himself. In another sense Mary herself is the 'Gate of Heaven' through whom Christ has come, and by means of whose helping prayers mankind may enter those eternal gates of Heaven. 'Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord?' the psalm continues, 'or who shall stand in His holy place? The innocent in hands, and clean of heart.' No creature has been raised to so high an eminence in the presence of God, as the purest of all—Mary Immaculate. The Alleluia verse repeats the glorious prophecy of the seer of the Incarnation: 'Behold a virgin shall conceive, and shall bring forth a Son, Christ Jesus. Alleluia.'

The Gospel is that which recounts the circumstances of the embassy of Gabriel to Mary; it is used on the Annunciation also. ‡

The Offertory-verse is the familiar *Ave Maria*: 'Hail, Mary, full of grace: the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women.' The Lord is within her; but the happy hour is drawing near

* Isa. vii. 11, etc. † St Matthew i. 23. ‡ St Luke i. 26, etc.

when He will be with us—Emmanuel. Blessed above all women is Mary, Christ's Virgin Mother!

The secret Collect runs: 'Confirm, O Lord, in our minds, we beseech Thee, the mysteries of the true faith: that we who confess Him who was conceived of a virgin to be true God and Man, may deserve to arrive at eternal joys.'

The Communion verse again takes up the prophet's inspired strain: 'Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bring forth a Son; and His name shall be called Emmanuel.' In Holy Communion we have our Emmanuel truly within us. No more appropriate words could have been chosen to be sung at the solemn moment when the priest delivers to the faithful their Incarnate God under sacramental veils.

The Post-Communion Collect is identical with that of the Annunciation. It is that familiar to us by the recitation of the *Angelus*. 'Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the incarnation of Christ Thy Son was made known by the message of an angel, may, by His passion and cross, be brought to the glory of His resurrection.' We see how the Church here, as in the secret Collect, carries on our thoughts to the great reason why Our Blessed Lord became Mary's Child; it was that He might 'save His people from their sins'* by dying on the Cross for them, and winning for all the grace to rise again with Him to eternal life.

* St Matth. i. 21.

Mary ardently desired the birth of Jesus, as every mother longs to see her infant lying in her arms, that she may lavish all her love and care upon the child God has given her. But her longing was more intense than that of any other; she desired Him as Saviour of the world. Amid the misfortunes of her people and the miseries of the rest of the world, she alone realised fully the glory and greatness of Him Who was to come. How fervently, then, would she pray that His reign might soon begin in the hearts of men!

We have to imitate her in her expectation. We have Our Lord within us when we are in His grace; we are to manifest Him to the world by showing that grace in practice—by living His life. Our hearts should rise in prayer to Mary during the Advent season; that by her loving help we may reproduce in our own souls those virtues which made her preparation for the birth of Jesus so pleasing to Him—the spotless purity, the ardent desire, the burning love with which she awaited His coming.

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Our Lady in the liturgy.

