

THE COMPLETE WORKS
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THE ASCETICAL WORKS.
Volume IV.

THE
INCARNATION, BIRTH AND INFANCY
OF JESUS CHRIST ;
OR,
THE MYSTERIES OF THE FAITH.

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It is a custom with many Christians to anticipate the arrival of Christmas a considerable time beforehand by fitting up in their homes a crib to represent the birth of Jesus Christ; but few there are who think of preparing their hearts, in order that the Infant Jesus may be born in them, and there find his repose. Among these few, however, we would be reckoned, in order that we too may be made worthy to burn with that happy flame which gives contentment to souls on this earth, and bliss in heaven.

Let us consider on this first day how the Eternal Word had no other end in becoming man than to inflame us with his divine love. Let us ask light of Jesus Christ and of his most holy Mother, and so let us begin.

I.

Adam, our first parent, sins; ungrateful for the great benefits conferred on him, he rebels against God, by a violation of the precept given him not to eat of the forbidden fruit. On this account God is obliged to drive him out of the earthly paradise in this world, and in the world to come to deprive not only Adam, but all the descendants of this rebellious creature, of the heavenly and everlasting paradise which he had prepared for them after this mortal life.

Behold, then, all mankind together condemned to a life of pain and misery, and forever shut out from heaven. But hearken to God, who, as *Isaias* tells us in his fifty-second chapter, would seem, after our manner of understanding, to give vent to his affliction in lamentations and wailings: *And now what have I here*, saith the Lord, *for My people is taken away gratis.*¹ “And now,” says God, “what delight have I left in heaven, now that I have lost men, who were my delight?” *My delights*

¹ “Et nunc, quid mihi est hic, dicit Dominus, quoniam ablatus est populus meus gratis?”—*Isai.* lii. 5.

were to be with the children of men.¹ But how is this, O Lord? Thou hast in heaven so many seraphim, so many angels; and canst Thou thus take to heart having lost men? Indeed, what need hast Thou of angels or of men to fill up the sum of Thy happiness? Thou hast always been, and Thou art in Thyself, most happy; what can ever be wanting to Thy bliss, which is infinite? "That is all true," says God; "but" (and these are the words of Cardinal Hugo on the above text of Isaias)—"but, losing man, I deem that I have nothing;² I consider that I have lost all, since my delight was to be with men; and now these men I have lost, and, poor hapless creatures, they are doomed to live forever far away from me."

But how can the Lord call men his delight? Yes, indeed, writes St. Thomas, God loves man just as if man were his god, and as if without man he could not be happy; "as if man were the god of God himself, and without him he could not be happy."³ St. Gregory of Nazianzen adds, moreover, that God, for the love he bears to men, seems beside himself: "we are bold to say it, God is out of himself by reason of his immense love;"⁴ so runs the proverb, "Love puts the lover beside himself."

"But no," then said the Lord, "I will not lose man; straightway let there be found a Redeemer who may satisfy my justice in behalf of man, and so rescue him from the hands of his enemies and from the eternal death due to him."

And here St. Bernard, in his contemplations on this subject, imagines a struggle to ensue between the jus-

of the love God bears us. It is related likewise of a pious hermit, that, walking in the country, and beholding the herbs and the flowers, he fancied they reproached him with his ingratitude; so that, as he went along, he struck them gently with his staff, saying to them: Hush, be silent, I understand you, no more! you upbraid me with my ingratitude, because God has created you in such beauty for my sake, that I might love him, and I love him not; oh, be silent, I hear you, enough, enough! And thus the good man pursued his way, giving vent to the ardors of love which he felt consuming his heart for God at the sight of those fair creatures.

Thus, then, all these creatures were so many darts of love to the heart of man; but God was not satisfied with these darts only; they were not enough to gain him the love of men: *He hath made me as a chosen arrow; in his quiver he hath hidden me.*¹ On this passage Cardinal Hugo remarks, that as the sportsman keeps in reserve the best arrow for the last shot, in order to secure his prey; so did God among all his gifts keep Jesus in reserve till the fulness of time should come, and then he sent him as a last dart to wound with love the hearts of men: "The choicest arrow is reserved; so Christ was reserved in the bosom of the Father, until the fulness of time should come, and he was sent to wound the hearts of the faithful."² Jesus, then, was the choice and reserved arrow, at the discharge of which, according as David had long ago foretold, entire nations should fall vanquished: *Thy arrows are sharp; under Thee shall people fall.*³ Oh, how many stricken hearts do I behold burning with love before the manger of Bethlehem!

¹ "Posuit me sicut sagittam electam; in pharetra sua abscondit me."—*Isa.* xlix. 2.

² "Sagitta electa reservatur; ita Christus quasi reservatus est in sinu Patris, donec venit plenitudo temporis, et tunc missus est ad vulnerandum corda fidelium."

³ "Sagittæ tuæ acutæ; populi sub te cadent."—*Psa.* xliv. 6.

¹ "Deliciæ meæ, esse cum filiis hominum."—*Prov.* viii. 31.

² "Non reputo aliquid me habere."

³ "Quasi homo Dei Deus esset, et sine ipso beatus esse non posset."—*Opusc.* 63. c. 7.

⁴ "Audemus dicere quod Deus, præ magnitudine amoris, extra se sit."—*De Div. Nom.* c. 4.

how many at the foot of the cross in Calvary ! how many before the Holy Presence of the Blessed Sacrament on our altars !

St. Peter Chrysologus says that our Redeemer took many various forms to attract the love of man: "For our sake he showed himself under different forms, who remains in the one form of his majesty."¹ That God, who is unchangeable, would appear now as a child in a stable, now as a boy in a workshop, now as a criminal on a scaffold, and now as bread upon the altar. In these varying guises Jesus chose to exhibit himself to us; but whatever character he assumed, it was always the character of a lover. Ah, my Lord, tell me, is there anything else left for Thee to devise in order to make Thyself loved? *Make known his inventions*, cried out Isaias.² Go, O redeemed souls, said the prophet, go and publish everywhere the loving devices of this loving God, which he has thought out and executed to make himself loved by man; for after lavishing so many of his gifts upon them, he was pleased to bestow himself, and to bestow himself in so many ways: "If thou desirest a cure for thy wound" (says St. Ambrose), "he is a Physician;"³ if thou art infirm and wouldst be healed, behold Jesus, who heals thee by his Blood: "If thou be parched up with fever, he is a fountain;"⁴ if the impure flames of worldly affections trouble thee, behold the fountain to refresh thee with his consolations. "Dost thou fear death, he is life; dost thou long for heaven, he is the way; in fine, if thou dost not wish to die, he is the life; if thou wishest heaven, he is the way."⁵

¹ "Propter te varias monstratur in formas, qui manet unica suæ majestatis in forma."—*Serm.* 23.

² "Notas facite in populis adinventiones ejus."—*Isa.* xii. 4.

³ "Si vulnus curare desideras, medicus est."

⁴ "Si febribus æstuas, fons est."

⁵ "Si mortem times, vita est; si cœlum desideras, via est."—*De Virg.* l. 3.

Meditations for Every Day of Advent.

MEDITATION I.

FIRST SUNDAY.

Goodness of God in the Work of the Redemption.

Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto. . . . Et homo factus est

"And was incarnate of the Holy Ghost, and was made man."—*Symbol. Const.*

Consider that God, having created the first man, in order that he might serve him and love him in this life, and be conducted afterwards to reign with him forever in Paradise, enriched him for this end with knowledge and grace. But ungrateful man rebelled against God, refusing him the obedience which he owed him in justice and gratitude; and thus, miserable sinner, was he left with all his posterity as a rebel, deprived of divine grace, and forever excluded from paradise. Behold, then, after this ruin, caused by sin, all men lost ! All were living in blindness, or in the darkness of the shadow of death. The devil had dominion over them, and hell destroyed innumerable victims amongst them.

But God, seeing men reduced to this miserable state, was moved with pity, and resolved to save them. And how ? He did not send an angel, a seraph; but to show to the world the immense love that he bore to these ungrateful worms, *He sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.*¹ He sent his own Son to become man, and to clothe himself with the same flesh as sinful men, in order

¹ "Deus Filium suum mittens in similitudinem carnis peccati."—*Rom.* viii. 3.

that, by his suffering and death, he might satisfy the divine justice for their crimes, and thus deliver them from eternal death; and, reconciling them with his divine Father, might obtain for them divine grace, and might render them worthy to enter into life eternal.

Consider, on the one hand, the immense ruin that sin brings upon souls, as it deprives them of the friendship of God and of Paradise, and condemns them to an eternity of pain. And, on the other hand, consider the infinite love which God showed in this great work of the incarnation of the Word, causing his only-begotten Son to sacrifice his divine life by the hands of executioners on a cross, in a sea of sorrows and of infamy, to obtain for us pardon and life eternal. Oh, in contemplating this great mystery and this excess of divine love, how can we do otherwise than exclaim: O infinite goodness! O infinite mercy! O infinite love! for a God to become man, and to die for me!

Affections and Prayers.

But how is it my Jesus, that after Thou hast repaired this ruin of sin by Thy own death, I have so often wilfully renewed it again by the many offences I have committed against Thee? Thou hast saved me at so great a cost, and I have so often chosen to damn myself, in losing Thee, O infinite Good! But what Thou hast said gives me confidence that when the sinner who has turned his back upon Thee is converted to Thee, Thou wilt not refuse to embrace him: *Turn ye to Me, and I will turn to you.*¹ Thou hast also said, *If any man shall . . . open to Me the door, I will come in to him.*² Behold, Lord, I am one of these rebels, an ungrateful traitor, who have often turned my back upon Thee, and driven Thee from my soul; but now I repent with all my heart for having thus ill-used Thee and despised Thy grace; I repent of it, and love Thee above every-

¹ "Convertimini ad me . . . , et convertar ad vos."—*Zach.* i. 3.

² "Si quis . . . aperuerit mihi januam, introibo ad illum."—*Apoc.* iii. 20.