

3.

The Homily of the Redemption of Man

It was declared unto you, good Christian people, in the last homily, how our first parents, Adam and Eve, were by the singular goodness and especial favour of Almighty God, created right worthy creatures and in the estate of perfect innocency. It was also showed how through disobedience to their creator they brought themselves and all mankind into the estate of everlasting damnation. Now shall you consequently hear of the deliverance of man out of that damnable estate, that is, of our redemption. For the understanding whereof you must perfectly bear in mind that the whole nature of man, both in body and soul, was through original sin greatly defiled. For the soul (which is the chief part of man) lost thereby the especial gifts of grace with which it was endued in the creation, and besides that, it was also maimed in the gifts of nature, as in memory, intelligence, will and other like. And the body (which is the inferior part) it also was by the means of original sin, brought to the necessary estate of mortality, so that it must needs die, and was through that sin of our said first parents, made weak and brought to be subject to sundry kinds of infirmities and sickness; and neither could God of his justice receive man again to favour and state of eternal life (being thus in body and soul by his own fault defiled) unless he were first made pure and clean, again neither man was able to help himself herein, no, nor yet any angel at all. Wherefore Almighty God (whose mercy exceedeth all his works) pitying the wretched case that mankind was in, did appoint, even from the beginning, his only Son, the second person in Trinity, to be the Saviour of the world and to restore man again to perfect cleanness, both in body and soul, and that, by the way of very justice, in making a full amends and paying a sufficient ransom for sin. And this Son of God (according to the will of his Father) did take upon him the nature of man, joining to his everlasting Godhead the whole and perfect nature of manhood, not making that nature of man which he took, anew of nothing, as he did heaven and earth, nor yet making it of a clod of earth, as he did the body of Adam, but he took the nature of man of the very substance of the virgin Mary his mother, that like as Adam and Eve brought themselves and all

their posterity, through sin, into the estate of eternal damnation, so Christ, taking upon him the very selfsame nature, being descended from Adam and Eve unto the virgin Mary, and of her being taken and joined in him to the Godhead in unity of person, should by his innocency and through death, willingly suffered in that his most innocent body, not only himself become immortal man and have glory everlasting, but make so many also partakers of like blessedness as should enjoy the merits of his passion. Wherefore it is a very pernicious error to think that Christ took not his flesh of the very flesh of the blessed virgin Mary his mother. How could his death have done me good, if it were not of the same nature that I am of? And therefore Saint Paul, in his second chapter of his epistle to the Hebrews saith: 'Qui sanctificat, et qui sanctificantur, ex uno omnes,' that is: 'He that sanctifieth and they which are sanctified are all of one,' and within a little while after he saith farther: 'Debit per omnia fratribus assimilari, ut misericors fieret, et fidelis pontifex, ad Deum ut repropitiaret delicta populi,' that is: 'Christ must in all points become like to his brethren, that he might be a merciful and fruitful bishop to Godward, to procure mercy for the sins of the people.'¹ If Christ took not the flesh of the virgin Mary, how is that promise fulfilled which God made immediately after the fall of our first parents, when he thrust them out of paradise, at which time he said unto the serpent (as it is written in the third chapter of Genesis): 'I will set enmity betwixt thee and the woman's seed, and it shall tread down thy head,'² lo how mercifully God dealeth with mankind, he promised that one should be born of the seed and stock of Eve, which should vanquish our ghostly enemy the devil. Now in that he calleth him the seed of the woman, he most plainly declareth that he must needs have in him the selfsame nature that the woman had. Again, God making the second promise of the same seed, to come of the stock of Abraham the patriarch, said unto Abraham (as is witnessed in the twenty-second [chapter] of Genesis): 'In thy seed shall all the nations of the world be blessed.'³ And many hundred years after that, he promised likewise to King David that that seed should come of him too. Which promises of Almighty God were not to be verified in Christ, if he took not the substance of his flesh, of the virgin Mary his mother. But here it may seem strange to some that Almighty God (seeing he intended from the beginning to send his Son into the world, to be incarnate for man's redemption) did defer the sending of him so long, that is the space of four thousand years or thereabout. To whom it is to be answered that the long tarrying of Christ, before he was incarnate, came not of lack of good will in God towards us, but of unreadiness and lack of good disposition to receive him on our parts. For if Christ should have come in the beginning of the world, men would have thought that if

1. Heb. 2:11, 17.

2. Gen. 3:15.

3. Gen. 22:18.

God had suffered them to use their own natural powers, they would have attained salvation well enough, without any other help on God's part. Again, though after long experience and travail of man, following the only light of nature it was evident that he needed a special aid from God, to the attaining of everlasting life, yet the world might have deemed that in case God of his goodness had given unto man some special light and knowledge of his will and pleasure, that then undoubtedly without further help, he following such special light and knowledge might be able well enough to attain to everlasting life. Therefore to take all such excuses away, and that we should plainly understand that after we once fell into sin, neither the light of nature in us, neither the knowledge of the will of God, by special revelation opened unto us, was able to help us, God suffered mankind to travel, first by the light of nature, secondly by the law of Moses, and yet man ran still farther and farther into damnation. Whereby it appeareth that though knowledge of the truth be necessary to the attaining of everlasting life, yet such knowledge (be it never so great) being in a man corrupted with sin, is too feeble and too weak to purge him of sin. For purgation and cleansing of sin cometh by some other means, besides the knowledge of the truth, and therefore Saint Paul in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans most plainly affirmeth, that in the time of the law of nature men knew enough of God, but yet notwithstanding their knowledge, they fell into abominable idolatry. The words of Saint Paul in that place are these: 'So much as may be known of God is manifest in them (that is to say, in those which lived under the law of nature, from Adam unto Moses) for his invisible things, even his eternal power and Godhead, were seen of them, being understood by the works of the creation of the world, so that they are without excuse, because that when they knew God they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became full of vanity in their imaginations.'¹ And as the light which men had by the laws of nature was not of force to keep them from sin, so neither the law of Moses, being opened from God himself by special revelation, could suffice to rid man from sin, as Saint Paul in the second chapter of his foresaid epistle testifieth, saying: 'Behold thou art a Jew and thou dost rest in the law and dost glory in God, and dost know his will and pleasure, and being instructed in the law, thou dost allow that is best and dost trust that thou art a guide of the blind, a light to them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a master of the ignorant, and that thou knowest by the law the form of science and truth, but yet thou that teachest other, teachest not thyself; thou that preachest against adultery art an adulterer thyself; thou that dost defy idols committest sacrilege thyself, thou that dost glory in the law through transgressing of the law, dost dishonour God, for the name of God though you is blasphemed amongst the gentiles.'²

1. Rom. 1:19-21.

2. Rom. 2:17-24.

Thus it is evident by the doctrine of Saint Paul that neither by the common law of nature, neither by the special knowledge of the law of Moses, man was able to avoid eternal damnation, but that he needed, besides such knowledge, of some other help, that is of amends to be made for his sins, and thereby to be reduced into the favour of God again, and to have abundance of grace given unto him, by which grace he should both in his knowledge be the better established and be able also, according to knowledge of the truth, to walk in the truth. For this amends to be made, the second person in Trinity, being God immortal, became mortal man and was made in all parts like unto one of us (sin only excepted) and he did unite unto his Godhead the body and soul of man, in unity of person, in such a marvellous sort, that as in us, the body being of one nature and the soul being of another nature, do make yet but one person, so in him the nature of God and the whole perfect nature of man, do make but one person. Of this incomprehensible union of the Godhead and manhood in Christ, Saint John speaketh in the first chapter of his gospel, saying: 'Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis, The Word (that is the Son of God) was made flesh (that is man) and dwelt amongst us.'¹ He dwelt here on the earth (as Scripture declareth) above thirty-three years, and when he had fulfilled all things, according to the sayings of the holy prophets, which were to be fulfilled of him before his passion, then he suffered death willingly, yea the death of the cross, by such pain (wrongfully procured of the devil against him) to ransom mankind out of captivity which it sustained under the devil most justly, and that this ransom should be perfect, he suffered sundry sorts of most spiteful wrongs and intolerable pains and torments, in his most pure and innocent body, as buffeting, binding, scourging, plating on his head a crown of thorn, hanging on the cross, piercing of his hands and feet with nails, opening of his side with a spear and shedding of his most precious blood, which passion of his, as it is a most perfect mirror and glass for us therein to behold the exceeding great love of God toward us, which spared not his only Son, but for us all gave him to die, so it is a sufficient occasion to bring all men in extreme hatred of the devil and sin; from danger of whom mankind could not be rid, but only by so painful a death, of the Son of God.

What can we look for at God's hands if we sin from henceforth but wrath and vengeance, seeing he hath once delivered us from sin by so merciful a means? All that our Saviour Christ suffered, he willingly suffered for our sins, himself having never deserved any whit of pain, as who never sinned. And yet his passion, though it be in itself a sufficient ransom for the sins of the whole world, yet it taketh not place in all men, not for insufficiency in itself, but for default in them that should condignly receive the merits thereof. For this you must know that God requireth in us certain things, to be accomplished by our own will and consent, without the which we cannot be saved, no more than if Christ had never died for us.

1. John 1:14.

What things these are shall be hereafter declared unto you. In the mean season, lift up your hearts and open them awide to receive in unto them a great love towards God, who so nobly created us, and when we, through our own default, were fallen into the estate of endless misery and wretchedness, so mercifully redeemed us by the passion and death of his only Son our Saviour Christ. Remember that sin and nought else brought us first out of God's favour, and that to take away sin, the Son of God was incarnate and suffered most painful death on the cross, and therefore hereafter flee you all kind of sin and fight incessantly against your ghostly enemy the devil, who being vanquished by Christ, is not able now to overthrow us if we, in the right faith of Christ, valiantly withstand him, which to do, grant unto us the blessed Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, to whom be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

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