

THE FEAST
OF CORPUS CHRISTI.

Let us adore Christ, the King, who ruleth the nations; who giveth fatness of spirit to them that eat him.

Christum regem adoremus dominantem gentibus, qui se manducantibus dat spiritus pinguedinem.

A GREAT solemnity has this day risen upon our earth: a Feast both to God and men: for it is the Feast of Christ the Mediator, who is present in the sacred Host, that God may be given to man, and man to God. Divine union,—yes, such is the dignity to which man is permitted to aspire; and, to this aspiration, God has responded, even here below, by an invention which is all of heaven. It is to day that man celebrates this marvel of God's goodness.

And yet, against both the Feast and its divine object, there has been made the old-fashioned objection: *How can these things be done?*¹ It really does seem, as though reason has a right to find fault with what looks like senseless pretensions of man's heart.

Every living being thirsts after happiness; and yet, and because of that, it only aspires after the good of which it is capable; for it is the necessary condition of happiness, that, in order to its existence, there must be the full contentment of the creature's desire. Hence, in that great act of creation, which the Scripture so sublimely calls his *playing in the world*,² when, with his almighty power, he prepared the heavens, and enclosed the depths, and balanced

¹ St. John, iii. 9; vi. 53.

² Prov. viii. 30, 31.

the foundations of the earth,¹ we are told that Divine Wisdom secured the harmony of the universe by giving to each creature, according to its degree in the scale of being, an end adequate to its powers; he thus measured the wants, the instinct, the *appetite* (that is, the desire) of each creature, according to its respective nature; so that it would never have cravings, which its faculties were insufficient to satisfy. In obedience, then, to this law, was not man, too, obliged to confine, within the limits of his finite nature, his desires for the good and the beautiful, that is, his searching after God, which is a necessity with every intelligent and free being? Otherwise, would it not be, that, for certain beings, their happiness would have to be in objects, which must ever be out of the reach of their natural faculties?

Great as the anomaly would appear, yet does it exist; true psychology, that is, the true science of the human mind, bears testimony to this desire for the infinite. Like every living creature around him, man thirsts for happiness; and yet, he is the only creature on earth that feels within itself longings for what is immensely beyond its capacity. Whilst docile to the lord placed over them by the Creator, the irrational creatures are quite satisfied with what they find in this world; they render to man their several services, and their own desires are all fully gratified by what is within their reach: it is not so with Man; he can find nothing in this his earthly dwelling, which can satiate his irresistible longings for a something, which this earth cannot give, and which time cannot produce;—for that something is—the infinite. God himself, when revealing himself to man through the works he has created, that is, when showing himself to man in a way which his natural powers can take in; God, when giving man to know him as the First

¹ Prov. viii. 27, 29.

Cause, as Last End of all creatures, as unlimited perfection, as infinite beauty, as sovereign goodness, as the object which can content both our understanding and our will,—no, not even God himself, thus known and thus enjoyed, could satisfy man. This being, made out of nothing, wishes to possess the Infinite in his own substance; he longs after the sight of the face, he ambitions to enjoy the life, of his Lord and God. The earth seems to him but a trackless desert, where he can find no water that can quench his thirst. From early dawn of each wearisome day, his soul is at once on the watch, pining for that God who alone can quell his desires; yea, his very flesh, too, has its thrilling expectations for that beautiful Infinite One.¹ Let us listen to the Psalmist, who speaks for us all: *As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, 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? My tears have been my bread, day and night, whilst it is said to me daily: "Where is thy God?" These things I remembered, and poured out my soul in me: for I shall go over into the place of the wonderful tabernacle, even to the house of God. With the voice of joy and praise, the noise of one that is feasting. Why art thou sad, O my soul? and why dost thou trouble me? Hope in God, for I will still give praise unto him: the salvation of my countenance, and my God.*²

If reason is to be the judge of such sentiments as these, they are but wild enthusiasm and silly pretensions. Why talk of the sight of God, of the life of God, of a banquet wherein God himself is to be the repast? Surely, these are things far too sublime for man, or any created nature, to reach. Between the wisher and the object longed for, there is an abyss,—the

¹ Ps. lxii.

² *Ibid.* xli.

abyss of disproportion, which exists between nothingness and being. Creation, all powerful as it is, does not, in itself, imply the filling up of that abyss. If the disproportion could ever cease to be an obstacle to the union aspired to, it would be by God himself going that whole length, and then imparting something of his own divine energies to the creature that had once been nothing. But, what is there in man, to induce the Infinite Being, whose magnificence is above the heavens, to stoop so low as that? This is the language of reason.

But, on the other hand, who was it that made the heart of man so great and so ambitious, that no creature can fill it; how comes it, that whilst the heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth how full of wisdom and power is every work of his hands,¹ how comes it, we ask, that in man, alone, there is no proportion, no order? Could it be, that the great Creator has ordered all things, excepting man alone, with measure, and number, and weight?² That one creature, who is the master-piece of the whole creation; that creature, for whom all the rest was intended, as for its king; is he to be the only one that is a failure, and to live as a perpetual proclaimer that his Maker could not, or would not, be wise, when he made Man? Far from us be such a blasphemy! *God is love*, says St. John;³ and love is the knot which mere human philosophy can never loosen, and therefore must ever leave unsolved the problem of man's desire for the Infinite.

Yes, God is charity; God is love. The wonder, in all this question, is not *our* loving and longing for God, but that *he* should have first loved *us*.⁴ God is love; and love must have union; and union makes the united like one another. Oh! the riches of the

¹ Ps. xviii. 2.

² Wisd. xi. 21.

³ 1 St. John, iv. 8.

⁴ *Ibid.* iv. 10.

Divine Nature, wherein are infinite Power, and Wisdom, and Love! These three constitute, by their divine relations, that blessed Trinity, which has been the light and joy of our souls, ever since that bright Sunday's Feast, which we kept in its honour. Oh! the depth of the divine counsels, wherein that which is willed by boundless Love finds, in infinite Wisdom, how to fulfil in work what will be to the glory of Omnipotence!

Glory be to thee, O holy Spirit! Thy reign over the Church has but just begun this Year of grace, and thou art giving us light whereby to understand the divine decrees. The day of thy Pentecost brought us a new Law, a Law where all is brightness; and it was given to us in place of that Old one of shadows and types. The *pedagogue*, who schooled the infant world for the knowledge of truth, has been dismissed; light has shone upon us through the preaching of the Apostles; and the children of light, set free, knowing God and known by him, are daily leaving behind them the weak and needy elements of early childhood.¹ Scarcely, O divine Spirit! was completed the triumphant Octave, wherein the Church celebrated thy Coming and her own birth, which that Coming brought, when all eager for the fulfilment of thy Mission of bringing to the Bride's mind the things taught her by her Spouse,² thou showedst her the divine and radiant mystery of the Trinity, that not only her Faith might acknowledge, but that her adoration and her praise might also worship it; and she and her children find their happiness in its contemplation and love. But, that first of the great mysteries of our faith, the unsearchable dogma of the Trinity, does not represent the whole richness of Christian revelation; thou, O blessed Spirit, hastenest

¹ Gal. iii. 5, 24, 25; iv. 9.

² St. John, xiv. 26.

to complete our instruction, and widen the horizon of our faith.

The knowledge thou hast given us of the essence and the life of the Godhead, was to be followed and completed by that of his external works, and the relations which this God has vouchsafed to establish between himself and us. In this very week when we begin, under thy direction, to contemplate the precious gifts left us by our Jesus when he ascended on high ;¹ on this first Thursday, which reminds us of that holiest of all Thursdays,—our Lord's Supper,—thou, O divine Spirit, bringest before our delighted vision the admirable Sacrament, which is the compendium of the works of God, one in Essence and three in Persons ; the adorable Eucharist, which is the divine *memorial*² of the wonderful things achieved by the united operation of Omnipotence, Wisdom, and Love. The most holy Eucharist contains within itself the whole plan of God, with reference to this world of ours ; it shows how all previous ages have been gradually developing the divine intentions, which were formed by infinite love, and, by that same love, carried out *to the end*,³ yea, to the furthest extremity here below, that is, to Itself ; for the Eucharist is the crowning of all the antecedent acts done by God in favour of his creatures ; the Eucharist implies them all ; it explains all.

Man's aspirations for union with God,—aspirations, which are above his own nature, and yet so interwoven with it, as to form one inseparable life,—these strange longings can have but one possible cause, and it is God himself—God who is the author of that being called *Man*. None but God has formed the immense capaciousness of man's heart ; and none but God is willing or able to fill it. Every act of the divine will, whether outside himself or in, is pure love, and is referred to

¹ Ps. lxxvii. 19.

² *Ibid.* cx. 4.

³ St. John, xiii. 1.

that Person of the Blessed Trinity who is the Third ; and who, by the mode of his Procession, is substantial and infinite love. Just as the Almighty Father *sees* all things, before they exist in themselves, in his only Word, who is the term of the divine intelligence,—so, likewise, that those same things may exist in themselves, the same Almighty Father *wishes* them, in the Holy Ghost, who is to the divine will what the Word is to the infinite intelligence. The Spirit of Love, who is the final term to the fecundity of Persons in the divine essence, is, in God, the first beginning of the exterior works produced by God. In their execution, those exterior works are common to the Three Persons, but they are attributed to the Holy Ghost, inasmuch as he, being the Spirit of Love, solicits the Godhead to act outside Itself. He is the Love who, with its divine weight and influence of love, sways the Blessed Trinity to the external act of creation ; infinite Being leans, as it were, towards the deep abyss of nothingness, and out of that abyss, creates. The Holy Spirit opens the divine counsel, and says : *Let us make man to our image and likeness!*¹ Then *God creates man to his own image ; he creates him to the image of God,*² taking his own Word as the model to which he worked ; for that Word is the sovereign archetype, according to which is formed the more or less perfect essence of each created being. Like him then, to whose image he was made, Man was endowed with understanding and free-will. As such, he would govern the whole inferior creation, and make it serve the purposes of its Creator, that is, he would turn it into a homage of praise and glory to its God ; and though that homage would be finite, yet would it be the best of which it was capable. This is what is called the *natural order* ; it is an immense world of perfect harmonies ; and, had it ever

¹ Gen. i. 26.² *Ibid.* 27.

existed without any further perfection than its own natural one, it would have been a master-piece of God's goodness; and yet, it would have been far from realising the designs of the Spirit of Love.

With all the spontaneity of a will which was free not to act, and was as infinite as any other of the divine perfections, the Holy Spirit wills that Man should, after this present life, be a partaker of the very life of God, by the face-to-face vision of the divine essence; nay, the present life of the children of Adam here, on this earth, is to put on, by anticipation, the dignity of that higher life; and this so literally, that the future one in heaven is to be but the direct sequel, the consequent outgrowth, of the one led here below. And how is man, so poor a creature in himself, to maintain so high a standing? how is he to satisfy the cravings thus created within his heart? Fear not: the Holy Ghost has a work of his own, and he does it simultaneously with the act of creation; for the Three Persons infuse into their creature, Man, the image of their own divine attributes; and, upon his finite and limited powers, graft, so to say, the powers of the divine nature. This being made for an end which is above created nature; these energies superadded to man's natural powers, transforming, yet not destroying, them, and enabling the possessor to attain the end unto which God calls him;—is called the *supernatural order*, in contradistinction to that lower one, which would have been the order of nature, had not God, in his infinite goodness, thus elevated man above his own mere state as man, and that from the very first of his coming into existence. Man will retain all those elements of the natural order, which are essentials to his human nature; and, with those essential elements, the functions proper to each: but, there is a principle, that, in every series, *that* should give the specific character to the aggregate which was the end proposed by

the ruling mind. Now, the last end of Man was never other in the mind of his Creator than a supernatural one; and, consequently, the natural order, properly so called, never existed independently of, or separately from, the supernatural.

There has been a proud school of philosophy, called “free and independent,” which professed to admit no truths except natural ones, and practise no other virtues than such as were merely human: but, such theories cannot hold. The disciples of godless and secular education, by the errors and crimes into which their unaided nature periodically leads them, demonstrate, almost as forcibly as the eminent sanctity of souls which have been faithful to grace, that mere nature, or mere natural goodness, never was, and never can be, a permanent and normal state for man to live in. And even granting that he could so live, yet man has no right to reduce himself to a less exalted position, than the one intended for him by his Maker. “By assigning us a supernatural vocation, God testified the love he bore us; but, at the same time, he acted as Lord, and evinced his authority over us. The favour he bestowed upon us, has created a duty corresponding. Men have a saying, and a true one: ‘He that hath nobility, hath obligations:’ and the principle holds with regard to the supernatural nobility, which it has pleased God to confer upon us.”¹

It is a nobility which surpasses every other; it makes man not only an image of God, but like unto him!² Between God,—the Infinite, the Eternal—and Man, who but a while back, was nothing, and ever must be a creature,—friendship and love are henceforth to be possible:—such is the purpose of the capabilities, and powers, and the life, bestowed on the human creature by the Spirit of Love. So, then, those longings for

¹ MGR. PIE, Bishop of Poitiers. First Synodical Instruction on the Chief Errors of our times, viii.

² Gen. i. 26.

his God, those thrillings of his very flesh, of which we were just now reading the inspired description by the Psalmist,¹—they are not the outpourings of foolish enthusiasm! That thirsting after God, the strong, the living God; that hungering for the feast of divine union;—no, they are not empty ravings.² Made *partaker of the divine nature*,³ as St. Peter so strongly words the mystery, is it to be wondered at, if man be conscious of it, and lets himself be drawn, by the uncreated flame, into the very central Fire it came from to him? The Holy Spirit, too, is present in his creature, and is witness of what himself has produced there; he joins his own testimonies to that of our own conscience, and tells our spirit that we are truly, what we feel ourselves to be,—the sons of God.⁴ It is the same Holy Spirit, who, secreting himself in the innermost centre of our being, that he may foster and complete his work of love,—yes, it is that same Spirit, who, at one time, opens to our soul's eye, by some sudden flash of light, the future glory that awaits us, and then inspires us with a sentiment of anticipated triumph;⁵ and then, at another time, he breathes into us those unspeakable moanings,⁶ those songs of the exile, whose voice is choked with the hot tears of love, for that his union with his God seems so long deferred. There are, too, certain delicious hymns, which coming from the very depths of souls wounded with divine love, make their way up to the throne of God; and the music is so sweet to him, that it almost looks as though it had been victorious, and had won the union! Such music of such souls does really win; if not the *eternal* union,—for that could not be during this life of pilgrimage, and trials, and tears,—still it wins wonderful unions here below, which human language has not the power to describe.

¹ Ps. lxii.

² *Ibid.* xli.

³ St. Pet. i. 4.

⁴ Rom. viii. 16.

⁵ Eph. i. 17, 18; Rom. v. 2.

⁶ Rom. viii. 26.

In this mysterious song between the Divine Spirit and man's soul, we are told by the Apostle, that *He, who searcheth hearts, knoweth what the Spirit desireth, because he asketh for the saints according to God.*¹ What a *desire* must not that be, which the Holy Spirit *desireth!* It is as powerful as the God who *desires* it. It is a *desire*, new, indeed, inasmuch as it is in the heart of man, but eternal, inasmuch as it is the *desire* of the Holy Spirit, whose Procession is before all ages. In response to this *desire* of the Spirit, the great God, from the infinite depths of his eternity, resolved to manifest himself in time, and unite himself, to man, whilst yet a wayfarer; he resolved thus to manifest and unite himself, not in his own Person, but in his Son, who is the brightness of his own glory, and the true figure of his own substance.² God so loved the world,³ as to give it his own Word,—that divine Wisdom, who, from the bosom of his Father, had devoted himself to our human nature. That bosom of the Father was imaged by what the Scripture calls *Abraham's bosom*, where, under the ancient covenant, were assembled all the souls of the just, as in the place where they were to rest till the way into the Holy of Holies should be opened for the elect.⁴ Now, it was from this bosom of his eternal Father, which the Psalmist calls the *bride-chamber*,⁵ that the Bridegroom came forth at the appointed time, leaving his heavenly abode, and coming down into this poor earth, to seek his Bride; that, when he had made her his own, he might lead her back with himself into his kingdom, where he would celebrate the eternal nuptials. This is the triumphant procession of the Bridegroom in all his beauty;⁶ a procession, whereof the Prophet Micheas, when speaking of his passing through Beth-

¹ Rom. viii. 27.

² Heb. i. 3.

³ St. John, iii. 16.

⁴ Heb. ix. 8.

⁵ Ps. xviii. 6.

⁶ *Ibid.* xliv. 5.

lehem, says, that *his going forth is from the days of eternity.*¹ Yes, truly, *from the days of eternity*; for as we are taught by the sublime principles of Catholic theology, the connexion between the eternal *procession* of the divine Persons and the temporal *mission*, is so intimate, that one same eternity unites the two together in God: eternally, the Trinity has beheld the ineffable birth of the Only Begotten Son in the bosom of the Father; eternally, with the same look, it has beheld him coming, as Spouse, from that same Father's bosom.

If we now come to compare the eternal decrees of God one with the other, it is not difficult to recognise which of them holds the chief place, and, as such, comes first in the divine intention of creation. God the Father has made all things with a view to this union of human nature with his Son;—union so close, that, for one individual member of that nature, it was to go so far as a personal identification with the Only Begotten of the Father. So universal, too, was the union to be, that all the members were to partake of it, in a greater or less degree; not one single individual of the race was to be excluded, except through his own fault, from the divine nuptials with eternal Wisdom, which was made visible in a Man, the most beautiful above all the children of men.² *For, as the Apostle says, God, who heretofore commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath himself shined in our hearts, giving them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in, and by, the face of Christ Jesus.*³ So that the mystery of the Marriage-Feast is, in all truth, the mystery of the world; and the kingdom of heaven is well likened to a King, who made a Marriage for his Son.⁴

But, where is the meeting between the King's Son

¹ Mich. v. 2.

² Ps. xliv. 3.

³ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

⁴ St. Matth. xxii. 1-14.

and his Betrothed to take place? Where is this mysterious union to be completed? Who is there to tell us what is the dowry of the Bride, the pledge of the alliance? Is it known who is the Master who provides the nuptial banquet, and what sorts of food will be served to the guests? The answer to these questions is given this very day, throughout the earth; it is given with loud triumphant joy. There can be no mistake; it is evident from the sublime message, which earth and heaven re-echo, that He who is come is the Divine Word. He is adorable Wisdom, and is come forth from his royal abode to utter his voice in our very streets, and cry out at the head of multitudes, and speak his words in the entrance of city-gates;¹ he stands on the top of the highest places by the way, in the midst of the paths, and makes himself heard by the sons of men.² He bids his servants go to the tower and the city walls, with this his message: *Come! eat my Bread, and drink the Wine which I have mingled for you; for Wisdom hath built herself a House, supported on seven pillars; there she hath slain her victims, mingled her wine, and set forth her table;*³ *all things are ready; come to the marriage!*⁴

O Wisdom, that camest forth from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from end to end, disposing all things with strength and sweetness!⁵ we besought thee, in the season of Advent, to come unto Bethlehem, "the house of Bread;" thou wast the long Expected of our hearts. The day of the glorious Epiphany showed us the mystery of the Nuptials, and manifested to us the Bridegroom; the Bride was got ready in the waters of the Jordan; we commemorated the Magi, who, with their gifts, hastened to the royal nuptials, where the guests were regaled with a

¹ Prov. i. 20, 21.

² *Ibid.* viii. 1-4.

³ *Ibid.* ix. 1-5.

⁴ St. Matth. xxii. 4.

⁵ Prima ex Ant. maj. Adventus.

miraculous wine.¹ But the Water which, to make up for the deficiency of a bad tree, was changed into wine, was a prophetic figure of future mysteries. The Vine, the true Vine, of which we are the Branches,² has yielded its sweet-smelling flowers, and its fruits of honour and riches.³ Wheat hath abounded in our valleys, and they shall sing a hymn of praise;⁴ for this *strength of the earth* shall cover the mountain-tops, and its fruit shall go up beyond Libanus.⁵

O Wisdom, thou noble queen, whose divine perfections enamour, from early childhood, hearts that are taken with true beauty!⁶ the day of the true Marriage-feast is come. Thou art a mother full of honour, and a young Bride in thy charms, and thou comest to nourish us with the bread of life, and give us to drink of a cup of salvation.⁷ Thy fruit is better than gold; and thy blossoms, than choicest silver.⁸ They that eat thee, shall still hunger after thee; and they that drink thee, shall again thirst for thee;⁹ for *thy conversation hath no bitterness, nor thy company any tediousness, but joy and gladness,*¹⁰ and riches, and glory, and virtues.¹¹

During the days of this great Solemnity, when thou art seated *in a pillar of a cloud*, and placest thy throne *in the holy assembly*, we would fain take each mystery of this thy divine banquet, and ponder over its marvels, and then publish them, yea, go to choir with thee, O beautiful Wisdom, and sing thy praise in the presence of thy Angels, who will be there adoring the Sacred Host!¹² Do thou vouchsafe to open our lips, and fill us with thy Holy Spirit, O divine Wisdom!

¹ Ant. Epiph. ad *Benedictus*.

² St. John, xv. 5.

³ Ecclus. xxiv. 22.

⁴ Ps. lxiv. 14.

⁵ *Ibid.* lxxi. 16.

⁶ Wisd. viii. 2.

⁷ Ecclus. xv. 2, 3.

⁸ Prov. viii. 19.

⁹ Ecclus. xxiv. 29.

¹⁰ Wisd. viii. 16.

¹¹ Prov. viii. 18.

¹² Ecclus. xxiv. 1-7.

that so our praise may be worthy of its theme, and, as thou hast promised in thy Scriptures, may it abound, may it be full to overflowing, in the mouths of thy faithful worshippers!¹

MATINS.

The Night Office for this Festival has a special interest of its own: it is the memory of that holy night when, as the Church expresses it, faith shows us our Lord presiding, for the last time, at the figurative Pasch, and following up the feast of the typical Lamb with the banquet of his own Body. For the reasons specified yesterday, we give the entire of to-day's Office.

In order to induce the Faithful to prefer the prayers of the Liturgy to all others, we would remind them that the Sovereign Pontiffs have solemnly opened the treasures of the Church in favour of such as, being contrite, and having confessed their sins, shall assist at any of the Canonical Hours, either on the day of the Feast, or during its Octave. Pope Martin the Fifth, by his Constitution *Ineffabile Sacramentum*, which allows this Feast and Octave to be celebrated, with the ringing of bells and solemnity, even in places which are under an interdict, confirmed and added to the Indulgences granted, by Urban the Fourth, in the Bull *Transiturus*. Finally, Pope Eugenius the Fourth, mentioning the acts of those two Pontiffs,² doubled the Indulgences granted by them. These Indulgences are as follows: two hundred days are granted for fasting on the eve, or for any good work substituted for the fast, at the discretion of the Confessor: on the

¹ Ecclus. xv. 5-10.

² Const. *Excellentissimum*.