

A BEAUTIFUL SERMON

ON THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

Preached by the Rev. Father McGARRY, C.S.C., of St. Laurent College, in St. Mary's Parish Church on Sunday, 30th April.

"An angel was sent by God to a city of Galilee called Nazareth, to Mary, a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph. And having entered the house, the angel said to her: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women."

Here is an extraordinary picture presented to our minds. An humble virgin in the attitude of prayer in an humble dwelling, and yet, the eyes of Heaven were fixed upon her. The brightness of an angel of God lit up her presence and the voice of the angel fell upon her ear, and what he said really astonished her, for the gospel narrative adds that she was disturbed at that extraordinary salutation: "Hail, full of Grace."

But, my brethren, we cannot doubt the truth of these words, because they are from the lips of God and were put on the tongue of the angel. They were dictated by God Himself to be spoken by His messenger to this favored creature. Why this extraordinary embassy? Why these extraordinary words, said to a person that seems to be anything but extraordinary, an humble maiden in her sixteenth year, unknown to the world, almost unheard of, who had passed her life in the temple; the world knew her not. Oh! my brethren, those whom the world know much of are not so much thought of as those who hide themselves in order that they may walk continually in the presence of God.

But the angel brought to this humble virgin an extraordinary message. He told her she was about to become the mother of the Messiah, that she had found favor with God, and that the Son of the Most High would be born of her, and she would be his mother. This is the whole explanation. It is the mission to which God had destined Mary. It is the office for which he had chosen her from all eternity.

We read in the Holy Scripture, that when Almighty God gave the tables of the law to his servant Moses, he caused a tabernacle to be built, in which those tables of the law were to be kept. He Himself designed the architecture, and chose the material with which it was to be built. It was made of the most precious wood and lined with the most pure gold. It was kept and guarded with the most sacred reverence, and so great was God's sanction of that reverence, that when the people of Israel were going from one place to another, a man fearing that the tabernacle would fall, put out his hand to sustain it. His hand was not a consecrated hand, and so did God sanction the reverence of the tabernacle, that the man was stricken dead on the spot, because, with an unconsecrated hand he had dared to touch it. This tabernacle only contained the tables of the law. And when God destined that this tabernacle should find a resting place, because it was carried from place to place and sometimes when the people of God were defeated it was captured by their enemies; the time coming when God destined the tabernacle to rest, he raised up a man and infused into the soul of that man a wisdom that surpassed the wisdom of all men before him, and all who came after, a man who was to build a resting place for that tabernacle, a man that was to build a temple, a sacred spot where that tabernacle was to be kept—that man was Solomon, whom God raised to such wisdom and power, that no other king equalled him.

But here, my brethren, there is not a question of building a temple for the tables of the law. There is a question of building a tabernacle for the Law-giver Himself, and Maker of Life; of building a tabernacle for God, in which the Divinity will reside really and truly united to our humanity, and that tabernacle is the soul and body of Mary. God himself built that tabernacle, by his own power he built it, and the holiness and reverence in which the first tabernacle was kept, and its riches simply figured the Mother of God, as all the figures of the Old Testament have their reality in the new.

How great then must have been the sanctity of Mary! God himself was her

constructor. Her sanctity was outlined, perfected, completed and crowned by the hand of the Creator, in order that she would become a living tabernacle, worthy of containing her very Creator.

No wonder the angel of God thought how the sanctity to which this privileged creature was raised. He stood before her with awe, and saluted her as a wonder even to his angelic eyes. He saw in her transcendent beauty, which nobody could equal. He saw the transcendent beauty of angels as they were formed into hierarchies, and hierarchies into choirs. He saw their transcendent beauty, he knew they were creatures, he saw in the words of St. John, "Towns we ourselves will one day view." Participating in the nature of God himself, the glory of the soul of Mary was for him an object of awe. It transcended the sanctity of angels, and the archangel bowing lowly before her, said: "Hail, full of Grace."

Yes, my brethren, she was full of grace. She was full of grace and for good reasons. Because she came in contact with the very fountain of grace. Just as we see the crystal waters of a fountain, the nearer the waters are to the source, the more bright and pure the waters are, and the less they have of corruption and alloy with them. And Mary is the very fountain head of creation, in all its transcendent beauty.

The author, the very throne of grace is Jesus Christ himself as God; the very instrument of grace is Jesus Christ himself as man.

But, my brethren, in Jesus Christ there was human nature and divine nature, united by the most perfect union, that even the creative power of Himself could devise or execute. The grandeur of nature may strike us a something extraordinary. The different creatures in nature may strike us by their extraordinary power and qualities. The grandeur of the orbs that roll over our heads, strike us with majesty and awe, and even the grandeur of man, whom philosophers call a little world in himself, is something extraordinary. But the world and man, whom God made the high priest of nature, these are not the master-piece of his creation. Even choirs of angels, with glorious privileges and prerogatives, they are not the master-piece of creation. Even Mary, whose sanctity and greatness we have tried in vain to fathom, she is not God's master-piece. The master-piece of creation, my brethren, is the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ. But God in the production of this master-piece, associated with Himself the Blessed Mother of Jesus Christ, and as truly as God is the Father according to His Divinity, so is Mary truly His mother according to His humanity. Both together then, God and Mary, produced the man Jesus Christ, the master-piece of God's creation. Yes, my brethren, as when God created the earth, it was sterile, dark, and surrounded by water, at His command, the waters rolled back, and darkness disappeared. And God told the earth to produce trees, and plants, and flowers, and herbs, and the earth produced them so, my brethren, by the mysterious power of the Holy Ghost, Mary gave birth to the Son, to Jesus Christ made man, the Second Person of the adorable Trinity, and the most perfect soul the creative power could ever produce animated the body of Jesus Christ, and the most perfect body that ever became the clothing of a soul, became that of Jesus Christ, because that body was lighted up by His Divinity and almost rendered divine though it still remained human. And in this great work Mary was the helper of Almighty God. Almighty God descended to lift her up to do his own work with Him. No wonder the angel sees in her what he never saw in any other creature.

Now then, my brethren, the beauty and grandeur of Mary's soul, we know that it must have been something extraordinary since God destined her for such an extraordinary mission, and God Himself prepared her for that extraordinary mission. We would say, if we might speak thus, that it was God's duty to prepare a worthy mother for His son. We must think that she was great, or, as an old theologian puts it: "It was becoming that God would prepare for Himself a mother who would surpass all mothers. He was able to do what became Him to do, therefore God did what He should do." And St. Thomas says there are three things we cannot conceive anything greater God could do. God could not give the blessed in heaven

a greater happiness than He gives them, because He gives them Himself. He could not create a greater work than the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ; and He could not create a greater mother for His Divine Son than He did, because God does all things with great wisdom, and the wisdom of God demanded that for His own Divine Son a tabernacle of that divinity, he would make a tabernacle surpassing all tabernacles that ever were or ever could be.

When we consider Mary's soul, not even the soul of Eve can be compared to it. Eve was to be the mother of sorrow, and Mary the mother of joy, therefore was Mary created above Eve; not only free from original sin, but transcendentally above Eve, even in her primitive innocence. Now then, my brethren, we consider the soul and the graces poured into that soul, sanctifying grace of baptism, and again, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost in confirmation, and the extraordinary holiness in Holy Communion, and many other graces conferred upon creatures. But Mary received all these at once, and in their fullness, and this is why the Archangel saluted her "Full of Grace." The three theological virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity, ever existed in her soul in an extraordinary degree. Her soul was ornamented by the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord; the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude, also were ornaments of her soul, by which she was ever governed. She was the mirror of all virtues. Of her humility, St. Bernard even places it above her virginity, and he says it was not so much her virginity, her immaculate purity, that drew down the Son of God, as much as her unfathomable humility. Every virtue that could adorn a creature, we find in Mary, and find them in her in a transcendent way.

Is it not a consoling thought to us, that when God was preparing a mother for His Divine Son He was also preparing a mother for us, and that the last will and testament of Our Blessed Lord dying upon the cross was to bequeath His mother to us as our mother? And to-day, when we have been trying to understand the transcendent virtues of Mary, we also try to sound the praises of our own mother. As she loved her Divine Son with tender love, whom she brought forth without sorrow, she loves us because she brought us forth in the pangs of sorrow at the foot of the cross. She brought us forth by a spiritual birth, and we became her spiritual children.

Let us then lift up our souls to her this day of her festival, with confidence, and ask her to lift up those innocent, virginal, pure, humble, immaculate and maternal hands in which she held her Divine Son, "who holds the world in the hollow of His hand," to obtain for us fidelity in the service of Jesus Christ. On this feast of Our Lady of Good Counsel, ask her to whisper the good counsel into our souls, as counsel is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, and by this gift we are able to discern and select the surest path to reach heaven and surest means to continue in that path. Look at the picture of Our Lady of Good Counsel. Her Divine Child whispers the counsels to be given to her children. Let us have confidence, then, not only to-day on her feast, but every day of our lives let us invoke her. God has given her as a protectress for this parish, and every person in the parish should invoke her every day of their lives, in all undertakings, whether spiritual or temporal, that they may may turn out for the glory of God, the salvation of their own souls, and the honor of Our Lady of Good Counsel.

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