

The Church Guardian

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CALENDAR FOR JANUARY.

- JAN. 1st—Circumcision.
 " 6th—Epiphany.
 " 13th—1st Sunday after Epiphany.
 " 20th—2nd Sunday after Epiphany.
 (Notice of Conversion of St. Paul)
 " 25th—Conversion of St. Paul.
 " 27th—3rd Sunday after Epiphany.
 (Notice of Purification.)

THE INCARNATION AND THE CHURCH.

It does not seem amiss in these days, when members of religious bodies have so vastly increased, all professing some form of Christianity, and each alike claiming to be the best, if not the only true one, to consider what is the Church of Christ, and how is faith in it of such vital importance as to warrant the prominent place which it holds in the Creeds.

If belief in the Church is a necessary concomitant of a true apprehension of the mystery of the Incarnation, a few words will show the connection. Seeing that it was the will of God that the creation of men should not be simultaneous or immediate, but should proceed by the way of nature from one common progenitor, so it pleased God likewise that the renewal of our race should be effected through one Man, Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

Now, because of the unity of the human race, and because of that well known principle of connection which the permanence of nature bears witness to, it follows that every child born into the world partakes truly of Adam's sin. It is no more imitation of Adam's sin which men are prone to fall into, when they attain to years of discretion, through the influence of example, "but the doom pronounced against the first transgressors holds in its gripe the whole race of their captive posterity; and no one is exempt from condemnation, because no one is free from sin."

"Accordingly, amid the universal ruin of the whole human race there was but one remedy which, under the mysterious law of Divine procedure, could come to aid the prostrate, and that was if some son of Adam could be born un-

connected with original transgression, and innocent, who would benefit the rest both by example and merit; and thus the Lord of David became the Son of David, and from the root of the promised sprout arose an unviated offspring, by the combination of two natures in one Person." It was not, says Bishop Beveridge, any human Person in particular, but the Human Nature which the Son of God assumed into His sacred Person. "He took in hand," says S. Chrysostom, "the common nature of men, as some excellent workman might take in hand a house decayed by time. He filled up what was broken off, banded together its crevices and shaken posterns, and raised up again what was entirely fallen down."

Now it is the great fact that our Lord holds an exactly analogous relation to restored man as Adam does to fallen man, which St. Paul so repeatedly insists on. "The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second Man is the Lord from Heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the Heavenly, such are they also that are Heavenly." Thus, then, there must be a real union with Him through whom our nature is raised, in order that our renewal may be effected. For as "original or birth sin standeth not in the following of Adam, but is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam," so the restoration of our nature can be wrought by no mere subjective contemplation of Christ, but there must be a real and vital participation in His sacred manhood. And here let us note that it is because of the perfect and indissoluble union of the higher with the lower nature that the supernatural gifts, graces, and effects of that nature are communicated to His flesh, which make it of such sort as to be a full and sufficient sacrifice for all sin, and the only instrument of restoration for fallen man. And thus, to quote S. Leo again, it was necessary that both the Divine and Human substances should meet in our Lord's flesh and blood, that our mortal nature might, through the Word made Flesh, receive aid alike from the birth and Passion of the New Man; and so "the union with the the Godhead enabled," as Hooker says, "the Humanity to do more than otherwise it could have done." As it is on the truth of the Incarnation that our nature is changed by the introduction into it of a higher than our nature, so "that from it there is infused into humanity graces sufficient for the generation of the race," so it is on the reality of our union with that perfect nature that each individual Christian is made partaker of the Divine nature. For the Body of Jesus is the new and living way whereby we must approach God.

Inasmuch as our Lord came in our nature to establish a similar relation to restored man, as Adam bears to fallen man, it is necessary that there should be some means whereby men might be united with His humanity as the stock or pattern from whom all renewal is derived. Now, on this subject it may be said in general that our union with the manhood of Christ is brought about in our union with the Church, which is His Body mystical. "The words of Adam," says Hooker, "may be fitly the words of Christ concerning His Church: flesh of My flesh and bone of My bone; a true natural extract out of Mine own Body." And if we refer to Holy Scripture we find that it is thus the Church is spoken of. It is the mother of those reborn in Christ, and so the Church is called not only His spouse, betokening a bond which savoured of actual union; but further, St. Paul transfers expressions applicable to our Lord's Body to His Church, thus showing the true dependence of the one on the other. "No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but loveth it and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." "They two (the man and his wife) shall be one flesh; this is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church."

And thus St. Augustine writes: "Christ and the Church are two in one flesh." The Church, then, is an unearthly society, founded by our Lord wherein His acts are perpetuated and the blessings of redemption are applied to individuals by engrafting them in that True Vine whence the life of our regeneration flows, the divine humanity of the Great Restorer of our race. It is no mere name given to classify a branch of persons, united under the same system of laws through a common interest; but it is a living body—one, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic—animated by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who is the "soul of the Church," by whose operation we receive the adoption of sonship, for, descending upon men's souls in baptism, "He burns up the image of the earthly and produces the image of the heavenly." It is then through this Society, which rests eternally in God that those renewing gifts, from the manhood of the Mediator, are diffused as the life giving seed through the mass of mankind. Had God so wished He might, doubtless, have effected the change in our nature by an internal spiritual communication of grace to man's spirit, but He willed instead to come among men, as an object external to themselves, bearing the identical relation to renewed men as Adam did to fallen man; that as by natural descent we partake of sin from the old man, so we should partake of that regenerating influence which flows from the Divine humanity of the new man, by supernatural birth. Faith, then, in Christ is wholly inadequate and powerless to effect that change in our nature, which alone is wrought by real and actual union with the manhood of our Lord; and thus in the words of a thoughtful writer, "though the Divine nature is the prime fountain of life to all, inexhaustible in itself, yet it is a fountain whereof we cannot drink save as it is derived unto us through the human nature of Christ;" and St. Chrysostom very beautifully—"When, therefore, thou art told that the Son of God is Son of David and Abraham, doubt not any more that thou too the son of Adam shall be the son of God." Now it is with reference to the abiding presence of His humanity with man as the perfect type which may "leaven the whole lump" that our Lord speaks when He says, "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you; and lo; I am with you always, even to the end of the world." For as God is everywhere, properly speaking He does not come or go, for God is a spirit. Wherever, therefore, there is a limitation of Presence, we may understand it of that inferior nature which alone can be absent. Now, it is because of the union with the manhood of Christ that the Church in Holy Scripture is called "the Body of Christ." The Church then is not a means or process whereby we are united to our Blessed Lord; but incorporation with it is union with Christ, and thus the sacred rite of holy Baptism, which engrafts men into the body of Christ's Church, makes them also "members of Christ, the children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven."

Seeing, then, our Lord became man and redeemed man's nature by uniting it inseparably to Himself, and exalted in it that He received gifts which He might bestow on man—and seeing that it is through the Church the benefits of the Incarnation are applied to men individually—it follows that the Sacramental media are no mere external forms by which we are reminded of an absent Saviour, but they are the pledges of His presence in our midst, and sure and certain channels of His communication with us. They are the veins, so to speak, in which flows the life giving Blood which cleanses from all sin. They rest in God for their efficacy; for it is by His Word alone, who is the incarnate Word and the Creator of all things, that earthly elements are elevated into the kingdom of grace, and become the media of God's choicest gifts to men, and bind them in loving union with Him, the great Head and Restorer of our race.*