



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. I.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1850.

NO. 19.

DISCOURSES
TO MIXED CONGREGATIONS.
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DISCOURSE XVIII.

THE GLORIES OF MARY FOR THE SAKE OF HER SON.

We know, my brethren, that in the natural world nothing is superfluous, nothing incomplete, nothing independent; but part answers to part, and all details combine to form one mighty whole. Order and harmony are among the first perfections which we discern in this visible creation; and the more we examine into it, the more widely and minutely they are found to belong to it. "All things are double," says the Wise Man, "one against another; and He hath made nothing defective." It is the very character and definition of "the heavens and the earth," as contrasted with the void or chaos which preceded them, that every thing is now subjected to fixed laws; and every motion, and influence, and effect can be accounted for, and, were our knowledge sufficient, could be anticipated. Moreover, it is plain, on the other hand, that it is only in proportion to our observation and our research that this truth becomes apparent; for though a number of things even at first sight are seen to proceed according to an established and beautiful order, yet in other instances the law to which they are conformed is with difficulty discovered; and the words "chance," and "hazard," and "fortune," have come into use as expressions of our ignorance. Accordingly you may fancy rash and irreligious minds, who are engaged day after day in the business of the world, suddenly looking out into the heavens or upon the earth, and criticising the great Architect, arguing that there were creatures rude or defective in their constitution, and asking questions which did but evidence their want of scientific education.

The case is the same as regards the supernatural world. The great truths of revelation are all connected together and form a whole. Every one can see this in a measure even at a glance, but to understand the full consistency and harmony of Catholic teaching requires study and meditation. Hence, as philosophers of this world bury themselves in museums and laboratories, descend into mines, or wander among woods or on the sea-shore, so the inquirer into heavenly truths dwells in the cell and the oratory, pouring forth his heart in prayer, collecting his thoughts in meditation, dwelling on the idea of Jesus, or of Mary, or of grace, or of eternity, and pondering the words of holy men who have gone before him, till before his mental sight arises the hidden wisdom of the perfect, "which God predestined before the world unto our glory," and which He "reveals unto them by His Spirit." And, as ignorant men may dispute the beauty and perfection of the visible creation, so men, who for six days in the week are absorbed in worldly toil, who live for wealth, or station, or self-indulgence, or profane knowledge, and do but give their leisure moments to the thought of religion, never raising their hearts to God, never asking for His enlightenment, never chastening their hearts and bodies, never steadily contemplating the objects of faith, but judging hastily and peremptorily according to their private views or the humor of the hour; such men, I say, in like manner, may easily, or will for certain, be surprised, and shocked at portions of revealed truth, as if strange, or harsh, or extreme, or inconsistent, and will in whole or in part reject it.

I am going to apply this remark to the subject of the prerogative with which the Church invests the Blessed Mother of God. They are startling and difficult to those whose imagination is not accustomed to them, and whose reason has not reflected on them; but the more carefully and religiously they are dwelt on, the more, I am sure, will they be found essential to the Catholic faith, and integral to the worship of Christ. This simply is the point which I shall insist on, disputable indeed by aliens to the Church, but most clear to her children, that the glories of Mary are for the sake of Jesus; and that we praise and bless her as the first of creatures, that we may duly confess Him as our sole Creator.

When the Eternal Word decreed to come on earth, He did not purpose, He did not work, by halves; but He came to be a man like any of us, to take a human soul and body, and to make them His own. He did not come in a mere apparent or accidental form, as Angels appear to men; nor did He merely overshadow an existing man, as He overshadowed His saints, and call Him by the Name of God; but He "was made flesh," He attached to Himself a manhood, and became as really and truly man as He was God, so that henceforth He was both God and man, or, in other words, He was one

Person in two natures, divine and human. This is a mystery so marvellous, so difficult, that faith alone firmly receives it; the natural man may receive it for a while, may think he receives it, but never really receives it; begins, directly he has professed it, secretly to rebel against it, evades it, or revolts from it. This he has done from the first; even in the lifetime of the beloved disciple men arose, who said that our Lord had no body at all, or a body framed in the heavens, or that He did not suffer, but another in His stead, or that He visited and left again the human form which was born and which suffered, at its baptism and before its crucifixion, or that He was a mere man. That "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," was too hard a thing for the unregenerate reason.

The case is the same at this day; few Protestants have any real perception of the doctrine of God and man in one Person. They speak in a dreary shadowy way of Christ's divinity; but, when their meaning is sifted, you will find them very slow to commit themselves to any statement sufficient to show that it is Catholic. They will tell you at once, that the subject is not to be inquired into, for that they cannot inquire into it at all, without being technical and subtle. Then, when they comment on the Gospels, they will speak of Christ, not simply and consistently as God, but as a being made up of God and man, partly one and partly the other, or between both, or as a man inhabited by a special divine presence. Sometimes they even go on to deny that He was the Son of God in heaven, saying that He became the Son, when He was conceived of the Holy Ghost; and they are shocked, and think it a mark both of reverence and good sense to be shocked, when the Man is spoken of simply and plainly as God. They cannot bear to have it said, except as a figure or mode of speaking, that God had a human body, or that God suffered; they think that the "Atonement," and "Sacrificion through the Spirit," as they speak, is the sum and substance of the Gospel, and they are shy of any dogmatic expression which goes beyond them. Such, I believe, is the character of the Protestant notions among us on the divinity of Christ, whether among members of the Anglican communion, or dissenters from it, excepting a section of the former.

Now, if you would witness against these unchristian opinions, if you would bring out distinctly and beyond mistake and evasion, the simple idea of the Catholic Church that God is man, could you do it better than by laying down in St. John's words that "God became" man? and could you express this again more emphatically and unambiguously than by declaring that He was born a man, or that He had a Mother? The word allows that God is man; the admission costs it little, for God is every where, and (as it may say) is every thing; but it shrinks from confessing that God is the Son of Mary. It shrinks, for it is at once confronted with a severe fact, which violates and shatters its own unbelieving view of things; the revealed doctrine forthwith takes its true shape, and receives an historical reality; and the Almighty is introduced into His own world at a certain time and in a definite way. Dreams are broken and shadows depart; the truth of God is no longer a poetical expression, or a devotional exaggeration, or a mystical dispensation, or a mythical view. "Sacrifice and offering," the shadows of the Law, "Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared for Me." "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have diligently looked upon, and our hands have handled," "That which we have seen and have heard, declare we unto you;" such is the record of the Apostle, in opposition to those "spirits" which denied that "Jesus Christ had appeared in the flesh," and which "dissolved" Him by denying either His human nature or His divine. And the confession that Mary is *Deipara*, or the Mother of God, is that safeguard wherewith we seal up and secure the doctrine of the Apostle from all evasion, and that test whereby we detect all the pretences of those bad spirits of "Antichrist which have gone out into the world." It declares that He is God; it implies that He is man; it conveys to us that He is God still, though He has become man, and that He is true man though He is God. By witnessing to the process of the union, it secures the reality of the two subjects of it, of the divinity and of the manhood. If Mary is the Mother of God, Christ is understood to be Emmanuel, God with us. And hence it was, that, when time went on, and the bad spirits and false prophets grew stronger and found a way into the Catholic body itself, the Church, guided by God, could find no more effectual and sure way of expelling them, than that of using this word *Deipara* against them; and, on the other hand, when they came up

again from the realms of darkness, and plotted the utter overthrow of Christian faith in the sixteenth century, then they could find no more certain expedient for the purpose, than that of reviling and blaspheming the prerogatives of Mary, for they knew full sure that, if they could once get the world to dishonor the Mother, the dishonor of the Son would follow close. The Church and Satan agreed together in this, that Son and Mother went together; and the experience of three centuries has confirmed their testimony, for Catholics who have honored the Mother, still worship the Son, whilst Protestants who have ceased to confess the Son, had begun by scoffing at the Mother.

You see then, my brethren, in this particular, the harmonious consistency of the revealed system, and the hearing of one doctrine upon another; Mary is honored for the sake of Jesus. It was fitting that she, as being a creature, though the first of creatures, should have an office of ministration. She, as others, came into the world to do a work, she had a mission to fulfil; her grace and her glory are not for her own sake, but for her Maker's; and to her is committed the custody of the Incarnation; this is her appointed office.—"A Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and they shall call His Name Emmanuel." As she was on earth and personally the guardian of her Divine Son, as she carried Him in her womb, folded Him in her embrace, and suckled Him at her breast, so now, and to the latest hour of the Church, do her glories and the devotion paid her proclaim and define the right faith concerning Him as God and man. Every Church which is dedicated to her, every altar which is raised under her invocation, every image which represents her, every Litany in her praise, every Hail Mary for her continual memory, does but remind us that there was One, who, though He was all blessed from all eternity, yet for the sake of sinners, "did not shrink from the Virgin's womb." Thus she is the *Turris Davidica*, as the Church calls her, "the Tower of David;" the high and strong defence of the King of the true Israel; and hence the Church also addresses her in the Antiphon, as having "by herself destroyed all heresies in the whole world."

And here, my brethren, a fresh thought opens upon us, which is naturally implied in what has been said. If the *Deipara* is to witness of Emmanuel, she must be necessarily more than the *Deipara*. For consider; a defence must be strong in order to be a defence; a tower must be like that Tower of David, "built with bulwarks;" "a thousand bucklers hang upon it, all the armor of valiant men." It would not have sufficed, in order to bring out and impress on us the idea that God is man, had His Mother been an ordinary person. A mother without a home in the Church, without a dignity, without gifts, would have been, as far as the defence of the Incarnation goes, no mother at all. She would not have remained in the memory, or the imagination of men. If she is to witness and remind the world that God became man, she must be on a high and eminent station for the purpose. She must be made to fill the mind, in order to suggest the lesson. When she once attracts our attention, she at once begins to preach Jesus. "Why should she have such prerogatives," we ask, "unless He be God? and what must He be by nature, when she is high by grace?" This is why she has other prerogatives besides, the gifts of personal purity and intercessory power, distinct from her maternity; she is personally endowed that she may perform her office well; she is exalted in herself, that she may minister to Christ.

For this reason, she has been made more glorious in her person, than in her office; her purity is a higher gift than her relationship to God. This is what is implied in Christ's answer to the woman in the crowd, who cried out, when He was preaching, "Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the breasts which Thou hast sucked." He replied by pointing out to His disciples a higher blessedness; "Yea, rather blessed," He said, "are they who hear the word of God and keep it." You know, my brethren, that Protestants take these words in disparagement of our Lady's greatness, but they really tell the other way. For consider them carefully: He says that it is more blessed to keep his commandments than to be His Mother; but what Protestant even will say that she did not keep His commandments? She kept them surely, and our Lord does but say that such obedience was in a higher line of privilege than her being His Mother; she was more blessed in her detachment from creatures, in her devotion to God, in her virginal purity, than in her maternity; and if as Catholics hold, she obeyed ten thousand times more perfectly than the holiest of other men, then her sanctity was a prerogative, greater than any other. This is the constant teaching of the Holy Fathers: "More blessed was Mary," says St. Augustine, "in receiving Christ's faith, than in conceiving Christ's flesh;" and St. Chrysostom

declares, that she would not have been blessed, though she had borne Him in the body, had she not heard the word of God, and kept it. This of course is an impossible case; for she was made holy, that she might be made His Mother, and the two blessednesses cannot be divided. She who was chosen to supply flesh and blood to the Eternal Word, was first filled with grace in soul and body; still, she had a double blessedness, of office, and of qualification for it, and the latter was the greater. And it is on this account that the Angel calls her blessed; "Full of grace," he says "blessed among women;" and St. Elizabeth also, when she cries out, "Blessed thou that hast believed." Nay, she herself bears a like testimony, when the Angel announced to her the favor which was coming on her. Though all Jewish women in each successive age had been hoping to be Mother of the Christ, so that marriage was honorable among them, celibacy a reproach, she alone had put aside the desire and the thought of so great a dignity. She alone, who was to bear the Christ, refused to bear Him; He stooped to her, she turned from Him; and why? because she had been inspired, the first of womankind, to dedicate her virginity to God, and she did not welcome a privilege which seemed to involve a forfeiture of her vow. "How shall this be," she asked, "seeing I am separate from man?" Nor, till the Angel told her that the conception would be miraculous and from the Holy Ghost, did she put aside her "trouble" of mind, recognise him securely as God's messenger, and bow her head in awe and thankfulness to God's condescension.

Mary then is a specimen, and more than a specimen, in the purity of her soul and body, of what man was before his fall, and would have been, had he risen to his perfection. It had been hard, it had been a victory for the evil one, had the whole race passed away, nor an instance occurred to show what the Creator had intended it in its original state. Adam, you know, was created in the image, and after the likeness of God; his frail and imperfect nature was supported and exalted by an indwelling of divine grace. Impetuous passion did not exist in him, except as a latent element and a possible evil; ignorance was dissipated by the clear light of the Spirit; and reason, sovereign over every motion of his soul, was simply subjected to the will of God. Nay even his body was preserved from every wayward appetite and affection, and was promised immortality instead of dissolution. Thus he was in a supernatural state; and, had he not sinned, year after year would he have advanced in merit and grace, and in God's favor, till he passed from paradise to heaven. But he fell; and his descendants were born in his likeness, not in God's; and the world grew worse instead of better, and judgment after judgment cut off generations of sinners in vain, and improvement was hopeless, "because man was flesh," and "the thoughts of his heart were bent upon evil at all times." But a remedy had been determined in heaven; a Redeemer was at hand; God was about to do a great work, and He purposed to do it suitably; "where sin abounded, grace was to abound more." Kings of the earth, when they have sons born to them, forthwith scatter some large bounty, or raise some high memorial; they honor the day, or the place, or the heralds of the auspicious event, with some corresponding mark of favor; nor did the coming of Emmanuel innovate on the world's established custom. It was a season of grace and prodigy, and these were to be exhibited in a special manner in the person of His Mother. The course of ages was to be reversed; the tradition of evil to be broken; a gate of light to be opened amid the darkness, for the coming of the Just;—a Virgin conceived and bore Him. It was fitting, for His honor and glory, that she, who was the instrument of His bodily presence, should first be a miracle of His grace; it was fitting that she should triumph, where Eve had failed, and should "bruise the serpent's head" by the spotlessness of her sanctity. In some respects, indeed, the curse was not reversed; Mary came into a fallen world, and resigned herself to its laws; she, as the Son she bore, was exposed to pain of soul and body, she was subjected to death; but she was not put under the power of sin. As grace was infused into Adam from the first moment of his creation, so that he never had experience of his natural poverty, till sin reduced him to it; so was grace given in still ampler measure to Mary, and she was a stranger to Adam's deprivation. She began where others end, whether in knowledge or in love. She was from the first clothed in sanctity, sealed for perseverance, luminous and glorious in God's sight, and incessantly employed in meritorious acts, which continued till her last breath. Her's was emphatically "the path of the just, which, as the shining light, goeth forward and increaseth even to the perfect day;" and sinlessness in thought, word, and deed, in small things as well as great, in venial matter as well as grievous, is surely