

MOST REV. DR. WALSH.

Sermon by His Grace on Christmas Morning.

The following is a substantial report of the sermon preached by his Grace Archbishop Walsh at St. Michael's Cathedral on Christmas morning:

"And the word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us, and we saw his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." JOHN I, 14.

The Incarnation of God the Son was the greatest manifestation that even God could make of His infinite goodness, love and mercy for the human race. He had created man through love—He redeemed him through mercy. The creation was a manifestation of Almighty love—the Redemption was a manifestation of infinite and all-pardoning mercy.

Man was originally created and constituted in justice and innocence. He was a child of God and an heir of heaven. By his fall he lost his innocence and justice and forfeited his Sonship of God and his heirship of heaven. He was banished from Paradise, and was driven into exile—a fugitive from the face of God, his offended father. Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, comes down from heaven, to restore to man the Sonship of God and the heirship of heaven, and to bring him back from his exile and his flight from God to an union of friendship and of love with Him. The incarnation of Christ was in principle the redemption of mankind, and their restoration to their place in God's eternal plans and to their own immortal destinies.

In the Eden dispensation the fear and dread of an offended God ruled and overpowered the hearts and minds of men. In that dispensation God ruled his people by the manifestation of Almighty power, by the force of stupendous miracles, by signal and tremendous chastisements of guilt, and in the might of His outstretched arm. When Adam sinned he was seized with fear, and he hid himself from the face of God. "I heard Thy voice in Paradise, and was afraid, and because I was naked I hid myself." This unholy fear, which carried away man from God, was transmitted with life to all the posterity of fallen Adam—banished and proscribed and expelled from Paradise by a sword of fire. All antiquity fled and hid itself from the face of an offended and angry God. And this fear which dominated antiquity was different in kind from that holy fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom, and which inspired the sinner at the same time with a dread of divine justice, a hatred of sin and a loving hope in the divine goodness and mercy. The fear of the ancients was a slavish fear, that had its origin in hatred of God, who punished sin and in hatred of the penalty inflicted on the sinner and not in repentance for the sin that merited the divine chastisement. And what were the bitter fruits of this unholy fear, that eventuated in the flight of mankind from God? Under its blighting influence the world had become thoroughly corrupt and out of joint with the purposes of its Creator. Men had for the most part lost the knowledge of the true God and of the priceless value of the immortal soul. Paganism, with its degrading rites and superstitions, and its vast system of idolatry, held the world enthralled. A dead sea of moral corruption covered the face of earth—vice became deified, for each had a God for its author and patron—whilst the great and eternal God was unknown and unchangeable. He was an outlaw in his own creation. The human family had lost its unity and sanctity, and became disrupted and broken up. Slavery held in its chains two-thirds of the Roman world, and degraded, demoralized and corrupted it. Human

life had become a dark and perplexing mystery enshrouded in impenetrable darkness, with all its problems unsolved and its destinies and purposes unexplained; and man, "noble in reason, infinite in faculties; in form admirable, in action like an angel, the beauty of the world, the paragon of created things," became worthless in his own eyes—the sated slave of his sensual pleasures, and ignoble passions. Such is the appalling picture which all sacred and profane writers draw of the moral state of the world in the days of Augustus Caesar—such was the moral condition of the world that the Saviour of mankind came to redeem and save. But how is this to be accomplished? How are justice, peace and mercy to be made to work together in this divine work of human salvation and restoration. "Behold," cries out the prophet, "God himself will come and save you." "Ecco Deus ipse veniet et salvabit vos."—Isaias c. xxxv., 4. God himself will come down from heaven in the Incarnation to seek his lost children, to dissipate their unholy and destructive fears, to bring them back from their banishment, and to win their confidence and their love. He will not come in great power and majesty as he did on Sinai, when he was clothed with the lightnings of heaven and spoke in a voice which was as a roll of thunder, and when the terrified people cried out to Moses, "O Moses, speak thou to God for us, but let not God speak to us, lest we die." No; God the Saviour will veil the splendor of His majesty, the awfulness of His power, the terrors of His justice, and will come gently as the dew of heaven falls on the thirsty earth—silently as the footsteps of the dawn descending the eastern hills. He will become man, He will become our brother, nay, He will come in the sweetness and tenderness and dependence of an infant; and with the pleading outstretched arms and the winsome and irresistible smile of a child, He will destroy our fears and will bring us back again to faith and hope and love in God our Father who is in heaven. This is the divine philosophy of the Incarnation and birth of Christ, in which "mercy and truth have met each other and justice and peace have embraced each other." *Misericordia et veritas obviaverunt sibi justitia et pax osculatae sunt.*—(Ps. lxxxiv., 11.)

The birth of the Incarnate God was the visible manifestation of the divine bounty and goodness. Hence, St. Paul says of it, that in it "the grace of God the Saviour hath appeared to all men." (Titus 2. ch.) And again "the goodness and kindness of God the Saviour appeared." (Titus, 3 chap. 4th verse.) Hence, also, St. Bernard, commenting on St. Paul's words, asks, "How could God better command or manifest his goodness than by assuming our flesh? How could He more strongly declare His mercy than by clothing Himself with our miseries?" As Moses made known to men God the Creator, God the Master and Sovereign Lord, God the All powerful and the infinitely Just and Terrible, so the Incarnation and birth of Christ revealed to the world God the Saviour, the God of love, and tenderness, and mercy—God the Father and the Brother and the Friend of man. "The grace, the goodness and kindness of God the Saviour hath appeared to all men."

The Incarnation and birth of Jesus Christ gave hope of pardon and confidence to the guilty fallen world. He was the day-star from on high that rose above the horizon of time and shed the light of hope and radiance of pardoning love like the smiles of God on the darkness of human misery and despair. "Fear not," said the angel, announcing the birth of Christ to the shepherds, who on the first Christmas night long ago were guarding their

flocks on the hill-sides of Galilee, "fear not, for behold I bring you tidings of great joy that shall be unto all people. For this day is born unto you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." His name shall be called Jesus, for He is come to save His people from their sins. (Matt.) And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army praising God and singing, "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men of good will." Luke II. The object and purpose of the Saviour's mission was announced by the angel's voice at the same moment as His birth. He is a Saviour Christ the Lord; He is Jesus because He has come to save the people from their sins, and His birth brings to all humanity glad tidings of great joy; and the angelic hosts of heaven rejoice, and they make the midnight air resound with their heavenly music, and the hills and dales of Galilee echo the glad refrain, and the burden of their song is: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men of good will." He has come to destroy the kingdom of Satan and the reign of sin on the earth, and establish instead the kingdom of God's peace and love. All power is given to that Divine Child in heaven and on earth, and He will use that divine power to destroy the reign of Satan, to forgive sin, to save man and to restore a fallen guilty world to the friendship of God. The bruised reed he will not break, and the smoking flax he will not extinguish; He will have pity on human sufferings and compassion for human sorrows and afflictions. Under the beneficent exercise of His almighty power, the blind will see, the lame walk, the lepers will be cleansed, the deaf will hear, and the poor will have the Gospel preached to them, and that gospel will bring them hope and comfort. He will bring light to the intellect, love to the heart, strength to the will. He will reveal to the world saving truths till then forever hidden in the mind of God; He will establish His Church, and will empower it to represent Him in the world when He shall have returned to His eternal throne. That church He will commission to teach all the truths He taught and He will make it the storehouse of His sacramental grace. That church will feed the hungry, will clothe the naked, will relieve the poor, will visit the sick, will bring hope and peace into the prison cell, will, like another Veronica, wipe the sweat and tears and blood from the face of suffering humanity, and, like the angel of consolation, will enter every Gethsemane of human sorrow, to comfort and to strengthen man in his deepest agony.

She will feed man with the food of divine truth, will heal the sin wounds of his soul, will nourish him with the bread of life, will, with a mother's care, guide him safely through the darksome journey of life, will comfort and strengthen him on his death-bed, and, having finished her task of saving and sanctifying him, she will accompany him to the divine judgment seat, to plead with a mother's voice for a favorable sentence. The Incarnation and birth of Christ brought confidence and the hope of pardon to the guilty world.

The third effect of the birth of God made man was to inspire mankind with the love of God, and to bring them into relations of friendship and union with Him. Man was made for God, and it is his normal condition to adore and serve Him and to love Him with all his heart and mind and strength. The human intellect was made for the supreme truth, the heart for the supreme good. The soul and its energies were made for union with God and for the possession of Him, just as the eye is made for the light. There is a stream of tendency in the human soul that makes God-ward and

heavenward just as streams and rivers rush onward from mountains, plains and valleys, ever, ever to the ocean. "Thou hast made our hearts for Thee, O God, and they cannot rest until they find rest in Thee," said St. Augustine. "As the hart panteth for the fountains of waters," said the Psalmist, "so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth after the great and living God; when shall I come and appear before the face of God." 40th Psalm. "What is there in heaven and besides thee what do I desire on earth; thou art the God of my heart and the God that is my portion forever." "O that Thou wouldst bend down the heavens and come. Come, Lord, and do not delay. Distil in dew, ye heavens, and let the earth open and bud forth a Saviour." Isaias. The great hearts of the Prophets in their passages did but give expression to the aspirations, to the cravings and the cries of man at all times for union with and the possession of God by friendship and love. In man's unfallen state God walked with him in Paradise, and conversed with him as a friend, and the memory of that happy intercourse haunted him in his exile like that of a happy dream that can never be forgotten, like the recollection of a vision of unutterable beauty once seen in the far off years, but has never faded from memory.

But whilst this hunger and thirst for God still racked the human soul and furnished the human heart, and parched the whole moral being of man with unquenchable desires and unutterable longings, there was in his being centrifugal force at work, the result of the fall carrying him away from the God he had offended and pushing and driving him farther and farther from him. This force was the original fear and terror of divine justice that first caused man to hide from God and kept him far away from Him. The result of these conflicting forces in man's spiritual being was idolatry, or the worship of man made Gods. Man could not live without God—he ran away and hid himself from the true God—he therefore made gods unto himself. Now, the birth of the man God in the flesh reconciled these two conflicting forces in man's moral nature, for it satisfied the desire of man for God and disarmed his fears that kept him away from him. It was the restoration of the human race to their place in the original design of God and to their true and immortal destinies. Jesus, in becoming man, and clothing himself with our flesh, became one of ourselves—a fellowman and a brother. And in doing this he appealed to the best and strongest feelings in our nature for our confidence and love, for there is that within us that prompts us to give out our confidence and heart's affections to those who try to assimilate themselves to us. When Alexander the Great conquered Darius and made himself master of Persia, he clothed himself in the national costume, to win the confidence and gain the affections of the Persians. Kings and rulers do the same thing even now when visiting subject peoples, and even missionaries in strange and far off lands wear the national costumes of the countries they are evangelizing, in order to conciliate their feelings, to disarm their prejudices, and to win their confidence and affections. Now, the Son of God, in becoming man, acted on this principle. In order to win our hearts He clothed himself with our hearts. He clothed himself with our flesh. "He was made," said St. Paul, "in the likeness of man, and formed in fashion as a man. God sent his Son in likeness of sinful flesh." (Rom. 3rd chap.) He allowed Himself to be tempted in all things like unto ourselves, except sin. "Therefore" says the same Apostle (Hebrews II., 14), "therefore because the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also