

Christmas 2023

"We kneel before the King of Heaven and Earth".

ECCLESIA

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**Raymond L.
Burke***



Heb 1, 1-12; Jn 1, 1-14

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The opening chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews reflects on the wondrous event which is the cause of our most joyous celebration today: "In many and various ways God spoke

of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the ages.” (Heb1, 1-2) The eternal Word of God, God the Son Who is the source of the right order and of the final destiny of all creation, has united our human nature to His divine nature. He has come to dwell with us, “full of grace and truth,” (Jn 1,14) so that, receiving Him, becoming one in heart with His Most Sacred Heart, we might become “children of God; ... born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” (Jn1, 12-13) Indeed, as the Prologue of the Gospel according to Saint John proclaims: “And from his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace.” (jn, 1-16) In Him, we live, in accord with “grace and truth.”

The wondrous event of the Redemptive Incarnation, of the Birth of Our Lord of the Virgin Mary at Bethlehem, is eternal. Thus, the Epistle to the Hebrews rightly applies to the Infant Savior, God the Son Incarnate, the words of Psalm 102:

“You, Lord, founded the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all grow old like a garment, like a cloak you will roll them up, and they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will never end.” (Heb 1, 10-12. Cf. Ps 102 [101], 25-27)

We kneel in prayer before the image of the Infant Savior, for we recognize in Him the King of Heaven and Earth, with Whom we have communion of heart through the Eucharistic Sacrifice which He is now about to offer. The crucifix on the altar is not some decoration, it is the sign of the Sacrifice of Calvary which Christ makes sacramentally new on the altar, the Sacrifice in which we are called to participate with all our heart.

Dom Prosper Guéranger helps us to understand the profound and enduring meaning of every aspect of today's celebration. Referring to the Epistle from the Letter to the Hebrews, he writes:

“Whilst our eyes are fixed on the sweet Infant in his Crib, St Paul bids us raise our thoughts up to that infinite Light, from the midst of which the Eternal Father thus speaks to this Child of Mary: *Thou are my Son; to-day have I begotten thee*: this *to-day* is the Day of eternity, a Day which has neither morning nor evening, neither rising nor setting. If the Human Nature which he has vouchsafed to assume places him below the Angels; he is infinitely above them by his own essence, whereby he is the Son of God. He is God, he is Lord, and no change can come upon him. He may be wrapped in swathing-bands or nailed to a Cross, or put to a most ignominious death; all this is only in his human

nature: in his Divinity he remains impassable and immortal, for he was born of the Father from all eternity.”

Kneeling before the Infant Jesus, we place in His Divine Heart united to the human heart which He received under the Immaculate Heart of Mary, His Virgin Mother, we renew all our trust in God the Father and in His promise of eternal salvation. We pray that we may always be found among “those who have loved [Christ’s] appearing,” for whom God the Father has “laid up ... the crown of righteousness.” (2Tim 4,8)

In the Infant Jesus, we recognize ourselves who, through the waters of Baptism, have been reborn in Him, and who, one with Him in His Eucharistic Sacrifice, place our hearts completely within His glorious-pierced heart. Our prayer before the Infant Savior is not an exercise of sentimentality but a source of grace for the embrace of all that it means to live in Him during our days on earth, in anticipation of His eternal company in the Kingdom of Heaven. The prayer of Saint Paul at the beginning of the Letter to the Ephesians expresses the eternal mystery of the identity of the Divine Infant whom we adore and of our identity in Him:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed upon us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us. For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth”. (Eph 1, 3-10)

Before the tremendous trials we confront in the world and in our personal life, let us never give way to the temptation to discouragement, but let us give ourselves ever more to prayer before the creche, before the crucifix, and, above all, before the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Through prayer and devotion, and, above all, through our Lord’s coming to us in the Sacraments, the sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us illumines the way to eternal life and gives the courage to follow that way faithfully.

May the joy of today’s celebration never leave us. May it ever inspire and

strengthen us, especially in the most difficult times in which we live. Let us offer, with Dom Guéranger, his prayer inspired by the Holy Gospel:

“Today, thanks to the wonderful ways of thy love, we have received thee: for who could refuse to receive thee, sweet gentle Infant Jesus ! but leave us not; abide with us, and perfect the New Birth which thou hast begun in us. We wish henceforth to be neither *of blood, not of the will of the flesh, not of the will of man*, but of God, by thee and in thee. Thou hast been *made Flesh*, O Word Eternal ! in order that we may become *sons of God*. We beseech thee, support our weak human nature, and fit us for this our sublime destiny. Thou art born of God thy Father; thou art born of Mary; thou art born in our hearts; thrice glorified be thou for this thy triple Birth, O Jesus ! so merciful in thy Divinity, and so divine in thy self-sought humiliations!”

The Infant Jesus, true God and true man, never fails us, never ceases to pour out His life for us. He ever perfects His life in those who love “his appearing.” His Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and His Virginal Father, Saint Joseph, never fail to guide us to Him Who alone is our salvation, never fail to safeguard our way in Him.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

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