

# Sunday Afternoon Readings

## XIII. THE KINGS AT THE CRADLE.

The shepherds were not the only visitors to the crib. In distant lands and far apart from one another, dwelt the Magi, devotees of wisdom; greater than kings, for they were the tutors and guides of kings. They were legatees of the great hope, and looked for its coming in humble, firm trust. Only the feet of humility are firm. They had no false learning to lead them away from God. No need for them to torture their minds with puzzles over the great enigma; to them there was no enigma, they knew their hope, and that it would come. Around them were men—and there are such to-day—whose heads held a vast amount of knowledge, held everything indeed except the truth; they were followers of phantoms that tortured their rambling feet. Not such were the Magi. The Star foretold appears in the East, and the Magi arise and follow in its wake. Their hearts are glowing, for the Saviour has come to all the nations. They encourage one another as they hasten to the tryst with holy words: they must be generous in their gifts to the little Babe, they must be humble in their manner in spite of all their wisdom:

"Go humbly; humble are the skies  
And low and large and fierce the star:  
So very near the Manger lies  
That we may travel far."

At the gate of Bethlehem they leave their camels, and, walking like little children, they enter the cave where God Himself has been born. They fall down and adore the Saviour of the nations, and open their treasures to make Him gifts; not lambs and doves and lengths of fleece as the poor shepherds had given, but such as would become the rich; they have with them gold and frankincense and myrrh.

But suddenly they pause, seeing their poverty. What gain to the Babe in these. He Who holds the gold heart of the sun, could not be enriched by mountains of earthly dross; and to Him Who enjoys the fragrance of the stars, frankincense would be foul, and myrrh a scentless lily. But the wisest of the three reassures his companions: let us make the gifts; they will not enrich Him, but given to Him, they will be safe from our mishandling.

In his "Song of Gifts to God" Mr. Chesterton has pointed out the high motive of giving: it is not that we make God richer, but that the more we give to Him, the less we have to spend on our passions, or on useless pleasure. Money has too often made "harlots of the Greeks," and most certainly it has made "hucksters of the Jews" in every part of the world. Think of this when you are tempted to put all your money in trade, reserving none for God. Trade may prove unreliable and bankruptcies may impoverish. It is with God alone our money is safe, He alone can never fail to

make return. To give money to the king, that is to merely national or temporal causes, is, more often than not, to hand it over to "a dumb devil of pride and greed" who, to multiply it, will plunge the world in horrid war. Keep the national coffers empty, and peace will be maintained, but if you put your money into the hat of every junker that accosts you, you must continue to weep for the widows and the orphans who are crushed beneath the wheels of Mammon. Our fathers in the faith stamped God's image on their coin, and, devoting it to His cause, built up Christendom, and crowned every land with churches and schools in which youth and age were taught the beauty of Bethlehem and the glory of the Cross.

The Magi, the first of the Gentile races to adore the new-born Saviour and to offer Him gifts, were our first fathers in the faith; and what they did for us on that great occasion, we must now do for ourselves. The same Divine Saviour comes to us daily in the morning Mass, each new day sees Him new-born on our altars. Why not come in larger numbers to adore Him, and to carry away with us to sweeten our homes the rich graces of the Holy Sacrifice? Why not ask Him to enlarge our hearts that we may be inspired to offer Him much of the goods we cherish?

"Poor world (said I), what  
Wilt thou do  
To entertain this starry  
Stranger?  
Is this the best thou  
Canst bestow?  
A cold, and not too  
Cleanly, manger?  
Contend, the powers of  
Heaven and earth,  
To fit a bed for this  
Huge birth."

He comes to us and, in places such as this where I am writing, we present Him with a building made of poor boards, and these not too wholesome. This is not the best in our wealth to give; this bears no proportion to the Catholic instinct, faith, and love of our forefathers; this is our reproach, which must be wiped out with generosity. Our love must conspire with our means to make a habitation more worthy of Him Who reposes in our midst. Yet more, meditating on the mysteries of Bethlehem and of the Altar, we shall feel constrained to consecrate to Him our souls and bodies also.

"Nay! what is this, Man?  
And who is He?  
The Holy Child must die  
For you and me."

Oh! say, brother! oh! say, brother!  
What then shall be?  
Home in His Sacred Heart  
For you and me.

Oh! what can we give, brother!  
For such a thing?  
Body and soul, brother!  
To Christ the King."

The consecration of ourselves, body and soul, will consist in a faithful imitation of Him. A Babe in the Crib, He has two titles—"Son of man," and "Son of God." The first is a new one, which He acquired by assuming our nature. In this He humbled Himself; in this God becomes a Child, Infinity contains itself in a body, Eternity encloses itself in a span. In imitation of Him, we must become like little children, with the docility and obedience of children, docility and obedience controlling heart and will and mind. Obedience will not make us less manly, but the keeping of the intellect under discipline and within its proper bounds, will safeguard us from false paths and will lead us into noble and ennobling courses. There are beautiful avenues of thought, and there are labyrinths of abysmal darkness and confusion; to follow in the footsteps of Christ will be to avoid confusion and enjoy supernal light.

When we are cast out and buffeted by the world, we must, in imitation of our Model, place ourselves in the hands of our Almighty Father, Who will safeguard and provide for us, as He sent His angels to hover round the lowly and despised stable.

But it is as Son of God that Christ is specially our Model. This is His title by nature and by right, it is ours by adoption and by grace; but in both cases it is in reality and in truth a Divine Sonship. It is the same grace that is in Jesus and in us. We must preserve and increase this grace by growing daily into His likeness. Without it we are neither His brethren nor heirs of His Kingdom.

Finally, Christ came to make His Father known and loved. Here again He is our Model; and we in our turn and in our measure, must strive to "make known the good things of Him Who hath called (us) out of darkness into His marvellous light."

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### MEDITATION.

What hast Thou made of me? A very god!  
Thy flesh and blood are mine; divinity  
(For in Thy image Thou hast fashioned me!)  
Is mine through Thee. The flowers within  
the clod

Has burst in dazzling glory—golden shod,  
Thy angels serve me, for they, joyous, see  
That my whole being is made a part of Thee.  
Transfigured, in the pathway Thou hast  
trod.

I kneel, the same, yet very different;  
"For ye shall be as gods," the preacher said;  
And now I know the light of Love divine,  
Which is Thy Heart! O Thou Omnipotent!  
O splendor of the world! Thy power hath  
wed  
Heaven and earth in this frail house of  
mine!

—Ave Maria.

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