

Christmas in Rome

In no other city, perhaps, is Christmas so specially emphasised as it is in Rome. Just as at home, the Christmas shopping makes itself a definite part of the festal time for days before the feast itself; but when the Vigil of Christmas actually comes, one is apt to see in Rome the religious aspect of things rather than their social aspect.

From 3 o'clock on the afternoon of Christmas Eve the shops are closing, and generally all business is suspended about 6 o'clock. The cabarets and night dens, which are generally beginning business about 10 o'clock in the evening, apparently do no business on this night of nights.

As one hurries through the streets one notices the unusual emptiness till about 11.30, when the people are seen going to one or other of the many midnight Masses that are being celebrated in the various parishes. Those Masses are very remarkable for the numbers of people who receive Holy Communion. Since the war a new feature has been the number of men who go to Communion. However, there is one striking feature that those of us from home miss Christmas after Christmas, namely, the "Adeste Fideles." I do not know whether or not the singing of this beautiful hymn at Christmastide is distinctively Irish, but I do know that nowhere have I heard it sung as part and parcel of the Christmas Night Mass as I have heard it in Ireland.

In Bavaria I have heard the lovely strains of the "Stille Nacht," and in other countries even the "Adeste Fideles"; but, except for the Bavarian hymn, no other chant seems to fill the place of our own "Adeste Fideles." Certainly, in Rome there is nothing like it. And in many years' residence here it is the one thing that I always seem to miss most during the Midnight Mass.

However, one is well compensated by the warm devotion of the crowded congregations in the various churches. Sometimes the priest who sings the High Mass stays at the altar and says his three Masses right through.

In almost every such case that I know of the majority of the congregation remains in church for the extra two Masses. Of course, everywhere the singing at the Mass is something that we seldom hear at home, for the *Scholae Cantorum*, as they are called, are well trained, and are all very keen on their work.

In the Colleges.

In the colleges the night is a night of long ecclesiastical ceremonies, but the Christmas relaxation comes on the afternoon and evening of Christmas Day, when concerts and impromptu entertainments of all sorts are permitted to the students.

Christmas Day is regarded among the Romans as a day of special augury, and there is a popular saying that the babe is specially blest who is born on that day, and that he will ever protect the nearest seven houses to the house in which he was born.

The whole week is regarded here as a holiday week, but it has lost something of its old-time splendor. It is not so many centuries ago since it was known as the Week of Remission, because it was not obligatory to pay debts during the Christmas octave.

But modern commercialism has killed that happy spirit. Even now, however, the holiday spirit continues, and all Rome is *en fete* up to January 2, when the new year's work seriously begins. The children, however, run the feasting beyond the Befana, as the Feast of the Epiphany is called, and every old Roman student can vividly recall the noises of the children's horns and bugles that usher in the Feast of the Three Wise Men.

— Brooklyn Tablet.

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