

Faith of Our Fathers

[A WEEKLY INSTRUCTION FOR YOUNG AND OLD.]

THE INCARNATION.

1. The Incarnation is the mystery of the Son of God made man.

We have seen that by the sin of the first man the whole human race became guilty, and fell from its original state into the slavery of the devil, from whose power it could not escape.

God might have treated sinful man as He did the rebel angels; He might have abandoned him to his fate and delivered him over to the eternal chastisement which he deserved. But He was merciful towards man, and promised him a Redeemer, who should expiate the sin of Adam's race, and re-establish it in justice and in all its former privileges.

2. The Author of the restoration of the human race was the Incarnate Word; that is to say, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity made man, and called by the name of *Jesus Christ*.

3. God becoming man to save us, such is the great fact taught us by faith, the wonderful dogma of the Incarnation and Redemption. This dogma entirely concerns the Person of Jesus Christ, whom we must endeavor to know according to the infallible teachings of the Church. We will consider Christ (1) in His history; (2) in His Person or His personal constitution; (3) in His works; (4) in the worship due to Him; (5) in His influence on humanity.

First Article: Jesus Christ Considered in His History.

4. Considered historically, Jesus Christ is the greatest Person who has ever lived in the world. He stands pre-eminent; He shines from amongst celebrated men, like the moon amongst the inferior light of the stars, or rather like the sun itself, eclipsing all the other luminaries.

Though a true and real man, Jesus Christ is unlike any other. All men but Himself are born and die, commencing with their birth and completing with their death their appointed destiny. Christ alone existed before His incarnation and lives after His death; of Him only can it be said, *Jesus Christus heri, et hodie, ipse et in secula*,—Christ yesterday, and to-day, and the same for ever" (Heb. xiii. 8).

Christ is living. He lives always and everywhere, not only in heaven where He ascended, but in the entire world and in the minds and hearts of men. Since His death on Mount Calvary, He has more than ever shown Himself to be the living God, and His living power is specially shown and developed in Christianity; by it He speaks, He teaches, He commands, He forbids, He combats, and He triumphs. All passes away and dies around Him; He alone lives and abides for ever, the Soul and the Head of His Church.

His history, then, is not confined to the 33 years which He spent on earth; it extends over all the ages of the world, from Adam to the end of time. Jesus Christ lives in the past by His prophetic existence; He lives in His own contemporary epoch by His mortal life; He lives in the future by His immortal existence.

I. Prophetic Existence of Christ.

5. By the prophetic existence of Christ is meant that which He has in the prophecies announcing His coming, and in the figures which represented Him from the beginning of the world. They are like rays heralding Christ's light, as the dawn announces the sun, or like the shadow which precedes the body, presenting an imperfect likeness of that which has to follow.

6. Christ or the Messiah was first announced in the Garden of Eden, on the day when man fell under the slavery of the devil. God promised, at the same time as He punished our first parents, that a woman born of their race should give birth to a Son, who should crush the serpent's head; meaning that they should have a Saviour, who would destroy the tyranny of Satan and break the bonds of his thralldom.

Adam gratefully received this magnificent promise, and transmitted it to his descendants.

This first prophecy was pronounced more than 4000 years before the coming of Christ. After that, about 2000 years before our era, God promised to Abraham that he

should become the father of a great people, and that all the nations of the earth should be blessed and saved by a Son who should come of his race, (Gen. xxvi. 4).

In the year 1700* the patriarch Jacob predicted that the Saviour of the world, the Expected of nations, should be born of the descendants of the tribe of his son Judah, and that this great event should happen when the royal sceptre which they should wield had passed into the hands of strangers.

In the year 1500 Moses announced that the Messiah would be, like him, a Legislator, but a greater than he—a Lawgiver who should give to Israel a lasting and definite law, the accomplishment of the temporary law of Sinai.

In the year 1050 God made known to King David that Christ should be born of his house; that He should be, like him, a King, but a King of glory and holiness, the Head of a spiritual and universal kingdom; that He should save the world by His sufferings and death; that He should be crucified, descend into hell, rise from the dead, and ascend gloriously into heaven, to sit at the right hand of God the Father, whence He should come to judge the world.

In the year 700 Isaias and the other Prophets announced that the Saviour should be born miraculously by a Virgin in Bethlehem of Juda, and that He should be at once God and Man; that He would lead a poor and obscure life, and that He would have a precursor to make this known; that by His doctrine He would instruct men; that He would work miracles on His way, healing the sick, raising the dead to life, teaching the poor; and that finally He would give up His life for the sins of men, and suffer a dolorous Passion for their salvation; that He would establish His Church, or the reign of God in the universe, by His apostolic preaching.

In the year 500 Daniel predicted that from the time of the captivity of Babylon seventy weeks of years, or 490 years, should elapse, and that then Christ should be put to death for the salvation of the human race.

* That is to say, about the year 1700. These dates must be taken approximately.

Mary is the Mother of Divine Grace, because Jesus, her Son, is the very Source and Fountain of grace, and because grace, which is Himself, is born in the soul, as in the stable of Bethlehem by her co-operation as well as by the operation of the Holy Spirit.

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