

CHRISTMAS AND THE EUCHARIST

By St. Peter Julian Eymard

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Parvulus natus est nobis. - A child is born to us. (Isaiah ix. 6.)

Christmas is a lovely feast. We always greet it with joy. Our love gives it a new life, and the Eucharist is Its continuation. Bethlehem and the Cenacle are inseparably linked together; they complete each other. Let us study the relations that exist between the two.

I

The Eucharist was sown at Bethlehem. What is the Eucharist but "the wheat of the elect" and "the living bread"? Now, wheat must be sown. It must fall into the soil, and spring up, and ripen, and be harvested, and be ground before it can be made into good bread.

When He was born on the straw of the stable, the Word was preparing His Eucharist, which He considered the complement of all His other mysteries. He was coming to be united to man. During His life He would establish with man a union of grace, a union of example and of merit; but only in the Eucharist would He consummate the most perfect union of which man is capable here below. If we want to understand the Divine plan, we must not lose sight of the Divine idea, of that purpose our Lord had in mind: a union of grace through the mysteries of His life and death; a physical and personal union through the Eucharist. Both unions were to prepare the consummation of union in glory.

Just as a traveler never loses sight of the goal of his journey and directs every step towards it, so throughout His whole life our Lord secretly prepared the Eucharist and brought it ever nearer.

This heavenly wheat was as it were sown at Bethlehem, the "House of bread." See the wheat on the straw. Trodden down and crushed, this straw represents poor humanity. Of itself it is barren. But Jesus will lift it into position in Himself, will restore it to life, and will make it fruitful. *Nisi granum frumenti cadens in terram.* "Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground . . ."

This Divine grain has been sown. The tears of Jesus are the moisture that will make it grow into beautiful wheat. Bethlehem is built on a hill facing Jerusalem. When this ear of wheat has ripened, it shall lean towards Calvary where it shall be ground and shall be set on the fire of suffering to become a living bread.

Kings will come to eat of it and find it delicious: *Praebeat delicias regibus.* "It shall yield dainties to kings." It is fit for the royal-nuptials of the Lamb: *Currunt Magi ad regales nuptias.* "The Wise Men hasten . . . to the marriage supper of the King." The Wise Men at that supper represented the kingly and self-possessed souls who today feed on this Bread of the Sacrament.

The relations between our Savior's birth at Bethlehem and the Eucharist considered as Sacrament exist also between our Savior's birth and the Eucharist considered as Sacrifice.

It was truly a lambkin that was born at Bethlehem. Jesus was born like a lamb in a stable, and like a lamb knew no one but His mother. He was already offering Himself for the sacrifice; it was His first cry: *Hostiam et oblationem noluit: corpus autem aptasti mihi.* "Father, Thou no longer desirest the sacrifices and oblations of the Law, but a body hast Thou given Me. Here I am." Jesus needed that body in order to be immolated; He offered it to His Father. This little Lamb was to grow up close to its Mother; in forty days she would learn the secret of its immolation. She would feed it with her pure and virginal milk, and would preserve it for the day of sacrifice. This characteristic of victim was so evident in our Lord that when Saint John the Baptist saw Him in the early days of His public life, he had no other name for Him than that of "Lamb of God." *Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccatum mundi.* "Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him Who taketh away the sin of the world."

The sacrifice begun at Bethlehem is consummated on the altar at Holy Mass. Oh! How touching is the Midnight Mass in the Christian world!

We greet it long beforehand and are always glad to see it come around again. What is it that gives to our feast of Christmas its charm and that pours joy into our carols and rapture into our hearts, if not that on the altar Jesus is really born again, although in a different state? Do not our carols and our homages go straight to His very person? The object of our festive celebration as of our love is present. We really go to Bethlehem and we find there not a memory, not a picture, but the Divine Infant Himself.

And see how the Eucharist began at Bethlehem. He was even then the Emmanuel, "God with us," Who was come to dwell among His people. On the first Christmas Day He began to live in our midst; the Eucharist perpetuates His Presence. At Bethlehem, the Word was made flesh; in

the Sacrament He is made bread in order to give us His flesh without stirring any feeling of repugnance in us.

At Bethlehem He also began practicing the virtues of His sacramental state.

He concealed His Divinity in order to familiarize man with God. He veiled His Divine glory as a first step to the veiling of His humanity. He bound His power in the weakness of a child's body; later He would bind it beneath the Sacred Species. He was poor; He stripped Himself of every possession, He, the Creator and Sovereign Master of all things. The stable was not His own; charity let Him have the use of it. He lived with His Mother on the offerings of the shepherds and the gifts of the Magi; later in the Eucharist, He would ask man for a shelter for Himself, the matter for His Sacrament, vestments for His priest and His altar. This is how Bethlehem heralds the Eucharist.

We even find there the inauguration of Eucharistic worship in its chief form, adoration.

Mary and Joseph were the first adorers of the Word Incarnate. They believed firmly; their faith was their virtue: *Beata, qua: credidisti*. "Blessed art thou that hast believed." They adored Him by the virtue of their faith.

The shepherds and the Magi also adored Him in union with Mary and Joseph.

Mary was entirely devoted to the service of her Son. She was all intent on His service, anticipating His least wishes to satisfy them. The shepherds offered their plain and simple presents, and the Magi, their magnificent gifts. They adored Him by the homage of their gifts.

The Eucharist also is the meeting-place for persons of all conditions; it is the center of the Catholic world. It is the object of that twofold worship of adoration: the interior adoration of faith and love; the exterior adoration through the magnificence of gifts, of churches, and of the thrones on which the Divine Host will be exposed.

II

The birth of our Lord suggests another thought to me. The Angels announced the Savior to the shepherds in these words: *Natus est vobis hodie Salvator*. "This day is born to you a Savior." A new era was beginning. Adam's work was about to be overthrown and replaced by a work of Divine restoration. There are two Adams, each one the father of a great people: the first Adam, "of the earth, earthly," *de terra terrenus*, father of the degenerated world; and the second Adam, "from Heaven, heavenly," *de caelo caelestis*, father of the regenerated world. The second [sic: came] to rebuild what the first had destroyed. Note that this restoration is well carried out here below only through the Eucharist.

The capital point about Adam's fault, as also the main argument of the diabolical temptation, was contained in these words, "You shall be as gods," and in the feeling of pride they aroused in Adam.

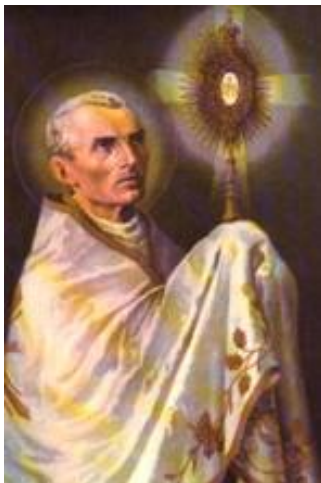
"You shall become like to God!" Alas! They became like to the beasts! Well, our Lord came not only to take up Satan's promises and repeat them to us, but to fulfill them. Satan was caught in his own snares. Yes, we shall become like to God by eating of His Flesh and Blood.

"You shall not die." In Communion we receive an unfailing pledge of immortality. "He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath everlasting" eternal life. We lose our temporal life. But it is not a life worthy of the name; it is only a halt on the journey to true life.

"You shall become like to God." Marrying into a family of higher social rank changes one's condition; by marrying a king, a commoner becomes queen. Our Lord shares His Divinity with us by communicating Himself to us. We become His Flesh and His Blood. We receive something of the Creator's Divine and heavenly kingship. Human nature was intimately united to the Godhead through the hypostatic union; so does Communion elevate us to union with God and make us partakers of His nature. A less perfect food is transformed into us, but we are transformed into our Lord, Who absorbs us. We become members of God. And in heaven our glory shall be in proportion to our transformation into Jesus Christ through a frequent partaking of His adorable Body.

"You shall know all things." All that is evil, yes; all that is good, by no means. Where can we learn this Divine science of good if not in Communion? Listen to what our Lord said to His Apostles after having given them Communion: "I will not now call you servants; . . . but My friends: because all things whatsoever I have heard of My Father, I have made known to you." Knowledge is imparted to us in the Eucharist by God Himself, Who constitutes Himself our special and personal teacher. *Et erunt omnes docibiles Dei.* "And they shall all be taught of God." He no longer sends us prophets; He is Himself - our teacher. "You shall know all things," for He is Divine Knowledge itself, uncreated and infinite.

That is how the Eucharist completes the restoration begun in the Crib. Make merry therefore on this beautiful day on which the sun of the Eucharist is rising. Let your gratitude never separate the Crib from the altar, the Word made flesh from the God-Man made bread of life in the Most Blessed Sacrament.



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