

MYSTERIES *of* CHRIST

Lucius Cary

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PREFACE

From 1914-1950 the Community of the Sisters of the Love of God had for its Director Father Lucius Cary, a member of the Society of St John the Evangelist to which we owe our foundation. During those years, with very few interruptions, Father Cary used to address the Sisters on every major festival and on most Sundays of the year, and it is because we want to make more widely known something of the teaching which has so significantly shaped and expressed the ethos of our community that this pamphlet has been published.

These extracts from Father Cary's addresses represent a minute selection from the rows of notebooks stacked in our chapter house, in which in various spidery hands and now faded ink they were first transcribed. We knew that in preparing such a small, edited version of his teaching we could not hope to convey the immediate force of a challenge that issued from the heart of the speaker, to capture his sparkle or the atmosphere in the convent chapel which those who heard him week by week still recall. With such limitations nevertheless, this selection still offers, we believe, a fair sample of Father Cary's way of presenting the central truths of Christianity as the stuff of contemplative prayer. His themes were not of his own choosing. They were given to him with the cycle of the liturgical year as it unfolded season by season, as inevitably as spring follows winter and autumn summer, from Advent through Christmas and Epiphany to Lent, Passiontide and Easter, the Ascension, Pentecost and Trinity, on to the great summer feasts as they were once widely observed in the Church: Corpus Christi, the Sacred Heart, the Precious Blood, the Transfiguration, the Holy Name, Michaelmas, and so on to Christ the King, All Saints, and Advent once again.

'A growing intimacy with the mysteries of the offered life of the divine Saviour King' is fundamental to the vocation of the Sisters of the Love of God. Such intimacy, if it is the fruit of fidelity in life and prayer, is likely to lead sooner or later to deeper penitence and a longing to be identified with the redemptive work of Christ. Much of Father Cary's teaching was given with this second strand of the Community's vocation in mind. But he maintained that in such a calling adoration always had the first place, that contemplation preceded, inspired and enabled reparation. The focus of

contemplative prayer is the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, revealed to us in and through the Incarnation. It was natural then that a new and tentative community, building its life upon the prayer of the Church in the Eucharist and the Divine Office, should respond to the same rhythm of worship as the Church herself, moving year after year 'from mystery to mystery by mystery'.

Father Cary's first concern was always to train the attention of his hearers on to God himself as the only conceivable claimant to a human being's total and lifelong gift of self. Over and over again he exhorts them to adoration, wonder and love before the amazing fact of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Life in the community was hard and monotonous, it was not directed towards visible or palpable results, and the conditions necessary to secure its integrity did not of themselves guarantee the members protection against staleness, pettiness, or other human infirmities. The effect of Father Cary's addresses on his listeners was always, they tell us, to renew their vision and enlarge their hearts, lifting them into a dimension of reality where all that is simply of the time being finds its true scale and proportion. He was an inspiring teacher not because his ideas were so novel or so copious that they attracted a ready audience over a period of forty years, but because he had that gift (which he shared with the early 'Cowley Fathers') of opening people's eyes to the invincible Love within which the history of the human race, as well as the details of each life, are held and brought to their fulfilment according to the will and plan of God. His words carried conviction because he spoke out of a depth of personal communion with God, with an urgent awareness of the task entrusted to contemplative communities; and because he imparted a serene sense, whenever his attention rested upon one or other of the saving mysteries, of drawing upon what was literally inexhaustible.

If the sparseness of allusions, suggestions, ideas other than those provided by Scripture for the interpretation of the work of God give small indication of the range of Father Cary's reading, the warmth and geniality of his sympathies, his wit and sense of fun, this again is because his concern was not so much to bring spiritual insight to bear on human experience and achievement as to focus attention on God himself; to draw all the faculties to a point of watchful stillness rather than to stimulate intellectual activity; to encourage an integrated

response of mind, heart and will to the light shed by the Holy Spirit in prayer. He knew that a growing relationship with God cannot but have a transforming effect on every area of personality and experience. Exactly what the light discovered for each one was a matter for personal direction, and in this too Father Cary was a master, but what concerned him when he spoke to the Community as a whole was that it should grow in corporate responsibility for its vocation, that it should let itself be formed into an instrument for God's continuing work in time and space.

Father Cary's ministry to us extended over the two world wars and their aftermath. Throughout these years and throughout the domestic crises that often beset and sometimes threatened the community, he never allowed it to forget that its own humble and hidden existence had come about by the direct will of God, who called it into being, precisely in this age, to bear witness to his creative and redeeming love against the forces of hatred and destruction. Its relationship with its own time and place in history is therefore indissoluble. He insisted that not he, nor any future guide, but the community itself was the custodian of its vocation, and he strove to interpret that vocation and foster a response to it according to a vision that could never be superseded or outworn, because it looked to nothing but God himself.

The Cycle of Mysteries

THE MYSTERIES of Christ are like the characters depicted in some glorious mediaeval stained glass window through which the eternal light shines, and lights up our growing understanding and our growing experience of the mystery of Christ. These mysteries of his life are available for us as if they were actually taking place before our eyes, and that is why we profit by taking the seasons of the Church's year and meditating on each passing mystery, thereby entering through a door into that which does not change but is eternal in the heavens.

The revelation of the mystery of the Godhead is shown forth in the incarnate Lord, Jesus Christ. Our Lord is the revelation of the Father; his whole work and witness was to show God as he is to the hungry soul of man. As creation by its origin and dependence witnesses to the life of God, so the mysteries of the incarnate life enhance, enrich and extend the witness of a silent and adoring world.

In the depths of the Holy Trinity we find the true abiding place of the mystery. From the depths of our being to the height of God in his being our act of worship rises: 'All glory be to thee, my God, for that thou art, three Persons, one, all-holy God, very love'. What follows then?—wonder, humility and worship. Beyond all that he has done in us and for us it is to God that we pay our worship, to God as he is in himself. And as our faith apprehends him in the mystery of the Holy Trinity, we from our lowliness lift up our hearts and worship, and go forward to live our life afresh in the sense of wonder, worship and praise.

Every holy festival of the incarnate life is the Church's recognition and tribute of adoration to that great symphony of love and worship which Jesus offered ceaselessly during his three and thirty years on earth.

His is the supreme oblation, not only of Calvary but of the whole life. It means not only the Cross but all that he was in human nature, all of that he offered to the Father. There never has been or could be

an offering as perfect as that. His human nature is the most perfect thing that creative love could accomplish. He is the crown of all creation: all creation is summed up in him, and all creation in Christ has access now to God, and our citizenship is in heaven. Our offering is there, but we must make it our own, and only in so far as we unite our offering with his (the infinitely small with the infinitely great) does our offering become worthy of God. Imitation of the virtues and graces of that lovely life is necessary but not sufficient; what is wanted is a living union with Christ, God and Man. Jesus dwells in us not as a guest but as a divine inhabitant, to love in us, suffer in us, and be victorious in us, for in every Christian soul called to perfection there must be a new Bethlehem, a new Nazareth, and in some measure as we are given grace to bear it, a new Gethsemane and a new Calvary.

The Dawn of Mystery: Advent

Advent is radiant with the light of dawn and the joy of expectation. It means not so much an arising from the death of sin, such as Lent demands, but rather an awakening from slumber, the quickening of life already there; its watchword is not penitence but vigilance.

It is a call addressed to the inner spirit, to prepare it to contemplate the most amazing thing which has ever happened in the world, and therefore it is a spiritual call to a spiritual enterprise. There must be a rising up of the inner spirit in response to the call; that is the real adventure of faith. By faith we rise from darkness to light, for the particular function of faith is to be concerned with the eternal order: with God, and the grace of God as He comes into our experience. It is the whole duty of faith to enter into and explore the affinity with that which is divine, breaking through the barriers which hide the true light.

Wake up, wake up to the sublimity of this call! The power which can radiate out from the spiritual life depends on the store of energy of those who realize the greatness of what lies before them, the splendour of the mysteries of faith. If you slumber you can be of no help. Like the world's Redeemer, but with less clear sight, we must go forward in the light of vision and with a spirit of daring. We know

whence the light comes, from whom it issues, and whither it calls, and between the acceptance of the light and its attainment there must be darkness, conflict, victory. Beyond the darkness lies the great salvation; for us too, *our salvation is nearer than when we believed*, and we must arise, press on where the light leads, with spiritual aspiration and pure desire. Beyond the conflict lies the crown of life, the great glory of eternal light.

Now it is time to awake!

The Mystery of Bethlehem

The mystery of the love of God seen by faith in the eternal life of the glorious Trinity is revealed to mankind in the mystery of Bethlehem. Jesus the Word incarnate, Mary the virgin mother and Joseph the guardian of the human life form the foundation of the Christian family, so that family life is now a holy, wonderful thing, filled with divine love and sanctified by the mystery of Bethlehem.

We meditate on the poverty of Bethlehem, we sing our carols by the crib and dwell on the exterior conditions in which the Son of God was born. Bethlehem stands for the life which lacks the humblest necessities—there is not even a place at the village inn, no cradle but a manger, a bare, lonely place which can offer nothing for the needs of the Holy Child—his parents must do the best they can with what God provides. This is a true and lasting inspiration, not just a passing emotion at Christmastide. Our Lord began by doing without many things—only a stable for shelter, the sky for a roof and the stars for candlelight. And yet this scene is the focus of light from which divine love will shed its radiance throughout the world.

As we see this light radiating from the manger at Bethlehem, we recognize that the presence we desire to cherish, before whom our whole life is bowed in surrender, is not given us for our own consolation but that it may shine out from within us. That is what being a Christian means, that our human heart should be enkindled by the love of God and radiate it into the darkness. *Let your light so shine before men that they may ... glorify your Father.* The light of Jesus is not hidden, not forgotten, but is always shining forth if we are rooted and grounded in love, because it is love which has come, it is love

which abides and grows, burning with an ever brighter flame, which leads away from the knowledge of things temporal to the very source of eternal love in the heart of the Father.

Bethlehem is the focal point here in this world of the blazing light of the glory of God, and to that light we may aspire to attain. The holy Incarnation was the necessary means by which man, fallen and stained with sin, might be brought back and learn to know holiness as it is in God. But it is important to pass by way of the events in which God works his wonders, into that presence where angels worship him. The glory in the heavenly places is made accessible to us because the Word became incarnate and dwells in our hearts by faith and leads us along the way. He has passed to eternal victory, and when time shall be no more, we shall see the Christ of Bethlehem, of Nazareth, of the Passion, the Resurrection and the Ascension, and we shall know what is meant by eternal love and be filled with all the fullness of God.

The Mystery of the Circumcision

He has come to do God's will; before him lies the eternal purpose. From his royal throne he descends, made obedient to the law for man, and as the first act of obedience he gives his sacred body to the knife. He who will give his life-blood on the Cross, and with it fill the chalice of the Church's sacrament through the ages, must now in infancy shed the first drops of that most precious blood. This alone might have sufficed for atonement, for that obedience of the perfect human nature is itself the great and perfect propitiation by which God and man are reconciled.

Love demands not least but most; therefore the great task of those called to love our Lord according to the love wherewith he loves us, is to seek to walk by his own Spirit which he has shed abroad in our hearts and wills, that we may be conformed to him, not only in a resemblance that will suffice for our ultimate acceptance, but which will make us like him, and in spirit one with him: fired with the same desire of love, quickened by the same energy of charity and devotion, uplifted with the same sense of high vocation,

according to our opportunity to fulfil our part in the work that he has done.

Love is a fire that burns in the heart and inspires to high desires and high enterprises, counting no cost, hindered by no obstacles, which presses on to the fullness of the Spirit of Jesus, to entire conformity, not only with the beauty, but with the meekness, the courage, the adoration of Christ.

The name fore-ordained in the counsel of divine eternal love is given in pain. He who is obedience must learn obedience by the things which he suffers. That is one of the supreme paradoxes of the life of the incarnate Son. So we too must learn. Obedience is real, intense, sanctifying, an opportunity for further advance in holiness, precisely in so far as it means victory gained, a discipline of suffering through which we pass to victory.

The Christian life, the spiritual life and most of all the life of the contemplative, is a life that is established, verified, and matured through pain. So in the service of that name we are enrolled, and our heritage thereby, like his, becomes *ipso facto* a span of suffering and an ageless glory when victory is gained. You will do well to reflect on your life as it needs to be worked out not in ease but in suffering as the condition of your progress and your victory.

Ye have not yet resisted unto blood. Life has its martyrdoms which are not sealed by the shedding of blood or violent death but by that which may be even more costly, a life of ceaseless devotion to the highest inspiration and to this most perfect love of the Spirit of God, which draws the soul that is called into intimate conformity with the whole life and spirit of the Lord Jesus, and makes that soul a partaker of his great enterprise, one who *fills up what is behind of the afflictions of Christ for his body's sake, which is the Church.*

The Mystery of Light: Epiphany

If Christmas gives us the mystery of the divine light breaking into the darkness of this world, Epiphany shows us the mystery of the transmission of that light: *the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.*

In the holy child whom they have come to adore the wise men recognize truth as it is in God, the glorious manifestation of God in human nature. Faithful to the light which has led them, they lay before him gifts whose meaning far exceeds their understanding. Gold, the symbol of authority, calling us to surrender, obedience and supreme loyalty to Jesus: incense, typifying the royal priesthood of our Lord into which we are taken as we share his life, and through which the spirit of prayer and self-oblation continually ascends; and myrrh, for since these things exact great cost, there must be the myrrh of death to self. We cannot be content merely to offer gifts from time to time; there must be transformation, and transformation means literally being changed, completely, wholly, utterly, by the light that pervades all, by the life that creates all, by the love that changes all.

With this manifestation of light the Church associates two other occasions in our Lord's life: his baptism and the wedding at Cana:

Now do we celebrate a holy day adorned by three miracles: today a star led the wise men to the manger; today water was made wine at the wedding feast; today Christ vouchsafed to be baptized of John in Jordan that he might save us, alleluia

When God makes a revelation, sends light into the world of darkness, it is for the most part only the few who are able to perceive and understand. The daystar arose in the hearts of Mary and Joseph, it arose in the hearts of the wise men, of John the Baptist and of the five disciples at Cana. It is precisely for this that the vocation to the contemplative life is given. It is the vocation to set the revelation of the knowledge and love of God above all other claims, to make it absolutely central, in order that, after due preparation and long waiting, the light may not only be shed *on* the soul, but may become *in* the soul the daystar rising in the heart, the true light from God. And that is none other than the Christian vocation in the widest sense, for the hope of all true Christians is that they may come to see God as he is, to know as they are known. Our Lord said: *He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.* Arise, shine; for thy light is come!

The Mystery of Self-Oblation: the Presentation

The deliverance of the chosen race from Egypt was always seen by them as a type of the great deliverance that was yet to come, and the separation unto God of the first-born as a token of that deliverance which is the fruit of sacrifice. Just as all that has gone before in the history of Israel leads up to the scene in the temple where the aged Simeon welcomes the child and his virgin mother, so it is from this presentation that the spirit of oblation will flow down through the ages still to come. In our Lord's own life it foreshadows the great presentation on Calvary; it belongs intrinsically to that oblation by which our redemption will be wrought out on the altar of the Cross. It is the embodiment of the spirit of ungrudging self-devotion that yields to the will of God for the purposes of God: the salvation of the human race, the restoration to Love of those who had been estranged from him.

We are moving in the world of Spirit now. The eternal purpose is veiled beneath the simple ceremonial, but it is there—mighty, purposive, divine. God's great salvation is enshrined in this newborn babe who in eternal Spirit has come to offer himself to God. So it is that Simeon, led by the Spirit into the temple to greet the incarnate Word, recognizes that salvation comes not from human endeavour but from the fact that Jesus is here. Taught by the Spirit, Simeon discerns three things in the child whom he adores: the presence of God incarnate, the holiness of God incarnate, the sacrifice of God incarnate. By these three things the world is to be redeemed—that is why the angels sang *Gloria in excelsis* and why Simeon now breaks forth into his *Nunc dimittis*.

Because the holy One of God came into our condition to offer himself to the Father, God draws us too to give our lives completely to him, that body, soul and spirit may be his forever—for him to order, for him to sanctify, for him to accept as our response to eternal love.

The Mystery of the Temptation

Dwell on those forty days in the wilderness when the evil powers were ranged against Christ as never before, mindful of the Father's proclamation, *This is my beloved Son*. Before he begins his redemptive work he must first stand among the ranks of sinners, and the powers of evil are ranged not only against him, but against all who are on his side. If you are prepared to share with him in his work, dwell on the cost to Jesus in his humanity even before he enters on the work of redemption.

This is the royal road, the way of salvation. He lets himself be reduced to the lowest point of bodily weakness, and in that weakness, humanly disarmed, he sets himself to the conflict. *Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts*. If we are to know the experience of Jesus in our own hearts and to lay hold on Christ, this mystery of the temptation must become part of the fabric of our lives, or else there will be something lacking.

Think how the Son of God is revealed to us as one who has humbled himself to take the form of a servant. But when in his humanity he has passed through the temptation, it is the form of a *righteous* servant, set to vindicate his Father's honour, that he displays. It is his desire as well as his chosen method to vindicate that righteousness of God not only in the strength but in the weakness of the nature he has assumed. And so this scene allows us to ponder the meaning of humility carried to its utmost extent. For us, humility should be a coming down to bedrock, to the truth of what we are in God's sight. That is what matters and it is to that point that Jesus descends in his human nature. When there is no strength left in him, no human power, then comes succour—not from men but from angels.

So, if we are true to ourselves, when temptations come as they needs must—in weariness, the undoing of the natural life, the exhaustion of the spiritual conflict—then by the ministry of angels we may recover our strength and be ready for further temptations. Note that the devil *departed from him for a season*; this was only the first round. It is the experience of Jesus in ourselves, of the tempted Christ who in the hour of our temptation holds our soul in life, that enables

us to receive succour from on high and strength to go forward in the great work to which he has called us.

The Mystery of the Passion

The wonder of our Lord's sacrifice in the eternal order is of necessity transacted on earth in the order of space and time, and therefore unfolds in so many hours, so many acts and endurances. The secret of the Passion lay in his interior acceptance from the beginning of all that was inflicted upon him from outside. It was the glorious Passion of the perfect Man who needed no redemption, who would bring to God an offering stainless from the first, that was the true and worthy sacrifice, the fulfilment that reaches back through the ages and forward into the ages for the redemption of mankind.

As we look on Jesus in his Passion we have to bear in mind the two orders, the temporal and the eternal. The broken heart, the troubled spirit, are indeed the world's redemption, the one true sacrifice acceptable to God. That is the mystery as it is wrought out in time, and the successive incidents in Jerusalem, from the entry into the city on Palm Sunday, all lead on to the two-fold mystery of the upper chamber and Calvary; for though separated by hours of time, what takes place is one act, in which the Cross completes the sacrifice already offered to God in the upper chamber. It was in the institution of the most holy Sacrament when he said, *This is my body, this is my blood*, that Christ made the atoning sacrifice which would be accomplished hours afterwards, as we count time, on Calvary. It is in that voluntary consecration of himself for sacrifice that the first peak of the Passion is reached; from that point all else follows and cannot be otherwise. We are in the presence of a most majestic purpose which pursues its end unflinchingly. There is the mystical offering by the Lord, himself the priest, and there is the actual fulfilment of the sacrifice already offered. Priest and victim both belong to the heavenly order; the Lamb is slain from the foundation of the world, though the actual immolation must needs take place in time and space. A wonderful scene is enacted on Calvary, but the true scene is in the heavenly places on the heavenly altar; there, beyond space and

time, where there is no sequence of events, the Word of God offers himself eternally to the Father.

It is possible to find a measure of satisfaction for our human compassion in the poignant human appeal of our Lord's Passion; but there is something greater, more mysterious, in the divine call that bids us enter into the heavenly places. *Who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God*—that is the dominant note of the Passion. Our endeavour, as we contemplate the mysteries of the suffering Christ, must be to perceive each one as an expression of that oblation through eternal Spirit, to enter into the worship of that which, of its nature, is beyond our power to comprehend.

If we see in Christ and his Passion the offering of the one perfect sacrifice, if we feel drawn to the fellowship of that Passion, to unite ourselves with his purposes, then that which he gave totally, we, weak and sin-stained as we are, are yet bound by our vocation to give according to our measure, for it is the very call of God himself. We cannot share in the Passion and still play about with little cheap unworthinesses and half measures, excusing or sparing ourselves. We must be purposive and apply the spirit of the Passion not only to our spiritual life but to all the homely details of every day; otherwise we stand outside the mystery of the Passion and are repudiating the yoke our Lord invites us to bear. Only as we depend on the Christ life within, on the certainty that it is Christ within us, the hope of glory, who is making us, body, soul and spirit, a temple for his indwelling, shall we be able to come with hope and confidence to behold the mystery of redemption, to drink the cup of salvation, to find ourselves accepted in the Beloved, received again by God. All our hope is in the indwelling Christ, and all our care is to secure that he shall possess us wholly, and that always our life shall be hid with Christ in God.

That which we behold on the altar of the Cross is the perfect sacrifice fulfilled here on earth in terms of bitterest suffering—anguish of body and spirit—and once that ideal of sacrifice has claimed our devotion, it must be continually and faithfully adhered to. Our prayer for ourselves might well be that he who leads the way will give us fortitude of purpose. These things were not necessary for him but for us, that on the stage of human history there might be the ratification, by an unswerving will to suffer and to love, of that

mystical sacrifice eternally offered and eternally acceptable to God the Father.

The Mystery of the Resurrection: Easter

When Christ gave himself to the Father on Calvary in reparation for the sin of mankind, his body was laid in the tomb, and remained there through all the mysterious hours of Holy Saturday. Unseen by mortal eyes the glory of the divine power rested upon him and raised him from death. When our Lord came, very early on Easter morning through the sealed doorway of the tomb, his risen manhood was proof that what he had given so totally was indeed accepted in the presence of God. Thereafter in the heavenly places, the Lamb that had been slain presents himself continually in the body of our humanity, pleading eternally before God the perfect sacrifice of obedience and love.

From that mystery of sacrifice accepted, we draw our realization and our possession of newness of life. What Christ gives to us whom he calls to follow him is the life that is his in the power of his Passion and Resurrection. We were buried with Christ and now with Christ we have been raised to new life. It is in the power of that very life of his that we are called to serve him, and this brings us into an entirely new relation to God.

God is now to us what he is to his incarnate Son. The mystery of the one eternal God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has been revealed to us in all its holiness and beauty through the Incarnation of the eternal Word, and in him we now have access to God. Accepted in the Beloved, we approach God no longer as an object of fear, but with love and desire we bring him the joyful tribute of constant service and adoration. We no longer live our lives within the confines of space and time but with him in heavenly places.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above ... for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. There are three words which most fully express the essential quality of a life hid with Christ in God, even though still occupied with the cares, duties and anxieties of life here on earth: joy, peace and power.

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy may be in you and your joy may be fulfilled. Thus, even as the shadows of the Passion are darkening around him, the note of Resurrection is sounded in our Lord's discourse in the upper room. A few more hours will find him in Gethsemane, praying in agony of mind and spirit, and then, standing before his judges subjected to cruelty and insult. But when Easter dawns—*Then were the disciples glad ... Your sorrow shall be turned into joy.* In all life's sorrows, anxieties and fears, when they are borne in fellowship with the sufferings of redeeming Love, we are more than conquerors, there is always joy set before us. Such joy does not always burst into alleluias—that is how the whole mystical body, the Church expresses its joy—but the joy of the soul truly hid with Christ in God is a joy that sees him who is the light of the world. That light is the life of such souls because, given by baptismal grace, renewed by absolution, sustained by holy communion, it is daily gaining ascendancy within them. Resurrection life is sacramental life.

Here is the strength which enables us to overcome natural feebleness and contend with the temptations from which man is never free. *The joy of the Lord is your strength.* Joy converts all tears to peace, and that is true not least of penitence. Those who have really come to the Cross with broken hearts and resolute wills, not afraid to recognize the sinfulness of their state, will find joy, because the life which is theirs is the very life of Christ who came to set them free.

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you—strange words from one who knows he is about to enter into the anguish of his Passion. But they are addressed to those who are prepared to follow him by leaving all things and taking up the Cross daily. Again it is a quality of the new life—Resurrection life—of which he speaks. It is not a matter of evading conflict, not a peace of compromise, but the peace of victory won. The peace of Christ belongs to those who in the power of his sacrificial love have escaped from the thralldom of self-centredness, and entering into the heart of Jesus, have found contentment.

Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. Peace is not a matter of squaring accounts with conscience, but the grace of a new life, continually received at the altar. As the soul looks up to God in prayer a sense of proportion grows, bringing a deep interior peace beyond all thought or understanding, and a spiritual power which

wells up through all the confusion in the faculties of the natural life. *Jerusalem is built as a city that is at unity in itself:* the life that is hid with Christ in God is a little Jerusalem.

But this life into which we have been drawn can never be a state of complacency and quiescence. The contemplative vocation is essentially dynamic. It is energy, power. Vigour and purpose are among the indicative signs that the life is always pressing on towards fulfilment. Jesus cries from the Cross, *It is all fulfilled—consummatum est*—and to that consummation all our life must be directed. In all our actions, in our attitude to our surroundings, our personal relations and above all our prayer, there should be that sense of responsibility. *Forgetting those things that are behind, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* There is energy, the dynamic power of a consecrated life, lived in union with the risen Christ. This power from on high is not given for the fulfilment of selfish purposes but to strengthen our obedience to the great charge of our Lord, to take up the Cross daily and to grow in holiness. But it means victory over the self—complete identification of the self with the heart and mind and will of the Lord. Then and only then can we begin to serve the purposes of God. There are no characteristics of the natural life that can resist the power, the peace, the joy of Resurrection life, no flaws of temperament which that life cannot transform.

The Mystery of the Ascension: The Triumph of Love

The glorious feast of the Ascension marks the end, in terms of time and space, of the revelation of the eternal Word in our nature. Throughout the three and thirty years of a life here on earth he showed in every act and word the inner secret of the life of heaven. The incarnate life was so radiant with the light not of this world that it serves as an inexhaustible treasure-house of wisdom, holiness and power for all generations. Only two were present when the angels heralded his birth, only eleven saw him leave the world he had come to save. Behind the scene of his uplifting as behind the lowliness of his human birth there are mightier mysteries for all ages to explore. It was by his glorious Ascension that our Lord opened the kingdom of

heaven to all who believe in him. Entering that kingdom he draws us after him that whither he has ascended we too may ascend.

Regard this mystery as the triumph of Love. He leads the eleven as far as Bethany, he blesses them and is taken from their sight. Heaven receives him, choirs of angels welcome him as he leaves the realms of time and space for the uncreated eternity of God. What does this mean to the eyes of faith? Surely, that all the mysteries of the incarnate life from Bethlehem to Olivet are but one single revelation of divine Love, sharing our life here on earth.

For that Love no self-abasement was too deep, no toil too arduous, no pain too disabling, no fear too paralyzing to impede its mighty purpose. The Ascension is the rational consummation of a life of perfect love, for heaven is the home of Love, and those who surrender themselves to learn the meaning of the Incarnation are already here on earth beginning to live the life of heaven.

If we see the Ascension as the triumph of Love, then it follows that his continual conquest within our own lives is leading us on to the same triumph. How the saints have loved to gaze on the glory of the ascended Christ! They love the Cross because beyond it lies the crown; they love the Passion because it is the school in which they are trained and purified to bear the vision of the living God. The personal love of Jesus is their ceaseless inspiration, and they serve him as the Lord of glory, although they know him as the Lord of pain.

That glory of the ascended Christ is immeasurably more real than anything of which we have knowledge here. His life is not less but more immediately present to us because he is no longer confined by the conditions of here and now. How he ascended and to what mode of life is beyond our powers of understanding. We only know that he is at the right hand of the Majesty on high, that his glorified manhood is forever joined to the fullness of the Godhead. The Ascension of our Lord is a mystery of faith. What we cannot understand we can believe and adore. If we fail to adore it is because of the poverty of our faith, because we are half-hearted in our efforts to lay hold by faith on that which surpasses our understanding, because we do not surrender ourselves wholly to the heavenly order where Christ reigns.

But we are also concerned with the immediate effects which follow from the Ascension. Our Lord has made a way by which we

may in heart and mind ascend and with him continually dwell. It is not the natural life which inherits the kingdom, but he enables the purified heart and the enlightened mind to be identified with him in his heavenly intercession. It is because he has ascended that we are able to leave behind the things that would otherwise hold us and to rise up and reign with him.

It is therefore in the spirit that the claim is heard. There is real spiritual continuity between our daily life here with its duties and service and the glorious life in heavenly places with Jesus that we need continually to remember. That is how the saints are made. Through the hearts sanctified by union with him, fresh gifts of grace stream down from Christ in glory, quickening the Church and the world. Every saintly life has power, not of its own but from Christ, to be a channel through which he works. That is our hope, that he who calls us will sanctify us. Our part is continually to answer the call to lift our hearts to him in worship, on every possible occasion, in all our intercessions, in the occupations of daily life, in our hours of darkness and depression. For these things belong only to the world that is passing away, our hearts are to be raised to heavenly places where our Lord reigns. Constant failures there may be, but they need not stand in the way, for the cure for despondency is to lift the heart to heaven, to the exalted Christ of our love and adoration.

The Mystery of the Coming of the Holy Spirit: Pentecost

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth. Such was the final word of assurance and command spoken by the risen Lord to his disciples, and thus the day of Pentecost found them waiting and prepared to receive the promised gift. And when the gift comes, it comes in the form of fire. A rushing mighty wind and tongues of flame alighting on each head are the signs of the new life, the new energy of the love and holiness of God imparted to the disciples.

Consider the Holy Spirit as our Lord himself commends him to us, as the One who is to carry on the work of revelation. Our Lord promises that when he himself our great Advocate has ascended to heavenly places, there to present himself to the Father as the one

eternal sacrifice, he will send another Advocate who will bring to remembrance the things our Lord has taught and said. He, the Holy Spirit, has this for his task: to train the hearts and minds of men, by virtue of his own creative power that works upon the knowledge already given and upon the minds ready to receive it, to enter into all truth.

In our own small portion of the created universe we have the mystery of the incarnate life. In Jesus God has assumed our nature and declared to us his Name. Even this is only an indication of things beyond our understanding but made known to the spirit of man by the Spirit of God. He has been at work throughout the long eras of history, bringing order out of chaos, turning the hearts of men in divers ways to the eternal order and preparing them, most specifically through the prophets sent to his chosen people, for the coming of the great redemption. It was through the Holy Spirit's power that God assumed our nature when in the fullness of time he overshadowed blessed Mary and caused her to become the Mother of the eternal Word.

From the first instant of God's supreme intervention—the Incarnation of his Son—the Holy Spirit makes himself from time to time evident and expressive. On the threshold of the public ministry of our Lord it is the Holy Spirit who descends visibly upon him as the Father's voice is heard proclaiming his beloved Son. Again and again there are signs of our Lord possessing unique endowments of the Spirit. In the Spirit he rejoices, in the Spirit he prays. It is when the hours of the Passion are darkening around him and it seems as if all that he had been and taught was about to be extinguished by the world power that overwhelmed him that Christ tells the disciples of the Spirit who is to come and to lead them into all truth. His communion with the Spirit is as it were the vital link between the divine life beyond our sight and its earthly manifestations, a continual imparting of the Spirit's power. When our Lord speaks of the sending of the Holy Spirit, he is speaking of a new phase in the work of his Father. He himself was led and inspired continually by the Spirit, and he promises that selfsame Spirit to those to whom he entrusts his work.

The spiritual life is not then merely a life disposed towards spiritual things because these things are seen to be desirable. It is

essentially a life which is instituted, quickened, formed, by virtue of a peculiar endowment of the Holy Spirit of God, who now enters by a new means of access into the nature created by his own power. For the Holy Spirit is poured out in the hearts of those who seek him. The more we seek him the more fully he will come into our hearts. We enter upon the spiritual life when we bow in adoration before the Spirit of God, praying to receive not only his gifts but himself.

It is not the Holy Spirit's function to plead in heaven. There it is Christ alone who pleads in glory. But here the Holy Spirit, sent to earth to carry on the work of Jesus, pleads in us with all the power of the prayer of God. The Advocate enthroned in heaven sends down the Paraclete to earth, and in the hearts of men redeemed to God he intercedes for men according to the will of God. The Holy Spirit performs his work as Paraclete by praying in the hearts of those who pray. So it is that we must learn to pray, not as those who being hungry and desirous form their own poor petitions as best they may. Not so do we come to God. We come as those in whom the Paraclete has made his dwelling. It is he who quickens into active energy the sanctifying grace already present in every member of Christ's body, who brings Christ to life within the soul of each would-be disciple. He is the Creator Spirit, always operative, always working, and in the soul's depths he stirs and quickens into stronger energy and exercise those three divine gifts of faith, hope and love which are the foundation of the Christ life within.

So it was with the disciples at Pentecost. To them, in St John's words, 'The life was made manifest and we have seen it'. But now this life into whose fellowship they had been drawn as companions of the incarnate Word enters into the very depths of their hearts and spirits and *with great power gave the Apostles witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus*. By the coming of this new life the old life is altogether changed, transformed, lifted up, and St Peter can say: 'We are made partakers of the divine nature'. That is the meaning of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down in tongues of fire to make his dwelling in the hearts and souls and spirits of redeemed mankind.

The Mystery of God: The Holy Trinity

There is no feast of the Christian year which surpasses the feast of the Holy Trinity in awe and wonder. It is the climax to which all other feasts ascend, from which they have their origin and meaning. It is the feast of the Mystery of God.

Our Lord himself has given us a very brief and vivid definition of that which is needed for created spirit to come into contact with the uncreated Godhead, to enter into that world of being which is the life of God. He tells Nicodemus: 'Except a man be born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God'. The natural life has its own complete equipment for dealing with the things of this world, but the natural life, by reason of its very preoccupation with these things, is hampered and hindered, cannot in freedom rise to enter the kingdom of things invisible. *That which is born of the flesh is flesh.* Flesh does not mean simply the lower material life, but all that belongs to the whole range of natural endowment. The processes of mind and intellect, so long as they are not directed by spiritual energies, fall within the same limitations that belong to the temporal, the ephemeral. Only when by a new birth the life passes into a new order does it become susceptible to the divine life and energy by virtue of which alone it can come to the knowledge of God.

That is a very blessed truth, consoling and inspiring. For it teaches us that it is not by way of high thoughts and refined intellectual analysis that we come to the unsearchable God. It is when faith goes out to apprehend what escapes the grasp of reason and love lays hold on that which faith has already made its own that we come to him. God is known by the pure and humble-hearted. The saving grace of knowledge is already there in the lowly, loving heart.

How strange those words of the carpenter's son from Nazareth must have sounded in the ears of Nicodemus! *We speak that we do know and testify of that which we have seen.* Does this young man, of such strange beauty and graciousness know the divine mind? Has he seen more than was revealed to Isaiah in his vision of the majesty of God? And as Nicodemus wonders, our Lord goes on, 'How shall you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?' Jesus the all-holy Word of God, who speaks as no man has ever spoken before or since, is seeking to introduce the eternal, the measureless into the categories

of finite human understanding. And so behind every word there is the fullness of holy wisdom, the splendour and truth of God himself.

When we keep the feast of the being and nature of God, the dawning understanding of which is possible only to those born of water and the Spirit, it is God as he is eternally in the mystery of the three Persons whom we adore. God acts in the overflow of his trinitarian love, *semper agens, semper quietus*, God is always giving. That concerns us profoundly, for when the universe as we know it came into being and was crowned by the creation of human nature, God set the impress of his own image upon that human nature. God calls man into being—that is man's reality. God endows him with his own powers of action and self-giving. As they are directed by the Holy Spirit these powers increase, and in their exercise man grows towards his true end, union with God for all eternity. Love created us, Love redeemed us, Love gave us his Holy Spirit who is the bond of love. As love grows, wholeheartedness grows, simplicity and truth grow, and we begin to enter into the kingdom of God.

The theme of Trinity Sunday is worship, devotion of a person to a Person. That involves a relation to God of pure simplicity in the soul that worships him, because it is born of the Spirit; a relation of pure truth, without shadows or questionings, for his holy will shines on our path; a relation of total surrender to God in his immensity; and a relation of charity because the whole will of those who would thus worship must be suffused with love.

Praised be Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, on the Throne of his Glory and in the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar

All the Mysteries of the incarnate life are summed up in the title 'Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ'. These words gather up and comprehend that which has completely changed the relationship between man and God. All that God the Holy Spirit had done throughout the ages to prepare the way for the fulfilling of his purpose—in the history of the chosen people, in all that was finest and best in pagan thought and practice—all of that was of a wholly different order from his work in the mystery of the Incarnation.

We need a renewed sense of the immensity of that truth. *Crash* your way through the familiarity of it, get to the wonder of it! Look at the offered Christ and see how for the first time since sin entered the world man can and does make an oblation which is worthy, acceptable to God. By offering himself the spotless willing victim, our Lord has not only ended the old estrangement, but makes it possible for us for whom his work was accomplished to enter into the peace of God. That peace is our union with him in whom time and eternity are one and indivisible and through whom we are reconciled to God. That is why we make our prayer 'through our Lord Jesus Christ'. It is not only because he has died for us that he is our peace, but because in so far as our wills and actions are in Christ, they partake of the eternal order.

We worship the mystery of Christ exalted, the anointed One whose work is accomplished. His return to the Father's glory is the exaltation of that manhood, which through all the years of his sojourn here, when he *delighted in the sons of men*, remained eternally united with the Godhead. Never did our Lord relinquish the glory which he had with the Father before the world was. It was always there, though hidden in the substance of our flesh, as St John recognized: 'We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth'. Just in proportion as we surrender ourselves in adoring gratitude to that grace and truth shall we also be witnesses of his glory. As we allow ourselves to be purified and sanctified, so we shall see more of that glory of the only-begotten through the veil of our flesh, the perfect humanity which in fulfilment of his own prayer, 'Father, glorify thou me', has been raised to the glory which was his from the beginning.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in! At our Lord's Ascension heaven was opened as it had never been opened before. Into the eternal glory there has entered a new element: the first fruits of a new humanity which has been proved and perfected within the time and space conditions of the created order. Not only is there now the glory of the triune God, three Persons in one essence, but a *human life* that has passed with unflawed perfection, unchanging purpose, undiminished love, through the crucible of suffering and death, and has returned triumphant to the glory from which it went forth in

obedience to fulfil the purposes of divine trinitarian Love. Christ is not alone in the exaltation of his manhood, for that which is exalted is the humanity he shared with us in order to redeem it. He, very God and very man, *ever liveth to make intercession for us* who are on the way. By his supreme oblation he draws all men unto him and they pass into the current of that life in glory.

We call it 'the supreme oblation' not because it is the climax in a series, but because it surpasses all others. The supreme oblation is not only the last act of obedience on Calvary but the whole life of Jesus. It is supreme in the sense of being incomparable, never equalled, let alone surpassed. The Lamb is slain from the foundation of the world; the incarnate Word is offered from the moment he is found in fashion as a man, *Lo, I come to do thy will, O God*. Now, as the eternal high priest of creation he eternally presents the completed sacrifice of his obedience. And the mystery of that supreme oblation in the heavenly sanctuary is daily set forth on our earthly altars in the breaking of the bread and the blessing of the cup. We praise and bless our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the holy sacrament of the altar, because it is the means whereby we enter into his supreme oblation. His sacrifice won our redemption, but unless we avail ourselves of that redemption we stand outside the sacrifice. We must make it our own by uniting our offering with his—the infinitely great with the infinitely small. The holy sacrifice is both the means whereby we may do this and also the means whereby the new life in Christ increases within us. The living bread, the precious blood which we receive at the altar are that which enable us to live with the life that is his in heavenly places, and in the Mystical Body as co-heirs of his glory.

Not alone, in the narrow poverty of our being, but in the great inclusiveness of the redeemed do we come to offer our love and worship. Love is poured out on all alike, and we, small units in a mighty concourse, respond with that which we desire to give—our heart and will—that they may become points of light and warmth, little fires kindled by divine charity, stars in the great constellation of the heavenly firmament. In that blessed company where Our Lady and all the saints burn with love and worship, we can even now begin to take our place as lovers of the Crucified, worshippers of God, who worship him in spirit and in truth. For the pleading of the holy sacrifice is a great and wholly spiritual act in which, as often as

it is done, the whole Church is participant. As we approach the altar it is not to bring Christ down to us, but that we through him our only mediator should be raised to the Father. As we unite our sacrifice with his great sacrifice, it becomes a contribution to the divine purposes. The world is continually being saved by Christ at work in the hearts and wills of those given to God.

The Contemplative

The contemplative is one who, having caught a glimpse of the divine, having seen for a moment what God is, lets all other things go, gathers all his powers to seek for, to gaze on, to possess that loveliness; counting all things lost for the sake of God; seeing first and always near at hand the loveliness of Jesus, but behind the loveliness of Jesus, the glory of the Uncreated.

That is the contemplative, the person who has seen something and can never leave the quest, never turn aside from seeking that which once envisaged, even for a brief glimpse, holds the life in its mighty attraction and draws it on.

The distinctive qualities apparent in the life of the contemplative are simplicity and comprehensiveness. The tendency of the life is to be directed towards one central dominant object of vision and desire. So the general prayer life of the contemplative has a character of its own. It is qualified by the domination of spirit influence which gives the intuitive character to the whole outlook on life. The more or less habitual fixity on God enables the soul when it enters on prayer to transcend the successiveness of time and to enter into the reality which any past scene presents. In place of the mental activity which with the help of the imagination reconstructs a scene and offers it to the affections to work upon, there will be a spiritual attention by virtue of which the one who prays is able to stand above the limitations of space and time, to be present spiritually at the scene on which his gaze is fixed.