

Sunday Within the Octave of Christmas 31 December 2017

“Behold, this child is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be contradicted.” Lk. 2:34

Today’s Holy Mass is an echo of Christmas as it speaks of peace and joy, but it also has a note of sorrow. In the *Gospel* (Luke 2:33-40), St. Luke transports us to the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, forty days after His birth, where we see the element of both joy and sadness with Simeon’s prophecy of Jesus’ destiny: ***“Behold, this child is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be contradicted.” Lk. 2:34.*** No doubt this prophecy joyfully relates to Jesus as the Messiah who will give His life for the salvation of all men. This prophecy also relates to sufferings and death of Jesus on the Cross which will be for some a curse and for others a great blessing. It is to the latter that St. Paul refers in the *Epistle to Galatians* (4:1-7) when he says that the Galatians have been called to be sons of God: ***“But when the fullness of time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, that he might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, ‘Abba, Father.’”*** Gal. 4:4-6 Being sons of God and inheritors of the Kingdom of God in heaven is a blessing beyond our imagination. Sadly, as Simeon points out, Jesus will also cause the fall of many in Israel because they will not accept Him.

The Call to Salvation of All Men

The baby Jesus will offer salvation to all men, but many will not accept it. This is the great mystery of human freedom. Man has been given intelligence and a free will, and he can accept or reject the great promises which Jesus gives to all men. Jesus came to save us and sanctify us. Through His merits, which He gained by sacrificing His life on the cross, Jesus holds out eternal life for us, but we have to accept it. St. Teresa of Avila tells us: ***“God never forces anyone; He takes what we give Him, but does not give Himself wholly until He sees that we are giving ourselves wholly to Him.”*** (*The Way*, 28) Jesus ***“is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel..”***, and those who reject Him will not be admitted to His heavenly kingdom.

“And thy own soul a sword shall pierce...” Lk. 2:35

Again, we see the contrast between the happiness and sadness of the Blessed Virgin Mary with the prophetic words of Simeon. At one moment, Our Lady is overjoyed at the future mission of her son who will be responsible for the salvation of many, and at the same time Simeon reminds her of the suffering which she will have to undergo when her Son will be immolated on the Cross for the salvation of souls on the Cross. This will be the sword which will pierce her own soul. She will see how those who reject her Son will crucify him and then be deprived of His redemption.

Rise and Fall of Many

St. John Chrysostom tells us of those who will rise and those who will fall because of Christ. ***“For whose fall? Without doubt, that of those who do not believe and that of those who placed the innocent Christ on the cross. For whose resurrection? For those who give thanks and turn to him with a grateful heart. And for a sign which shall be contradicted. What sign is this? None other than the torment of the cross; the sign which the Church proclaims as the salvation of the world and which the Jews have rejected. A sign which heaven itself has also proclaimed to the world many times. It is exposed to contradiction in order that truth may triumph. Complete victory is not won by numbers alone, without a struggle. It must, therefore, meet with contradiction, so that in every age the Judge may triumph in meekness and patience. And for a sign that shall be contradicted... That is, by the unbelieving and the impious. The sign exposed to contradiction so that those who stand up against it, incited solely by their evil malice, shall be confounded. For if the truth were not exposed to such contradiction, virtue would receive no fitting confirmation. But the struggle which is permitted makes clear the light of truth to the soul that perseveres.”***

Witnesses to Christ and His Cross

When Jesus was presented in the temple, there were only two souls of virtue who recognized Jesus as the Messiah: the aged Simeon and the prophetess, Anna. Of Simeon, it is said, ***“He was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Ghost was in him.”*** Lk. 2:25.

Of Anna, who was a widow of eighty-four years, St. Luke tells us: "*She departed not from the Temple, by fastings and prayers serving night and day.*" Lk. 2:37 We can see here the characteristics of those who will be disposed to recognize the redemption of Christ: both were righteous in mind and will and longed to see the coming of the Messiah. The light of the Holy Spirit comes to them and they recognize and proclaim to all that Jesus is the Messiah, the long-awaited hope of Israel. These are the same souls of whom St. Paul writes in today's Epistle who will be sons of God: "*And because you are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father!*" Gal. 4:6

Let us cry, "Abba, Father."

Although many souls do not recognize the great grace that has been given to them by God in their baptism when they become adoptive sons of God and heirs of heaven, there are many who do recognize Christ. "**When, on the other hand, a soul generously corresponds with God's action, He takes total possession of it, and the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, cries out from the depths of its heart, 'Abba, Father.'O my God, what responsibility men have when they consider Your great gifts, and especially the Incarnation of Your only begotten Son, who became man for our salvation!**" Fr. Gabriel, OCD, *Divine Intimacy*, p. 101

Christmas Novena: Christmas Novena of Masses from Christmas Day 25th December 2017 to 2 January 2018. This novena will be for all of the benefactors, friends and relatives of the Franciscan Friars and Sisters. Thank you for all of your kind donations of alms and providence to us here in Lanherne.

The First Friday, 5 January 2017

Now is a good time to continue (or begin) the devotion to the "**Nine First Fridays**" of the Month. The Sacred Heart of Jesus promised to St. Margaret Mary: "**I promise thee in the excessive mercy of My Heart that My all-powerful love will grant to all those who communicate on the First Friday in nine consecutive months, the grace of final penitence; they shall not die in My disgrace nor without receiving the Sacraments; My Divine heart shall be their safe refuge in this last moment.**" There is no better way of honouring

the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus than in receiving Holy Communion on the "**Nine First Fridays.**"

The First Saturday: 6 January 2016

Our Lady told Sr. Lucia in 1925 "**...I promise to assist at the hour of death, with all the graces necessary for salvation, all those who, on the first Saturday of five consecutive months go to confession and receive Holy Communion, recite five decades of the Rosary and keep me company for a quarter of an hour while meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary, with the intention of making reparation to me.**" If only we would do what Our Lady asks, we would be assured of eternal salvation. Our Lady promises us all the graces necessary for our salvation if we keep *The Five First Saturdays!*