

Day of Renewal December 10, 2016

THIS LITTLE BABE (BRITTEN CEREMONY OF CAROLS)

by Saint Robert Southwell (a priest who was tortured and martyred during the English Reformation for secretly bringing the sacraments to his people)

This little Babe so few days old, is come to rifle Satan's fold;
All hell doth at his presence quake, though he himself for cold do shake;
For in this weak unarmed wise the gates of hell he will surprise.
With tears he fights and wins the field, His naked breast stands for a shield;
His battering shot are babish cries, His arrows looks of weeping eyes,
His martial ensigns Cold and Need, and feeble Flesh his warrior's steed.
His camp is pitched in a stall, His bulwark but a broken wall;
The crib his trench, haystalks his stakes; of shepherds he his muster makes;
And thus, as sure his foe to wound, the angels' trumps alarum sound.
My soul, with Christ join thou in fight; stick to the tents that he hath pight.
Within his crib is surest ward; this little Babe will be thy guard.
If thou wilt foil thy foes with joy, then flit not from this heavenly Boy.

EXCERPTS FROM POPE BENEDICT XVI IMMACULATE CONCEPTION HOMILY 2005

The human being does not trust God. Tempted by the serpent, he harbours the suspicion that in the end, God takes something away from his life, that God is a rival who curtails our freedom and that we will be fully human only when we have cast him aside; in brief, that only in this way can we fully achieve our freedom.

The human being lives in the suspicion that God's love creates a dependence and that he must rid himself of this dependency if he is to be fully himself. Man does not want to receive his existence and the fullness of his life from God.

He himself wants to obtain from the tree of knowledge the power to shape the world, to make himself a god, raising himself to God's level, and to overcome death and darkness with his own efforts. He does not want to rely on love that to him seems untrustworthy; he relies solely on his own knowledge since it confers power upon him. Rather than on love, he sets his sights on power, with which he desires to take his own life autonomously in hand. And in doing so, he trusts in deceit rather than in truth and thereby sinks with his life into emptiness, into death.

Love is not dependence but a gift that makes us live. The freedom of a human being is the freedom of a limited being, and therefore is itself limited. We can possess it only as a shared freedom, in the communion of freedom: only if we live in the right way, with one another and for one another, can freedom develop.

We live in the right way if we live in accordance with the truth of our being, and that is, in accordance with God's will. For God's will is not a law for the human being imposed from the outside and that constrains him, but the intrinsic measure of his nature, a measure that is engraved within him and makes him the image of God, hence a free creature. If we live in opposition to love and against the truth - in opposition to God - then we destroy one another and destroy the world. Then we do not find life but act in the interests of death.

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We call this drop of poison "original sin". Precisely on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, we have a lurking suspicion that a person who does not sin must really be basically boring and that something is missing from his life: the dramatic dimension of being autonomous; that the freedom to say no, to descend into the shadows of sin and to want to do things on one's own is part of being truly human; that only then can we make the most of all the vastness and depth of our being men and women, of being truly ourselves; that we should put this freedom to the test, even in opposition to God, in order to become, in reality, fully ourselves.

In a word, we think that evil is basically good, we think that we need it, at least a little, in order to experience the fullness of being. We think that Mephistopheles - the tempter - is right when he says he is the power "that always wants evil and always does good" (J.W. von Goethe, Faust I, 3). We think that a little bargaining with evil, keeping for oneself a little freedom against God, is basically a good thing, perhaps even necessary.

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Mary's gaze makes us feel her maternal embrace. She shows us that "the only power capable of winning human hearts is the tenderness of God. What delights and attracts, humbles and overcomes, opens and unleashes is not the power of instruments or the force of the law, but rather the omnipotent weakness of divine love, which is the irresistible force of its gentleness and the irrevocable pledge of its mercy" (Address to the Mexican Bishops, 13 February 2016). What people seek in the eyes of Mary is "a place of rest where people, still orphans and disinherited, may find a place of refuge, a home." And that has to do with the way she "gazes" – her eyes open up a space that is inviting, not at all like a tribunal or an office. If at times you realize that your own gaze has become hardened from hard work or weariness – this is something that happens to us all – or that you tend to look at people with annoyance or coldness, stop and look once again to her in heartfelt humility. For Our Lady can remove every "cataract" that prevents you from seeing Christ in people's souls. She can remove the myopia that fails to see the needs of others, which are the needs of the incarnate Lord, as well as the hyperopia that cannot see the details, "the small print", where the truly important things are played out in the life of the Church and of the family. Our Lady's gaze brings healing.