

Rev. Fr. Leonard Goffine's

## The Church's Year

### FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

In the Introit of the Mass of this day the Church exhorts us to a joyous adoration of Christ by the following words:

*INTROIT* Upon a high throne I saw a man sitting, whom a multitude of angels adore singing together: behold Him the name of whose empire is to eternity (Is. 6). Sing joyfully to God, all the earth: serve the Lord with gladness (Ps. 99:2). Glory be to the Father.

*COLLECT* Attend, O Lord, we beseech Thee, of Thy heavenly mercy, to the desires of Thy suppliant people; and grant that they may both perceive what they ought to do, and may have strength to fulfill the same. Through our Lord.

*EPISTLE* (Rom. 12:1-5). Brethren, I beseech you by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be reformed in the newness of your mind: that you may prove what is the good, and the acceptable, and the perfect will of God. For I say, by the grace that is given me, to all that are among you, not to be more wise than it behooveth to be wise, but to be wise unto sobriety: and according as God hath divided to every one the measure of faith. For as in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*EXPLANATION* The apostle entreats, even conjures us by all the mercies we have received to bring to God a living sacrifice; namely, the mortification of our carnal desires, and the practice of every virtue, a holy, pure and immaculate sacrifice agreeable to God, intended for His glory alone; not a dead sacrifice as the Jews offered by killing animals, nor an unholy one as the Gentiles offered by polluting their bodies. This living, holy, God-pleasing sacrifice should be the offering of our body; but this does not exclude the sacrifice of our spirit, because all our actions, the corporal as well as spiritual, should be directed to God, the end for which we were created. The sacrifice of the spirit is made when we overcome pride, anger, impatience, etc., and by avoiding willful distractions during prayer and divine worship. Like David we should have a contrite and humble heart to present to the Lord; this is a most pleasing sacrifice in His eyes, one which He will never despise. Thus we render a reasonable service, and are, as St. Peter says (I Pet 2:9), a kingly priesthood, because we govern, like kings, our evil inclinations, and offer with body and soul a continual sacrifice to God. The apostle further exhorts us not to become like the world, that is, not to follow the corrupt manners and principles of the children of the world; not to desire those things at which the world aims; not to love that which the world loves; not to act as the world acts; but rather seek constantly to change our evil disposition, by combating our corrupt and evil inclinations and by practicing virtue instead. We must cease to be the old worldly man, and become a new heavenly man; to be such, we must carefully seek to know in all things what is pleasing to God, and

therefore perfect and good. This is the necessary science to which St. Paul alludes, when he says that we should not wish to know more than is proper. All worldly arts and sciences will not help us to gain heaven, if we do not endeavor to learn thoroughly that which faith teaches, and what God demands. Even if we have made great progress in this holy science we should not presume to think more of ourselves than what we really are, nor violate charity by contempt of others less instructed, for God gives to every one, in some measure, the gift of faith. This gift of faith we should use in order to continually glorify the body of Christ, His Church, Whose members we are, and enable us to lead such a life that others, being edified, may be brought into the true fold.

*ASPIRATION* Grant, O Jesus, that by mortification, humility, and contrition, I may offer my body and my soul as a living, holy, and pleasing sacrifice to Thee, and that I may never defile them by impurities.



*GOSPEL* (Lk. 2:42-52). And when Jesus was twelve years old, they going up into Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast, and having fulfilled the days, when they returned, the child Jesus remained in Jerusalem; and his parents knew it not. And thinking that he was in the company, they came a day's journey, and sought him among their kinsfolks and acquaintance. And not finding him, they returned into Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his wisdom and his answers. And seeing him, they wondered. And his mother said to him: Son, why hast thou done so to us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said to them: How is it that you sought me? did ye not know that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the word that he spoke unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and was subject to them. And his mother kept all these words in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom, and age, and grace with God and men.

*Why did our Savior go with His parents to Jerusalem to the temple?*

Because God commanded (Deut. 16:16) that all the male Israelites should appear, three times a year on certain festivals, and offer sacrifice to Him in the temple; Jesus fulfilled this commandment to set us an example that we, according to the will of the holy Catholic Church, should willingly and devoutly be present at the services of the Church on Sundays and holydays of obligation. Neither the distance from the church nor the difficulties of the way should prevent our attendance, since Jesus did not shun a three days' journey to the temple.

*Why does the gospel say according to the custom of the feast?*

That we may understand, that like Mary and Joseph, we should be punctual in observing the ecclesiastical festivals and holy usages, and like true Catholics, should observe them. Parents should require their children at an early age to take part in prayer, attend church and school, and see that they conduct themselves quietly and reverently while there. Mary and Joseph took the holy Child Jesus with them to the temple.

*Why did the child Jesus remain in Jerusalem?*

Because of His love of prayer and communion with His Heavenly Father, and to show, even then, some rays of His divinity, by which to make known that He had come for the glory of His Father, and to procure our salvation. The glory of God and the salvation of our souls should be our chief object in life.

*Why did Mary and Joseph search so diligently for Jesus?*

Because they were fearful lest they should lose Him Whom they loved so exceedingly. We should learn from this, how careful we should be not to lose Jesus by sin, or having lost Him, how anxiously we should seek by penance to find Him. The parents of Jesus, by their diligent search and inquiries for the divine Infant, teach and rebuke those parents who care less for the Christian education of their children than for their temporal advantages, who pay no attention to the persons with whom their children associate, nor to the places which they frequent, whether they learn things that are useful to them, and who for the sake of some temporal advantage permit their children sinful intimacy with evil-minded persons. From these parents God will one day demand the souls of their children with severest justice.

*Why was our Savior found in the temple in the midst of the doctors, hearing them, and asking them questions?*

To teach us that we ought to seek the knowledge necessary for our salvation, and attend carefully to the sermons and instructions on Christian doctrine; we should by no means be ashamed to ask questions of our pastors when we are in doubt, and should listen to their answers. Was Christ, the Eternal Wisdom, ashamed to ask questions and to answer? Why should we ignorant people hesitate? It is much to be regretted that persons who have many important things concerning their spiritual welfare on their minds, through pride and false shame, would rather go to perdition than ask advice, solely for fear of showing their ignorance.

*Why did Mary say: Son, why hast thou done so to us?*

These words were forced from her by pain at the absence of her Son, Whom she loved above all things, and not by indignation, for He was blameless. Mary's conduct should teach parents to remember their duty of caring for their children, and punish them when they do wrong.

## **INSTRUCTION ON THE VIRTUE OF OBEDIENCE**

*He was subject to them (Lk. 2:51).*

From this all Christians should learn to be obedient to the commandments of God and of the Church. God has united life or death, blessing or malediction with obedience or disobedience to His commandments, and the Bible (I Kings 15:22) shows that obedience pleases God more than sacrifices or the fat of rams, and that He despises disobedience as He does witchcraft and idolatry. We must be obedient to the Church, because Christ Himself with His holy Spirit lives in her, and governs her, and has said: Who hears not the Church, let him be to thee a heathen and a publican, therefore, shut out from eternal life. We must be obedient to our parents, because they are placed over us by God, and we are indebted to them, under Him, for life and many benefits. Those children who do not assist their parents when they are old, poor, and helpless, or are ashamed of them, have reason to be afraid, since even Christ Jesus, the God-Man, was obedient and subject in all things to His poor mother, and to a humble mechanic who was only His foster-father. Cursed be he that honoreth not his father and mother (Deut. 27:16); how much more cursed those who despise, deride and abandon their parents? Their eyes will one day be picked out by ravens (Prov. 30:17). If God commanded obstinate and disobedient children to be stoned (Dent. 21:20), what do those not deserve who even strike or abuse their parents?

*How did Jesus advance in age, wisdom and grace?*

He showed new effects of the wisdom and grace with which He was filled, as He advanced in years, and thus teaches us to progress the more in virtue, and fulfill the duties of our state in life that we may attain perfection hereafter.

**ASPIRATION** Most amiable Jesus! Who in the twelfth year of Thy age, didst permit Thyself to be found in the temple by Thy parents, and, as an example for us, wast humbly obedient to them, grant that we may diligently attend to the important affair of our salvation, willingly carry the yoke of Thy law from our youth, and be always obedient to the laws of Thy Church, to our parents, and superiors. Prevent uneducated youth from growing reckless, and preserve them from a scandalous life. Give parents wisdom and grace to educate their children according to Thy will in all virtue. Grant to us all, that we may never lose Thee by sin, or if we have lost Thee, anxiously to seek Thee, happily find Thee, and with Thy grace more and more increase in wisdom and in virtue. Amen.

## **TRUE PIETY**

*They found Him in the temple (Lk. 2:46).*

Many people deceive themselves in regard to true piety, because their imagination represents it to them according to the effect produced by their passions or disposition of mind. He who fasts often and willingly believes that he is pious, though in his heart he nourishes a secret hatred, and while he fears to wet the tip of his tongue with wine, even with water, lest he should not live temperately enough, finds pleasure in detraction and slander, that unquenchable thirst for the blood of his neighbor. Another, because he is accustomed daily to recite a long string of prayers, esteems himself pious, though he gives vent afterwards to haughty, bitter, offensive language, hurting people at home and abroad. Another keeps his purse open for the poor, but keeps his heart ever closed to the love of his enemy, whom he will not forgive; another forgives his enemy with all his heart, but will not pay his creditors, until forced by law. All these think themselves pious, and are perhaps so regarded by the world, but in truth they are far from being pious. In what then does true piety consist? In the perfect love of God. This love is called the beautiful love, because it is the ornament of the soul, and attracts to itself with complacency the eyes of the Divine Majesty. When it strengthens us to do good, it is called the strong love; when it causes us to do that good quickly, carefully, and repeatedly, it is called piety. The ostrich has wings, it is true, but never uses them to fly; the chickens fly heavily and not high; but the eagles, the doves, and the swallows, fly high and swiftly, and do not easily tire. The sinners are but earthly people, they creep upon the ground; the just, who are still imperfect, rise, it is true, towards heaven but seldom, and then but slowly and heavily. But there are some, true, pious souls, who like the doves and the eagles soar high on strong, swift wings to God. In a word, piety is nothing else than a certain active, swift energy of the spirit, with which the strong love in us, or we with it, performs, as far as it is possible to us, all good. As the strong love urges us to keep God's commandments, the perfect love, that is, piety, urges us to keep them carefully and with all possible zeal.

No one is just or pious who does not keep all God's commandments without exception; for, to be just we must possess the strong love, and to be pious we must possess besides, a certain eagerness to profit by all the occasions of doing good, that present themselves. Thus St. Francis de Sales writes in his *Philothea*, from which it is seen that true piety consists not in special devotions, or the practice of special good works, but in the zealous, earnest, continuous obedience to the commandments and performance of duty for the love of God.