

GOD'S LOVE ON LIFE'S STAGE

To speculate upon the nature of Divine Love, to enter into any theological discussion concerning its eternity, immensity, unchangeableness and individuality is far afield of our purpose in this article. Divine Love is a topic that far surpasses the comprehension of man. It cannot be confined within the bounds of human thought and language. But whatever else concerning that love evades our grasp, one fact is certainly intelligible. It can easily be seen that God loves the human family abundantly, superabundantly, yea, tremendously, as Francis Thompson says,

"With thy young skiey blossoms heap me over
From this tremendous Lover"—

We purpose to run before the mind a few of the numberless ways in which God proves His love for men, and we shall touch upon Divine Munificence as manifested in our Creation, Redemption and Sanctification.

God is all good and all loving! God is goodness and love itself. When we have spoken this, hardly anything remains to be said. To *have* goodness is to *be* partially good; to have love is to be partially loving. But to *be* goodness and to *be* love carry the idea of goodness and love to fulness and perfection. It is the nature of goodness to spread, to diffuse and communicate itself. God is subject to this same communicativeness. Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh. Out of a full breast, the nightingale pours his throat. Out of the fulness of the source the fountain overflows. So it is with God, only infinitely so. He runs over in goodness, and pours Himself upon us His children in unspeakable riches. All that we have and are, must look for its cause to this Divine overflow. "Every best gift, and every perfect gift, is from above." (James i, 17).

To relieve an over-full creative thought, God gave us being. He summoned us out of the abysmal void, and placed us upon the stage of existence. And what a fair and glorious stage that is! The scenery is the green woodland, the silver lakes, the rivers, the towering mountains, the sinking valleys, the yawning chasms, the rising steeps, the placid deep and heaven's limitless expanse. The lights are the sun by day; and by night, the moon and the jewels that stud the sky. And the music! It is of endless and beautiful variety. The orchestra ranges from

the liquid note of the thrush to the roar of the lion; from the whispering zephyrs to the shrill whistlings of the winds; from the babbling of the brook to the ocean's howl; from the calm of eve to the rumble of thunder. Bestow a moment's attention upon ourselves, the actors on this stage. The costumes we wear far surpass the surrounding landscape. Our Author fashioned our bodies from the slime of the earth. He placed in them a soul that bears the stamp of His likeness and is ornamented with the threefold garment of memory, understanding and will, and the splendor of His sanctifying grace. Thus equipped man stood ready to begin the drama of life. And what was to be the plot of this act? All to the Maker's high and noble purpose. Man was put upon the stage to learn to know, love and serve God on earth, so as to be happy with Him forever in the eternal drama that is enacted above the heavens. What a sublime destiny! That is why man was made the chief and lord of creation. He was not made for the world; rather the world and its stage was made for man to work out that divinely appointed plan. His goal is the highest possible, Heaven. Man appears upon a wondrous stage, himself far more wonderful, noble in body, nobler in the soul and its faculties, noblest in sanctifying grace. A beautiful creature clad in innocence and holiness, raised to the supernatural state, about to set out with everything in his favor upon a career of happiness on earth and bliss in the realms of God. A spectacle for angels to contemplate. A picture well worthy the brush of Divine Love!

The scene changes! Since the Almighty wanted a free love from the creature, He left him to play his allotted part with perfect freedom of action in obedient liberty. He pointed out to our first parents a certain tree in Paradise and to test them, commanded them not to eat of its fruit. The trial proved their doom. They ate the forbidden apple and in consequence lost grace and forfeited their right to eternal happiness. In that misplay the whole human race suffered. Just as the human family would have received the grace and friendship of God had He been obeyed, so now Adam's descendants inherited divine displeasure, bereft of this holy friendship and stained with sin. Irrevocable doom hung over the entire race. Heaven was now utterly beyond the reach of man; and his sojourn upon earth was to be filled with all manner of suffering and sorrow. The thorns of mental and physical sickness, cares of all kinds, wast-

ing diseases, decay and death were to bristle in his path. A dear price to pay for a wilful blunder! What a striking contrast to the first scene of cheer! From the brilliance of day, to the gloom of midnight. Man once robed in the life of grace, clothed now in the sable garment of death.

This sad and melancholy scene would have lasted forever had not Divine Love taken compassion on His poor creatures. Moved by pity, God promised to send a Redeemer into the world who should atone for sin. But He did not dispatch Him immediately. For reasons best suited to His wise and loving purpose, the Almighty left men to themselves for two score hundred years to stumble as best they could through their performance on the stage of life. He in the meantime stood, so to speak, behind the scenes patiently biding His time in preparation for the next act.

When we contemplate this act, we are confronted with the sublime. Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, appears upon the stage of life and of human nature. In the first act of this drama we saw Adam disobey with fatal consequences to our first parents and the entire race. The body which otherwise would never have died, now became subject to death's law. The soul which under the sunshine of God's grace had enjoyed vigor of life, was now actually dead. Christ came to snatch men from this spiritual demise. By the wilfulness of His creature God had been offended; by the humility and utter subjection of His Son, He was now to be placated. Christ's part was to point out to men the way to His Father and to show them how to keep to the right road. This meant nothing less than the immolation of Christ upon the altar of love for men. From the night that he lay in the manger till the afternoon that gave the tragic close to His earthly career He was the personification of self-denial and self-abjection. Human indulgence had robbed men of life; Divine denial won back that life. This manner of atonement and restoration was an invention of Divine Love. "God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son" to redeem it. (John 3, 16). What a staggering disclosure of God's love in effecting our redemption by the Incarnation!

How magnificently and generously Christ met all the demands of His Messianic role in those three and thirty years of teaching, laboring and suffering. He died to satisfy Divine Justice; He rose from the tomb; He remained upon the earth for

a short time and ascended into heaven. But the Ascension into Paradise did not mean that His Divine Part on the stage of human happiness had been completed. There was another act yet to be played. In the preceding act He performed visibly. Now He is the invisible Actor, hidden under the species of bread and wine. Although unseen He dwells among men wholly and truly. From His hidden places, the tabernacles, He prompts us in our parts, when our memory fails. When we know not, He teaches us. When we weaken, He strengthens. Having merited the supernatural life for us by His passion and death, He now personally helps us to follow that life by means of His Sacraments. The sacraments bring us into intimate touch with Christ. They are but so many conduits that convey grace to us from the overflowing source of Holiness. At every period and station of the spiritual life, we find Him ready to instruct us, help us and cheer us along the way. "My delight is to be with the children of men" are His own words of love. He makes His abode among us! He nourishes us with His own Sacred Body and Blood! He sanctifies our existence on earth! When we reflect on these generous manifestations of Divine Love, our thoughts grow too deep for words. Only the mind of a seraph can adequately conceive, only an angelic pen can fully describe these miracles of miracles.

Creation, Redemption and Sanctification, then, are God's words and deeds of unsurpassed love for man. These are the big acts of the drama, that might well be called, "Wherewith He loved us." (Eph. 2-4). —Bro. Mark Della Penta, O. P.