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THE CRIB OF PEACE

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FOR centuries before the birth of Christ men had searched for true peace and happiness. In their quest they had indulged in every kind of wickedness and perversion. Their pride led them to worship false gods; their greed and ambition fanned the embers of hatred. So intense was their desire for peace they even battled for it, but they knew not where it lay. Thus we read in Isaias: "They have not known the way of peace, and there is no judgment in their steps: their paths are become crooked to them, every one that treadeth in them, knoweth no peace."¹

Such was the state of ignorance and disillusionment when God sent His only begotten Son, born of the Virgin Mary, to guide men into the way of peace. The way of peace which Christ proclaimed at His birth was the way of virtue. Lying in a manger in swaddling clothes, the Saviour represented the most excellent way, God's way, to peace and happiness. The Babe of Bethlehem was humble. Contrary to the opinion of the world, He showed that meekness of spirit was a wise step toward peace. The Babe of Bethlehem was poor. By embracing poverty willingly, He showed that it can be a great means of becoming united to God, whereas riches, which so many thought a joy unalloyed, can be an obstacle to the peace and love of God. There was nothing of the eye-filling magnificence of the worldly prince in the crib of Bethlehem.

Christ's birth in a cave at Bethlehem was not alone a symbol of peace. It was also a revolution against the wickedness of the world. Christ in the manger, in the words of Chesterton, "crystallizes three things: the human instinct for a heaven that shall be as literal and

¹ Isaias, 59, 8.

almost as local as a home; a philosophy 'larger' than other philosophies; it proclaims peace yet fights every mode of error."² Christ, the King of Heaven, brought heaven to the earth as He was born at Bethlehem, and His philosophy which was to be known as Christianity would battle with the spirit of the world. Christianity would bring peace not by pride, avarice and hatred but by fostering humility, self-sacrifice and love.

Christ in the manger assumed flesh. In His humility He showed that the greatest impediment to the attainment of peace, namely man's pride, must be subdued. While God could become man, man could not become God but must be subject to God as creature to Creator. Our First Parents desired to be not so much God-like as like gods. For their error they did not enjoy peace but suffered misery and sorrow. About the crib there was complete tranquility, because there was absolute submission to Him who orders all things perfectly.

The humility of the first Christmas is further seen in the persons of Joseph and Mary. Joseph, in obedience to the command of Almighty God, took Mary as his wife. Mary, when chosen by God to be the Mother of Christ, exclaimed: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done according to thy word."³ The obedience of Joseph and Mary entailed suffering; their submission to the Will of God exacted heroic sacrifices. Joseph knew the great responsibility which was his. Mary realized the part she was to play in the great holocaust. They were to enjoy God's peace in the company of the Infant Saviour, the Prince of Peace, because they were obedient to the commands of God.

The humility of Christ's birth is seen also in the lowliness of His birthplace. Refused lodging in the inn of Bethlehem, Christ was born in a forsaken stable along the wayside. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not,"⁴ but about the crib there was complete joy and happiness. Joseph and Mary, as they knelt before the crib, were perfect images of peace and contentment—so calm, so still, so raised above sorrow because they possessed the all-blissful presence of light and holiness. They had been humiliated and rebuffed, but in their meekness of spirit they had followed God's way to peace and happiness.

We can picture Mary beside the crib of peace pleading with us to approach the Infant Jesus in a spirit of humility, meekness and love. She pleads with us, because we are dazzled by the tinsel

² CHESTERTON, *Everlasting Man*, p. 218, Dodd, Mead Co., New York. 1925.

³ Luke 1, 38.

⁴ John 1, 11.

wealth of the world with all its pomp and vanity. Mary's first-born Son lies in a manger. He Who is the bread of angels, our daily heavenly bread, is put to rest in a manger—a manger from which the dumb animals take their daily nourishment. Poor as was that resting place, it was a symbol of a glorious gift. Its prefiguring of that glory to come raised it above the satins and silks, the soft luxury into which is placed a new-born prince. As we look into that first Christmas, Mary is beseeching us to cradle her poor Son, the Prince of peace, in our bodies by receiving Him in the Eucharist. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you."⁵

The world needs to meditate upon the wisdom of the crib of peace. For the most part the significance of the birth of the Redeemer has been forgotten. Too many are seeking material advantages and pleasures rather than the Bread of Heaven. The enemies of true peace are not entirely outside of the fold; even within there are many who fail to live in their personal lives the virtues which Christ's peace demands. We must be willing to deny ourselves and make sacrifices. As we visualize the stable of Bethlehem, we can see the shadow of the Cross.

In our own time the sins of men have lengthened their shadows and cast their gloom upon the world. Men today do not know the way of peace, because their passions have blinded them and they are faltering in the path of error. "Whence do wars and quarrels come among you? Is it not from this, from your passions, which wage war in your members?"⁶ The life of Christ as it began at Bethlehem was a life of peace; however, at the same time it was a revolution against the sensual allurements of the world, the flesh and the devil. If the angels recognized the glory of Christ's birth, why should not men? It is because men have strayed from the path of virtue and do not know the "Light" in Whom there was no darkness. "And the light shines in darkness; and the darkness grasped it not."⁷

The crib of peace was at variance with the world. "Do not think that I came to send peace upon earth; I have come to bring a sword, not peace."⁸ The sword would be the sword of persecution wielded by those who would seek peace in sin, who would hate the true peace of virtue. The peace Christ offers is not the sterile complacency which seeks its rest in submitting to worldly conceptions of peace. Christ's

⁵ John 14, 27.

⁶ James 4, 1.

⁷ Matt. 10, 34-35.

⁸ Matt. 10, 34-35.

peace is the peace of God, for which we must struggle against an adverse world. Christ's peace is really "worth fighting for"; it is eternal.

The crib of peace is the wisdom of God. Christ's message of love and hatred for sin has formed the heart of that doctrine which is Christianity. Since the first Christmas many have rejected the good tidings which Christ brought to the world. At the present time when the cruelty, the grief, the trouble and suffering of war are being felt, Christianity is said by some critics to have "failed," but the Vicar of Christ, His Holiness Pope Pius XII, in his Christmas Message to the world a year ago, exclaimed: "No! Christianity, whose force derives from Him Who is the Way and the Truth and the Life and Who is with and shall remain with it until the consummation of the world, has not failed in its mission, but men have rebelled against that Christianity which is true and faithful to Christ and His doctrine. In its place they have fashioned Christianity to their liking, a new idol which does not save, which is not opposed to the passions of the carnal desires nor to the greed for gold and silver which fascinates, nor to the pride of life; a new religion without a soul or a soul without religion, a mask of dead Christianity without the spirit of Christ. And they have proclaimed that Christianity has failed in its mission!"

Catholics who would learn the lesson of that crib of peace turn to the throne of peace—the Chair of Peter. The Sovereign Pontiff knows that we shall have no lasting peace unless men adopt the right way, the Christian way of life. The spirit of Christ which shone forth in the crib of peace in its lowliness, its meekness, its love is now resplendent in the Vicar of Christ who would lead us, if we could only be led, to the crib of eternal joy. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, and that preacheth peace: of him that showeth forth good, that preacheth salvation, that saith to Sion: Thy God shall reign!"⁹

⁹ Isaiah 52, 7.