

HOMECOMING

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WE WERE on our way home! The long months and years away from loved ones, with all the longing and heartache separation had entailed, would soon be ended. Here we were, now flying in majestic motion over the last few miles of ocean before we would see the States again. Many hours of just sitting and thinking are apt to make a man day-dream and that is what happened to me; reverie set in and my imagination began to dwell lovingly on my family, once more together for Christmas. These were cheering thoughts; what delight, what joy-filled hours were in store!

Sleep must have come gently, for the next moment I saw the family around the tree in the parlor, exactly as we were the last time we enjoyed Christmas together as a family. The scene was vividly clear, not a detail missing; there we were, doing the identical things we did that morning, each of us busy opening his last present, and everything was in blissful disarray. Yes, there we were: Mary, twelve year old Jack, and myself, excitedly wondering what was to come next. Mary's eager fingers wrestled impatiently with the wrappings. Red ribbons and gaily colored paper, so enticing and neat, were quickly taken off and put aside. I knew what was coming now: her sixth pocketbook! The cover was removed and there came into view the pocket . . . , what in the world? Mary gasped, and I was dumbfounded, for tumbling out of the box in furious succession came dresses, ornaments, hats, cosmetics, and the numberless articles so welcomed by most women. These seemingly human objects climbed madly over Mary, appearing to crush her, in the next moment they had faded and disappeared into nothingness. Now there was I, about to open a box that had contained a tie that only a bullfighter would dare to wear; but this time there poured out of the box an endless stream of all the things that men seek after: cars, money, factories, radios, theatres, books, and all the many desirable things of life. There was everything that a man could hope for, yet as they appeared, just as suddenly did they evaporate into thin air. Young Jack now came into focus as he untied the strings of the box that had kept his imagination soaring to dizzy heights for hours. I well remember that present, for it returned the boy to earth in a

hurry; what a disappointed youngster Jack was, for his aunts had lovingly sent him a set of nice, shining, building blocks! Blocks? Yes, they were in the box now, but besides these wooden toys, out came huge warships, burning planes, flaming guns, and other hideous objects. They came roaring into the room, almost seeming to devastate everything; then, they too disappeared. The room was in wild disorder, yet I could see that Mary, apparently forced by some impelling power, went over to the tree and cautiously picked up a tiny package. Gingerly she loosened the strings, and with an almost superhuman effort she moved herself to open the box. It was a familiar object to me, for it contained the diamond I hoped to surprise her with that morning. However, it wasn't the diamond at all, but what an infinitely more precious sight: a most beautiful Infant lying in a manger, and, kneeling beside Him, the loveliest woman and noblest of men. The scene at Bethlehem! I was overwhelmed; what could it mean?

As I continued to gaze upon the Holy Three, everything faded away until I remained alone with this awe-inspiring scene. The Blessed Mother seemed to sense my presence for she slowly turned in my direction with a breath taking smile. Her welcome was gentle and serene, "Come, my soldier, come and see the true Christmas Gift." And now, there I was kneeling beside Mary and Joseph in heart-filling adoration of the Infant. Such joy and peace filled my heart as I never thought possible. After too short a time, the Queen of Virgins again spoke to me and explained everything.

"My son," she began, "you are coming home from war into the heart of your family. You have a deep desire for peace, good will, and love; your only wish is never again to be separated from your loved ones, and a sincere desire to save them and yourself any further horrors of war and discord. What you have seen in these last few moments is the reason why man is in so helpless a state. Those pictures were indeed of you and your family but you represented all my children; it was a Christmas scene you witnessed, but it was more truly the spirit of all the year. Christmas, you see, is but the mirror, the reflection of our entire life. It is the Day upon which the theme of life depends, and each year it brings into strong relief just what we make of life. You witnessed what my children unconsciously make the spirit of their every action, the never-ending search for happiness and pleasure in little things; only incidentally do you recall the real spirit at all. You not only saw the spirit just now, but you also saw the things men seek and how ephemeral they are. You and your wife represented the majority of men and women, searching

for the wrong things. Your handsome son found in his box the heritage all youth will receive if men make such a worldly spirit their theme of life.

Christmas saw your Saviour born to me, His unworthy mother. Joseph, the Child, and I represent the spirit in which every family of God should live. In us, all mankind can find the answer to life, because we are the perfect models for Christian living. Look at us, my soldier, and learn; see in us the way to peace and joy. Here is a Family that must go through life, as does every family. Love has joined Joseph and me in the holy married state; we are truly wedded even though we both retain our virginal purity. A Child is born to me; our Family is enlarged with This precious gift. All is serene and glorious at this moment, as is every moment when each family receives its first-born infant. You know our entire life, too; we had more than our share of the pains and sorrows of this world, but every second of every day was, nevertheless, a constant source of love and peace because the troubles did not deter us but rather gave us more and more opportunities for perfecting ourselves in the love of God."

As our Blessed Lady spoke a divine light seemed to pervade everything; it was all very clear before, but now all sparkled with the intensity of diamonds, and as though numberless suns were shining down upon us. Countless stars twinkled and danced on a stupendous carpet of purple sky; and the earth itself seemed to show the greatness of the moment in every way. The King of Kings was here in the midst of most abject poverty, yet the realization was not one of pity but rather of the splendour and grandeur of love.

The Infant's Mother intensified these thoughts as she said, "Look at us more closely, I beg of you, and what do you see? Is this Family scene painted with luxurious appointments, or even with ordinary comforts? Think you that we must have wealth before we can have a blissful, happy home? No indeed, home is truly where the heart is, my son; love is the center of our lives. We live only in God, and for Him, and with Him. All else is nothing to us, except insofar as through other things we may attain to Him, for Whom we are, and live, and breathe. For you and every man God must be the central and only Objective in life, and you must use all else as means for perfectly possessing Him.

The other scene horrified you; it was madness, disorder, all-enveloping aimlessness. Yet, in truth, it is the spirit of the world. It is a man's idea of life as seen in one panoramic Christmas view. I say Christmas should be the spirit of all our life, and it is; even

unconsciously we picture our outlook on life by our use of that Day. Christ, this wondrous Infant you now gaze upon so adoringly, is your whole reason for living. He must be the Objective for which you do all things. And since this is so, my son, you cannot but fail when you place other things uppermost in your mind. Other things are good, very good; but they are good only insofar as they are means for our reaching the one, true end. You, and all my sons, have great trouble remembering that, and the close relationships of life here below have blinded you to the real meaning of life. It is such a demanding thing, our life, that we are apt to consider it the only object there is for us. No wonder, then, that we go to all kinds of extremes in search for the fullness of life in material goods. With such a viewpoint we are forced to search madly and never-endingly for perfect happiness in wealth, power, position, all creatures. And the search never ends; you are always and forever looking for more and more. Peace and happiness, are they yours? Possibly for a short while, but never for very long. What is wrong with this mode of life, then, you ask me. Oh son, you can never attain happiness in such a way, because you are an heir to something infinitely more beautiful, precious and lasting than the most desirable object on earth. You are a brother of this Baby of mine. He is the Son of the King of Heaven and His royal home is There; so also is yours, for He has purchased mansions for you and all my sons at the cost of His precious life. Nothing else but Heaven will ever satisfy you, for you were made for that alone."

As Our Immaculate Mother spoke these last few words, she gazed most tenderly upon her Son. I, too, was impelled to look upon Him with awe and reverence. The first few hours of life always impress us deeply, but never so much as this moment as I held the Infant Saviour in my view. One was drawn to Him strongly, in a manner that is impossible to describe; surely all that I heard and saw this morning was Truth and Goodness Itself. Yes, I felt myself the worldling I was, and the awakening was rude but wonderful.

Again I heard Mary's voice, as she continued, "Do you remember that other soldier of your country, who was condemned to live forever outside its beloved borders? Recall that nothing could ever make him happy, no matter what it was, for he could never have the one thing he considered worthwhile in life, a country of his own. He was heartbroken and could never rejoice; his home was forever refused him. Unconsciously, many of my sons are like that unfortunate man; no matter what they have, they can never find true happiness. But unlike him, they do not know why, and they never

search for the one Good that will perfectly fulfill all their longings and desires; unlike him they can reach their home. He grieved constantly because he could never return home; my sons grieve because they will not seek their home. Blind, they walk every road but the lighted one; unseeing, they go down the many confusing byways of life instead of the easily-seen highroad to Heaven.

Love is the dominant emotion in life; it is the dynamo which moves us in all our actions. We love and we wish to be loved, for that is the way we have been created. Do you not realize that creation was but an act of divine love? Our Father saw Himself to be the most perfect goodness and He desired that others would share in His goodness; so He created all things. We were not made only to love creatures, who only share the divine goodness as we ourselves do; rather, our glorious heritage is to love Him Who is all goodness, beauty, and truth. No wonder then that my sons are unrewarded when they attach themselves to created goods.

I pray constantly, dear son, that you, and everyone, will receive the grace to see the real meaning of life; endlessly do I ask my Divine Son to show you the need always to keep your spiritual destiny before you. Now you are coming home to your dear family; how happy this reunion will be, for your love is a noble and true love. The desire that is deep rooted inside you seeks for that peace and good will which will keep you united always. Think, now and always, of what has been told you. You are my children and will have constant joy and love in your midst if you will but live as this Holy Family has shown you how to live. Keep my Son always before you as your one, true end; remember us constantly as your perfect models for living; and finally, begin and end all things in and for God, never separating Him from the rest of your daily lives. Remember, that to consider your daily life and your spiritual heritage as distinct and never-to-be-joined realities is a fatal mistake; but to unite them in perfect harmony, to see your life as the highroad to Heaven, is to find wondrous peace and joy on earth, and eternal bliss hereafter. May this Divine Infant bless you and protect you always. Practice faithfully what you have learned this day, and pray always that all my beloved children will learn the true spirit of Christmas, which is the true spirit of life."

Slowly I awoke from my deep slumber; or was I really asleep? It took a little time to recall where I was, for all that went on in my mind had been so beautifully real and captivating that my whole being seemed to be wrapped in the scene I was so privileged to witness. The words of the Blessed Mother reached deep into my heart and I

knew, with a new sort of knowledge, that they could never be erased. In very truth I had learned today, in a few short minutes, what a lifetime of searching might never show me; my gratitude and love were boundless, and I prayed that my life, and that of all who were influenced by me, would forever be sparked by the spirit of divine love and lived in the faithful imitation of our glorious models, the Holy Family.

Now I looked about me and saw that all in the plane were busily engaged in getting their belongings together, at the same time anxiously looking out the small windows of the plane. We must be getting ready to land, I thought, and so we were, for soon the word came to prepare for landing. In no time at all the ship hit the landing strip softly, and we were home again! Yes, we were home again; and my first rational thought was a prayer that we would learn the real answers to life so that true joy and peace would always be ours, now and eternally.