

EXPECTATION TO FULFILLMENT

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SPARK . . . a rosebud . . . The dawn promising another day . . . the breath of a new-born child. These are beginnings. A flame . . . a flower . . . the sunset resting in the branches of a tree . . . the prayer of a saint. These are realizations.

There is an attractiveness about all these things which captures the mind and thrills the heart. Perhaps the reason is that they hold a secret which is meant for the mind and heart alone. In every beginning there is an order to perfection which the senses cannot perceive. This deeper reality speaks its ordered message to the mind, for the mind alone can look beyond the sense phenomena and discover order. This same reality offers its goodness to the heart, for the heart alone can reach out to accept a good which is beyond the touch of the hands and the vision of the eyes. A beginning has an order which, like the sound of an arrow in flight, speaks of its path to perfection. The order to perfection, unknown by the senses, can capture the mind in the wonder of expectation. The heart can thrill to the order perceived by the mind, and through its desire for the further perfection it can reach out to embrace the realization. And realization, when embraced, yields its secret to the heart. Realization speaks of an ordered and happy past, and gives itself to the heart as a fulfillment.

THE NATURAL ORDER

The mind and heart then, not limited to the picture drawn by the senses, can discover in every beginning, an expectation and in every realization, a fulfillment. It is expectation and fulfillment which holds the mind and moves the heart. Thus there is more to the rosebud sparkling with dew in the early morning sun than a firm red ball of unfolded petals, a few drops of water, and light by which to see. The senses can report these facts. These are the letters of reality, but only the mind can read the drama. The mind can read in the bud the beginning of a flower, can understand the wonderful order of petals living to bloom. In the dew the mind sees a sign and a promise of future health,

while the sun gives its warmth as a pledge of growth. In this simple beginning of the bud there is an expectation of the beauty of fulfillment in the full blown radiance of the rose. The mind has comprehended the reality of order which will never be known by the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, or the hands. There is then real reason for the mind to be captured and the heart to be thrilled, when, in the simplest of beginnings, the mind can discover an order which bursts into expectation and promises a realization which in truth is a fulfillment.

And if there is in the life of a rose an order which can hold the mind in expectation and promise a fulfillment, how much more is this true of human life. For just as the mind can find in the reality of nature an order which the senses cannot perceive, so too the mind of man can turn within to reflect and discover realities in human life which cannot be seen or touched. Every mind and every heart which has been caught up in the tide of an expectation, or drenched with the joy of a fulfillment knows that the human soul can reach out beyond the limits of the bodily senses and contact a reality appreciated by the spirit alone. There is in human life a sorrow more profound than pain, a joy more sublime than pleasure. The human mind and heart are simply not bound down to the commonplace toil and drudgery of the moment. The most intensely human experiences of life are realized, not in the pleasure or pain of the sensitive life, but rather in those expansive moments when the mind searches beyond the horizon of the senses, and the heart outstretches its physical limits to suffer or to love.

In the expectation of the young lover, the joys and sorrows of a lifetime with the beloved crowd into the experience of a moment. The lover cannot seek counsel from the senses in such an expectation. The mind and heart alone can comprehend the real meaning of the lifelong order of love. The whole drama of life is concentrated in a living moment of experience, an experience which can make the physical structure of the heart groan under the weight of being human.

Though the order in a rosebud can capture the mind in expectation, and the heart can expand to encompass the heights of human love and the depths of human sorrow, still, these realities are neither profound enough to fill, nor noble enough to perfect the soul of man. There is no human joy so sublime as to satisfy the human spirit, nor is there a human sorrow strong enough to kill it. The world will never fulfill the expectations of the mind

and heart of man, and the passing of the world will not destroy his soul.

THE SUPERNATURAL ORDER

There is another reality, however, which promises an eternal fulfillment to the searching mind and restless heart of man. It is the supernatural order by which human life is raised up to participate in the Divine. As in the case of the rose and the experience of human love, the mind must look beyond the senses to discover the hidden reality of an order to perfection, so, in seeking to know the supernatural ordering of man to God, the mind must look beyond the natural. At the threshold of this new beginning, this new life, man must rise up in the light of faith and read reality with the eyes of faith to discover and appreciate the most sublime expectation and most sublime fulfillment of mind and heart. There are times when a person of faith meets the whole of reality face to face and understands a new depth of meaning in life for he sees his own life bathed in the light of eternal truths. Only in this light does life have real meaning and order. Only in the warmth of this light can the heart of man find repose, for only this warmth is able to diffuse itself throughout the breadth and depth of the soul.

The mother who has lost all human hope for the life of her child, with the help of grace, can turn to God with faith, hope, and love, to place the destiny of her child in His hands. She knows of another anguished mother's heart, whose love for the will of the Father accepted the death of her Son for the redemption of the world. She knows the goodness of the Father, the mercy of the Son, and the generous love of the Mother. This light, shining through all ages, can illumine a new order in her own life. The warmth of this light can surge through her whole being, bringing a gentle peace in the midst of human sorrow. Though a mother would never cease to busy herself in comforting her child in every possible way, still the activity would not enter in and disturb the peace and order of a heart which has given itself to the Divine Will of a loving God.

In the toil and struggle, pleasure and pain of every human life there is a Divine plan unfolding. It remains but to look for that order with the eyes of faith. Faith alone can pierce the veil of the commonplace and illumine the Divine. The man of faith is free, under grace, to accept his daily life of toil with joy. The man of faith will take a moment from every day to rest and to pray. He can draw away from a world, which knows no order beyond

the play of human caprice, to rest and once again draw an ordered and peaceful breath. In the peace of prayer he can look beyond the sweat and the rush of a busy day and see his life in a clearer light. He can see beyond the forces of the world, which day by day seem to hold him in an unreasonable slavery, and discover the hand of a loving God working in the plan of his life. He can discover that, when the forces against him were greater than he, there was also the care of a Creator guarding and guiding him, leading him to this moment of fulfillment and expectation. He can know his own weakness, his own failings, and yet, see the fruits of a Divine Redeemer giving strength to his striving. He can find a new order in his life, an order which he did not make, and cannot fully comprehend, but an order to which he can with peace and confidence, with faith and hope and love, subject himself.

For the person of faith, the hardships and the consolations of daily life take on a new meaning. Pain is no longer a stumbling block, but a step carved out of life to help the soul reach a higher path. Pleasures strengthen and encourage the body to keep pace with a soul that reaches for God. Duties and obligations are the signposts of an order that thrills the heart, for it leads to God. There is a song of expectation and fulfillment. Pleasure and pain are not the theme of this song, they are but the sensible notes. Yet they are ordered by God to produce a song of faith, hope, and love.

This is the song that alone can satisfy the human heart. When man has once heard the song, however briefly did his mind perceive its depths and his heart rest in its melody, he knows this is reality; reality which neither clings to the past nor ends with the present. The whole man has touched a whole reality. It is a beginning, and in this beginning there is an order that reaches into an eternity of fulfillment. Though the first steps may be faltering, like every beginning, it is decisive; the direction has been chosen. Though, through weakness, man may not always grasp the reality, still he knows that it is there and in every step along the way of life he cannot give up the striving to again hear its melody, understand its meaning, and walk in its beauty.

THE VOICE OF THE CHURCH

Nor does man walk alone. He has a companion who walks beside him in this life, a companion who is able to keep these truths before his eyes, a companion who can help him because

she knows his heart. The Church is man's true companion in this life. Only the Church, the custodian of the truths revealed by God, knows the expectations of the human heart, and only the Church, the visible hand of the loving God, is able to fulfill them. In her loving concern for fallen man, the Church helps him find and hold the whole of reality by placing before him the great mysteries of expectation and fulfillment. The voice of the Church in the Divine Office sings the mysteries of Faith, Hope, and Love, the song which man longs to hear.

"Hark to the voice whose thrilling tone
Bids shadows of the night begone
Vain dreams of earth and visions fly
Christ in His might shines forth on high."¹

Seven times daily the Church calls aside her ministers from their active labors to rest in prayer, to put aside the oppressing cares and worries of the moment and lift up their minds and hearts to God. These are peaceful moments when the mind and the heart of man can look beyond the limits of daily routine and understand the deeper reality, that every day and every hour is His day and His hour and that all things in life are ordered to His Glory. Liturgical prayer is an invitation of the Church to restore peace and order where it may have been lost, or to strengthen and deepen the peace and order where it has been preserved. It bids the man of Christ to come aside and compose himself in faith, hope, and love in order to celebrate the mysteries of expectation and fulfillment for all men.

At this time of Advent the Church commemorates the long ages of expectation of the world for its Redeemer and looks lovingly to Mary for fulfillment. In Vespers of the Saturday Office of the Blessed Virgin the Church places an "*Ad Magnificat*" antiphon which clearly reveals this spirit, so in keeping with the solemn truths of Faith and the searching heart of man.

"O Virgin of virgins, how shall this be done?
For no one has appeared like to thee before nor since.
O daughters of Jerusalem, why do you look at me in wonder?
This Mystery you see is all Divine."

The long centuries of expectation and hope were marvelously transformed into the new ages of fulfillment and love in

¹ Hymn of Lauds for season of Advent—translation from *Hymns of Dominican Missal and Breviary*, Byrnes, Herder, 1943.

the simple, profound "fiat" of Mary. It was under the rapturous joy of this fulfillment that the heart of the Virgin burst into, "My soul doth magnify the Lord." This fulfillment, greater than all expectation, is commemorated in the singing of the Magnificat. Yet this commemoration is not merely a review of an historical fact. The Divine Office is not for the historian. It does not remain in the past. Nor is it for the poet, since it does not rest in the present. It is a celebration of the eternal mysteries in which all men of all ages participate. The Divine Office offers praise and adoration to the Eternal Father by applying the manifest glories of the past and the anticipated glories of the future to the prayers of the present.

During Advent the constant refrain in the Office is that the coming of Christ is still the greatest expectation of the human mind and heart. Men today, like the Jews of the Old Covenant, must look to Mary if they are to see its fulfillment. This Mother whose holy joy at the words of the Angel Gabriel brought fulfillment to the expectation of ages, by that same holy joy can bring the fulfillment of Christ into hearts of men today. The Antiphon "Alma Redemptoris Mater" recited after every Office of Advent in the Roman Rite beautifully expresses these thoughts.

"Mother benign of our Redeemer Lord
Star of the sea and Portal of the skies
Unto thy fallen people help afford—
Fallen, but striving still to rise.

"Thou who didst once, while wond'ring world's adored
Bear thy Creator, Virgin, then as now
O by the holy joy at Gabriel's word
Pity the sinners who before thee bow."

This antiphon makes no defense for fallen man, but offers a new beginning and a new fulfillment through Mary. The Church in placing it before men every day during Advent invites all to prepare for a new coming of Christ upon the earth. And since Christ can only enter into a peaceful and ordered heart, the Church invites priests to withdraw from the active ministry, religious to set aside their apostolic works and the laity to cease their labors and come and be refreshed. It is an invitation for all to abandon the activities which daily press in upon the soul, to forsake the pleasures and disregard the pains which invade the privacy of the heart. It is an invitation to rest a moment in

prayer, to look beyond the world which seems so real and discover anew the depth of eternal truth in which man shares. In that rest and in that prayer, in that freedom from earthly care the soul can expand and grasp the expectation and fulfillment of centuries past and make them live and breathe again in a new Advent of expectation and a new Christmas of fulfillment. The heart will be free again to sing of a whole reality.

"Alma Redemptoris Mater."