

"OUR ABODE WITH HIM"

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THIS MISSAL closed before him, the novice knelt in the choir, now nearly deserted after the Solemn Mass of Pentecost. The faint fragrance of incense was symbolic of the regret he felt that the liturgical cycle was completed. Why had the Church not spaced the feasts more extensively through the year instead of making one half so top-heavy? The time after Pentecost seemed more of an advent than Advent itself. The simple statement in his missal that this period was devoted to the Blessed Trinity and Its Presence in the soul did little for him to fill the gap. The novice's reaction is not surprising. More than a knowledge of the simple fact that the time after Pentecost is dedicated to the Indwelling of the Blessed Trinity is required for an appreciation of this period of the liturgical year. A closer consideration of the import of this doctrine of the Divine Presence, however, brings with it a realization that it is the source of a solid, fruitful interior life; that under the warmth of grace and charity the soul, the abode of the Blessed Trinity, will mature to the full vigour intended by its Creator. The realization of such a truth will do more than fill a seeming gap in the liturgical year; it will reveal the time after Pentecost as a precious period in which we strive to cultivate the intimate life of the soul, the union with its Abiding Guests, the Persons of the Most Blessed Trinity.

THE TRANSCENDENCE OF THE BLESSED TRINITY

There are two things to be kept in mind in studying this doctrine. The first is the absolute transcendence of the Blessed Trinity over all creatures. Of all the mysteries of the Catholic Faith, the Trinity is the most hidden. This, the mystery of the intimate life of God further than all other knowable things, surpasses the reach of our mind. Not only the nature of the Trinity escapes us, but even its very existence. We could not know that there was such a mystery had not Jesus Christ, the Second Person, revealed it to us. Throughout all the ages from Adam to Christ men were in ignorance of the existence of Three Persons in One God. There may have been a few who knew of the existence of the Trinity, such as Abraham, Moses and

some of the Prophets, but their knowledge was vague and imperfect when compared with what Christ revealed.

The second thing to be kept in mind follows upon this transcendence of God over creatures. When God dwells in the just soul, He in no way loses His transcendence over that soul: "God comes to us not that He may be moved towards us, but that we may be moved towards Him."¹ In other words, the soul, while still remaining in the body, is lifted up to God, and made worthy of eternal life through the Presence of the Blessed Trinity, which is Eternal Life in itself.

While not explicitly mentioning the Presence of the Blessed Trinity in man, the liturgy for the Sundays from Pentecost to Advent repeatedly calls him to a more perfect life on earth, which is none other than a life lived in union with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. During this time the liturgy calls the faithful to an intimate and loving friendship with God. To them it extends an invitation to begin eternal life now, to contemplate the mysteries Christ has revealed and to obey His call to this new life in the Blessed Trinity. Now are the words of Christ especially true: "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you."² He will come to men when they have turned away from sin and received His grace and charity.

THE DIVINE INDWELLING THROUGH SANCTIFYING GRACE

Every soul that loves God and lives a supernatural life by sanctifying grace and charity possesses the Persons of the Trinity. "No other effect," says St. Thomas, "can be given as the reason why the Divine Person is in the rational creature in a new manner, except sanctifying grace."³ What is it about this particular grace that makes it possible for man to possess the Godhead in a special manner? Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange answers this by saying: "If we had a profound knowledge of the state of grace, we would see that it is not only the principle of a true and very holy interior life, but that it is the germ of eternal life."⁴ It is the principle of the interior life because it is the beginning of divine life in the soul. It is the first element to be had if the soul wishes to be on intimate terms with God. Through the soul this grace channels the Divine Life and carries everything back to God, its Source. The life that is begun with this grace should end in

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on St. John's Gospel*, XIV, 23.

² John XIV, 18.

³ *Summa Theologica* I, q. 43, a. 3.

⁴ Garrigou-Lagrange, Reginald, O.P. *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, I, p. 29.

the eternal life of the vision of God in heaven. That is why it is called the germ of eternal life. Sanctifying grace is compared to this vision as the seed to the full grown tree. One should grow into the other. So priceless a possession is it, that St. Thomas writes: "The good of grace in one (soul) is greater than the good of nature in the whole universe."⁵ This applies to any grace from God. How much more does it apply to that grace which effects the Presence of the Blessed Trinity in the soul!

Nor is there any other grace that can be compared to sanctifying grace in dignity. Actual grace falls far short, since it cannot bring God to the soul in a permanent manner, and since even the enemies of God are often moved by this grace. Special graces such as prophecy or the gift of tongues, given to the individual for the good of the Church, are not equal to it. They can exist simultaneously with sanctifying grace, but they do not necessarily presuppose it in the soul. God sometimes gives these gifts to sinners, and once He gave the gift of prophecy to a dumb animal, Balaam's ass.⁶ The reception of these lesser graces only indicate that God is using one of His creatures as an instrument to carry out His designs. Not that actual graces or the charisms are to be scorned—they are gifts from God far surpassing any natural gift—but there is no other grace given to man during this life that can prepare his soul to receive the Persons of the Blessed Trinity except sanctifying grace.

Who can possess this grace? Evidently those in mortal sin cannot. These souls are willfully turned away from the loving presence of God. They cannot possess the seed of eternal life as long as they refuse to receive it, and do everything in their power to smother its growth. Once repentant, however, no matter what their sin was, these souls became again the friends of God. The seed comes to life and begins to grow towards eternal life, its natural fruit. These friends of God are eligible for all the privileges God grants to those that love Him. There is no middle state between that of enemy and that of friend; no period of uncertainty when, after repentance, the soul waits as it were for a peace treaty to be signed. Christ said: "He who is not with Me is against Me."⁷ Souls either possess sanctifying grace or they do not. Who can possess this grace? Who can bear within himself the Persons of the Trinity? God has reserved this gift for those who love Him.

⁵ St. Thomas, *op. cit.* Ia IIae, q. 113, a. 9, ad 2um.

⁶ Numbers XXII, 28-30.

⁷ Matt. XII, 30.

INTIMATE FRIENDSHIP

No one, whether on earth, in heaven or in hell can say, "God is not here." God sees all things, governs all things. But more than this, He is *in* all things. He is not there as a part of the thing, but as a hand holding it in existence and keeping it from fading back into the nothingness from which it came. As the Cause of life God is closer to the object than it is to itself. "God exists in all things as their hidden root, their principle of being, nearer to their being's very core than their soul to their body . . . entirely filling each with His Presence by giving all that they are to all."⁸ There are no requirements to be filled by the creature to possess God in this way. He is there as long as the creature exists; without Him there is no existing. But this sustaining, conserving Presence of God is not enough for man to know and love God Himself intimately and directly. Such knowledge and love cannot be attained merely from natural effects like the Divine Omnipresence.

This general Presence of God in all creatures, like creation itself, is, of course, a gracious manifestation of God's goodness. But to the rational creature the Divine Goodness has been unbounded. Calling man to a life of happiness with Himself, God has given Himself to him in a special manner. "I have loved you with an everlasting love," God has said.⁹ He was not satisfied to give Himself to man in a cold impersonal association, merely to be present to man as He is to all other creatures. Rather He has called man to a friendship that is meant to be an intimate and loving union. To such a friendship the liturgy calls the faithful during the time from Pentecost to Advent.

St. John, the Apostle of Christ's love, clearly affirms that the Blessed Trinity is given to men in a special and intimate manner beyond the simple natural Presence of God. In his Gospel, the account of the revelation of the Word-God to men, he records Christ's invitation to men that they enjoy the Divine Friendship. On the eve of the crucifixion Christ promised the Apostles that He would return in a little while; that He would send them an Advocate Who would teach them all things. But besides these promises of separate Persons St. John has given Christ's word that the Three Persons would come at one and the same time: "If anyone love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our abode with him."¹⁰ This, the classic text in this matter, clearly sub-

⁸ Garrigou-Lagrangé, *The Love of God and the Cross of Jesus*, I, p. 152.

⁹ Jer. XXXI, 3.

¹⁰ John XIV, 23.

stantiates the truth of the Indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the soul. Although Christ seems to be referring to but two Persons, Himself and the Father, it cannot on that account be said that one who is in the state of grace and who loves Christ, possesses only the Father and the Son. St. Thomas handles this difficulty simply by saying: "Since the Holy Spirit is the Love of the Father and Son, once the Father and Son have been mentioned the Holy Spirit is necessarily understood."¹¹ They are so perfectly united that One cannot be had without the other Two. If at times only One Person is said to be sent, this manner of speaking is for the sake of clarity, that this Person might be better known.

ABIDING GUEST

Once established that the Three Divine Persons dwell within man, the question naturally arises: how long will they stay? It is not asked apprehensively as one would ask distant relatives who have suddenly arrived for a surprise visit. The form it takes is one of eager hope: have they come for a moment only, then to depart never to return? Has God given man this bliss for but one memorable moment? Christ has given us assurance that this is not the case, for He said: "We will make our *abode* with him." This means that the Trinity of Persons comes to the soul in a permanent and lasting manner. God has not only given the perfect gift; He has given it in a perfect manner. As long as the soul remains faithful in its love for Christ, it can possess Him more intimately day by day. This love will vivify the seed of grace, giving it the growth it so ardently seeks. There can be no limit to the enjoyment of the Divine Persons short of the beatific vision itself. The soul has only to love Christ to receive this gift and continue to love Him to keep it.

The words of St. Paul to the Corinthians corroborate this idea of the permanency of the Divine Indwelling: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"¹² St. Paul understood a temple as a fixed abode of God, made holy by His Presence. In the Old Law there was but one temple where God dwelt in a permanent manner. In the New Law under Christ there are millions of temples all over the world. Besides the churches where God is sacramentally present, there are countless just souls who possess Him as their Divine Guest. They are everywhere, on the street, in the home, in factories, stores and offices.

¹¹ *Commentary on St. John, loc. cit.*

¹² I Cor. III, 16.

CONCLUSION

Every soul in the state of sanctifying grace is subject to the activity of the Blessed Trinity within it. There are three fundamental effects of the Divine Indwelling. Though the three are in reality the effects of the Three Persons together, to aid our understanding of them the effects are ascribed or appropriated separately to the different Persons. The Father comes to the soul in the majesty of His Divine Power; the Son illumines the soul so that it can think about the mysteries of God; the Holy Spirit moves the soul to the completion and crown of life, eternal happiness. On the part of the soul there must be a correspondence to these actions of the Trinity. The soul in the state of grace ought to receive the Presence of the Father; it ought to use the light that the Son has given; it ought to be obedient to the actual graces by which the Holy Spirit moves it towards holiness. To welcome, to contemplate, to obey—these are the three duties of every soul that possesses the Blessed Trinity. With such a correspondence to the Divine Presence a solid and true interior life will be begun; a life which should terminate in the perfection of holiness, in the vision of God.

In the light of these truths it is quite understandable that the Church should devote so much of the year to the cultivation of the Abiding Presence of the Blessed Trinity in man. Throughout this time she prays to nourish the growth of holiness in the soul and to obtain fidelity to the Three Persons dwelling therein. In this vein is the prayer of the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost:

O God, Who hast prepared good things unseen for those that love Thee, pour into our hearts the fervor of Thy love, that, loving Thee in all things and above all things, we may attain Thy promises which surpass all desires. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

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