



## THE CHURCH, THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

(J.F.M. H. – 7.12.2017)

God's church takes on a different aspect when looked at using the name it is sometimes called in scripture. The terms bride (for the Church) and Bridegroom (for Christ) have a Scriptural basis as the Catechism explains. (CCC 808) "*The Church is the Bride of Christ: He loved her and handed Himself over for her. He has purified her by his blood and made her the fruitful mother of all God's children.*" The unity of Christ and the Church, head and members of one body also implies the distinction of the two within a personal relationship. The theme of Christ as Bridegroom of the Church was prepared for by the prophets and announced by John the Baptist. (Jn 3: 29) The Lord referred to himself as the "bridegroom." (Mk 2; 19) The Apostle speaks of the whole Church and of each of the faithful, members of his Body, as a bride "betrothed" to Christ the Lord so as to become but one spirit with him. (Cf. Mt 22:1-14; 25:1-13; 1 Cor 6:15-17; 2 Cor 11:2. The Church is the spotless bride of the spotless Lamb. (Cf. Rev 22:17; Eph 1:4; 5:27.) "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her."(Eph 5: 25-26)

He has joined her with himself in an everlasting covenant and never stops caring for her as for his own body. (Eph 5:29) This is the whole Christ, head and members, one formed from many, Whether the head or members speak it is Christ who speaks. He speaks in his role as the head (*ex persona capitis*) and in his role as body (*ex persona corporis*). What does this mean? "*The two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the Church.*" (Eph 5:31-32) And the Lord himself says in the Gospel: "*So they are no longer two, but one flesh.*" (Mt 19; 6) They are, in fact, two different persons, yet they are one in the conjugal union, . . . as head, he calls himself the bridegroom, as body, he calls himself "bride. (St. Augustine *En in P 74:PL 36*) When anyone believes this it seems logical to accept that just as Christ loved the Church, we too must also love His Bride, the Church.

God created man a rational being, conferring on him the dignity of a person who can initiate and control his own actions. "He willed that man should be left in the hand of his own counsel, so that he might of his own accord seek his Creator and freely attain his full and blessed perfection by cleaving to him." The ability to make choices, we call 'Free Will'. It makes us responsible for our acts, good or bad. In this life each of us can have a number of different vocations; religious, laity, victim souls of substitution, virgin, married, parent, teacher, nurse and so on, as they are not mutually exclusive. We live each of our vocations, as members of Christ's mystical body. Our choice of the vocation may be free but the results of each choice are not free, and have different results on our lives. As the prayers and sacrifices we offer in accordance with Christ's will, are offered to the almighty Father, with, through and in Him, it is as well to choose to pray about our choice before making it. Together Christ and us are the bride, while He, as the head of the union is also the bridegroom, who loves his bride and offers our prayers and sacrifices to his Father. The Father who loves His Son accepts them. As long as we are in union with the will of Christ, we have an open door to God our Almighty Father. What an astonishing love for a fallen mankind is shown in these provisions coming out of the birth of Jesus in the Stable of Bethlehem. The same love shown then is present today. In fact as the great theologian and Doctor of the Church, St. Thomas Aquinas, pointed out that "*God's love for us is not greater in heaven than it is now.*"

It is no wonder that the Angel announced to the shepherds "*I bring you good news of great joy which will come to all the people: for to you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.*" (Lk.2.10 - 11) None of us were present at the time of Christ's birth or death, over 2000 years ago when Christ sacrificed himself for us without our knowledge or agreement. If we had been alive at that time where would we have been? Perhaps with those who "knew not what they did" and crucified him. Perhaps, (despite the menace of the Roman soldiers and hostile crowd) we would have made our opposition clear as to the way He was being treated, as did the very few who stood with Him at the foot of the Cross. Perhaps we would have shown our indifference by not bothering to attend our Saviour's Sacrifice on the Cross and stayed at home. Long ago at Calvary the choice was made by the people alive at the time, today, at every Mass where the same Sacrifice occurs the choice is ours. The same person born in the stable at Bethlehem and then hanging from the cross all those years ago, is now transubstantiated by priests at every Mass. Each Mass is a re-presentation of the same sacrifice made by the Lord at the Last Supper and Calvary. So, we, in this modern age continue to have the opportunity to make clear where we stand. We can line up for or against Him, we can show our indifference, or we can show our love and conform our wills to Christ's. We can make our Confession and ask "*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*" (Lk 23:42-43)

We are even allowed to have a share in the Sacrifice offered. He was, and still remains the victim of the Sacrifice to His Father, who not only told us to follow him, but is himself the way we are to get to Our Father in Heaven. We have our part to play, for Christ in His love never forces us against our will. However, in His infinite love for each of us, allows us to be helped, and to help others along the way to Our Father in Heaven. Recently Pope Francis reminded us of the importance of getting our choice right about the way we behave, right up to the time of our own death by saying, "*Awakening from death isn't in itself a return to life. Some in fact will awake to eternal life, others to eternal shame.*"

To day, as so often in the past, our Church, the "Bride of Christ" faces persecution. Do we love her enough to be recognised as being clearly on her side? Do we even love Christ the Bridegroom, God the Son, enough to share his joy at Christmas, as with arms extended He embraced His heavenly Bride? Or are we so engrossed in the material side of giving and receiving presents that we neglect the reason behind the Feast? St John of the Cross (1542 -1591) a Carmelite, a Mystic, a poet and Doctor of the Church (Feast day 14 of December), takes us further with the idea of the lover to that of the bridegroom, as he wrote a poem about it.

***When the ancient dispensation  
Its predestin'd course had run,  
Straight from out His bridal Chamber  
Came the Bridegroom, God the Son.***

***Once on earth, with arms extended  
He embrac'd His heavenly Bride,  
And His blessèd Mother laid Him  
In the Manger, at her side.***

***Celebrating the betrothal  
'Twixt the Bridegroom and the Bride,  
While the Almighty, in the manger,  
As an infant, wept and cried.***

***Gems these tears which human nature  
Brought to the betrothal-rite,  
And the Maid was lost in wonder  
As she witness'd such a sight.***

***All around that helpless baby  
Animals were standing by;  
Men sang songs of glad rejoicing;  
Angels join'd their songs on high,***

***Man was full of joy and gladness;  
God was weeping, weak and lone.  
Ne'er before throughout the ages  
Had so strange a thing been known.***

