

**THE INCARNATION, BIRTH, AND
INFANCY OF JESUS CHRIST**

**THE INCARNATION,
BIRTH, AND INFANCY OF
JESUS CHRIST**

Translated from the Italian of

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Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer*

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Most Holy Redeemer

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By virtue of the authority granted me by the Most Rev. Nicholas Mauron, Superior-General of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, I hereby sanction the publication of the work entitled “The Mysteries of the Faith—The Incarnation,” which is Vol. IV. the new and complete edition in English of the works of Saint Alphonsus de Liguori, called “The Centenary Edition.”

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

n the tranquil embrace of the 18th century, amidst the ever-changing currents of human history, there emerged a luminous figure whose life and teachings continue to resonate with profound wisdom and devotion even today. This monumental five book set you now hold is a tribute to the enduring legacy of a man who remains an exemplar of piety, scholarship, and spiritual insight—Saint Alphonsus Liguori.

Born on September 27, 1696, Saint Alphonsus Liguori, during his earthly sojourn, achieved remarkable heights that would shape the course of Catholic theology and spirituality for generations to come. His sanctity and theological acumen were recognized by the Church when he was declared Venerable on May 4, 1796, followed by his beatification in 1816 and ultimate canonization in 1839. In 1871, his intellectual contributions were further acknowledged when he was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church.

July 30, a date etched in the hearts of the faithful, marks the feast day of this Doctor of the Church. Saint Alphonsus Liguori earned the sobriquet “The Prince of Moral Theologians” for his profound insights into moral theology, a body of work that has served as a guiding light for countless souls seeking ethical and spiritual clarity.

This five book set showcases the richness and depth of Saint Alphonsus’s theological and spiritual writings. His literary output, spanning over one hundred books, is a testament to his

dedication to sharing the treasures of the Catholic faith with the world. Through these pages, readers will have the privilege of delving into the profound wisdom of a man whose teachings have touched hearts and transformed lives for centuries.

Saint Alphonsus Liguori's singular devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary earned him the title of the "Marian Doctor of the Church." His works, such as *The Glories of Mary*, are a resplendent tribute to the Mother of God, illuminating her role in the Christian faith and her maternal intercession for all believers.

In addition to his theological contributions, Saint Alphonsus Liguori founded the Redemptorist Order, a spiritual family dedicated to imitating Christ's mission of proclaiming redemption to the most abandoned. His devotion to the Eucharist, explored in *The Holy Eucharist*, underscores the central importance of the Blessed Sacrament in the life of the Church and the believer.

This set also includes Saint Alphonsus's reflections on the passion and death of Jesus Christ, the incarnation, birth, and infancy of Jesus Christ, and *Preparation for Death*, addressing crucial aspects of Christian faith and the human experience.

As we embark on this literary journey through the works of Saint Alphonsus Liguori, may we be inspired by his unwavering faith, intellectual brilliance, and deep love for Christ and His Church. May these volumes serve as a beacon of light, guiding readers towards a deeper understanding of their faith, a closer relationship with God, and a more profound appreciation of the saintly legacy of Saint Alphonsus Liguori.

In the spirit of the saint himself, may these pages inspire us all to live lives of holiness, virtue, and unwavering devotion to Our Lord and His Mother, Mary.

—Conor Gallagher
CEO and Publisher of TAN Books



THE MYSTERIES OF THE FAITH¹
THE INCARNATION

¹ By a *Novena* we mean the nine days that precede a feast; the first day of the novena of Christmas is, therefore, the 16th of December.

These discourses may serve either for meditation or for spiritual reading. After the discourses will be found novenas of meditations and of prayers. There is also added a list of the indulgences attached to this exercise.—ED.


DISCOURSES FOR THE NOVENA OF CHRISTMAS

DISCOURSE I. The Eternal Word Is Made Man

Ignem veni mittere in terram; et quid volo, nisi ut accendatur?

“I am come to cast fire on the earth; and
what will I but that it be kindled?”

—*Luke, xii. 49*

he Jews solemnized a day called by them *dies ignis*,¹ the day of fire, in memory of the fire with which Nehemias consumed the sacrifice, upon his return with his countrymen from the captivity of Babylon. Even so, and indeed with more reason, should Christmas-day be called the day of fire, on which a God came as a little child to cast the fire of love into the hearts of men.

I came to cast fire on the earth: so spoke Jesus Christ; and truly so it was. Before the coming of the Messias, who loved God upon earth? Hardly was he known in a nook of the world, that is, in Judea; and even there how very few loved him when he came! As to the rest of the world, some worshipped the sun, some the brutes, some the very stones, and others again even viler creatures still. But after the coming of

¹ *2 Mach. i. 18.*

Jesus Christ, the name of God became everywhere known, and was loved by many. After the Redeemer was born, God was more loved by men in a few years than he had before been in the lapse of four thousand years, since the creation of man.

It is a custom with many Christians to anticipate the arrival of Christmas a considerable time beforehand by fitting up in their homes a crib to represent the birth of Jesus Christ; but few there are who think of preparing their hearts, in order that the Infant Jesus may be born in them, and there find his repose. Among these few, however, we would be reckoned, in order that we too may be made worthy to burn with that happy flame which gives contentment to souls on this earth, and bliss in heaven.

Let us consider on this first day how the Eternal Word had no other end in becoming man than to inflame us with his divine love. Let us ask light of Jesus Christ and of his most holy Mother, and so let us begin.

I.

Adam, our first parent, sins; ungrateful for the great benefits conferred on him, he rebels against God, by a violation of the precept given him not to eat of the forbidden fruit. On this account God is obliged to drive him out of the earthly paradise in this world, and in the world to come to deprive not only Adam, but all the descendants of this rebellious creature, of the heavenly and everlasting paradise which he had prepared for them after this mortal life.

Behold, then, all mankind together condemned to a life of pain and misery, and forever shut out from heaven. But hearken to God, who, as Isaias tells us in his fifty-second chapter, would seem, after our manner of understanding, to give vent

to his affliction in lamentations and wailings: *And now what have I here, saith the Lord, for My people is taken away gratis.*² “And now,” says God, “what delight have I left in heaven, now that I have lost men, who were my delight?” *My delights were to be with the children of men.*³ But how is this, O Lord? Thou hast in heaven so many seraphim, so many angels; and canst Thou thus take to heart having lost men? Indeed, what need hast Thou of angels or of men to fill up the sum of Thy happiness? Thou hast always been, and Thou art in Thyself, most happy; what can ever be wanting to Thy bliss, which is infinite? “That is all true,” says God; “but” (and these are the words of Cardinal Hugo on the above text of Isaias)—“but, losing man, I deem that I have nothing;”⁴ I consider that I have lost all, since my delight was to be with men; and now these men I have lost, and, poor hapless creatures, they are doomed to live forever far away from me.”

But how can the Lord call men his delight? Yes, indeed, writes St. Thomas, God loves man just as if man were his god, and as if without man he could not be happy; “as if man were the god of God himself, and without him he could not be happy.”⁵ St. Gregory of Nazianzen adds, moreover, that God, for the love he bears to men, seems beside himself: “we are bold to say it, God is out of himself by reason of his immense love;”⁶ so runs the proverb, “Love puts the lover beside himself.”

² “Et nunc, quid mihi est hic, dicit Dominus, quoniam ablatus est populus meus gratis?”—*Isai.* lii. 5.

³ “Deliciæ meæ esse cum filiis hominum.”—*Prov.* viii. 31.

⁴ “Non reputo aliquid me habere.”

⁵ “Quasi homo Dei Deus esset, et sine ipso beatus esse non posset.”—*Opusc.* 63, c. 7.

⁶ “Audemus dicere quod Deus, præ magnitudine amoris, extra se sit.”—*De Div. Nom.* c. 4.

“But no,” then said the Lord, “I will not lose man; straight-way let there be found a Redeemer who may satisfy my justice in behalf of man, and so rescue him from the hands of his enemies and from the eternal death due to him.”

And here St. Bernard, in his contemplations on this subject, imagines a struggle to ensue between the justice and the mercy of God. Justice says: “I no longer exist if Adam be not punished; I perish if Adam die not.”⁷ Mercy, on the other hand, says: “I am lost if man be not pardoned; I perish if he does not obtain forgiveness.”⁸ In this contest the Lord decides, that in order to deliver man, who was guilty of death, some innocent one must die: “Let one die who is no debtor to death.”⁹

On earth, there was not one innocent. “Since, therefore,” says the Eternal Father, “amongst men there is none who can satisfy My justice, let him come forward who will go to redeem man.” The angels, the cherubim, the seraphim, all are silent, not one replies; one voice alone is heard, that of the Eternal Word, who says, *Lo, here am I; send Me.*¹⁰ “Father,” says the only-begotten Son, “Thy majesty, being infinite, and having been injured by man, cannot be fittingly satisfied by an angel, who is purely a creature; and though Thou mightest accept of the satisfaction of an angel, reflect that, in spite of so great benefits bestowed on man, in spite of so many promises and threats, we have not yet been able to gain his love, because he is not yet aware of the love we bear him. If we would oblige him without fail to love us, what better

⁷ “Perii, si Adam non moriatur.”

⁸ “Perii, nisi misericordiam consequatur.”

⁹ “Moriatur, qui nihil debeat morti.”—*In Annunt. B. M. s. 1.*

¹⁰ “Ecce ego, mitte me.”—*Isai. vi. 8.*

occasion can we find than that, in order to redeem him, I, Thy Son, should go upon earth, should there assume human flesh, and pay by my death the penalty due by him. In this manner Thy justice is fully satisfied, and at the same time man is thoroughly convinced of our love!" "But think," answered the Heavenly Father—"think, O my Son, that in taking upon Thyself the burden of man's satisfaction, Thou wilt have to lead a life full of sufferings!" "No matter," replied the Son: "*Lo, here am I, send Me.*" "Think that Thou wilt have to be born in a cave, the shelter of the beasts of the field; thence Thou must flee into Egypt whilst still an infant, to escape the hands of those very men who, even from Thy tenderest infancy, will seek to take away Thy life." "It matters not: *Lo, here am I, send Me.*" "Think that, on Thy return to Palestine, Thou shalt there lead a life most arduous, most despicable, passing Thy days as a simple boy in a carpenter's shop." "It matters not: *Lo, here am I, send Me.*" "Think that when Thou goest forth to preach and to manifest Thyself, Thou wilt have indeed a few, but very few, to follow Thee; the greater part will despise Thee and call Thee impostor, magician, fool, Samaritan; and, finally, they will persecute Thee to such a pass that they will make Thee die shamefully on a gibbet by dint of torments." "No matter: *Lo, here am I, send Me.*"

The decree then being passed that the Divine Son should be made man, and so become the Redeemer of men, the Archangel Gabriel speeds on his way to Mary. Mary accepts him for her Son: *And the Word was made flesh.*¹¹ And thus behold Jesus in the womb of Mary; having now made his entry into the world in all humility and obedience, he says: "Since, O my Father, men cannot make atonement to Thy

¹¹ "Et Verbum caro factum est."—*John*, i. 14.

offended justice by their works and sacrifices, behold me, Thy Son, now clothed in mortal flesh, behold me ready to give Thee in their stead satisfaction with my sufferings and with my death!" *Wherefore when He cometh into the world He saith: Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldst not; but a body Thou hast fitted to me. . . . Then said I, Behold, I come. . . . It is written of Me that I should do Thy will.*¹²

So, then, for us miserable worms, and to captivate our love, has a God deigned to become man? Yes, it is a matter of faith, as the Holy Church teaches us: *For us men, and for our salvation, He came down from heaven . . . and was made man.*¹³ Yes, indeed, so much has God done in order to be loved by us.

Alexander the Great, after he had conquered Darius and subdued Persia, wished to gain the affections of that people, and so went about dressed in the Persian costume. In like manner would our God appear to act; in order to draw towards him the affections of men, he clothed himself completely after the human fashion, and appeared made man: *in shape found as a man.*¹⁴ And by this means he wished to make known the depth of the love which he bore to man: *The grace of God our Saviour hath appeared to all men.*¹⁵

Man does not love me, would God seem to say, because he does not see me. I wish to make myself seen by him and

¹² "Ideo ingrediens mundum dicit: Hostiam et oblationem noluisti; corpus autem aptasti mihi. . . . Tunc dixi: Ecce venio, . . . ut faciam, Deus, voluntatem tuam."—*Heb.* x. 5.

¹³ "Propter nos homines, et propter nostram salutem, descendit de cœlis. . . . et homo factus est."—*Symb. Nic. et Const.*

¹⁴ "Habitum inventus ut homo."—*Phil.* ii. 7.

¹⁵ "Apparuit gratia Dei Salvatoris nostri omnibus hominibus."—*Tit.* ii. 11.

to converse with him, and so make myself loved: *He was seen upon earth, and conversed with men.*¹⁶

The divine love for man was extreme, and so it had been from all eternity: *I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee.*¹⁷ But heretofore it had not appeared how great and inconceivable it was. Then it truly appeared, when the Son of God showed himself a little one in a stable on a bundle of straw: *The goodness and kindness of God our Saviour appeared.*¹⁸ The Greek text reads: *The singular love of God towards men appeared.* St. Bernard says that from the beginning the world had seen the power of God in the creation, and his wisdom in the government of the world; but only afterwards, in the Incarnation of the Word, was seen how great was his mercy.¹⁹ Before God was seen made man upon earth, men could not conceive an idea of the divine goodness; therefore did he take mortal flesh, that, appearing as man, he might make plain to men the greatness of his benignity.²⁰

And in what manner could the Lord better display to thankless man his goodness and his love? Man, by despising God, says St. Fulgentius, put himself aloof from God

¹⁶ "In terris visus est, et cum hominibus conversatus est."—*Baruch*, iii. 38.

¹⁷ "In charitate perpetua dilexi te; ideo attraxi te, miserans."—*Jer.* xxxi. 3.

¹⁸ "Benignitas et humanitas apparuit Salvatoris nostri Dei."—*Tit.* iii. 4.

¹⁹ "Apparuerat ante potentia in rerum creatione; apparebat sapientia in earum gubernatione; sed benignitas misericordiæ maxime apparuit in humanitate."—*In Nat. D.* s. 1.

²⁰ "Priusquam appareret humanitas, latebat benignitas. Sed, unde tanta agnosci poterat? Venit in carne, ut, apparente humanitate, benignitas agnosceretur."—*In Epiph.* s. 1.

forever; but as man was unable to return to God, God came in search of him on earth.²¹ And St. Augustine had already said as much: "Because we could not go to the Mediator, he condescended to come to us."²²

*I will draw them with the cords of Adam, with the bands of love.*²³ Men allow themselves to be drawn by love; the tokens of affection shown to them are a sort of chain which binds them, and in a manner forces them to love those who love them. For this end the Eternal Word chose to become man, to draw to himself by such a pledge of affection (a stronger than which could not possibly be found) the love of men: "God was made man, that God might be more familiarly loved by man."²⁴ It seems that our Redeemer wished to signify this very thing to a devout Franciscan called Father Francis of St. James, as is related in the Franciscan Diary for the 15th of December. Jesus frequently appeared to him as a lovely infant: but the holy friar longing in his fervor to hold him in his arms, the sweet child always fled away; wherefore the servant of God lovingly complained of these departures. One day the divine Child again appeared to him; but how? He came with golden chains in his hands, to give him to understand that now he came to make him his prisoner, and to be himself imprisoned by him, nevermore to be separated. Francis, emboldened at this, fastened the chains to the foot

²¹ "Homo, Deum contemnens, a Deo discessit; Deus, hominem diligens, ad homines venit."—*S. de Dupl. Nat. Chr.*

²² "Quia ad medicum venire non poteramus, ipse ad nos venire dignatus est."—*Serm.* 88, *E. B.*

²³ "In funiculis Adam traham eos, in vinculis charitatis."—*Osee*, xi. 4.

²⁴ "Deus homo factus est, ut familiarius ab homine diligeretur."—*Misc.* l. i. tit. 87.

of the Infant, and bound him round his heart; and, in good truth, from that time forward it seemed to him as if he saw the beloved Child in the prison of his heart made a perpetual prisoner. That which Jesus did with this his servant on this occasion, he really has done with all men when he was made man; he wished with such a prodigy of love to be, as it were, enchained by us, and at the same time to enchain our hearts by obliging them to love him, according to the prophecy of Osee: *I will draw them with the cords of Adam, with the bands of love.*²⁵

In divers ways, says St. Leo, had God already benefited man; but in no way has he more clearly exhibited the excess of his bounty than in sending him a Redeemer to teach him the way of salvation, and to procure for him the life of grace. "The goodness of God has imparted gifts to the human race in various ways; but it surpassed the ordinary bounds of its abundant kindness when, in Christ, mercy itself came down to those who were in sin, truth to those wandering out of the way, and life to those who were dead."²⁶

St. Thomas asks why the Incarnation of the Word is called the work of the Holy Ghost: *And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost.*²⁷ It is certain that all God's works, styled by theologians *opera ad extra*, or external works, are the works of all the three divine Persons. And why, therefore, should the Incarnation be attributed solely to the Person of the Holy Ghost? The chief reason which the Angelic Doctor assigns

²⁵ "In funiculis Adam traham eos, in vinculis charitatis."—*Osee*, xi. 4.

²⁶ "Diversis modis humano generi Bonitas Divina munera imperitiit; sed abundantiam solitæ benignitatis excessit, quando in Christo ipsa ad peccatores Misericordia, ad errantes Veritas, ad mortuos Vita descendit."—*De Nat.* s. 4.

²⁷ "Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto."

for it is because all the works of divine love are attributed to the Holy Ghost, who is the substantial love of the Father and of the Son; and the work of the Incarnation was purely the effect of the surpassing love which God bears to man: "But this proceeded from the very great love of God, that the Son of God should assume flesh to himself in the womb of the Virgin."²⁸ And this the prophet would signify when he says, *God will come from the south*;²⁹ that is, observes the Abbot Rupert, "From the great charity of God, he has shone upon us."³⁰ For this purpose, again writes St. Augustine, the Eternal Word came upon earth, to make known to man how dearly God loved him.³¹ And St. Laurence Justinian: "In no instance has he so clearly manifested his amiable charity to men as when God was made man."³²

But what still more evinces the depth of the divine love towards the human race is, that the Son of God should come in search of him, whilst man was fleeing away from him. This the Apostle declares in these words, *Nowhere doth He take hold of the angels; but of the seed of Abraham He taketh hold*.³³ On which St. John Chrysostom thus comments: "He says not, he received, but he seized hold of; from the figure of those who are in pursuit of fugitives, that they may effect

²⁸ "Hoc autem ex maximo Dei amore provenit, ut Filium Dei carnem sibi assumeret in utero Virginis."—P. 3, q. 32, a. 1.

²⁹ "Deus ab austro veniet."—*Hab.* iii. 3.

³⁰ "A magna charitate Dei in nos effulsit."

³¹ "Maxime propterea Christus advenit, ut cognosceret homo quantum eum diligit Deus."—*De catech. rud.* c. 4.

³² "In nullo sic amabilem suam hominibus patefecit charitatem, sicut cum Deus homo factus est."—*De Casto Conn.* c. 23.

³³ "Nusquam enim Angelos apprehendit, sed semen Abrahamæ apprehendit."—*Heb.* ii. 16.

their capture.”³⁴ Thus God came from heaven to arrest, as it were, ungrateful man in his flight from him. It is as if he had said, “O man! behold, it is nothing but the love of thee that has brought me on earth to seek after thee. Why wilt thou flee from me? Stay with me, love me; do not avoid me, for I greatly love thee.”

God came, then, to seek lost man; and that man might the more easily comprehend the love of this his God for him, and might surrender his love in return to one who so deeply loved him, he willed, the first time of his appearance under a visible form, to show himself as a tender infant, laid upon straw. “O blessed straw, fairer than roses or lilies,” exclaims St. Peter Chrysologus, “what favored land produced you? Oh, what an enviable lot is yours, to serve as a bed for the King of Heaven! But, alas!” continues the saint, “alas! you are but cold for Jesus; for you know not how to warm him in that damp cavern, where he is now shivering with cold; but you are fire and flames for us, since you supply us with a flame of love which rivers of water shall never quench.”³⁵

It was not enough, says St. Augustine, for the divine love to have made us to his own image in creating the first man Adam; but he must also himself be made to our image in redeeming us.³⁶ Adam partook of the forbidden fruit, beguiled by the serpent, which suggested to Eve that if she

³⁴ “Non dixit: Suscepit,—sed: Apprehendit;—ex metaphora insequentium eos qui aversi sunt, ut fugientes apprehendere valeant.”—*In Heb. hom.*, 5.

³⁵ “O felices paleas, rosis et liliis pulchriores! quæ vos genuit tellus? Non palearum momentaneum, sed perpetuum vos suppeditatis incendium, quod nulla flumina exstinguent.”

³⁶ “In primo homine, fecit nos Deus ad imaginem suam; in hac die, factus est ad imaginem nostram.”—*Serm.* 119, *E. B. app.*

ate of that fruit she should become like to God, acquiring the knowledge of good and evil; and therefore the Lord then said, *Behold, Adam is become one of us.*³⁷ God said this ironically, and to upbraid Adam for his rash presumption; but after the Incarnation of the Word we can truly say, “Behold, God is become like one of us.”³⁸

“Look, then, O man,” exclaims St. Augustine, “thy God is made thy brother;”³⁹ thy God is made like thee, a son of Adam, as thou art: he has put on thy selfsame flesh, has made himself passible, liable to suffer and to die as thou art. He could have assumed the nature of an angel; but no, he would take on himself thy very flesh, that thus he might give satisfaction to God with the very same flesh (though sinless) of Adam the sinner. And he even gloried in this, oftentimes styling himself the Son of man; hence we have every right to call him our brother.

It was an immeasurably greater humiliation for God to become man than if all the princes of the earth, than if all the angels and saints of heaven, with the divine Mother herself, had been turned into a blade of grass, or into a handful of clay; yes, for grass, clay, princes, angels, saints, are all creatures; but between the creature and God there is an infinite difference. Ah, exclaims St. Bernard, the more a God has humbled himself for us in becoming man, so much the more has he made his goodness known to us: “The smaller he has become by humility, the greater he has made himself in bounty.”⁴⁰ But

³⁷ “Ecce Adam quasi unus ex nobis factus est.”—*Gen.* iii. 22.

³⁸ “De cætero dicemus veraciter, quia Deus factus est quasi unus ex nobis.”—*De Emman.* l. 1, c. 19.

³⁹ “Deus tuus factus est frater tuus.”

⁴⁰ “Quanto minorem se fecit in humilitate, tanto majorem exhibuit in bonitate.”—*In Epiph.* s. 1.

the love which Jesus Christ bears to us, cries out the Apostle, irresistibly urges and impels us to love him: *The charity of Christ presseth us.*⁴¹

O God! did not faith assure us of it, who could ever believe that a God, for love for such a worm as man is, should himself become a worm like him? A devout author says, Suppose, by chance, that, passing on your way, you should have crushed to death a worm in your path; and then some one, observing your compassion for the poor reptile, should say to you, Well, now, if you would restore that dead worm to life, you must first yourself become a worm like it, and then must shed all your blood, and make a bath of it in which to wash the worm, and so it shall revive; what would you reply? Certainly you would say, And what matters it to me whether the worm be alive or dead, if I should have to purchase its life by my own death? And much more would you say so if it was not an inoffensive worm, but an ungrateful asp, which, in return for all your benefits, had made an attempt upon your life. But even should your love for that reptile reach so far as to induce you to suffer death in order to restore it to life, what would men say then? And what would not that serpent do for you, whose death had saved it, supposing it were capable of reason? But this much has Jesus Christ done for you, most vile worm; and you, with the blackest ingratitude, have tried oftentimes to take away his life; and your sins would have done so, were Jesus liable to die any more. How much viler are you in the sight of God than is a worm in your own sight! What difference would it make to God had you remained dead and forever reprobate in your sins, as you well deserved? Nevertheless, this God had such a love for you that, to release

⁴¹ "Charitas Christi urget nos."—2 Cor. v. 14.

you from eternal death, he first became a worm like you; and then, to save you, would lavish upon you his heart's blood, even to the last drop, and endure the death which you had justly deserved.

Yes, all this is of faith: *And the Word was made flesh.*⁴² *He hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood.*⁴³ The Holy Church declares herself to be filled with terror at the idea of the work of redemption: *I considered Thy work, and was afraid.*⁴⁴ And this the prophet said of old: *O Lord, I have heard Thy hearing, and was afraid. . . . Thou wentest forth for the salvation of Thy people; for salvation with Thy Christ.*⁴⁵

Hence St. Thomas terms the mystery of the Incarnation the miracle of miracles,⁴⁶ a miracle above all comprehension, in which God showed how powerful was his love towards men, which of God made him man, of Creator a creature.⁴⁷ The Creator, says St. Peter Damian, springs from the creature, of Lord it made him servant, of impassible subject to sufferings and to death: *He hath showed might in His arm.*⁴⁸ St. Peter of Alcantara, one day hearing the Gospel sung which is appointed for the third Mass on Christmas-night—*In the beginning was the Word*—in reflecting on this mystery became so inflamed with divine love that, in a state of ecstasy, he was borne a considerable space through the air to the foot of the Blessed Sacrament. And St. Augustine says that his

⁴² "Et Verbum caro factum est."—*John*, i. 14.

⁴³ "Dilexit nos, et lavit nos . . . in sanguine suo."—*Apoc.* i. 5.

⁴⁴ "Consideravi opera tua, et expavi."—*Off. Circumc. resp.* 6.

⁴⁵ "Domine, audivi auditionem tuam, et timui. . . . Egressus es in salutem populi tui, in salutem cum Christo tuo."—*Hab.* iii. 2. 13.

⁴⁶ "Miraculum miraculorum."—*De Pot.* q. 6, a. 2, ad 9.

⁴⁷ "Creator oritur ex creatura."—*In Nat. B. V.* s. 2.

⁴⁸ "Fecit potentiam in brachio suo."—*Luke*, i. 51.

soul could feast forever on the contemplation of the exalted goodness of God, manifested to us in the work of human redemption.⁴⁹ For this reason it was that the Lord sent this saint, on account of his fervent devotion to this mystery, to inscribe these words on the heart of St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi: *And the Word was made flesh.*

II.

Whosoever loves, has no other end in loving but to be loved again. God, then, having so dearly loved us, seeks nothing else from us, as St. Bernard remarks, but our love: "When God loves, he desires nothing else than to be loved."⁵⁰ Wherefore, he goes on with this admonition to each one of us: "He has made known his love, that he may experience thine."⁵¹ O man, whoever thou art, thou hast witnessed the love which God has borne thee in becoming man, in suffering and dying for thee; how long shall it be before God shall know by experience and by deeds the love thou bearest him? Ah! truly every man at the sight of a God clothed in flesh, and choosing to lead a life of such duration, and to suffer a death of such ignominy, ought to be enkindled with love towards a God so loving. *Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and wouldst come down: the mountains would melt away at Thy presence, . . . the waters would burn with fire.*⁵² Oh that Thou wouldst deign, my God (thus cried out the prophet before the arrival of the

⁴⁹ "Non satiabar considerare altitudinem consilii tui super salutem generis humani."—*Conf.* l. 9, c. 6.

⁵⁰ "Cum amat Deus, non aliud vult quam amari."—*In Cant.* s. 83.

⁵¹ "Notam fecit dilectionem suam; experiatur et tuam."—*De Aquæd.*

⁵² "Utinam dirumperes cœlos et descenderes! a facie tua montes defluent . . . aquæ arderent igni."—*Isai.* lxiv. 1.

Divine Word upon earth), to leave the heavens, and descend here to become man amongst us! Ah, then, on beholding Thee like one of themselves, the mountains would melt away; men would surmount all obstacles, remove all difficulties, in observing Thy laws and Thy counsels; the waters would burn with fire! Oh, surely Thou wouldst enkindle such a furnace in the human heart that even the most frozen souls must catch the flame of Thy blessed love! And, in fact, after the Incarnation of the Son of God, how brilliantly has the fire of divine love shone to many loving souls! And it may be indeed asserted, without fear of contradiction, God was more beloved in one century after the coming of Jesus Christ than in the entire forty preceding centuries. How many youths, how many of the nobly born, and how many monarchs even, have left wealth, honors, and their very kingdoms, to seek the desert or the cloister, that there, in poverty and obscure seclusion, they might the more unreservedly give themselves up to the love of this their Saviour! How many martyrs have gone rejoicing and making merry on their way to torments and to death! How many tender young virgins have refused the proffered hands of the great ones of this world, in order to go and die for Jesus Christ, and so repay in some measure the affection of a God who stooped down to become incarnate and to die for love of them!

Yes, all this is most true; but now comes a tale for tears. Has this been the case with all men? Have all sought thus to correspond with this immense love of Jesus Christ? Alas, my God, the greater part have combined to repay him with nothing but ingratitude! And you also, my brother, tell me, what sort of return have you made up to this time for the love your God has borne you? Have you always shown yourself

thankful? Have you ever seriously reflected what those words mean, a God to be made man, and to die for thee?

A certain man, while one day attending Mass without devotion, as too many do, at these concluding words of the last Gospel, *And the Word was made flesh*,⁵³ made no external act of reverence; at the same instant a devil struck him a severe blow, saying, "Thankless wretch! thou hearest that a God was made man for thee, and dost thou not even deign to bend the knee? Oh, if God had done the like for me, I should be eternally occupied in thanking him!"

Tell me, O Christian! what more could Jesus Christ have done to win thy love? If the Son of God had engaged to rescue from death his own Father, what lower humiliation could he stoop to than to assume human flesh, and lay down his life in sacrifice for his salvation? Nay, I say more; had Jesus Christ been a mere man, instead of one of the divine Persons, and had wished to gain by some token of affection the love of his God, what more could he have done than he has done for thee? If a servant of thine had given for thy love his very life-blood, would he not have riveted thy heart to him, and obliged thee to love him in mere gratitude? And how comes it, then, that Jesus Christ, though he has laid down his life for thee, has still failed to win thy love?

Alas! men hold in contempt the divine love, because they do not, or, rather let us say, because they will not, understand what a treasure it is to enjoy divine grace, which, according to the Wise Man, is an infinite treasure: *An infinite treasure to men, which they that use become the friends of God.*⁵⁴

⁵³ "Et Verbum caro factum est."—*John*, i. 14.

⁵⁴ "Infinitus enim thesaurus est hominibus; quo qui usi sunt, participes facti sunt amicitiae Dei."—*Wisd.* vii. 14.

Men appreciate the good graces of a prince, of a prelate, of a nobleman, of a man of letters, and even of a vile animal; and yet these same persons set no store by the grace of God,—but renounce it for mere smoke, for a brutal gratification, for a handful of earth, for a whim, for nothing.

What sayest thou, my dear brother? Dost thou wish still to be ranked among these ungrateful ones? For, if thou dost not wish for God, says St. Augustine, if thou canst meet with something better than God: “Desire something better, if thou dost deserve something better.”⁵⁵ Go, find thyself a prince more courteous, a master, a brother, a friend more amiable, and who has shown thee a deeper love. Go, seek for thyself one who is better qualified than God to make thee happy in the present life and in the life to come.

Whoever loves God has nothing to fear, and God cannot help loving in return one who loves him: *I love those who love me.*⁵⁶ And what shall he be afraid of who is the beloved of God? *The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?*⁵⁷ So said David, and so said the sisters of Lazarus to our Blessed Lord: *He whom thou lovest is sick.*⁵⁸ It was enough for them to know that Jesus Christ loved their brother, to convince them that he would do everything for his recovery.

But how, on the contrary, can God love those who despise his love? Come, then, let us once for all make the resolution to give the tribute of our love to a God who has so sincerely loved us. And let us continually beseech him to grant us the precious gift of his holy love. St. Francis de Sales says that this grace of loving God was the grace for which we ought

⁵⁵ “Aliud desideras, si melius inveneris.”—*In Ps. 26 enarr. 2.*

⁵⁶ “Ego diligentes me diligo.”—*Prov. viii. 17.*

⁵⁷ “Dominus illuminatio mea et salus mea; quem timebo?”—*Ps. xxxvi. 1.*

⁵⁸ “Quem amas, infirmatur.”—*John, xi 3.*

to ask God more than for any other; because with divine love all good comes to a soul: *All good things come together with her.*⁵⁹ This made St. Augustine say, “Love, and do whatever you like.”⁶⁰ Whoever loves a person avoids everything that may offend him, and always seeks what may give him most pleasure. Thus is it with one who really loves God; he can never deliberately do anything to offend him, but he studies in every possible manner to please him.

And in order the more quickly and the more surely to obtain this gift of divine love, let us have recourse to the foremost of God’s lovers—I mean, to Mary his Mother, who was so inflamed with his holy love that the devils, as St. Bonaventure assures us, had not the boldness even to tempt her: “They were scared away by her burning charity, so that they dared not approach her,”⁶¹ And Richard adds that even the seraphim themselves might descend from their lofty throne in heaven to take a lesson in love from the heart of Mary.⁶² And because, continues St. Bonaventure, the heart of Mary was a complete furnace of divine love, therefore all who love this Blessed Mother, and address themselves to her, will be inflamed by her with the same love; she will make them resemble herself.⁶³

If we wish to add to this discourse some example about the Infant Jesus, we may select one of those related at the end on page 164.

⁵⁹ “Venerunt . . . omnia bona pariter cum ilia.”—*Wisd.* vii. 11.

⁶⁰ “Ama, et fac quod vis.”

⁶¹ “A sua inflammatissima charitate dæmones pellebantur, in tantum quod non erant ausi illi appropinquare.”—*Pro Fest. V. M.* s. 4, a. 3, c. 2.

⁶² “Seraphim e cælo descendere poterant, ut amorem discerent in corde Virginis.”

⁶³ “Quia tota ardens fuit, omnes se amantes eamque tangentes incendit (et sibi assimilat).”—*De B. V. M.* s. 1.

Affections and Prayers

Let us say with St. Augustine, “O fire, ever burning, inflame me.”⁶⁴ O Word Incarnate, Thou wert made man to enkindle divine love in our hearts: and how couldst Thou have met with such a want of gratitude in the hearts of men? Thou hast spared nothing to induce them to love Thee; Thou hast even gone so far as to give Thy blood and Thy life for them: and how, then, can men still remain so ungrateful? Do they, perchance, not know it? Yes, they know it, and they believe that for them Thou hast come down from heaven to put on mortal flesh, and to load Thyself with our miseries; they know that for their love Thou hast led a painful life, and embraced an ignominious death; and how, then, can they live forgetful of Thee? They love relatives, friends; they love even animals: if from them they receive any token of good-will, they are anxious to repay it; and yet towards Thee alone are they so loveless and ungrateful. But, alas! in accusing them, I am my own accuser: I who have treated Thee worse than any one else. But Thy goodness encourages me, which I feel has borne with me so long, in order at length to pardon me, and to inflame me with Thy love, provided I will but repent and love Thee. Indeed, my God, I do wish to repent; and I grieve with my whole soul for having offended Thee; I wish to love Thee with my whole heart. I am well aware, my Redeemer, that my heart is no longer worthy of Thy acceptance, since it has forsaken Thee for the love of creatures; but, at the same time, I see that Thou art willing to have it, and with my entire will I dedicate it and present it to Thee. Inflame it, then, wholly with Thy divine love, and grant that from this day forward it may never

⁶⁴ “O Ignis qui semper ardes! accende me.”—*Solil, an. ad D.* c. 34.

love any other but Thee, O infinite Goodness! worthy of an infinite love. I love Thee, my Jesus; I love Thee, O sovereign Good! I love Thee, O only Love of my soul!

O Mary my Mother, thou who art the mother of fair love,⁶⁵ do thou obtain for me this grace to love my God; I hope it of thee.

DISCOURSE II. The Eternal Word Being Great Becomes Little

Parvulus natus est nobis, et Filius datus est nobis.

“A child is born to us, and a son is given to us.”

—*Is.* ix. 6

Plato said that Love is the loadstone of love.⁶⁶ Hence comes the common proverb, as St. John Chrysostom remarks: “If you wish to be loved, love,”⁶⁷ for certainly there is no more effectual means to secure for one’s self the affections of another than to love him, and to make him aware that he is loved.

But, my Jesus, this rule, this proverb, holds good for others, holds good for all, but not for Thee. Men are grateful to all, but not to Thee. Thou art at a loss what further to do, to show men the love Thou bearest them; Thou hast positively nothing more to do, to allure the affections of men; yet, in point of fact, how many are there among mankind who love Thee? Alas! the greatest number, we may say, nearly all, not only do not love Thee, but they offend Thee and despise Thee.

⁶⁵ “Mater pulchræ dilectionis.”—*Ecclus.* xxiv. 24.

⁶⁶ “Magnes amoris, amor.”

⁶⁷ “Si vis amari, ama.”—*Ad pop. Ant. hom.* 13.