

New Brighton, Sunday 24th December 2023

Christmas – Midnight Mass

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

“Have you ever seen one of these family gatherings around a cradle, when baby is asleep? What calm, what silence, I would dare to say, what contemplation! We avoid the slightest noise, to not interrupt his sleep, and we talk about him in hushed tones! We talk to him, randomly, and everyone leans over the cradle to get a better look.”¹

Tonight, a Saviour is born to us. He is still a child, but we do come and adore Him as THE King, The One who came to deliver us from the slavery of our sins. He is laying in a manger, in the drafts, barely protected with a bit of straw, and the breath of two animals. Him, the Saviour, has come amongst the poors, unknown from other creatures, being only acknowledged at first by animals, which fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy:

“The ox knoweth his owner, and the donkey his master's crib.”²

In the silence, in the middle on the night, He came, and now lie in a manger. Our Lady wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and here He is, expecting our silent adoration. This silence can be understood because of His holy sleep, for us to not disturb his quietness and rest. But from our part, as we know about the mystery of His birth, the Mystery of His coming, we behave before Him as we would do before a king of the earth: stay silent unless you are asked anything, answer, and stay silent again. Our silence could also be the evidence of our shyness, the acknowledgment of our unworthiness to be presented to such dignified person.

The Midnight Mass is the mass of the contemplation of Our Lady and St Joseph, kneeling in adoration before the treasure God the Father entrusted to their care, before the coming of the holy shepherds (Mass at Dawn). They give us the model of our meditation this night; they figured the Church

“gathered around Our Lady, who leans over Him, is attentive to Him alone, without looking back at herself. Her own worries, her concerns, her sufferings, her dangers, her needs? Oh, how far away all that is for the moment. He is the only one who counts. We’ve waited for so long! A few hours ago, his arrival was announced as imminent: “Today you shall know that the Lord will come, and save us: and in the morning you shall see His glory.”³ And now it's done, he's here.

¹ Dom Joseph Gajard, *Les plus belles mélodies grégoriennes*, La Nativité du Seigneur – Les Matines. Translated with www.deepl.com.

² Is., I, 3.

³ Ex., XVI, 6-7. Vigil of Christmas, Introit.

The Church cannot take her eyes off this little body filled with the fullness of the Divinity. She is lost in Her contemplation, in a silent and mute contemplation.”⁴

In the midst of this silent contemplation, we can hear the eternal whisper of the Son, saying to His eternal Father: “The Lord said to Me, You are My Son; this day I have begotten You.”⁵ And the Father answering: “In holy splendour, before the daystar I have begotten You.”⁶ This night, the King of Peace has come, and invites us to have a share in His Intimacy. He opens for us the treasure of the Mystery of His eternal generation, and then,

“the words of God and of the liturgy, meditated and repeated without ceasing, have a sovereign power of withdrawing the soul from anxious self-consideration, in order to possess it wholly and introduce it into the mystery of God and His Christ. Once there, the need of beautiful considerations or of the well-constructed arguments of a keen intellect vanished. There is need for nothing but contemplation and love, in all simplicity.”⁷

We prepared the crib of our soul to welcome tonight the Son of the Lord. Later, during Mass, He will even visit to us through Holy Communion. Let’s receive Him with the same sweetness Our Lady received Him for the first time. When the time has come, She

“had been longing for this happy moment. Her heart was suddenly overwhelmed with a delight which was new even to her. She fell into an ecstasy of love.”⁸

She is our example tonight; we may ask of Her to take our hand, kneel next to us, and teach us how to properly and devoutly receive the Infant King at the time of Communion. From her we may learn how to renew in the secret and silence of our hearts, the miracle that once happened in Bethlem of Juda, where She was the privileged witness and actress. Our soul is His cradle. As one night,

“Heaven opened over this spot of earth, which men call a Stable; and from it, the first prayer, the first tear, the first sob of His Son, our Jesus, who thus began to prepare the world’s salvation, mounted to the Throne of the Eternal Father.”⁹

Then, our soul will become His place of delight, and we will never live anymore than through Him, in Him and with Him.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

⁴ Dom Joseph Gajard, *Les plus belles mélodies grégoriennes*, La Nativité du Seigneur – Les Matines. Translated with www.deepl.com.

⁵ Ps., II, 7. Midnight Mass, Introit.

⁶ Ps., CIX, 3. Midnight Mass, Communion.

⁷ Dom Delatte, *Commentary on the Rule of St Benedict*, Chp. XLVIII.

⁸ Dom Guéranger, *Liturgical Year*, Christmas, Midnight Mass.

⁹ Dom Guéranger, *Liturgical Year*, Christmas, Midnight Mass.