

# The Gospel Portrait Of Christ Our Lord

By Rev. John A. Phillips, S.J.

Australian Catholic Truth Society No.1685 (1976)

[This pamphlet is a living portrait of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It is solidly scriptural, written in simple, vivid sentences. It can serve as an effective introduction to deepen study while meeting the need of any ordinary reader. May we commend it to all secondary students? The author, Father John A. Phillips, S.J., is a scripture scholar. Presently he is the Director of the Central Catholic Library, Melbourne.] -THE EDITOR.

## INTRODUCTION

It is the purpose of these pages to study the way in which the Son of God expressed Himself through the human nature that He took from Mary.

Such a study will help us realize how very human our Lord was. Knowing Him better, we shall be drawn to imitate Him more closely. and to love Him more deeply.

Knowing that He was the Son of God, we naturally look on Him as perfect and sinless; but we may also regard Him, for that very reason, as rather unreal or remote. This feeling could set up a barrier between our Lord and ourselves, a barrier that should not exist. Jesus came into this world to teach us and to give us an example of the perfect human life, an example we are meant to follow.

But how can we imitate One so perfect? How can we find in this Man who was free from all fault the ideal we need? Is He not too far above us?

Christ our Lord is, indeed, far above us; but, as we shall see, He is also very near to us, and the wonderful perfection of His human character makes him the best of all models, because in Him every human being can find an ideal and a noble way of life. Some will do this in one way, some in another.

In approaching our study of our Lord, we must remember that the character described in these pages remains the character of Jesus Christ in His risen glory. Today there is the same Heart, the same great love, the same approachableness and the same responsiveness to the cry of human distress. But our Lord cannot give us all that He wants to give unless we ourselves want all that He has to give.

## I. THE MIND OF CHRIST OUR LORD

The education of a Jewish boy in our Lord's time was something very different by our standards. Ordinarily, he went to school only till he was twelve, and the instruction was largely religious in character. Higher education could be sought in special academies or at the schools for Scribes in Jerusalem. St. Paul had received an education of this kind (Acts 22:3).

We must assume that our Lord went to school at Nazareth. Of course the training given there would not have entitled Him to be regarded as an educated man, and the Jews realized this. "How does this man come by learning," they asked, "since He has not studied?" (Jn. 7:15). Nevertheless, it is the

thought and words of this Man that fill the four Gospels, although He did not write one word of them.

### He Spoke to Them in Parables

Our Lord's speech has a special character: it is filled with pictures. His comparisons and figures of speech have passed into our literature and have inspired many of the noblest achievements of our arts. To realize this, we have only to recall the parables of the Prodigal Son or the Good Shepherd, or to think of the way Jesus spoke of Himself: "I am the Light of the world"; "I am the true Vine."

Further, all these word-images and pictures that He created are designed to teach us something about spiritual realities - about things that we cannot see with our bodily eyes. To do this, our Lord took such simple things as the corn growing in the fields, the wildflowers on the hillside, the rain, even the sparrows. What He said of each was something readily grasped by the people who listened to Him - yet, at the same time, what He said went beyond the rain and the corn and the birds to some higher truth which He wished to convey to the minds of His hearers.

No one has ever equalled our Lord's delicacy of thought and expression: the sweep of His mind, His power of understanding all the thoughts and aspirations of mankind, the penetrating insight He had into what really matters. He was not deceived by appearances or led astray by prejudices. He did not accept the passing views and opinions of men on human life and the meaning of events. He knew the truth, and He spoke it boldly.

### Judgement on Sinners?

The Jews had a wrong idea of the Saviour who had been promised to them. They wanted a political saviour, a great military leader who would free their country from the Roman yoke, and our Lord knew that they would reject Him for not being that kind of saviour. Because they would reject Him, they would perish by the Roman sword in A.D. 70.

For example, some men came to Him and told Him about "the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices" (Lk. 13:1-3). Our Lord then asked "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they have suffered such things?" The Jews would have answered yes. Knowing the answer they would give, our Lord went straight on without waiting for a reply. "I tell you," He said, "no." Then He warned the Jews that, unless they changed their attitude to Him, they would perish in a similar fashion.

Our Lord then offered a further instance of what the Jews would have considered a judgement of God. He reminded His hearers of the eighteen men who were crushed to death when a tower fell down in Siloe. Were these eighteen men the greatest sinners in Jerusalem? "No," our Lord said, and again He went on to warn the Jews: "Unless you repent, you will all perish in the same manner" (Lk. 13:5).

We see our Lord, then, treating the misfortunes and accidents of life as no guide to a man's state of soul. His hearers should not continue to judge people by such occurrences. At the same time they should realize that they had good reason to be concerned about their own state of soul. If they persisted in their wrong attitude to Christ, they would bring upon themselves just the very kind of death that they regarded as a judgement of God.

There is something so characteristic about the way our Lord spoke that His words need no patent of copyright. One may succeed in making a parody of some saying of His, but one cannot create the

kind of thing He said. There is, really, nothing like His way of speech in all literature; for His words are not merely striking in a literary sense - they embody personal claims of an absolute nature.

"I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me does not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12). "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (Jn. 11:25). "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life" (Jn. 14:6) "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Mt. 16:24). "Come to Me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28). "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to Me" (Mt. 28:18). "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away" (Mt. 24:35).

### First Person Singular

The emphasis is on the first person. Generally we do not like anyone who makes frequent use of "I," "my," "me." Is it really being humble to stress the "I"? Well, we know that our Lord was truly humble. He came into this world to carry out His Father's plan for the redemption of mankind, and He always did His Father's will: "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him" (Jn. 8:29). If, then, He put emphasis on the "I," He was quite right in doing so. He was, in fact, the Light of the whole world, the Truth that men need to know, the only Way to the Father, the Life that every man must live if he is to find everlasting happiness. Our Lord knew all this and saw with perfect clarity that He mattered to every human being far more than anyone else could matter. Being Truth itself, He must face this fact and proclaim it. His words may be sweeping, His challenge may seem daring, but what He said was wholly true. No other man in all history has been able to face the world and say with perfect confidence: "Come to Me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28). No one else could say: "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to Me" (Mt. 28:18).

Our Lord made great claims, but He made them because they are true, and because they matter supremely to each one of us. In Him, therefore, greatness, humility, and charity are blended in the most wonderful way.

The superiority of our Lord's mind is clearly manifested in the various conflicts between Him and men who hated Him.

Among His opponents the Pharisees came first. They were a group who aimed at a thorough knowledge of the Law of Moses, interpreting it according to various traditions to which they attached great importance. Quite early in Christ's public ministry the Pharisees became critical of His teaching - first in their own minds, then openly. He denounced them for imposing unnecessary burdens on others by insisting on their "traditions," and also for perverting the true idea of religion, turning it into a merely external observance of the Law of Moses. When the Pharisees saw how the people flocked to listen to Him, their critical attitude grew into jealousy, and, in the end, their jealousy became hatred.

The Sadducees were a worldly-minded group who rejected the "traditions" of the Pharisees and wanted to keep on good terms with the Romans. From political motives they took sides against our Lord, and, with the co-operation of the Pharisees, planned His death (Jn. 11:47-53).

Thus, for their own reasons, both groups tried to discredit our Lord in the eyes of the people or to trap Him into saying something that they could use against Him.

### The Greatest Commandment?

The Pharisees attempted to discredit our Lord by putting to Him a question they thought He could not answer (Mt. 22:33-40). As they studied the Law of Moses so carefully, they often discussed which of all the different precepts in it was the most important. Some thought one thing, some another.

Now, if the learned men among the Jews could not decide which was the most important commandment in the Law of Moses, was it likely that a carpenter from Nazareth could solve the problem? The Pharisees did not think so. If, then, Jesus could not give an answer, the people would see that He was not so clever as they supposed. So an expert in the Law of Moses approached our Lord and, calling Him "Master," asked which was the great commandment in the Law.

Our Lord immediately replied by quoting from the Law (Mt. 22:37; cf. Dt. 6:5):

"You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole mind."

"This," our Lord continued, "is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second," He went on, "is like it,

"You shall love your neighbour as thyself."

No Jew would have denied that there is only one God, Creator of all things, Source of all we have and are. It should have been clear, then, that our first and most important duty is to love Him who made us, and since all that we are is God's work, we should love Him with our whole self - with all our heart and soul.

Once our Lord had said this, it seemed obvious. It might not be so obvious that our second greatest duty is to love our neighbour. But he, too, comes from the creating hands of the same Father, so we are all children of one great family and should live and behave as such.

### The Sadducees' Question

The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the body, but the Sadducees denied this doctrine. They thought that they could prove to our Lord that resurrection would lead to impossible situations, and so could not happen at all.

Some Sadducees came to Jesus with an argument based on an ancient law which said that, if a man died childless, his brother should marry his widow and raise up children to his name. The Sadducees claimed that through the operation of this law a certain woman had married no fewer than seven brothers in turn. "At the resurrection, therefore," they asked, "of which of the seven will she be the wife?" Thus, they implied, the doctrine of the resurrection leads to such absurdities that it cannot be true.

Our Lord attacked these Sadducees with vigour. "You err," He told them, "because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Mt. 22:29). He went on: "Those who shall be accounted worthy of that world and of the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor take wives. For neither shall they be able to die any more, for they are equal to the angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (Luke 20:35-36).

The Sadducees could make no answer to our Lord's attack on their great argument. They were reduced to silence.

Tribute to Caesar?

Let us now take an example of an attempt to trap our Lord and get Him into trouble, and let us see how He avoided the trap.

The whole thing was carefully planned by the Pharisees (Lk. 20:20). The men who were to put the catch-question were instructed to pretend that they were good and honest Jews who had a scruple of conscience about paying taxes to the Romans. Their idea was that the Jews, because they were God's Chosen People were not bound in conscience to pay taxes to their pagan conquerors.

The tools of the Pharisees tried to play their part well. "Master," they said, "we know that You are truthful, and that You teach the way of God in truth and You care nothing for any man; for You do not regard the person of men. Tell us, therefore, what do You think: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" (Mt. 22:16-17).

If our Lord said that it was not right to pay the tax, the Pharisees could denounce Him to the Roman authorities for encouraging rebellion. On the other hand, if He said it was right to pay the tribute money, they could then denounce Him to the nationalistic groups among the Jews and get Him into trouble that way. He must say either yes or no. What other answer could He give?

Our Lord's first reply was to denounce these men who were pretending to be troubled in conscience. "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites?" He asked (Mt. 22:18).

Whose Image?

Having torn away their mask, our Lord faced the Pharisees' problem. It was based on a misunderstanding. The Pharisees thought that the Saviour's kingdom would be a kind of Church - State, which would rule the rest of the world. But our Lord had not come to found a political kingdom, of whatever character. His Church was to be a religious body that would have to exist under various forms of government. Consequently, the members of His Church would have civil as well as religious duties.

"Show Me," He now said, "the coin of the tribute" (Mt. 22:19-22). They gave Him a coin, and He held it up for all to see. "Whose are this image and the inscription?" He asked. The particular type of coin with which the tax had to be paid was a Roman coin bearing the image of the emperor, and so the Pharisees could only reply to our Lord's question: "Caesar's." Handing the coin back, He said: "Render, therefore, to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

The Pharisees could not answer this. Probably they did not understand our Lord's full meaning, but they could see that He had not fallen into their trap, and they went away.

Every Jew would know, of course, that God's rights are supreme and that our first duty is to Him. Our Lord had made it clear that He was not going to institute a kingdom that would exercise political power. Such power would remain in the hands of the rulers of the various countries into which the Church would spread, and every good follower of His should also be a law-abiding citizen - insofar, of course, as state laws do not require him to act against God's law.

Stone Her?

One day in the Temple the Pharisees presented our Lord with a more involved problem. They brought to Him a woman who had violated the sixth commandment. 'You shall not commit adultery' There was no doubt about her guilt. According to the Law of Moses, she should be stoned to death. "What, therefore, do You say?" the Pharisees asked Christ (Jn. 8:2-5).

They were not interested in our Lord's view as such. What they wanted was to get Him into trouble somehow. If He said, "Yes, that is the Law, stone her," they could report Him to the Romans, who had forbidden the Jews to put anyone to death (Jn. 18:31). On the other hand, if He said, "No, you must not stone her," He could be accused of speaking against the Law of Moses. And, in any case, how could He show pity and compassion in such a case as this? The Pharisees must have felt that this time they had the perfect trap.

At first our Lord took no notice of the question. He was not an official Jewish judge. Why should the woman be brought to Him? Sitting there in the Temple court, He bent down and began to make marks in the dust with His finger.

But the Pharisees kept on asking, "What do You say?" Finally Jesus straightened up and looked at them. If they must have a reply, He would give one. He said: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her" (Jn. 8:7). Then He bent down again and continued making marks in the dust.

One by one the Pharisees turned and walked away. When Jesus looked up again, they were all gone. "Where are they?" He said to the woman. "Has no one condemned you?" "No one, Lord," she answered. "Neither will I condemn you," said Jesus. "Go your way, and from now on sin no more" (Jn. 8:10-11).

Our Lord had not said anything against the Law of Moses. Nor could any accusation against Him be carried to the Romans. He had, indeed, shown Himself merciful and compassionate, but to a repentant sinner whom He warned to sin no more. He who had come to save sinners had done His work, and in doing it He had brought out the fact that, on the private and personal plane, we have no right to play the judge. \* [\* Footnote: We may form a prudent judgement on the morality of another's act, but we have no right to judge the person.] There is only One who has that right - He who is Himself sinless. Jesus, sinless and all-holy, could judge if He wished. He forgave.

By What Authority?

Let us examine an instance now in which it was Jesus who put the awkward question. This time there will be no answer. On the Monday of Holy Week, our Lord drove the dealers and money-changers out of the Temple (Mt. 21:12-13). The next day, while He was teaching there (Mt. 21:23), the Jewish authorities came to Him. They were furious, not only because they made money out of renting the booths and stalls to the dealers, but also because they regarded Christ's action as unjustified interference in their official domain. They demanded that He tell them by what authority He did these things. Who gave Him such authority?

Our Lord responded calmly. He would first, He said, ask them something. If they answered His question, then He would answer theirs. The question He put was about the baptism that John had been giving. Did John baptize people because he personally thought it was a good idea, or did he do it because God inspired him to do it?

The Temple authorities began to discuss the question among themselves. They realized that, if they admitted that John was a prophet acting under God's direction, Jesus would want to know why they did not believe John when he declared that He, Jesus, was the Son of God (Jn. 1:34). On the other hand, the authorities could not say that John was not a prophet, because the people all regarded him as one, and might become dangerous in their anger if any denial were made of John's God-given mission.

What, then, could they say? Only: "We do not know." And as they had not answered His question, Jesus turned away, saying that He would not answer theirs; "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things" (Mt. 21:27). Their refusal to answer our Lord's question brought out their insincerity; and since they were not sincere, it was useless for Him to tell them that He had every right as the Son of God to take action in His Father's House, the Temple.

#### A Good Debater?

If we are to learn to understand our Lord better from this study of His encounters with the hostile Pharisees and Sadducees, we should note, first of all, that He did not make "debating points." His replies went far beyond the clever answer of a good debater. On every such occasion, He brought out some great truth or determined some fundamental principle. His solutions of the problems put to Him are valid guides for all time. He showed that our first duty is to God, our second to our fellow men. His Church would be an independent religious body existing within the framework of political bodies. We are not to judge man's future state in an eternal world by what happens among mortal men. If we are to learn the truth we must be rightly disposed, honest and sincere, willing to accept the truth because it is the truth.

Our Lord's way of dealing with the Pharisees who wanted the sinful woman stoned was not, of course, a guide for official judges in courts of law. Neither He nor the Pharisees in question were appointed instruments of the law. What He wanted to bring out on this occasion was the fact that laws deal with external and visible actions, while He Himself was preaching a doctrine that penetrates into the very heart of man and searches his inmost soul.

We may note also that our Lord never used His superiority to exult over the discomfiture of an opponent; yet on every occasion He showed Himself the master of clever men and gave them an answer that none could rebut, and none could have foreseen. No one would have even dimly guessed His line of reply.

No wonder, then, that the people marvelled at our Lord's teaching (Mt. 7:28; Lk. 4:22), and at His replies (Mt. 22:33; Mk. 12:32).

#### "One is your Master"

Our Lord is our Teacher. "Only one," He told the Apostles, "is your Master, the Christ" (Mt. 23:10). And again: "You call Me Master and Lord, and you say well, for so I am" (Jn. 13:13).

That is why, on Mount Tabor, the Father spoke the great words from heaven: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear Him" (Mt. 17:5). That is, He is the Revelation of the Father (Jn. 1:13), so we must heed and accept all that He tells us. He is the Truth that we all need to know; for He is our Way to the Father, He is the Life we must live by (Jn. 14:6).

Christ our Lord is the Revelation of God, and in revealing God to us He has revealed Himself. "No one," St. John tells us, "has at any time seen God. The only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has revealed Him" (1:18). Because He is Son, our Lord is "the brightness of His [the Father's] glory and the image of His substance" (Heb. 1:3). Hence our Lord Himself declared: "No one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and him to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him" (Mt. 11:27).

Through our Lord, then, we learn the ways of God - His love, His power, His providence, His pity, and His desire for the love of every human heart. God is the Almighty to whom "all things are

possible" (Mt. 19:26). He is holy in an absolute sense, so that Christ could say: "One there is who is good, and He is God" (Mt. 19:17). That is, God is Goodness itself and the Source of all created goodness, so that independently of Him there cannot be anything that is truly good. Men must adore and serve this supremely good and holy God. This is God's right and man's duty. "Begone, Satan!" our Lord said to the tempter. "It is written, 'The Lord your God shall you worship, and Him only shall you serve' " (Mt. 4:10). It follows that the first and greatest commandment is to love God with all our power (Mt. 22:37-38). If we are so unfortunate as to lose God, we lose everything (Lk. 12:4-5).

### Who Shall See God?

God loves the humble, our Lord said, and He reveals His secrets to those who think little of themselves (Mt. 11:25). Again and again, in various ways, Jesus made it clear that it is the heart of a man that matters, not his external appearance nor even his apparently good actions. A man may appear very religious outwardly and yet not be so pleasing to God as some poor fellow who beats his breast and pleads for God's mercy. That was the point of our Lord's parable about the Pharisee and the Publican (Lk. 18:9-14). Our Lord assures us that it is the childlike person who will find his way into the kingdom of God (Mt. 18:3). The man whose heart is free will see God - that is, the man of single mind, who does not devote himself to getting all he wants in this world and thinks that he can still love and please God, too (Mt. 5:8). Unless the human heart is set on God, the prayer of the lips is vain (Mt. 15:7-11). If, on the other hand, we trust in God, everything that we need for our salvation will be given to us: "Ask, and it shall be given to you" (Lk. 11:9).

Our Lord went so far as to say that we should not even worry; for God has care of us (Lk. 12:22-27).

God's providence is supreme; for no one, no power on earth, can snatch Christ's faithful followers out of His hand or out of the hand of His Father (Jn. 10:28-29).

All this may give us some idea of the ways in which Jesus revealed God to us, and from it we can understand something of what we might call His practice of religion, His spiritual life. As man, our Lord revered the Father in just those ways that He teaches us to do. We should notice how His whole bearing is that of a beloved and only son, profoundly and spontaneously reverent. He invites us to love and serve God as Him who is truly our Father.

Both in what He reveals to us of the Father, and in His own attitude, our Lord manifests the richness and depth of His thought and feeling. His whole concern is with God and our relation to Him. Nothing else matters. His attitude is summed up in the prayer He taught His disciples (Mt. 6:9-10), the "Our Father".

Thus, in revealing God's ways to us, our Lord revealed Himself. This self-revelation can be seen clearly in His intercourse with His Father - in His prayer.

"Father,..."

The first thing that we notice about our Lord's prayer is, I think, the fact that it is so simple and direct. He did not look to any mediator between Himself and His Father. Rather, He spoke to the Father as to One with whom He was on terms of perfect intimacy:

"I praise you, Father,..." (Mt. 11:25);

"Father, if you are willing,..." (Lk. 22:42);

"Father, save Me from this hour..." (Jn. 12:27);  
"Father, glorify your name..." (Jn. 12:28);  
"Father, forgive them..." (Lk. 23:34); and so on.

So constantly, so naturally, did our Lord pray that we may say that He led a life of prayer. There was no place, no circumstance, in which His heart could not immediately pour itself out in trustful and loving prayer to His Father. He prayed on the lonely hillside or in the midst of a great crowd, in the noisy Temple courts or in the peaceful spaces of a private garden, walking by the side of a river or in the quiet of a closed room. He would rise early in the morning to pray, and sometimes His evening prayer would be continued far into the night or even to the dawn of another day (Mk. 1:35; Mt. 14:23; Lk. 6:12).

Jesus began His public life with prayer: "It came to pass..., Jesus also having been baptized and being in prayer, that heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form as a dove" (Lk. 3:21). He also ended His life in prayer, breathing forth His soul on Calvary with these words: "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit" (Lk. 23:46). St. Luke goes on: "And having said this, He expired." On Tabor, Christ was transfigured while He prayed (Lk. 9:29), and in the Agony in the Garden of Gethsemani He prayed repeatedly (Mt. 26:29, 42, 44). So impressive was His constant recourse to prayer that His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray. It was then that He taught them the Our Father (Lk. 11:1-4).

### The Unfallen Man

All this we can understand. But there was also something about our Lord's prayer that sets Him apart from us. We beg God to have mercy on us and to forgive us our sins. But Jesus never expressed any request for pardon, any plea for mercy or forgiveness. In His prayer there is no trace of regret, remorse, or sorrow for faults. He conducted Himself before God as one who is already perfect, who already possesses that absolute purity which is the goal of the spiritual life in its perfection. He never asked to make progress. In His prayer there was no request or desire for greater perfection. Already He had everything. He urged others to repentance, He bade others "sin no more"; but He Himself felt no need of repentance, no consciousness of anything amiss in His whole life. He warned others to take care and be on their guard, but He behaved as one who was perfectly secure and beyond the reach of evil.

Another remarkable thing about our Lord's prayer is that it was so ordinary. There is nothing in the Gospels to indicate any unusual state of soul. Always our Lord was perfectly Himself, in complete possession at all times of His powers and faculties. Nevertheless, He moves through the Gospel pages as one who was also completely human. He experienced hunger and thirst, and He knew what it was to be tired out. Ingratitude hurt Him as it hurts us. He felt compassion for the poor and needy, and He came to their aid. The sorrows of men touched His heart, and He mingled His tears with ours.

### Model and Master

Thus, this truly human Man lived a wonderful life of constant prayer in the conscious presence of God, and His example is a lesson and model to us. His prayer is the direct and simple intercourse of Son with Father. Here, too, we can learn from our study of our Lord. Knowing and understanding better the wonder that came into the world when the Son of God took our flesh from a human Mother, we can grow in appreciation and love of our Lord and Master. It is this admiring love that impels us to shape our lives according to His teaching and example.

## II THE HEART OF CHRIST OUR LORD

Having considered our Lord's powers of mind and His life of prayer, let us turn now to His sentiments or emotions and His appreciation of nature and of the world around Him.

The soul of Jesus was always at peace. No trouble, anxiety, or emotion ever crossed it independently of His will. Calm, unhesitating, never embarrassed, He pursued His way in tranquillity of soul and sentiment. There was no undue eagerness or haste, no impatience - except to suffer for us (Lk. 12:50). Enemies surrounded Him and spied upon Him. They sought to catch Him in carefully planned traps or to embarrass Him by awkward questions. Yet we see Him always Master of Himself, as He was Master of those that hated Him. His soul remained untroubled, serene, at peace.

When the Apostles were afraid in the storm on the Lake of Galilee, Jesus was asleep in the boat. The Apostles awoke Him, and He rebuked them for their fear and want of faith. Then, and only then, for His disciples' sake, without concern or haste, He bade the waves be still (Mt. 8:26).

The devils, acting through people whom they possessed, interrupted our Lord's discourses: "What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are - the Holy One of God" (Mk. 1: 24). The Pharisees, the Scribes, experts in the Law of Moses, even the people themselves, interrupted our Lord and insulted Him: "This man blasphemes" (Mt. 9:3); "You have a devil" (Jn. 7:20); "Master, in saying these things, You insult us also" (Lk. 11:45). On one occasion a crowd in Jerusalem picked up stones to cast at Him (Jn. 8:59); His own townsfolk took Him to the top of a cliff with the intention of hurling Him over (Lk. 4:29). Yet neither insult or threat made Him lose His composure. When He said to His disciples, "Let us go again into Judea," they answered: "Rabbi, just now the Jews were seeking to stone You; and do You go there again?" (Jn. 11:7-8). Jesus did go back, deliberately. To the rabble that came out to the Garden of Gethsemani to arrest Him, He said, "Whom do you seek?" When they replied, "Jesus of Nazareth," He calmly told them: "I am He" (Jn 18:4, 5). When Pilate threatened Him, Jesus warned him: "You would have no power at all over Me were it not given you from above" (Jn. 19:11).

We see, then, that there never appears in the soul of Jesus any emotion or agitation that we could liken in any way to disorder or imperfection, and we must conclude that if He showed distress in the Garden of Gethsemani, it was because He let that distress come upon Him. Freely, and for our sakes, He underwent pain and sorrow of soul: "My soul is sad, even unto death" (Mt. 26:38).

"Woe to you, hypocrites!"

The serenity of the soul of Jesus did not exclude indignation at what was wrong. He hated all sham and hypocrisy and insincerity - every form of pretence. He loathed especially insincerity in religion, in the worship of God, and when He met it He flayed it without mercy. So completely and transparently sincere Himself, He could not bear falseness in others.

Those that called down our Lord's severest condemnation were the Pharisees, who set themselves up as models of religious behaviour and looked for the esteem and respect of others. Jesus condemned them because their religion was only an external thing and not an expression of the attitude a man should have in his heart and soul toward God.

"Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" Christ said, "because you pay tithes on mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the Law, right judgement and mercy and faith" (Mt. 23:23). That is, the Pharisees paid to the Temple a tenth part of even the

smallest herbs, but they failed to observe what was much more important in the Law, the practice of the social virtues. "Woe to you," He said to them again, "because you clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but within they are full of robbery and uncleanness. You blind Pharisee! clean first the inside of the cup and of the dish, that the outside too may be clean" (Mt. 23:25-26). The cleanliness in outward things should be an expression of one's purity of heart. "You also outwardly appear just to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (Mt. 23:28).

These, and other denunciations that St. Matthew records in chapter 23, show us how much our Lord esteemed sincerity in the practice of religion, and they are a testimony to His own utter sincerity and complete detachment from all self-interest.

### The World around Us

As far as nature is concerned, our Lord was deeply sensible of the world around Him, its details and its beauty. He watched the reeds on the Jordan banks swaying at the touch of every breeze (Mt. 18:8) ; He listened to the sighing of the wind in the eaves of the house (Jn. 3:8): "The wind blows where it will, and you hear its sound," He said to Nicodemus. The colour of the evening sky had a meaning for Him, and He could read the indications of a coming storm (Mt. 16:2-3). He saw wheat growing in the fields - "first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear" (Mk. 4:29). The fields white for the harvest caught His eye, and He told His Apostles to pray that labourers might be sent to gather in the harvest (Jn. 4:35; Lk. 10:2). He knew how men were engaged for work in the vineyards, and that the most trying period of work was the middle of the day (Mt. 20:1-16). Our Lord even showed a detailed knowledge of the difficulties the farmer had to contend with. This appears in the parable of the Sower. (Mt. 13:4-9).

All this mirrors conditions in the Palestine of that time. The tilled lands were not fenced in, and people took the shortest way home, so that beaten tracks ran through the fields. Seed falling on this hard ground could not sink in, and became the spoil of the wild birds. Or a bed of rock may lie close under a film of soil. Seed falling there springs up quickly, because of the moisture and the warmth caught on this surface. But the moisture is soon dried up as the sun becomes hot, and the seed cannot thrust its roots deeper to get more moisture since the rock prevents it; so it withers away. Again, thorns grow quicker than grain, so they outstrip it and kill it.

Our Lord had also watched the fishermen at work. He saw them cast their net and draw it in full of fish. Then they would sort the catch, keeping the good fish for eating or sale, and throwing away those that were useless (Mt. 13:47-48). He knew how a shepherd would leave his flock in a safe place while he went to search for a missing sheep (Mt. 18:12). He understood what a glass of water meant in hot and dusty Palestine (Mt. 10:42).

The glorious wildflowers on the Galilean hills caught His eye (Mt. 6:28-30). He had watched the farmer plowing his field and looking steadfastly ahead so as to keep the furrow straight (Lk. 9:62).

### The World of Men

Just as He observed the world of nature, and the homely crafts of men in winning a living from flocks and soil, so, too, our Lord took note of what went on in city and town and home.

Rich men would send out invitations to a banquet, and sometimes the invitation would not be appreciated and excuses would be found for not attending (Mt. 22:1-13). A rich man would have a steward or overseer to manage his estate and household; one in such a position might prove dishonest (Lk. 16:1-8), while another would know his duty and do it (Lk. 12:42-45). A type of rich

man would be tempted to enjoy his riches - one of those who "used to clothe himself in purple and fine linen, and who feasted every day in splendid fashion" (Lk. 16:19), while at his very gate a beggar might be dying of hunger (Lk. 20, 22).

The poor cannot afford extravagance but must look after everything carefully, because they have little. So they patch a garment with a suitable piece of material, in order that the patch may last (Mt. 9:16). Nor do they put new wine in old wineskins, because the fermentation would burst the worn skins and both wine and container would be lost (Mt. 9:17). And we like to think that our Lord had often watched His Blessed Mother making bread, and that this was the source of the apt simile: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and buried in three measures of flour, until all of it was leavened" (Mt. 13:33).

There are many other indications in the Gospels of how closely our Lord observed the world around Him. Perhaps one of the most striking is His little story about children sulking when they should be playing. He said that the Jews of His time reminded Him of such children.

Some of the children wanted to play either at having a marriage procession, or at having a funeral; while the rest peevishly held aloof from both games, the gay and the solemn (Mt. 11:16-17).

We see, then, that this Man of such great powers of mind, so able to deal with adversaries, this Man who lived in constant, direct converse with His heavenly Father, was also One who knew human life thoroughly in its every aspect.

Everything that our Lord said about the world around us and about human behaviour was said for the sake of conveying some spiritual lesson; but, at the same time, it shows us that this Person who came from another world took His place in our own world and saw and understood it all. Truly God, He was also truly one of us. His eye was caught by the loveliness of a flower, as ours are. His ear took in the varied notes of the wind's voice, as ours do. He was interested in human behaviour, even in the details of daily life, household chores included. Most of all, He was interested in the hearts of men, whether or not they really recognize His Father as Lord of all. He saw that as the great problem in every human life, and since we tend to forget that our Lord came into this world to win us to a happy eternity in His own home, He used every means to make this fundamental fact clear to us.

### III. THE WILL OF CHRIST OUR LORD

Having studied our Lord's powers of mind and His sentiments and feelings, we may turn now to consider the perfection of His heart and will. It is by the mind that we know and understand. The will is the power of doing things. It is the power of loving or hating, of seeking or rejecting. It is in the will, therefore, that virtue or vice are found. We merit or we sin through the free decisions of the will.

We might say, of course, that when we come to study the Son of God, we would expect Him to be perfect, free of all sin, and possessed of all the virtues. And that was indeed the case. But the mere stating of the fact does not make a great impression on us. The aim of these pages is to try to see how completely Christ our Lord was free of all sin and imperfection, and how far His virtues went. In this way we may come to a deeper understanding of Him and a better appreciation of His moral greatness.

When we examine the life of Christ, we find not only that He was free from sin but that He was quite conscious of the fact and even used it as an argument. To some of those Jews who were

opposed to His teaching He said: "Which of you can convict Me of sin?" (Jn. 8:46). And he could say this though He knew that these jealous men watched Him closely to find something that they could use against Him. They did not find it. There was no answer to that extraordinary challenge. There never has been an answer. Christ stands alone, the only truly perfect Man. ,

Why did our Lord claim this freedom from sin? For the sake of His teaching. He came into the world to tell men what God wants of them, what He wishes them to do; and men might well ask what right He had to assert so definitely that what He said was the will of God for us. He showed that He had such a right by working miracles, but He also put Himself forward as a proof. That is, He offered His own way of life, entirely in accordance with the will of His Father, as a proof that He came from God. One who lived as God wants men to live could not lead men astray into error and sin. So, when Jesus said He was sinless, He had an excellent reason for making the claim. It was not boasting - it was the simple statement of a wonderful and most significant fact.

### The Unselfish Man

The moral perfection of our Lord's character is revealed in various ways. We find that He was fair and just. That is, while He condemned the wicked and malicious, He also praised the good and those who sought to do what was right. He was strong - He bore patiently the hostility of His enemies, their insults and abuse. He accepted and endured not only hunger and thirst, hard work and long journeys on foot, but also pain and suffering beyond the experience of other men. But perhaps what strikes us most is His complete lack of consideration for Himself. He was wholly free of all traces of selfishness and declared that He had come into the world to sacrifice Himself for others: "The Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:28). On another occasion He said: "Greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:14). And He made it clear that He was going to do just that. He would give His life in sacrifice to redeem and save us.

### The Balanced Character

There was nothing missing from our Lord's character. There was no weakness, no overbearing strength in any direction. One virtue completed another, and all worked together in perfect harmony. The strength and resolution of His character was counterbalanced by simplicity, kindness, gentleness, and deep sympathy. Yet His gentleness did not degenerate into weakness or indulgence. He never repelled the sinner who came to Him in sorrow, yet He never approved of evil or failed to make it clear that sin is deeply wrong. There was a certain austerity about His life - His needs were few and simple. Nevertheless He could take His place at a banquet or attend a wedding feast. Perhaps most significant of all is the fact that little children ran to Him, and He took them in His arms.

Our Lord's powers of mind, as we have seen, were of the highest order, yet we do not find Him making a display of His ability or knowledge. When He evaded the traps set for Him by His enemies, He did not exult over their discomfiture. He never gloried in His superiority. Rather, He sought the company of the poor and the ignorant, and He mingled so naturally with these people that they did not feel that He was condescending toward them.

When Jesus was faced with a difficulty, He did not accept a compromise. As we saw in His conflicts with the Pharisees, He went beneath the question at issue and brought out what was involved. He worked hard to establish His kingdom, and He prayed for it far into the night; nevertheless we do not find in Him any fearfulness about the future, any anxiety, even, about the morrow.

Jesus was a Man who loved solitude, but He went about among men and mixed freely with all classes and types. His love for human souls went to the supreme limit of self-sacrifice, and yet He could thank His Father for hiding His mysteries from men who were satisfied with their own ideas and did not want to learn the truth that He, God's Son, had brought into the world.

It is clear that Christ our Lord did not live or move or think in an unreal world. He knew the world and its ways, yet He was not of it. The world finds Him disconcerting because He recalls all men to their duty. He demands that we should recognize the fact that we owe complete obedience to our Father in heaven. Nothing else is reasonable. No other way of acting is real. Jesus Christ is also disconcerting to the world because He put Himself forward as the only hope of the world, as the only way to the Father. He could not do otherwise, because that is the fact. Nevertheless, we find that at the same time He effaced Himself and accepted entirely the Father's plan for the redemption of the world - a plan that involved so much suffering and sorrow for Himself. He knew that He was all that really matters to men, yet the Father's will was the very food of His soul: "I have to eat of which you do not know" (Jn. 4:32).

"Come to Me..."

The perfection and balance of our Lord's character revealed itself in many ways. All classes of people came to Him - fishermen, soldiers, civil and military officials, business men, students, cripples, beggars, lepers - and He could get on with them all. Women left home to follow Him at a distance and to minister to His needs out of their own resources (Lk. 8:3). The secret was His approachability and His manifest compassion.

When the people were so amazed at His miracles in raising the dead to life that they could not move, He thought of the needs of those He had brought back to life. He told the stupefied parents of the little girl He had just restored to them, to give her something to eat (Mk. 5:43). Lazarus was standing before the tomb, bound hand and foot with the grave clothes. "Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go' " (Jn. 11: 44). Lest the multitudes should faint on the way home, He would not dismiss them without first providing food for them (Mt. 15:32). When many sick people were brought to Him to be healed, He did not cure them with a word or with a sweeping gesture. No; He went around and laid His hands on every one of them. His interest in each of these poor people was PERSONAL. Moved by the sorrow of Martha and Mary, "Jesus wept" (Jn. 11:35). He appreciated courtesy, just as we do, and He was hurt when men showed themselves ungrateful (Lk. 17:17).

Jesus could be severe, but His severity was reserved for hypocrites - for those who pretended to be good and holy men when they were not really such. That very severity shows us how wonderfully sincere He was, how genuine, so to say. He was a Man who could be trusted absolutely.

#### What We Are Not Told

The Gospels tell us what our Lord said and did, but they do not say explicitly that there were certain things He did not say or do. We have to gather from the silence of the Evangelists and from our general knowledge of Himself the fact that this very human Man was entirely free from certain very human weaknesses. Perhaps the most significant of these signs is the fact that He never sneered at anyone. It is so easy, so human, to say "I would not do that! " Yet, although Jesus was sinless and knew quite well that He was sinless, He never looked down on another. Nowhere in all the Gospels is there a single trace of contempt. He mocked no one. He did not ridicule or scorn anyone. Certain ones He did denounce, with a severity terrible even on the printed page; but He always did this in a direct way, for a definite reason. For example, He condemned them for not

believing when all the evidence they needed had been offered to them. He rebuked them for sinning against the light that shone in their midst. He reproved their craving for honour and recognition, and He named the various forms of injustice of which they were guilty. So Jesus condemned these men, but He never sneered at them or belittled them.

Again, there was in our Lord no cynicism - He never lost faith in human nature, although no man ever had more cause to do so. For three years He had taught the Jews His sublime doctrine, explaining to them the way of salvation. He had cured their sick, fed their hungry, healed their crippled, and even raised their dead to life. Patiently, He had borne insult and injury, always trying to bring His hearers to see the truth. Yet, in the end, the Jews rejected Him and forced Pilate to condemn Him to a criminal's death. And as He hung there on the cross, the crowd taunted Him, deriding His claims and challenging Him to save Himself: "He saved others, Himself He cannot save!" (Mt. 27:42). Yet He prayed for all with tender pleading: "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk. 23:34).

Our Lord never spoke an idle word - a word of no benefit to anyone. He never apologized for Himself or for His teaching - men must simply take Him for what He was. The Gospels nowhere record that He ever asked for time to think things over or that He withdrew anything He ever said. There is no hint of uncertainty anywhere in all His teaching. He never expressed doubt, He never hesitated, He was never at a loss. When some of the Temple guards were sent to arrest Him, they returned empty-handed. "Why have you not brought Him?" their masters asked. The guards could only answer: "Never has man spoken as this Man" (Jn. 7:46). It was a strange reply to give for failing to carry out orders, but it was the simple truth about our Saviour. No one has ever spoken to mankind as He spoke.

#### IV. FILLING OUT THE PORTRAIT

In the preceding pages an attempt is made to throw some light on various aspects of our Lord's character. Details can still be added to make the portrait more clear.

One of the most remarkable things about our Lord's character is its directness and simplicity. Every word meets the occasion or the circumstances. He does not talk above the heads of His listeners; to critics He could give a reply that was beyond them; but when the Apostles asked our Lord to explain something that He had said, He always gave an explanation.

Indeed, we find that His general practice was to give His hearers as much as would benefit them and that his approach was always determined by the attitude of the person or people with whom He was dealing. The power of adaptation is rare among men, and our Lord's was extraordinary, so exactly and consistently did He meet the needs or the deficiencies of the human beings whom He encountered.

#### "My Father's Will"

Not only was Christ's manner simple and direct; His own life had a wonderful simplicity. Our Lord's whole life in this world was ruled by a single principle. "I seek not My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (Jn. 5:30). This rule of action affected all that He did (Jn. 8:29), and because of it His life attained a marvellous unity.

Human nature tends to waver and hesitate, to vary and change. Christ our Lord showed no doubt or hesitation. He was always sure of Himself. If He seems to change, we find on examination that it is because the circumstances have changed. In other men self-confidence can be pride or selfishness

or mere foolishness. Jesus of Nazareth was most realistic in His understanding of men and of the world. He was most unselfish, courteous, and considerate. Although He spoke so much of Himself and gave Himself the central role in the drama of the world's history, He did so because it was the will of Another - His Father.

This surrender of His own will to the will of the Father was the basic fact in our Lord's practice of religion, but it was by no means the whole content of His religion. His approach to God, if we may so call it, was one of delicate tenderness. We reach out to God, seeking to know and understand Someone far beyond us. For Jesus, the gap between man and God did not exist. If we try to find some kind of comparison from our own experience, the best we can think of is the behaviour of a very loving and devoted son toward an equally good and loving father. There is no conflict or friction, because each understands the other perfectly, and the son has no other ambition than to please his father. But once we begin to develop such a comparison, we realize that we are going beyond our human experience and painting an ideal picture. Yet that ideal was realized by one Man who lived a human life among us in this world. He did not evade the difficulties of life by working miracles in His own behalf. Rather, He accepted our human limitations and shouldered the burden of daily life, just as His Father wanted Him to do.

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild"?

In their endeavour to convey an idea of goodness and gentleness, many portrayals of our Lord suggest a lack of real strength in Him. We know that strength is necessary to the complete character of a human being. Hence we look for it in our Lord, and we find it. He appreciated the rugged strength of St. John the Baptist, who did not go about dressed in soft garments, who was not shaken by every wind that blows (Mt. 11:7-8). Time and again we see Christ faced by a hostile crowd, slipping away only when His life was threatened, because His hour had not yet come. Twice He drove a horde of dealers from His Father's House (Jn. 2:13-17; Mk. 11:15-17). There was nothing spineless or hesitant about Jesus of Nazareth. He faced the world with a personal challenge and said that on Himself the stream of humanity would split and divide. His claims were, and are, absolute.

It is true, as G. K. Chesterton once pointed out, that "The mass of the poor are broken and the mass of the people are poor, and for the mass of mankind the main thing is to carry the conviction of the incredible compassion of God." But if we overlook altogether the strength of Christ, we cannot appreciate the perfection of His character; one without strength lacks an essential of the perfect character.

"Jesus wept"

Our Lord's strength of character is counterbalanced by a wide and deep sympathy. Jesus saw not only the ordinary virtues and weaknesses of mankind; He penetrated into the deepest motives, good and bad, that drive men on to action. So complete was His understanding of mankind that He himself has become timeless.

It is not merely that our Lord saw all this with His mind. Our needs touched His heart. Seeing human grief, "Jesus wept" (Jn. 11:34), mingling His own tears with the streams of human sorrow that pour down the centuries. The fate that obstinate Jerusalem would bring upon herself also drew tears from His eyes (Lk. 19:41); and on the way to Calvary, in His own great pain, He could think of what would come upon others: "Do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and your children" (Lk. 23:28).

Our Lord's sympathy with us and with all our forms of sorrow is shown most clearly in His agony in the Garden of Gethsemani. Not that He had to suffer all that, but He wanted to suffer what we suffer, as far as He could, and we may say that in a way His agony included all the sorrows of the world. By taking our human nature the Son of God became a member of a fallen race, where "all heads droop and all hearts are broken." Christ our Lord was a man, and He wanted to suffer what we suffer - fear and loneliness, dread and apprehension, shrinking from pain and suffering and death; to bear all this that we might kneel beside Him in our own anguish of soul and there find strength and courage. He did not come to teach us to bear pain and sorrow stoically. Rather, the ideal that He set before us is to triumph over our human weakness through the grace of God. And so He showed us the way.

---