

# The Happiness Of Being A Catholic

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WHEN we call to mind the many gifts and benefits for which we have to thank God, it is only right that the principal place among them should be given to the fact that He has made us Catholics. In calling us of His pure mercy to be members of His worldwide family, the Church, God has given us a grace of so great value that, if we could but appreciate it at its true worth, we should find in it alone motives for boundless gratitude.

At a time when everything seems to warn us of the approaching end if not of the world at least of a world, since so much of what we have been accustomed to look upon as final and unalterable is now either being transformed or crumbling to pieces, no happiness can equal his who is secure in his reliance on that Church against which not even the gates of hell can prevail. (See Matthew 16:18) Now, as at all the great turning-points of history, the Church is suffering in the persons of her members, because the spirit of evil is working everywhere with a peculiar energy; but in the midst of searching trials she remains very much alive, to pursue unremittingly the task committed to her of giving to all who do not refuse to accept them, the commandments of Christ, which are the Way, the doctrine of Christ, which is the Truth, and the grace of Christ, which is the Life.

There are many pressing anxieties which preoccupy our minds and weigh upon them; but without in any sense overlooking either the blessings which recent progress in the arts and sciences has in some respects brought us, or the evils which are at once a blot on our civilization and a menace to its continued existence, it will be worth our while to consider for a moment the incomparable happiness which is ours, in time and in eternity, as children of the Catholic Church.

We are happy to be Catholics, in the first place, because the Church safeguards and explains to us the Word of God contained in the Old and New Testaments — the whole Word of God, which was the trust committed to her charge by Jesus Christ, her Founder. The Church exists to proclaim to the world the divine revelation made to mankind first by Jesus Christ and then by the apostles. The duty of the Church is to preserve this revelation in all its purity, and to explain it unerringly. As the Council of the Vatican of 1870 says, ‘The Holy Spirit was not promised to the successors of Saint Peter in order that by His inspiration they might reveal some new doctrine, but that by His assistance they might keep uncontaminated the deposit of faith transmitted through the apostles, and expound it faithfully.’

The Church is not, and does not claim to set herself, above the Word of God; those who charge her with any such pretensions give proof of an ignorance for which there is very little excuse. For already Saint Francis de Sales, replying to one such objector, has remarked that it is not Holy Scripture that needs to have light thrown upon it by the Church, but rather the many human interpretations, explanations and commentaries upon Scripture. It is not a question of whether God understands Scripture better than we, but of whether the adversaries of the Church, ancient or modern, understand it better than the Pontiffs and Fathers of the Church, who represent the authentic Christian tradition. Bossuet makes precisely the same distinction: ‘We do not say,’ he

writes, 'that it is for the Church to judge the Word of God; but we do assert that it is for her to judge the various interpretations that men have put upon the Word of God.'

The Church, it need scarcely be said, has never kept the Bible concealed from her children. She gives them all the best and most essential passages of it in the text of her liturgy, in the books of her theologians, and in the works of her artists. She encourages the faithful to read it, provided that they use duly authorised editions, with such notes as may be necessary to explain difficult passages. Saint Peter himself, as we read in the New Testament, remarks that the epistles of Saint Paul contain 'certain things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction.' (2 Peter 3:15-16.)

We therefore thank God for the authoritative teaching of the Church, which has kept intact all the inspired books, without sacrificing a syllable to satisfy human caprice, and has kept also the true meaning of their contents, without having to be continually searching for some interpretation which will be acceptable to the minds of the newest generation. Thanks to her, therefore, we are not 'children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine,' but, rich in the possession of the truth, we can grow continually in charity, in union with 'Him who is the head, even Christ.' (Eph. 4:14-15.)

Christ is our Head; and He alone is necessary to us. He is the centre of all things, and the sole end of the Church's teaching is to give Him to us. Her essential task, towards which all her instructions, all her prohibitions and commands are directed, is to bring us into contact with Christ — with the Person of Christ known in His divinity and His humanity, with the grace of Christ, which the sacraments produce in our souls, with the friends of Christ, His blessed Mother and the Saints, with the supreme power of Christ, delegated to His apostles and their successors, with the suffering members of Christ, in whose persons, as they pass us by labouring under their crosses, we recognise the likeness, though sometimes disfigured, of Christ Himself.

We are happy to be Catholics because the Church is in a true sense the guardian of Christ Himself.

Recall for a moment the scene which Saint Matthew describes for us in the sixteenth chapter of his Gospel. Far from Galilee, which He will not see again till He passes through it to go and die in Jerusalem, Our Lord is on His way to Caesarea Philippi, and is traversing lonely villages, which do not know Him, nor show any interest in Him as he converses with His disciples. At a certain point He asks them, 'Whom do men say that the Son of Man is?' 'Some John the Baptist, and others Elias (Elijah), and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets,' is the answer. 'And whom do you say that I am?' Our Lord asks, and Simon, answering in the name of all, says: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' 'Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah,' Our Lord replies, 'because flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but my Father, who is in heaven. And I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.'

Certain Popes have been accused of many weaknesses, many crimes even. That in a number of cases the charges are well founded we admit; and the enemies of the Church are welcome to what matter for rejoicing they may find in the admission. But the Roman Pontiffs have one glory, their title to which no one in the whole course of history has ever dared to dispute — the glory of having always safeguarded, of having preached consistently and uncompromisingly the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, following in this the grand example of him whose lawful successors they are.

To justify a claim to the name of Christian it is not enough that we should regard Jesus Christ in the same light as John the Baptist, or Elias, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets, or even as a prophet

greater than all other prophets. Nor is it enough to profess a devotion to Jesus Christ without having any clear idea as to who He is, on the grounds that this is something incomprehensible and mysterious. It is a matter of common sense that we cannot love without knowing what we love; and this truth has all the more force in relation to Jesus Christ, since the love which we ought to have for Him is not comparable in any respect with other loves. We may find happiness in the companionship of sympathetic friends; we may admire great-hearted men and women who seem to approach our ideal of human perfection; but our feelings towards Jesus Christ are of an entirely different order. We love our parents; we are irresistibly attracted to such men as Saint Francis of Assisi or Saint Thomas More; but the love, joined with reverence that we have for them cannot be of identically the same kind as that which we have for Christ. ‘Whom do you say that I am?’ The question presents itself whether we will or no, and demands a precise answer. For nineteen centuries and more the Catholic Church has been giving the answer to those who are willing to listen: it is the answer of the Gospels, and of the Gospels neither robbed of their true meaning to fit the latest theories of the critics, nor explained away to render them easier of acceptance by the modern mind in its curious aberrations.

The Church has been accused of setting a barrier between the soul and Christ, of making herself rather than our Redeemer the object of popular devotion. But both personal experience and the testimony of those who are sincere and loyal Catholics proves exactly the contrary to be the truth — that the Church, by defending correct notions about Christ’s Person against those who, sometimes with the best intentions, pervert them, is in actual fact helping us to live freely united with Him.

This union would be impossible if we had no clear idea who Christ really is: to say that anyone can live united with Him without knowing whether He is God or a mere man, is no more reasonable than to say that it is all the same to a mother whether she clasps in her arms the child she has brought into the world, or the doll she used to play with as a little girl. Only those who are prepared to declare unhesitatingly that ‘the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us’ can attach any real meaning to the words of Saint John: ‘God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish but may have life everlasting.’ (John 3: 16.)

This is what the apostles preached, ‘to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the gentiles foolishness’ (1 Cor. 1:23-25.) This is what they sealed with their blood, because what is foolishness in the eyes of men is wisdom with God. (See 1 Cor. 3:19.) We, too, then, have cause to thank God that, in the midst of the uncertainties and hesitations of modern thought, while so many are seeking and, unhappily, failing to find, the Church has preserved intact for us the dogma of the divinity of Christ.

We are happy to be Catholics because the Church has been a faithful guardian of the sacraments instituted by Our Lord Jesus Christ to give grace to our souls and to maintain it in them. It is impossible in so short a space to pass in review all the seven sacraments, and to show the place they hold, or ought to hold, in the life of the individual, of the family, and of society; but we must speak shortly at least about what, as Catholics, we call ‘the Blessed Sacrament,’ the Holy Eucharist.

When Our Lord, in the discourse which Saint John has recorded for us in the sixth chapter of his Gospel, promised the institution of the Eucharist in terms which leave no possible doubt about the real presence, some of his hearers, unable to believe his words, ‘went back and walked no more with Him,’ whereupon Our Lord turned to His apostles and said: ‘Will you also go?’ And Peter — it is always he who speaks in the name of the rest — replied: ‘Lord, to whom else shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.’ In our times, there are still many who refuse to accept the doctrine of

the real presence. The Church has always maintained it, and we believe it because she teaches it; but it gives us a still deeper sense of security when we read the Gospels and find that the Church's doctrine is so perfectly in harmony with the very words spoken by Our Lord, and that it is in absolute agreement with the teaching of representative Christian thinkers of the earliest ages.

Those who reject the doctrine of the real presence cannot logically admit that of the Incarnation. For if it is not unreasonable to believe that the Son of God took a body and soul like ours for love of us, it is no more unreasonable to believe that this same Son of God, urged by the same love, remains with us always under the outward veils of the Blessed Sacrament. In willing that His Son should come into this world and spend thirty years as a working man in a humble village, that He should die on the cross like a criminal to save the human race, God did a thing no less extraordinary than in decreeing that His Son should dwell till the end of time really present in the Sacrament of His love. Those who refuse to take literally the words, 'This is my body' cannot consistently understand in their literal sense the words of the text: 'The Word was made flesh.' And if anyone no longer believes that the Word was made flesh, and has the courage to say so frankly, it is difficult to see in what sense he continues to be a Christian.

We believe that after the consecration Our Lord is really present under the appearances of bread and wine. We believe that in this 'mystery of faith' He offers Himself to His heavenly Father with the same love, with the same intentions, with which He offered Himself on the cross, so that the sacrifice of the Mass is one sacrifice with that of Calvary, without which, needless to say, it (the Mass) would have no value. We believe this because the Church teaches it; for it is always on the authority of the Church that our faith ultimately rests. Saint Augustine says that he would not believe the Gospels themselves except on the authority of the Catholic Church. We believe, and we are ready by God's grace rather to die than deny it, that when we receive Holy Communion we receive, as our spiritual food, the Creator of all things, the sovereign Lord of the world, the Being of infinite Goodness, who calls to Him all who suffer, the Being of infinite Power, whose desire is to strengthen all who are weak, the sovereign judge, on whose decree our eternal destiny depends.

This is a very wonderful thing, and if our faith were only more deep and real we should find in Holy Communion strength enough to resist the most harassing temptations, and courage enough to endure the hardest trials. If anyone comes to Communion not as a routine act or a formality, but with sincere faith and in response to Our Lord's desire that he should come, if he receives the sacred Host not as something but as someone, he can say that he is never alone. His day, even if it is wholly occupied with humble and laborious duties, is divinized, so to speak, by the grace of Christ: it is with Him that he prays, with Him that he works and suffers, with Him that he tastes the joys which divine Providence never entirely withholds from even the most unhappy. All his thoughts, his words, and his actions become holy thoughts, words, and actions, because it is no longer he that lives, but Christ lives in him. (See Gal. 2: 20.)

During our life here on earth we have plenty of causes for sadness, plenty of anxieties, plenty of cares: would that we could realise more fully that in the Holy Eucharist God has given us something which, if it does not alter the fact that this life is a time of trial, at least renders our troubles bearable, and sometimes, as many can testify from experience, transfuses them with supernatural joy.

The joy of Communion makes us think of another joy, one which often, but not always, precedes it — that of confession. How much those are to be pitied who look upon confession as a burdensome

obligation that must be fulfilled at a particular time in order to obey a precept of the Church. It is another debt of gratitude that we owe to the Church that she has preserved for us the true meaning of the words: 'Whose sins ye shall forgive they are forgiven.' Of course it is of God we ask forgiveness; the Church has always taught that without sincere inward repentance no absolution is valid, no forgiveness is obtained. It is therefore before God that the soul must humble itself and repent, independently of any intermediary; it is from God Himself that the sinner receives the word which heals and brings peace; it is in God that the sinner finds peace again. But as God makes use of our parents to give us physical life, so does He make use of a spiritual father to give us back the supernatural life. And how good it is after stumblings and falls to feel a hand that raises us in God's name, to hear a voice that assures us in His name that we are forgiven.

We are happy to be Catholics because the Church teaches us to live not only with Christ, but with those special friends of His, the Angels and Saints. We find immense comfort in the companionship of those Saints whom our forefathers invoked, who travelled by the road by which we are now travelling, who worked and prayed in the places where we work and pray, whose names, many of them, are perpetuated in the names of our towns and streets. No Catholic imagines that they can take the place of Our Lord, that they would be anything without Him; but we do not forget that their charity towards their fellow creatures is no less ardent now that they are in heaven than it was when they were on earth. They help us because they are still our brothers in Christ, just as Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is our mother.

Of course, if Jesus were only man the Blessed Virgin would have no title to those honours which we pay her. But Jesus is truly the Son of God, the Word made flesh, and that is why she in whose womb that flesh was formed is set above all other creatures and below God alone. Mary is the means by which God has given us Christ, by which He has given us supernatural life; for Christ is our life; and therefore Mary is, in the order of grace, truly our mother. From these premises we draw the conclusions contained in them, and rejoice to apply to ourselves the words spoken by Our Lord on the point of consummating His sacrifice, when He turned His eyes towards Mary at the foot of the cross and said to His apostle, Saint John: 'Behold your mother.'

We know that the motherhood of Mary extends beyond the beloved disciple to include all of us. We see her tenderly solicitous for others at the marriage of Cana; and although she makes no more than a discreet suggestion, and He manifests a semblance of unwillingness, we know that it was Mary's words to her Son that called forth this first miracle, by which Our Lord designed at once to come to the assistance of some poor people in a difficulty and to confirm the faith of His apostles. The Blessed Virgin showed then, as she continues to show day by day, that she understood the meaning of Our Lord's words, so simple in themselves and so consoling to us, 'Behold your son.'

Since the Gospels tell us that there is rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who returns to God (see Luke 15:7-10) we are sure that the Saints are not selfishly wrapped up in their glory, so to speak, but concern themselves about us, exiles and sinners as we are. We believe that the Blessed Virgin in particular must rejoice to see us faithful to Christ, and that she cannot remain unmoved when she sees us falling, or in danger of falling into sin, and thus rendering of no effect for our souls the precious Blood which Christ shed for us on Calvary, the Blood which He took from her. Firm in this certainty which nothing can shake, since it comes to us across the ages from so many holy men and women who believed as we believe, in every event of our lives we turn to the Mother of God, who is also our mother, to tell her of our troubles and joys, to ask her to pray for us and with us. And since where two or three are gathered to pray Christ our Lord is in a special manner present

(Matthew 18:20), even in solitude we find ourselves always in an atmosphere of immense tenderness, because we have with us the Mother of Christ and the Saints, who are her special friends, all of us members of one vast family, which is bounded neither by space nor by time.

Those who have no experience of what this means profess to pity us. It seems to them that our devotion to Our Lady and the Saints must be an obstacle to us on our way to God, while actually it leads us to Him with quicker and surer step. It is Christ whom we worship as our only Saviour; it is His Heart with which we desire to unite our own, and without Him, though we had all the Saints in heaven with us, we should be lost and beyond all hope. But it is precisely because of his deep love for Christ that a Catholic finds it impossible for him to adopt a distant attitude, as though they were strangers, towards the Mother who brought Him into the world, or those who are in a special sense His brethren, because they served Him with exceptional faithfulness.

We are not ashamed to commend to Our Blessed Lady even our most commonplace cares, for she did not disdain to come to the help of some worthy people who happened to run short of wine. But what we ask of her above all is that, having once given Jesus to us, she would help us to keep Him in our hearts and make Him grow in us, to love Him with all our hearts, and so to follow Him from the crib to the cross and from the cross to heaven.

We are happy to be Catholics because the Church has a visible head who can always give us sure guidance, whether on matters of doctrine or on points of practical conduct. In the midst of the confusion of ideas and principles that surrounds us, the existence of this supreme authority seems to us, now more than ever, a matter for profound thankfulness.

Others think otherwise, principally because the dust of centuries of controversy has obscured the splendour of this truth. If they would only judge of the doctrine as it is authentically explained by Catholics themselves, they would see that its implications are quite other than they imagine them to be.

We say that the Pope is infallible, that is, that by the special assistance of the Holy Spirit he cannot make a mistake when he speaks as head of the Church on matters of faith or morals; but we have never said that this infallibility extends to all his words, or to his actions. For infallibility is not the same as impeccability: the Pope can sin like any other man.

We are proud of the holiness of life which has characterised many of the great Popes of modern times, but we can admit the moral failings of certain Popes in past centuries, and lament them, without being in the least shaken by the fact that they occurred. These instances of human weakness cannot be imputed to the Church as such, whose doctrine sanctifies those who follow it faithfully, but certainly cannot sanctify those who voluntarily depart from it.

We say that the Catholic Church is Roman, but with the knowledge that membership of the Roman Church does not prevent the faithful from being loyally devoted to their own country, and that the visible head of the Church, with a breadth of spirit greater than many suspect, has a due regard for all that is good in the legitimate traditions of different nations. 'The Roman Church,' Saint Leo IX says, 'knows well that diversity of custom according to difference of time and place is no obstacle to the spiritual well-being of the faithful, so long as one faith, working by charity, makes them all pleasing to the one God.'

When we say that the Pope is the head of the Church we do not mean that he takes the place of Jesus Christ, as though he were some sort of substitute for Him. Christ our Lord continues to rule

His Church until the end of time: the Pope has only a delegated power. To speak as though among Christians there could be some owning obedience to Christ and others to the Pope is to impute to Catholicism a conception that is wholly foreign to it. We obey the Pope because we wish to obey Christ; we submit to the authority of the Pope because we believe it to have been instituted by Christ: — ‘Following none but Christ,’ Saint Jerome wrote to Pope Saint Damasus, ‘I join myself to you, that is, to the chair of Peter.’

When we go to Rome, the centre of Catholicism, what strikes us and stirs us is not the splendour of the pontifical palaces, nor the dignity of the papal court; it is not even the majesty of the great basilicas or the beauty of the solemn ceremonies; it is the fact that there, in the City of the Vatican, so small in territorial extent and so great in what it stands for, there lives one who is the guardian of a doctrine, the fact that this man is regarded as their chief pastor, and that this doctrine is held as true, by men innumerable from all the nations of the world. Governments are anxious to send their diplomatic representatives to the Vatican because there exists there an authority that is on a higher plane than any other authority, and because, in spite of all efforts to stifle his utterances or to misrepresent them, the Pope’s words carry further than the words of any other living man. Even at times when circumstances make their journey very difficult, pilgrims throng round the Pope, differing in race, colour, speech, and condition, but united in the same faith and in the same desire to receive a blessing which they know to be the pledge of the divine blessing, and to hear a voice which they know can bring peace and light, because it comes from the successor of Saint Peter, upon whom Christ built His Church. *Tu es Petrus* are the words we read at the base of the dome of Saint Peter’s: ‘You are Peter’ — this is the secret of Rome’s attraction.

The servitude that this obedience to the Pope constitutes, the constraint that it imposes, exist only in the imaginations of our adversaries and on the lips of apostates. But why should the testimony of a few unhappy renegades be accepted in preference to that of the hundreds of thousands who have remained faithful, or who, after a time of wandering, have returned as prodigals to their Father’s house? The most terrible slavery is that of those who are enslaved to ignorance and error, and it is precisely from this slavery that the authority of the Pope sets us free. And when we see the hopeless confusion of those who pity us for being led by authority, we are all the more thankful to that Providence which has given us a way of seeing clearly and walking securely. ‘How good it is’, an illustrious Catholic of the last century (the 19th) said, ‘to love You, my God, while others are discussing You!’

We are happy to be Catholics because by her consoling doctrine of the Communion of Saints the Church teaches us to remain in contact not only with the elect in heaven, who pray with and for us, but also with the poor souls in purgatory, who are there paying the debt of punishment due to sins which have been forgiven. There is much to comfort us in the thought that by our prayers and sacrifices, by the willing acceptance of suffering, by good works and acts of self-denial we can help the dead — those we have known and loved, and also those we never knew who, perhaps, like the paralytic in the Gospel, (John 5:7) have no one to stretch out a hand to them. Our Lord tells us to give alms to the poor, that when we die they may receive us into everlasting dwellings, (see Luke 16:9) and there are no poor more worthy of sympathy than the souls in purgatory, no alms more precious than our prayers for them.

As the years pass and the shadows lengthen on our road, as we begin to feel more lonely in a world that is no longer the world of our childhood, we begin to realise more and more clearly what a wealth of comfort there is in the thought that our dead are always invisibly present to us, that we

can share our spiritual treasures with them while we await the day when we shall be united with them for ever in the presence of God.

But while the Church teaches us to live in close communion with the faithful departed, it is her will that we should also show ourselves charitable and generous towards our fellow men here on earth. She teaches us, further, that by so doing we can merit for ourselves an eternal reward. The term 'merit' is, unfortunately, one which has been attacked by controversialists without understanding what we mean by it. They accuse us of sacrificing grace to human merit, of claiming to save ourselves instead of believing in salvation through Christ. Yet the Church insists, and has always insisted, that without grace we cannot have so much as a single thought that has any value towards salvation, that our love of God is itself a wholly gratuitous gift, since He must first have loved us while we were displeasing to Him in order to give us the means of pleasing Him, and that without an impulse from the Holy Spirit a man is incapable of believing, of hoping, of loving and repenting as he must do to obtain justification. She lays it down that if anyone asserts that a man can be justified by his works without the grace given by Jesus Christ, he is anathema, that is, cut off from the Catholic communion. These words are a faithful commentary on Our Lord's words, 'Without me you can do nothing'. (John 15:5.)

This theoretical instruction is borne out by the practice of the Church in a variety of ways, amongst others by the words she uses in her liturgy. She teaches us to say to Almighty God that we rely only on the help of His grace, that it is by His gift that He is worthily and faithfully served by His people, that His grace must both go before us and follow us, that without Him we cannot please Him, that it is the death of Our Lord which gives us the hope of receiving that in which we believe. (See, in the Liturgy of Saint Pius V, the Collects for the 5th Sunday after Epiphany, and the 12th, 16th, and 18th Sundays after Pentecost, and also for Palm Sunday.) It is therefore impossible for anyone to maintain in good faith that we set our own merits in the place of the merits of Jesus Christ.

What we do assert is, that once a man has been justified by grace, incorporated in the mystical body of Christ and made the son and heir of God, his acts of virtue are then really meritorious, not because of any human value in them independently of Christ, but because of the grace of Christ in him, so that his merit is itself a gift of God. 'When God crowns your merits,' Saint Augustine says, 'He does but crown His own gifts.' Eternal life is given to us in view of our merits; yet since our merits do not come from ourselves but are the fruits of grace in us, eternal life is itself a grace: it is a free gift not because it is given to those who have no merits, but because merit itself is a gift.

This being so, if we wish to perform meritorious actions in loving our neighbours, helping them in their needs and treating them as we should wish to be treated ourselves, we must show charity towards them not because we find them personally sympathetic, or because we owe them a debt of gratitude, but because Christ has said: 'As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren you did it to me'. (Matthew 25:40.)

We must love our brethren for the love of God; we must wish even our enemies well, even those who ill-treat and persecute us, because Christ has laid this obligation upon us. And if it is a hard thing to do, we must take courage from the thought that by fulfilling this command of Our Lord, we can store up riches in heaven, which rust cannot destroy nor robbers carry away. (See Luke 12:33.) Again and again the Gospels hold up to our eyes the eternal reward of our good deeds, and not least among our reasons for being thankful for our membership of the Catholic Church is that she leaves



us in no doubt whatever about either the reward assured to those who fulfil their duty, or the punishment which awaits those who die wilfully separated from God.

A clear realisation of the sanctions attached to the divine law, which comforts the just by reminding them that ‘the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come’, (Romans 8:18.) and will not suffer sinners to forget Our Lord’s warning that it is better to sacrifice an eye or a hand than to risk falling into the gehenna of fire, this alone can give the right orientation to our lives. The Church in her preaching insists upon this truth which the world would like to forget, while at the same time she repeats continually that Christian charity which merits an eternal reward is an essentially different thing from mere philanthropy. We must dedicate ourselves to the service of our neighbour, but in the person of our neighbour we must see Christ, who, in the words of an ancient writer, appears before our eyes as the Poor Man, the one true poor man, who suffers in the persons of all the poor upon earth.

This is the Church’s teaching: this theory of charity (which of course presupposes the fulfilment of all the obligations that justice lays upon us) is the basis of the Church’s social doctrine. And if all of us did indeed see Christ himself in the person of our neighbour, our attitude towards him would necessarily be wholly different from what in actual fact it only too often is: all our social problems, even the most complicated of them, would be solved as though by magic or rather no such problems would arise to require a solution.

To sum up, we are happy to be Catholics because, in spite of the human weaknesses and sins of many of her members, in spite of abuses that in certain periods of history have disfigured her, the Church has never ceased to exercise her divine mission. Thanks to her teaching we have true and precise notions concerning the Person of Jesus Christ; we have in the sacraments the founts of Christ’s sanctifying power; we honour in the Blessed Virgin and the Saints a reflection of Christ’s sanctity; we acknowledge in the Pope an authority delegated to him by Christ; in the poor, living or dead, we love the suffering members of Christ. Christ with the Church as His sentinel always on guard — this is the unshakable ground of our hope and our joy, the pledge of our happiness on earth and in heaven. Since the Son of God has loved us enough to lay aside His glory and be born into this world for our sakes, since He heals and strengthens us by the sacraments, and dwells always in our midst in the Blessed Sacrament, since He has given us His blessed Mother for our mother, and continues by the voice of the Sovereign Pontiff to show us the way by which we must walk, we have no fears for the future, however dark it may appear.

‘No riches, no treasures, no honours can equal in value the priceless possession of the Catholic faith,’ are the words of a sermon attributed to Saint Augustine, which might equally well have been spoken by Saint Francis of Assisi, whose will was ‘in all things and above all things to hold fast, to honour, and to practise the faith of the Roman Church.’ And there are many great and noble souls who have expressed the same thought in almost the same words. Pascal himself, in spite of unorthodox tendencies, understood the value of Catholic orthodoxy: ‘Thanks be to God,’ he said, ‘that I am attached to nothing on earth, except to the one Church, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman, in which I desire to live and to die... I will never separate myself from her communion, at least I beg God for the grace never to do so, for outside it I should be lost for ever.’ From such men we may learn to appreciate our own privileges in being Catholics.

According to Saint Augustine, ‘the Church pursues her way amid persecutions from the world and consolations from God’; and these latter recompense her for the former. We must never lose

confidence: the prince of darkness cannot but hate the light, but in the light of the Church, we shall find peace. The fact of being Catholics does not transform our lives into a kind of earthly paradise, where pain and sorrow are no longer felt. But if we appreciate the grace that God has given us in making us members of the Church, and do our best to correspond generously with this grace, then we shall feel the deprivation of any temporal good things less, because we shall care more for good things of a higher order. We shall spread more joy around us, and, because we have a truer sense of the relative value of things here, we shall find a greater measure of happiness in this life, while yet we expect perfect happiness only in that which is to come.

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