

The Rosary Is Irreplaceable

Aggiornamento is the cry of the day. It is intended to mean a bringing up to date, a renewal of youth. It has been given to us as a watchword by that revered man, Pope John XXIII. But as interpreted by a hot-headed section among us, it has been given meanings which were not intended. For instance we are to change for the sake of change! The past is primitive – so overboard with it! Yesterday is old! Revolution is the thing!

Such talk as that would be folly and to put it into practice would be madness. For we stand on the past in every sense. If the past growth of our bodies were to be cancelled out, we would not be here at all. If our mental development was erased, we would be left lower even than the animals, because we would be unsupported even by instinct. Blot out our inheritance of ideas and man would be back in the jungle contending with the wild beasts and making ready to start again the slow climb to knowledge and civilisation. This applies not only in

general but in detail. We truly stand on the shoulders of the past.

We must always move forward. To be progressive is a duty. We must fulfil it in a sensible way. Not all that glitters is gold; nor is all that is new good. While plunging adventurously into the unfamiliar and unknown, we must maintain touch with what we have.

In the first place our existing knowledge is the only test of the new. Without experience how can we even judge what we can safely eat?

In the second place we may have to return to the old. To lay aside the present prematurely might mean being left without anything. As exemplifying the wisdom of the world in this regard, see the careful little steps being made towards putting man on the moon. As a culmination of that orderly, reasonable process it is certain that one day man will take possession of that portion of Christ's domain and come back here to render an account.

So I presume to add on to the watchword of that noble man John: While reaching out to the alluring future keep one hand tightly on what we have. Let us ascend as we would climb a stairs one step at a time. Seek to evolve methodically; avoid revolution.

This preamble leads up to my topic which is the Rosary. Why must I approach it with those words of caution and warning? It is because the Rosary has become a victim of the false *aggiornamento*. Outside the Legion, for we have not felt it, there is a campaign against the Rosary, suggestions that it be abandoned. Actually this has been put into effect in many places. A gospel phrase against vain repetition is improperly applied to it, as if to repeat is always vain and as if no prayer is to be repeated! If this argument were to be insisted upon would it be right to say

a prayer even twice? Our Lord in teaching the Pater Noster certainly meant it to be repeated often.

Another affectation is that the Rosary is a prayer for ignorant people and that as these are days of enlightenment there is no room for the Rosary. I will deal with this later.

Another attack, which is a justified one, is caused by the manner of saying the Rosary. Frequently it is said too rapidly. Agreed! Such can truly be an unedifying performance. Incidentally the more the Rosary is rushed, the longer it seems to be.

It is a pity and an anomaly that the Rosary having established itself as a special communal prayer, should be abused in such a way as to menace its existence. We cannot afford to be deprived of one of the few communal prayers which we have.

The remedy is obvious. The Rosary should be recited reverently. What difficulty is there in the way of this? In the main the Legion says the Rosary properly; so why not everyone else?

The Rosary is not the only prayer which is open to that same objection. Every prayer tends to be said at a speed which would not be used in conversation and presumably this means that it is being said too fast. If so it can be unedifying and disrespectful to the person to whom it is addressed.

Another objection sometimes heard is what we might call a mathematical one, i.e. that it is not right to give only one Pater to God and ten Aves to Mary – as if that proportion meant the amount of attention given to the respective persons. Presumably this would get nothing out of the Rosary. This would be an absurd point of view.

Every word of the Rosary is a prayer to God. We pray to God when we do anything for God. Our daily work

is done for him although it may be of a character which does not admit of giving him one thought directly. It would be wrong to pray to him if it interfered with the proper doing of that work. Likewise it would be wrong to pray to God directly if at the moment he wanted us to address ourselves to Mary. If we refuse to address ourselves at all to Mary on the grounds that to do so is to take away from God that would be incorrect. It might be seriously incorrect even heretical.

In the first place, when giving to Mary we give to God because attention to her is definitely his will. In the second place a refusal to pray to her indicates that we do not understand Catholic doctrine in which Mary has so significant a place, one entitling her to a part in our worship. It would be wrong if we were to say 'I go direct to God. I have no need of Jesus.' It would be similarly wrong in a minor key to say the same of Mary: 'I have no need to go to her.'

There is more in prayer than a presentation to God of our praises, thanks, petitions. Prayer has to be an attitude, a raising of the mind to God and not exclusively a matter of words. Prayer has also to be an expression of our belief. Our worship has to take in and acknowledge all that has been done for us and by whom. It must likewise serve the purpose of constantly reminding us of those different considerations. In a word our prayer is in part a little catechism lesson for ourselves. This means that our prayers taken all together should be teaching us the Christian mysteries as well as declaring our belief in them.

Every prayer when backed by correct faith is an act of worship of God. But not every prayer is an expression of doctrine. For example the Psalms are hymns to God and special inasmuch as they are the voice of the Church.

This is emphasised to legionaries in connection with praetorian and adjutorian membership. But it could not be contended that Psalms either teach us the Catholic doctrines or express those doctrines. How could they? They are taken from the Old Testament and they are prior to the coming of Our Lord. If taken by themselves how much of the Catechism would they teach us?

The same could be said of certain other forms of prayer but it could not be said of our present subject, the Rosary. The Rosary is a prayer of particular value from that point of view. It is an instruction in Christian doctrine as it was originally designed to be. Indeed it is difficult to imagine how this purpose could be better fulfilled without asking too much of the individual or putting a burden on the mind. Never let us forget that prayer must be essentially a simple exercise. If it is not, it will not be resorted to. We should also be hesitant about differentiating as between prayer for simple persons and for an alleged intellectual élite. In the spiritual order those roles are often totally reversed. In my own time I have found many intellectuals without the slightest spiritual sense in them.

Moreover the Rosary having taught us the Christian details and subsequently reminded us of them, then reflects them all to God again as our worship, coupled with our love, our praise, our thanks and our petitions; all of which forms a comprehensive and invaluable approach to God. Perhaps for certain persons the Rosary is surpassed by other forms of prayer, for instance the Divine Office in the case of priests for whom it is imperative. But we would want to be sure in recommending the Psalms that certain other educative and devotional ingredients (including Our Blessed Lady) are otherwise adequately provided for, because the Psalms do not contain those elements.

The Legion in its praetorian and adjutorian membership provides both the Rosary and the Psalms, basing the latter on the fact that they are the official voice of the Mystical Body. But I would venture to say that to present the Psalms to the ordinary people without a foundation would be a mistake.

Part of the foundation which the Rosary infallibly supplies is Our Blessed Lady. It mixes her up with the Holy Trinity and with Our Lord, and with all the circumstances of his life. And that is what God himself has done. He mixes her up with everything. The Rosary counteracts any tendency to relegate her to a sub-compartment in the Christian life. The Rosary casts a comprehensive picture on the mind. It shows the purpose of Redemption and all its phases from beginning to end. It does not show Jesus alone as if no one else counted, but gives the settings and circumstances and persons, turning all into a vivid image, a living drama. And all fashioned into a prayer.

In that process of Redemption from beginning to end, Mary played a vital part, such that all who benefitted by it must not separate her from it. She must figure prominently in the tribute of gratitude which we offer to Heaven. All generations must call her 'blessed'.

That brings me to something which is really terribly serious. How much of that hostile attitude towards the Rosary is really due to a lack of conviction in regard to Mary's role? If people think her to be no more than a trimming then the Rosary would seem to them to be a grave excess and we are supposed to get rid of excesses and extravagances. But Mary is no mere ornament or sentiment in the Christian religion. Her position is unique. Whatever room for error or temptation against her may have existed before 21 November 1964 there is

no excuse today. The *De Ecclesia* decree has promulgated as *de fide*; that is as something which must be received by Catholics as part of their faith; that she has an essential part in all the Christian mysteries. She is styled Mother of the Church and of every soul in the whole world. She is our Advocate. She is the Co-worker in salvation. She is our Helper from the cradle to the grave. She is the Mediatrix of All Graces. She is to be explained to all those outside the Church. Being their mother they must be told her story and her function as their mother. This new promulgation should be meekly and gladly accepted by those whose objection to the Rosary has been that it makes Mary too prominent in our worship.

The Rosary was established about the year 1200 and it took on from the first minute. It was proposed to people and they were encouraged to use it. It proved itself to have an affinity for the people. Ever since it has been intertwined with Catholic life. It has been prominent in devotional literature; an element in the lives of the holy ones of the Church; the subject of the teachings of the Popes and the Doctors. The Rosary has been carried by Our Lady in many of the accepted apparitions. It has entered into many of the recorded miraculous events, some of which have saved the world. It is believed to have been responsible for innumerable favours. I wonder has there been any saint since the thirteenth century who did not use it.

The suggestion that only childlike minds avail of it is not justified. I could give you a list of remarkable people who have been devoted to the Rosary. Just take a few: Cardinal Newman was a great lover of it in spite of his Protestant origins. Marconi, Michelangelo, Mozart and Joseph Hayden were some of the geniuses who loved it

and who believed that it brought inspiration to them in their mental searchings.

It has been wrapped up with the Legion since its first day. It is the official prayer of the Legion, zealously propagated by it. It is shown as the border of the Tessera picture and carried by the legionaries in that picture. It is taken for granted as the ideal prayer for our meetings, supplying the right atmosphere in every way. Therefore it was no small shock at a certain stage in our progress to find that it did not figure in the Eastern Church, not even in that section of it called the Uniates which is united to the papacy. The Great Schism which separated the Eastern from the Western Church took place in the year 1054 - that is about 150 years before the introduction of the Rosary - so the Eastern Church could not carry it with them into their voluntary exile.

When the Legion began to grow among the Uniates and after that the Orthodox or non-united section, the problem of replacing the Rosary by some other prayer had to be faced up to. Why not, you might say, press the Rosary upon them? Well Rome had asked us not to do that, not to Latinise them. So we had to seek for a substitute. The efforts which were made in that direction have important bearing. The tale is too long to tell here. It suffices to say that every expedient was tried and failed until at last the Uniate Greeks helped us out by a compromise. I give you the solution.

They adopted a sort of Rosary which contained seven of our fifteen Mysteries. Each of those Mysteries was precluded by a little introduction or meditation followed by one Pater, three Aves and one Gloria. In other words, the whole contained seven preludes, seven Paters, twenty-one Aves and seven Glorias; these being followed by the

remainder of the Legion prayers. It has been a success. It produces the same conditions and tone as our Rosary, thus endorsing the Rosary and also showing how hard it is to replace it.

This is a profound lesson. It warns us that approach to the Rosary must be a respectful one and mindful of its ancient and universal position in the Church, and also of an undoubted psychological status which it has. It fits in with the human mind as indeed we would expect if both come from God. It suits the learned and the unlearned, and all types expect the proud. The beads themselves as a counting apparatus have an important mental value. They are jeered at in some quarters as being like an abacus on which a child is taught to count. Another kindred reproach is that it is like a Buddhist praying wheel! But just do away with the beads and it will be found that a powerful incentive towards saying the Rosary has gone. Try counting the prayers on the fingers; that sequel will be that a complete Rosary will not be said! I repeat: the Rosary is irreplaceable. We have only partially succeeded in that process by an expedient which goes very close to the Rosary itself.

Therefore those moderns, moved by false *Aggiornamento*, who want to supplant the Rosary, should take heed lest they be guilty of a mere vandalism. The latter is definable as a destroying without a thought as to what is thereby entailed. What will be put in the place of what is destroyed? Vandalism can be performed with physical knocking down. Precisely the same thing can be effected by standing passively, doing nothing where helpful action is called for. It is vandalism to withhold a protection which is strictly necessary. It would be the same intolerable kind of behaviour to withdraw necessary stimulation from the

Rosary by keeping silent about it. If Christianity itself ceased to be taught it would necessarily wither away.

There is another way in which the Rosary can be hurt and that is in the over emphasising of the perfection with which it must be said. Of course we are supposed to meditate on the Mysteries according to our capacity. But here let there be moderation. We must not impart too much mental strain to it lest we turn it into something that it was not originally intended to be. In it we are saying certain prayers which must have their place and meaning. It would be a very extraordinary proceeding to keep on saying those prayers but never giving them a thought while the mind goes off on excursions into completely different fields.

No more solemn words exist that the scriptural phrases of the Ave. They furnish a compressed meditation on the Incarnation of the Son of God. We could not dwell too often on that central event of time so that to speak of those words as vain repetition is both disrespectful and dangerous. If we can but impress the fact of the Incarnation upon our minds we have become rich and privileged, even though all other comfort is lacking to us. And on the other hand if we do not appreciate that event we are in misery, though we may have gained the whole world.

So precious therefore are those words that we must often return to them and not allow them to be totally submerged by any other meditation.

The Rosary is a prayer which fits itself to changing circumstances. At times of sickness or of exhaustion there is no other so useful. It comes within our reach. What we then want is restfulness in the spirit of prayer. So let the beads slip through the fingers without concern as to what

particular accompaniment the mind is playing, because it is truly resting in God and is attentive to Mary. This is the essence of prayer. Prayer is a state more than it is a recital.

As we say the Rosary we try now, as a background and another time as a foreground, to stage the Mysteries before our minds. However meagre our powers to meditate, we cannot help learning all those Mysteries. They expand into so many 'photographic' situations, linking themselves up with the various pictures we have seen or the accounts which we have heard or read of those events. We may be sure too that grace takes hold of that 'picturisation', intensifies it and renders it fruitful.

We must not make this operation too involved for ourselves. The Rosary must be left essentially simple. Its main idea is a chat with our mother about her on, herself and about all the elements of salvation. We say the Pater with her in absolute union. Then we have our little mixed meditation with her, frequently falling back on the actual words which we speak to her. Then at the end of each decade she says the Gloria with us as she did with St Bernadette at Lourdes; you will recall that episode. Anyone who says the Rosary will have a reasonably complete and vivid idea of the Christian narrative and I repeat that this is a necessary foundation for all prayer. Indeed what good are any prayers if they do not rest on that foundation of knowing what they are all about?

As an example of what can follow from straining too far, I mention what has been called the German Rosary. For the pious purpose of trying to make people meditate all the time, the subject of the particular Mystery has been inserted into each Ave. The result has been that the five decades occupy 35 minutes. As a consequence the Rosary is no longer said in Germany except by the Legion which

uses our ordinary method. That admirably exemplifies the saying that the perfect is often the enemy of the good.

So there is my contention: the Rosary is a treasure which must be cherished. It combines in itself a host of ingredients, among them being Mary the Mother of the Church and of every soul in it and outside it. It acknowledges her position. It teaches us the Christian religion and it induces us to pray. If the Rosary be hurt, Mary's place will be diminished and so will the quantity of prayer in our lives. In practice nothing will be inserted in substitution for that which has been taken out. That is where the vandalism would enter in. Something is knocked down and nothing is put in its place. The Rosary is irreplaceable.

I have only one little complaint in my own mind regarding that treasure. It is that it does not go far enough. Instead of abolishing it I would wish to see it extended. How? I would like to see a few Mysteries included for the purpose of directing the minds of the people to them, for they are no less important than those which are comprised.

In the first place, it is an astonishing thought that the Immaculate Conception does not form one of the fifteen Mysteries, although it is the foundation of all the privileges of Our Lady; the special fashioning of her for the Incarnation. Presumably the reason why it was not incorporated was that at that time the Immaculate Conception was the subject of disputation and that only subjects which were not in any sense in question were chosen.

Secondly - the birth of Mary, which might be regarded as the first dawning of salvation on earth.

Thirdly - the marriage of Mary, because it meant the constitution of the Holy Family, the immediate preparation

for the Incarnation and because it gives prominence to St Joseph, enhancing devotion to him.

Fourthly - the marriage feast of Cana which represented the opening of Our Lord's mission which then terminated on Calvary.

Fifthly - the institution of the crowning Mystery of the Eucharist.

That would be four fives instead of three fives. This would utilise still more than at present this marvellously psychological and effective method of teaching doctrine, of working it into people's minds and then of reflecting it back to God as worship.

The Legion Is Pure Christocentrism

Nowadays the Legion would seem to have come into its own. After wandering like the Israelites in the desert for approximately 40 years, it is now recognised everywhere.

I suppose all have read the papal letter which has come to us and which is a signification of that universal recognition. Those who are not experienced in Vatican communications may take it all as a matter of course. But those who have had any dealings with that most august of all bodies will realise that they seldom write a document of its tone. They have, to use the popular expression, gone to town over the Legion. The approbation conveyed to it therein is unreserved. Not content to bestow a general approval, each detail of the Legion is taken and commended strongly. Perhaps the most gratifying words in the whole letter are contained in a phrase which people might be inclined to pass over: 'His Holiness is happy to rely on this spirit of the Legion.' These are overwhelming words. But they mean what they say. The Pope sees the

Legion as a great army on which he can depend in this time of crisis.

But all is not commendation that has been coming along. Of late there has been a wild outburst of criticism of the Legion. These opposites should not surprise us and such attacks must be faced in the Christian way. They characterised the life of Our Lord himself. If we expect triumph, we must be ready for the contradiction which is mixed up in it. The handbook puts this in a pithy phrase: 'We cannot pick and choose in Christ.' As a principle, opposition must come to the man and to the society which align themselves uncompromisingly with Christ. We cannot escape the impact of this law. If one does escape it is a bad sign; something has gone wrong. The Legion has tried to effect this alignment with Our Lord. It has sought to identify itself with him in every conceivable respect. This is the very keynote of the Legion, yet only too many have completely failed to discern it. It is the old tale of not being able to see the wood for the trees; they deny the existence of the wood!

I explain this. It is intriguing to find one charge constantly levelled against the Legion. It is alleged that it is not Christocentric. This is a word of imposing sound. It is being used in the manner of a conjuror's word, or like the magic incantation in the fairy tales. The very mention of the word Christocentric proves the Legion to be wrong! So religion must have Christ as centre. Of course that is a truth, the very essence of truth, because we are Christians. But incredible to say, those people who keep on casting that word against the Legion as a condemnation thereby mark themselves as not having properly grasped what it means. By adhering excessively to the natural image of a circle and its centre they have tended to obscure the true

idea for themselves. Christocentrism is not a pointing towards Christ, but a living in him and then an outward radiating of him.

Moreover those persons are mostly using the term as a deprecating of our devotion to Mary. Without realising the fact they confess themselves to be minimisers of Our Lady and at the same time to be ignorant of the correct meaning of the term Christocentrism.

This is a big statement. I am now going to try to justify it and also to show that so far from the Legion of Mary falling short in point of Christocentrism, it is in fact the Christocentric organisation par excellence, that is to say in a pre-eminent manner.

Perhaps this latter claim may bring a retort: 'If such be your ambition why not call yourselves "Legion of Christ"?' This suggestion proceeds to us currently from an Argentinean priest. He does not see that the very proposition negatives itself. For was not Our Lord known as the son of Mary? Why then should we not be known as the Legion of Mary, if our aim is that of identification with Our Lord?

The Legion is built root and branch on the doctrine of the Mystical Body; its entire scheme issues from that foundation. The Mystical Body is sometimes called the whole Christ; that is Our Lord and his members. In discussing this I do not cover the ground of the handbook, which explains the idea of the Mystical Body extensively and in great detail. I simply say that the Legion is intended to be an expression of the Mystical Body identified with Christ; and this not merely as a fact and a truth but on the basis of a comprehension of that fact and that truth. This is vital. Because it is possible to confront a fact and not to understand it. Here the fullness of the fact which

must be understood is that the Legion is Christocentric. This is intended to apply not merely in a general way but in detail. And – so far as can be contrived – down to minor points. The Legion is anxious to embrace every feature in the following of Christ.

All its doctrines, principles, prayers, rules, works and methods bear on Christocentrism. This topic is so important and yet so large that a single article cannot possibly hope to cover it. Yet sketchy as my present effort is, I think it will display the remarkable position held in this respect by the Legion of Mary. I now consider this in detail.

The Legion tries to understand the Holy Trinity. Obviously this is not by an intellectual perception, which would be impossible, but by a glimpsing of the doctrine in faith. If we want to be Christocentric in any true sense of the word that glimpsing is essential. Why? Because Christ lived in the Trinity and was the visible embodiment of the Trinity. Therefore anyone who seeks to live in Christ and share in his life must be found giving some sort of loving attention to the persons of the Trinity. This has always been deemed to be beyond the reach of ordinary people and especially to be outside the scope of an active organisation. I also do not know of any other active society which aims at giving to the Holy Trinity the same sort of attention. The handbook sections on the subject of the Trinity were not originally comprised but forced themselves in as the Legion began to mature and to understand itself; for the Legion was growing up as a person would.

The same principle applies in regard to prayer. No active organisation insists so much on prayer as does the Legion. As the Legion sees things it must by virtue of its

Christocentrism possess a heart of prayer. It must be full of prayer at its meetings. Hence also its praetorian, auxiliary and adjutorian grades of membership through which the praying members are enrolled or the active members led on to still more prayer.

My next point is that the Legion is of Mary as Christ was of Mary. The Legion of Mary and the son of Mary are analogous ideas. This is a vital principle which the minimisers of Mary do not comprehend. The Mystical Body carries on the life of Christ to a degree which exceeds our imagining. So logically the Mystical Body must be found subject to the maternal influences of Mary. Furthermore the Mystical Body must love Mary as Christ loved her. This is a doctrine of primary importance yet not receiving the attention which it should. Some years ago I ventured to devote an article to that theme in *Maria Legionis*.

Our Lord loves Mary with his whole nature more than all other created things put together. The theologians say that he derived more consolation from her than he did from all other created beings, past, present and to come. The Christian must imitate Christ. So he must bestow on Mary a love which imitates that which Jesus gave her; a devotion not from the heart alone but from the intellect as well; seeing her as the Valliant Woman of Redemption: Advocate, Co-operator, Helpmate, Mediatrix, possessed of the faith and unique assemblage of qualities which fitted her to play that part.

So after all the Legion's behaviour to Mary which many regard as an excess, almost an offence, springs inevitably from the Mystical Body and therefore is Christocentric. That is now obliged by our faith as a result of the promulgation of the *De Ecclesia* decree on 21 November 1964. Anyone who persists in minimising Mary is out on

a bough which may shortly break under him and cast him into the abyss of outwardness.

In the next place the Legion's apostolate derives from the same doctrine of the whole Christ. His apostleship has to issue through us. In us he goes about doing good, teaching his gospel, striving to reach all men with intent to convert them. In this association with his person we are immersed in his power. Surely this is pure Christocentrism.

A distinctive feature of the Legion lies in the associating of Mary to its work. This work is to be done in the company of Mary and in reliance on her. But why should the Legion thus identify her with its apostolate, considering that other than exceptionally she did not go about with her son during his Mission. But Mary's co-operation in all the phases of Redemption was of a higher order than that of accompanying him always. It consisted – over and above her gift to him of his humanity through which he did his work – of a moral and spiritual union with the Redeemer, which applies to every moment of their lives and which was not interrupted by any physical separation between them. That union is continued in the Mystical Body and she remains conjoined to its saving work in a necessary way. Her concurrence must be sought.

Somewhat unexpectedly the angels are found figuring prominently in the Legion's scheme. They do so because they serve under Christ as part of his army of salvation. A significant reference was made by him to that celestial section in Mt 26:53: 'Thinkest thou that I cannot ask the Father and he will give me presently twelve legions of angels.' The Legion seeking to share the thoughts of Christ looks to those heavenly allies and invokes them in its prayers: St Michael, St Gabriel and all the Heavenly Legion.

The Legion's choice of its other patrons is governed by the principle of their association with Our Lord's earthly mission. With one exception they were contemporaries of his, playing vial parts in his life, St Paul a little belatedly.

The exception is St Louis Marie de Montfort, who is honoured because he so helped the Legion to form itself. He made the Legion see the place of Mary in salvation and out of that came everything.

The Legion's Christocentrism flows into every other channel of its activities. I take that department of which we hear so much today, the Liturgy. It would be a grave error to suppose that it is only when one is engaged in the formal liturgical rites that one is praying in Christ. All prayers must be in Christ to have any value. Deprived of his virtue, our poor utterance would be no more than the crying of the plover. Moreover the action of Christ is displayed in every action of the Church. But at the same time there is a special virtue in participation in the liturgical exercises of the Church and this is enhanced in the measure that we consciously immerse ourselves in that activity in Christ.

In this regard the Legion emphasises the Mass and Holy Communion. It appeals to its members to have daily recourse to those sources of grace in the light and spirit of the Mystical Body. Then it presents those degrees of membership called the praetorians and adjutorians, which involve the daily recitation of an Office. This is an unexpected gesture on the part of an organisation which is regarded as purely active. But it is completely in the line of its universal Christocentrism that it should thus seek to be as liturgical with the Church as to be apostolic with it.

In regard to Mass and Holy Communion the handbook goes to much pains to instruct legionaries as to the full

meaning of those superlative things. It does not leave its members to suppose that Mass is only a ceremonial of prayers being recited by somebody clad in certain vestments. There is an inner meaning to the Mass, which is its real meaning and this is proposed in season and out of season to the legionaries.

The Eucharist is the Lord's Supper and likewise his Sacrifice. It is not something external to us. We are in those supreme events because we are in Christ. In him, by union of the Mystical Body, we are taking part in the tremendous Sacrifice of the Lord. Surely again Christocentric!

But it is not only in the Mass, on Calvary, that we live and suffer in the Lord. There are all our own common sufferings. We are always in Christ, always involved with him, always suffering with him. This is what gives value to suffering. And this Christocentrism makes it plain why the Legion, which is an organisation of action, devotes so much space in the handbook to the idea of suffering, which would appear to belong rather to the private than to the legionary life. At first sight it would seem to be an incongruous idea, but it is not. It is something essential if there is a question of Christocentrism. Because suffering was a vital aspect of Our Lord's life, was made to be the element by which he completed the Redemption. So must it be of the legionary life too. Here once more that complete Christocentrism.

The legionary must always be on duty. This is not a pious exhortation aimed at improving or rather widening the work of the Legion. It is a logical consequence of our Christocentric condition. Always we are in Christ. So must we be united to his thought and action for souls. We must always be concerned about souls as he was. Not alone about the souls around us, those we see and

touch, but with souls everywhere, even those beyond our ken utterly, souls that we will never under any conceivable set of circumstances have contact with. The Legion cannot content itself with that separation from souls by distance and it makes symbolic gestures in their direction. The *Peregrinatio Pro Christo* and the *Viatores Christi* are expressions of that wanderlust for souls. If we cannot go out after them as a regular apostolate, we must do symbolically for a week or two or in the case of the *Viatores* for a year or two. This is the response of the Body to Christ's command: Go unto the ends of the earth, seek out all men and give them my gospel. Baptise those who hear you. Christocentrism again!

The holding of meetings is a prominent feature of all apostolic endeavour. Meetings must be held regularly to direct the activities. Many societies talk about Christocentrism but do not impart any note of it to their meetings which often include little prayer and possess no atmosphere of the supernatural. Perhaps they take it for granted but that is unwise in human affairs. Or perhaps they regard the meeting as of minor importance, a mere tailpiece to the work. On the contrary, the Legion concentrates on its meetings as being of pivotal importance. It sees them as a community exercise of the Mystical Body in which Christ and his mother and their members set about their Father's business. Throughout the parts of each meeting must run faith, prayer and charity, so that all the business partakes of that character. Each item helps the others. They all amalgamate to form a distinctive product. The outlook of the Legion on the sort of spirit which must animate its meetings is set out in close detail in the handbook section called the Mystical Home of Nazareth. Out of that mentality come the Legion

meetings which are not like other meetings. They are prayerful and harmonious gatherings. At the same time they develop efficiency; they afford a model of the way in which to run a meeting and administer a work. So you will see that even the routine system of the Legion is reduced to Christocentrism.

The doctrine of the Mystical Body involves particularly the understanding and implementing of the relations existing between the members themselves. First there is the relation which they have to the Lord and his mother, and then there is the consequential relation which they have to each other. I am referring to charity, obedience and the sense of proper subordination. This relation flows from Christocentrism because Jesus was subject to Mary and Joseph, and he always studied complete duty. 'I come to do my Father's will.' So the Legion has been Christocentric in that way and obedient to the degree of winning the special commendation of the Holy Father for it. He asks all legionaries to continue with that same love for the Church, ever in closest dependence on the bishops in the works of the apostolate and in a spirit of collaboration with all other Catholic associations. Then the Pope talks of the wonderful discipline of the Legion which can always be depended on; of the strong interior life of its members, of its dedication to the salvation of the neighbour; and its unflinching loyalty to the Church.

Is not that terrific! That sense of subordination, obedience, right discipline is vital in religion. But failure is easy – so weak is human nature, so strong is temptation. Hence it is a joy of joys to hear the Pope say that the Legion has it. We have tried to unite ourselves to Our Lord and to his doctrine and also to love our mother with all that is in us. Then behold we find ourselves closely united

to the authorities of the Mystical Body and then to each other.

This question of subordination touches on the priesthood. A bishop writes to us suggesting that too large a function is allocated to the priest in the Legion; that the Legion is lay and should carry on more or less independently of the priest. This would not accord with the Christocentrism of the Legion, which would view the priesthood as analogous to the place of Christ in the Mystical Body and therefore as possessed of headship functions.

The Legion carries its Christocentrism into departments which might be regarded as surprising. For example it directs the idea towards recreation and holidays. But 'Legion Holidays' are not merely holidays composed of a number of legionaries. That could amount to nothing special. The Legion tries to impart its own Christian and legionary character to those ventures which are specifically labelled Legionary Holidays, and which are subject to a set of rules. Legion Holidays are an effort to establish a better order of holidays and then to set a headline. They comprise Mass and daily Communion at all costs. If these should for any reason be ruled out by the circumstances of a place, then that place would not qualify for a Legion Holiday. The routine of the day is to be gone through in the spirit of the Legion. All excursions, pursuits and conversations are at least in a general way to be viewed according to the idea of the Mystical Body; that is done with Jesus and Mary. This programme contains no unreality, because we must conceive Our Lord as having had some recreation, not only in his youth, but also later on with his disciples. When we try to imagine them thus engaged after the burdens of the day, relaxed into

conversation and simple amusement, the picture which presents itself to the mind is very much that of a Legion Holiday.

It is a further striking consequence of this idea that as we can be the instruments of Jesus and Mary in all the foregoing ways, so too can we be instruments for their recreation. We can bring them on our holidays and give them pleasure.

As time goes on, other ways will disclose themselves in which to put legionary Christocentrism into logical action and that application will be made. The Legion will continue to pursue its characteristic course, seeking to subject every aspect of life to the domination and inspiring power of Christ Our Lord and always in the company of Mary his mother and ours.

The Legion is Christocentric to the fullest extent that it can be made so.

‘I Have Suffered With Him Whom I Saw Suffer’

We have been receiving a large number of visits from distinguished persons on their way to and from the sessions of the Great Council. From our talks with them it has been made clear that most of the bishops have made up their minds about the Legion and are going to rely on it in the tasks which lie ahead. We have found them familiar with the various items of Legion history and particularly appreciative of its capacity to put courage and toughness into its members, so that they stand up to ill-usage instead of retreating from it.

You will agree that in those words a very good definition has been afforded of the difference between an army and a mob. The army stands up to its work and the mob takes to flight. In that judgment I would think that those prelates are judging rightly and that the decisive circumstance is going to be that one of strength. This will be the case even in places where the graver troubles may not declare themselves. In the end it will be found that the common

tasks, which perhaps are the most important, likewise depend upon that quality of strength. It should not be forgotten, for instance, that it requires as much solid quality to work in one of our hostels as to face up to something like China. A glamour can attach to the more spectacular combats and to martyrdom itself, which can assist us to bear them. But the daily facing of the cross of suffering and frustration, whose shadow stretches out through all the years ahead, can be truly what is called a white martyrdom.

We were speaking with the bishop of one of the South American dioceses. He painted a grim picture of the task of creating order out of the religious and general chaos of that territory; faith and practice are gone. In that situation he was placing his entire reliance upon the Legion and for the special reason that the Legion has backbone and is able to communicate it to the people. In that he is discerning. He sees that all the other qualities without that one of strength are of doubtful value in the time of difficulty, a little like the case of bricks in a wall without cement and mortar. Any virtue must possess strength to make it worthwhile.

And this holds for the quieter virtues as much as for the sterner ones. Gentleness, kindness, and love without strength, would really only amount to weakness – if you think things out. So I am going to talk to you about strength in the Legion. I am going to tell you where to find it and how to find it in a balanced form – that is kept in its true place. We are not seeking a mere strength, which could be a hard, cruel, crushing thing – indeed not a good thing at all.

Where does the Legion find that strength which people observe in it? The secret lies in having our Christian

motives so present to our minds that they, so to speak, automatically gear themselves into every action. If those motives so assert themselves, the result must be that the baser side of our nature will be held in check, and the nobler elements stimulated into a supremacy.

In all this process Mary plays a special part because it is she who has given us Jesus Christ, and along with him (as the Church is fond of saying) every other good. She holds every good in her gift for the purpose of passing it on to those willing to receive it. But in order to receive as she would wish to give, we must be in some degree united to her. This union is only effected by a continual act of the will, by an effort which does not cease. It is not established by any act of consecration which could be merely a passing thing. We must keep it alive by reasonably frequent advertence to her.

We must try to link our actions to similar ones of hers. Thereby a two-fold process is entered upon. On the human plane we derive consolation and inspiration from that corresponding act of hers. This by itself can produce a great consequence, for any noble example affects us powerfully and leads us on. But that human effect is far exceeded by the operation of grace, which raises it to a superior level. This can make a difficult act easy and even enable us to confront horrifying situations with a sort of pleasure.

In order that we may so unite our states with those of Our Lady, we must aim at knowing her. We must try to familiarise ourselves with her life by reading and thought. Thereby will be set before us various episodes of her life, the great and the little. Some of these will be supplied to us by the gospels. Others by the spiritual writers; and some we may have to imagine for ourselves. A certain

number are thrown into special relief by the mysteries of the Rosary and of the Dolours.

This reading about her with a view to establishing a sort of intimacy between us and her is essential. If we leave her a shadow, we will not find ourselves turning to her ordinarily and confidently. Therefore I repeat that we must read, and then think over what we have read.

What are we to read? What is said about her in the gospel is of immense importance but not so great in quantity, and as food for our minds we must have substance as well as importance. Here are a few works which I suggest that you study.

Anne Catherine Emmerich (now Blessed), an Augustinian nun, has produced what are popularly called her Revelations or Visions. These are mainly about the life of Our Lord but they include Our Lady. It is to be understood that the Church attaches no seal to that book. There are many things in it which are at variance with the generally accepted version of what took place. But at the same time the work is one which every Catholic should read as a meditation, because it describes in intimate detail the circumstances and happenings which have been briefly summarised in the gospels. Out of that knowledge will emerge to you in living detail the persons of Our Lord and his mother.

Another book which is in the same line of territory is that of Mary of Agreda, a Spanish Franciscan. It too possesses no special authority but it fulfils the same vital purpose of supplying food for our meditations and of rendering vivid and real to us those august lives upon which our own whole lives depend.

There is another work of great excellence, written by the Abbé Orsini, a French writer, called *The Life of the Blessed*

Virgin. It exists in an English translation and it is based on the idea that what you cannot tell about Our Lady by absolute knowledge, you can often deduce by relating her to the circumstances of her time and to the way in which a girl of her age and condition would have lived. Orsini proceeds on the principle that Mary would be faithful to the approved usages, religious and customary, of her people. On this basis he gives in detail an account of the way Our Lady spent her day, the prayers she would say; how she was dressed and so forth.

When you have familiarised yourselves with those three books, you will have provided yourself with something in the way of a knowledge of her. On that your mind must play constantly, because you must know her. She is your mother, more so than your earthly mother. She is the custodian of your soul and your life. She is the person who is referred to in today's liturgy as the woman into whose hands God places salvation.

I have referred to the Dolours and to the Rosary. Each of the mysteries comprised teaches its own essential lesson. Out of them I am going to pick for present purposes one which I think has not been called upon to yield its full lesson to us. This lesson moreover bears upon my subject; that is of strength.

I speak of the gospel picture of Our Lady at the foot of the Cross: 'There stood by the Cross of Jesus his mother.' What force in a few words! The Evangelist insists that she was standing. Not only did she stand erect in her body, but her mind and her heart stood up unflinching also. One of the ideas which is applied to her by the Church is that she is the strong woman, the strong woman of all time. She is exhibited to us as an ideal of strength, strength in its purity without admixture of any of those other things

that would amount to dross. She is the strong woman, and the episode of Calvary is the special presenting of that to us.

Therefore it is that moment of the consummation of Redemption, when suffering reached its maximum point and when, according to the ordinary rules of humanity, weakness should also assert itself most, which we must present to ourselves in our own peak moments of difficulty. If we do, that twofold operation of nature and grace will accomplish itself in us. Strength will rise up in us and we will meet the crisis in what I might call a positive way. That word 'positive' is important here. Usually we face a difficulty in a negative way that is we yield a little interiorly. Our first reaction is of weakness. Perhaps then we make an effort to mobilise our resources; we try to be positive. But in that moment of hesitation we have invited defeat. At best we have lost ground which we may not recover. So we must aim at doing better – at not surrendering at all. If we succeed, the trial turns into a triumph.

To effect this to the fullness of its possibility we should seek to enter intimately into Mary's state of mind as she stood gazing on her son. We must identify our own misery and necessity with hers. We must use our own suffering as a means of enabling us to appreciate hers. 'Knowledge by suffering entereth,' says Browning. If in the moment when intolerable torment and grief seize us, we turn our thoughts to her, we get a little insight into the extent of her sufferings – not as an exercise in theory but in a dreadful practice.

Associating our suffering and weakness with her, we throw the emphasis on *her* woe. Then we must struggle desperately to rise to the heroism of being even *glad* that

we are suffering with her at that moment. The role we must aspire to is that of standing up in her and suffering in her in a sort of identity. There is strength in this. We supernaturalise and sweeten our own emergency.

The technical term which is applied to Mary's sufferings is her compassion. Many words have suffered modification of meaning through the passage of time and that word is one of them. 'Compassion' thus applied to her has not its present conventional meaning, which is only to feel pity. Similarly the word 'passion' which designates Our Lord's ordeal of suffering means only anger today. Our Lord was not in a rage. Neither was Our Lady merely pitying him in his agony. Her compassion meant her suffering his Passion along with him. 'I have suffered with him whom I saw suffer.' His very pains were transferred to her through her eyes and her exquisitely sensitive nervous system. So that she endured his sufferings along with him for our sakes.

Moreover, a very suffering of death was in question. She felt the agonies of death along with her son and she would have died with him but for the fact that she was miraculously preserved. The Church teaches us this describing her as almost dead. But her time was not yet come: she had another task of mothering to do.

This idea of her compassion is an essential one in Christianity. It was the plan that she was to share in a real way in the mission of Our Lord. She would initiate it. She would be brought into it in such a pivotal way that, even though dependent on Our Lord, she would help to earn Redemption and afterwards share in his administration of grace. The Church has accorded to her the designation of Co-Redemptrix, and she is the Mediatrix of All Graces in the sense that they are not given without her.

It has been the will of God to exalt her to the maximum degree of which she was capable. She was prophesied at the time of the Fall as the woman who would cooperate in Redemption. It was to that prophecy of the woman and her seed that all men looked forward from the time of the Fall. All nations as they separated and went out over the world bore with them that image. It occurs in their religions in some shape or another, disfigured but recognisable: The woman and her child of salvation.

So when Our Lord stood up on his Cross and consummated Redemption, she was standing at its foot as the gospels meaningfully insist. At that epochal moment Our Lord, speaking to her, cast the minds of all generations back to the original prophecy, indicating that she was the woman who would help in Redemption: 'Woman, behold thy son.'

Protestants have traditionally suggested that Our Lord at that most solemn moment of all was being disrespectful to his mother – an idea which would lower the son even to a greater extent than it would diminish the mother! Finally their scholars wakened up to the unworthiness of it. They have produced a new Bible which has been accepted by all the Protestant Churches over the world, so far as I know, without exception. It is a respectable document. In it they try in many ways to make amends for past wrongs of interpretation. Among other things, in order to uproot that false conception and forever to dispel any notion that Our Lord could be disrespectful to his mother in his final moments, they replace the word 'woman' by the word 'mother'.

It is a gracious act on their part but thereby they err in another way. They remove the intended, significant word. 'Woman' is here the important word. It is the word which

bridges the chasm of years between the Promise and the fulfilment of the Promise. The woman is now helping her seed to redeem the world.

Mary was the most exquisite creature that could be. Therefore she could suffer, you might say, almost infinitely beyond all others. Her feelings had an approximation to those her son. The Church places on her lips the words of scripture: All ye who pass look and see if there is any sorrow unto mine. All generations have assigned to her the title: the Woman of Sorrows. Just as Jesus encompassed the whole gamut of human woe, so did she. Though our limited understanding cannot see how such could be. His sufferings and hers contained every possible ingredient. Her agony of mind communicates itself throughout her body, so that in one intense operation she endures all possible torments. All of these, save despair, she must have felt to the extreme.

Her own perfection enhanced her ordeal. She was immaculately conceived and therefore sensitive beyond ordinary nature. Only Jesus could feel more acutely than she. Likewise her glorious intellect gave her insight into what was taking place. In these circumstances her affliction reached depth beyond our probing. Yet there was joy in her. This may seem to entail contradiction. St Bernard, referring to this mysterious process, says that she had perfect faith and complete suffering together; that she acquiesced with all her heart in the Crucifixion and yet it broke her heart. She knew that she would see her son again in a few days and yet what was before her eyes represented the end of the world to her. To glimpse how such joy could exist in her side-by-side with such a degree and type of suffering, we have to realise that the faith, which was her supreme quality and her consolation,

made her feel to the full both the beauty and the horror of the Cross which had as its victim the loveliest, the most innocent, the most exalted person that could be: her almost infinitely loved child. In a word, her faith gave her exact appreciation of the position and this accentuated every aspect of it, including what appear to be absolute opposites.

With ideas and motives such as those made familiar to us by reflection and practice, we must seek to unite our own suffering with her as she stands at the foot of the Cross. Standing there with her – or rather in her – we must be worthy of her. We must not cower and cry and wish to be dead, for she did not give way like that. Neither must we indulge in self-pity, for she had no thought of herself. Nor must we lie down on the ground and abandon ourselves to despair, because despair was not in her. If we want to be like her and to help her, we must call up strength and courage in ourselves. This idea of helping her is a justified one; our help is a real help, just as our helping of Our Lord is real, even to the point that he has made himself dependent on it, requiring it, leaning on it and being helpless without it.

Strength say St Paul is developed in weakness. That is, of course, by fighting the weakness. If we suffer manfully in Mary we invest that suffering with her quality and her quality flows into us in all its forms. We receive her strength and along with it her faith and all her virtues. The law of common goods operates.

In connection with the recent Legion crisis in regard to the Regina Coeli Hostel, I had the opportunity of proving the value of the above process. I think that it may have preserved my sanity, for the horror of the situation was indescribable. What faced us was the abomination that

250 of the most helpless and vulnerable of the population were to be cast to destruction. In one minute the work, which had taken 33 years of desperate striving and devotion on the part of many to build up, was going to be hurled to the winds. So that it was not a question of only the 250 but all the multitudes who would in the future be subjected to shipwreck by the taking away of the ark which could have saved them. That prospect was beyond bearing. I cannot think about it even at the present moment without quivering with pain. Death seemed a happy way of escaping the torture of it. And yet you know that it is one of our little recourses in times of weakness to wish that we were dead! But that marks a surrender in us, an escape.

So I tried what I have been talking to you about. I sought to bury myself and my torment in Mary, to stand upright in her at the foot of her son's Cross and her own – merging my pain in hers. I found it almost easy to do that by reason of the fact that it brought visible physical relief. It reduced my own position to proper perspective; my torture lessened; I held control. Eventually the crisis was surmounted. We may suppose that the underlying graces of the situation far exceeded in their worth the benefits which were made evident.

'And Thy Own Soul a Sword Shall Pierce'

(Lk 2:35)

A new stage of the Church's year was visibly marked by the dismantling of the cribs and the careful putting away of the figures that filled them – Our Lady and the Child, St Joseph, the shepherds, the gorgeous Magi with (in the better sets in any event) some of their picturesque following, the camels, etc.

That removal marks the passing of the season of the Nativity which concludes on 2 February in the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin. But likewise on that same day we celebrate the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple and the recognition of him as the Messiah by holy Simeon and the aged Anna the prophetess; these make prophecies of the Redemption which are of a sensational character. It will be seen therefore that the feast is a sort of mixed up one. It embodies the characteristic feature of the lives of Our Lord and his mother, i.e. that they are an inseparable combination of joy and sorrow, of suffering

and glory. No different is the Christian destiny; if we reach out for the one, we find that we have got hold of the other as well.

When Did They Come?

The Presentation is one of the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary and likewise it is the first of the Seven Dolours – a study in contradictions. To be noted as a preliminary thought is the fact that the Holy Family were in Judea at the time – i.e. 40 days after the Nativity, showing that the Magi had not come on the previous 6 January as is commonly supposed, but much later, because immediately after the Magi went to Bethlehem, they returned home at the bidding of the angelic messenger. Soon after that, the angel told St Joseph to take the child and his mother and fly into Egypt, which was done. The German mystic, Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich, whose writings have a merit of their own, said that the Magi arrived nine months after the Nativity, but I would incline to the belief that 6 January was no case of an arbitrary date and that it possesses significance. So that we may believe that it was on the 6 January twelve months that those distinguished figures arrived.

The same Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich, explains why Mary and Joseph could come to the Temple so soon after the Nativity and the talking that the shepherds had indulged in (Lk 2:20), and yet create no particular commotion. She said that the shepherds' statements were noised abroad a good deal at the time, not only in Bethlehem but in Jerusalem which is only six miles distant from Bethlehem; but that those statements were regarded as nonsense by the more important people. She also says that those rumours came to the notice of Herod.

Of course everybody was on the look-out for just such a thing, because the time for the coming of the Messiah according to prophecy had arrived. Therefore people's minds were in a state of pious tension. Herod thought the matter sufficiently important to investigate. He sent some official of his down to Bethlehem to have a look at things. That investigator interviewed Mary and Joseph and reported back that they were only poor folk making no lofty claims and that the whole thing was not worthwhile bothering about.

The Offering of the Poor

According to the Old Law, a woman was unclean after the birth of a child, for 40 days in the case of a boy and for 80 days in the case of a girl. Reason for the difference – not clear. The mother had to come to the Temple and relieve herself of that uncleanness. She had to give an offering which was prescribed in the Books of the Old Law. It was a lamb and a turtle dove; or if the parents were poor, they could substitute an extra dove for the lamb. Then the priest in charge would pray over her she was purified.

The second ceremony which goes to compose that feast was the presentation of the first-born son to God. It formed a reminder to the Jews, coming down from the days of Moses, that their first-born had been saved in Egypt while those of the Egyptians were slain. That first-born was to be offered in the Temple, but could be immediately redeemed by a money payment. At the time of Our Lord the amount of money specified was five shekels. As you will see, the value of all these offerings was quite considerable and they came from every mother.

Every Condition Was Fulfilled

Mary and Joseph as devout believers fulfilled these ceremonies to the letter. Mary was not subject to any defect either by way of Original Sin or otherwise, and really she did not come under the law. But it was no part of her policy to make herself conspicuous by standing out. Indeed reflection will show that it would not be possible for her to explain the real position in which she was. People would not understand or believe her. So she came to the Temple and she fulfilled all the conditions. One of these was the making of the offerings.

It was not a fact that Joseph and she were poverty-stricken. It is probable that they had a hard time in Egypt, where they were strangers in a strange land, but that would not apply to their own country. St Joseph was an honest and competent tradesman who probably earned pretty well. In those circumstances Mary could, no doubt, have given the lamb and the turtle dove, but instead she availed of the privilege granted to the poor and gave an extra dove instead of the lamb. Why? Here we are surely in the presence of a vast symbolism which we must try to probe. If we reason things out, we will realise that she was already offering a lamb – her child Jesus, the Lamb of God! The ritual lamb prescribed by the law only stood for the Lamb of God. When inserted in the code at the beginning, it had the Redeemer, the Lamb of God, in mind and it stood for him. It would have been quite inappropriate in the circumstances for Mary to offer another ordinary lamb and so she offered the two doves.

Woman of Genesis Prefigured

It is of interest to speculate on what the dove represented side by side with the lamb. We might be inclined to ask:

Why should it represent anything more than an animal offering? No. Everything in the liturgy of the Old Testament prefigures the Woman of Genesis and her seed who would jointly redeem the world. Everything, however small, had its pointing. It stood for something vital. Therefore, just as the lamb stood for the Lamb of God who would be sacrificed, so the dove had to stand for something also. What else could it stand for but Mary herself who is referred to in our own Church liturgy as 'my love, my dove, my beautiful one'?

The law obliged that she present her child to God. In her case that child was someone extraordinary. That presentation in the case of the ordinary Jewish mother was nothing more than a legal ceremony – something to be gone through. To Mary it was a real giving to God the Father of his son who was also her son. It was a beginning of sacrificing him. It involved what Benedict XV in our own time has called 'the surrender of her own rights over her son'. She had a most clear insight into the course of the Redemption. All the prophecies of Holy Scripture flowed before her mind at the time, even though her knowledge told her that this was not yet the moment for the destruction of her son. Still it was an entering into the portals of the Redemption and a paralysing chill must have penetrated her heart.

But things proceed normally and she was able to purchase back her child for the five shekels. One is driven to make the remark, which sounds cynical but which is really only sad, that Our Lord always sells cheap. Judas sold him for a somewhat similar sum of money.

The law provides that the mother only received back her child for the purpose of rearing him for the worthy service of God. How this was to be fulfilled in the case of Our Lady! What a perfect work she would make of it, but at what an infinite cost to her heart!

A Great Dream Was Realised

Those ceremonies finished, there came the extraordinary meetings with Holy Simeon and then with the prophetess Anna. Each of these was led to the encounter with the Holy Family by the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit, as the gospel itself declares. The time of the coming of the Messiah according to the prophecies, as has already been said, was ripe. Simeon (says Lk 2:26) had received an answer from the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Christ the Lord. In that expectation he was eagerly waiting.

Imagine that extraordinary scene! Mary coming with the babe that she had just bought back, Joseph with her, and this aged and wonderful Simeon meeting them. Beholding the babe in the arms of Mary he recognised him. He took him in his own arms and burst out into that celebrated canticle, the *Nunc Dimittis*, the hymn of Compline: 'Now God, thou canst dismiss thy servant according to thy word in peace; because my eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples: a light to the revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel' (Lk 2:29-32).

Symbolism of the Candles

Let me mention that one of the ceremonies of 2 February is the blessing and the lighting of candles. Again rich in symbolism! This has caused the feast to be also called 'Candlemas'; it is a pointing to that phrase in the canticle: 'a light to the revelation of the Gentiles' and also to those other words which Our Lord himself would later on utter: 'I am the Light of the world'.

Simeon prophesised the fate alike of the Redeemer and his mother. This is done in the most solemn tone of

Scripture, one which is reserved for the primary moments. The record insists that Simeon had the Holy Spirit in him and spoke by the Holy Spirit. Addressing Mary, he said: 'Behold this child is set for the fall and the resurrection of many in Israel and for a sign that shall be contradicted.' Then he added: 'and thine own soul a sword shall pierce that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed'. We see from this the immense fact that Mary's Compassion (to use the technical word which describes Our Lady's partnership in Our Lord's Passion) was made the subject of one of the resounding utterances of scripture: an insistence on her vital part in the Redemption. Added is the mysterious reference that 'out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed'.

A Test and Turning Point

What do these words mean? What else could they mean but that just as Our Lord is going to be a test of men's hearts so that some shall succeed and rise, while others shall fail and fall; so shall it be in regard to Mary. The acceptance of her or the rejection of her shall similarly be a test of men's hearts, a turning point of salvation.

Mary was versed in the scriptures. She already knew full well that she was to be the Mother of the Man of Sorrows. She knew the depth of those sorrows. 'A worm and no man' – thus Isaiah had foretold the extreme condition to which Our Lord would be reduced! But now it comes to her from human lips – not from the Holy Book. It was the first dread tolling of the bell! She was going to be tortured along with him. She would die a mystic death along with him. 'Almost dead,' Benedict XV would say about her. Yet that was not sorrow but joy for her to hear, because it meant that as they had begun together in the mind of God

from before creation of the world and from all eternity, so they would be together to the end: the Redeemer and the Faithful One who made everything possible and who was his unfailing partner in all his mysteries. There was but one destiny, one martyrdom, one victory and one Kingdom. Neither must our gratitude and love be divided. Our worship must place her at his side – or else!

The gospel narrative then comes down to earth from those immensities. Almost coldly it remarks: 'After they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee to their own city Nazareth' (Lk 2:39).