

“Who is this?”

First Week. Tuesday.

“When, He was come into Jerusalem, the whole city was moved, saying: Who is this? And the people said: This is Jesus the Prophet, from Nazareth of Galilee.” (The “Gospel.”)

1st Prelude. Jesus riding into Jerusalem.

2nd Prelude. Grace to answer the question: Who is this?

Point I.

The City and its Question

The city had heard the cheers of the multitude, which had accompanied our Lord on His triumphal ride into Jerusalem. It had caught the Hosannahs and the words of the Messianic Psalm: “Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord.” “And the whole city was moved”—it was curious, excited, anxious. *Who is this* that makes such a stir, and of Whom *we* know nothing? The question had been asked ever since His birth. Herod had asked it in that same city; the doctors in the temple; many, no doubt, at Nazareth; the people who saw His Baptism; Satan in the desert; those who saw His miracles; His own Apostles; those who saw Him suffer and die; those who saw Him after His Resurrection. And the world, ever since, has been asking the same question. Jesus of Nazareth perplexes it. His Church perplexes it. Who is this Who founded a Society, whose unity and power no amount of opposition has been able to touch? The city is moved, but it loses its chance, and allows the question to go by unanswered—and *He* would have been so glad to have answered it! so glad to have explained!

Point II.

The Answer of the Multitude

“This is Jesus, the Prophet, from Nazareth of Galilee.” The multitude knows Him well enough. They know His name and where He comes from. He has taught in their streets, healed their sick, spent Himself for them during the last three years. They cannot plead ignorance, they know more about Him than the city knows; but what use will they make of their knowledge? “Crucify Him!” will be their cry in a few days’ time. Ah, the multitude is easily swayed. Their answer is true as far as it goes, but what is it worth? What use do they make of their opportunity? The multitude, as well as the city, lose its chance.

Let me pray today, not only for those who do not know Him, because they will not take the trouble to find out Who He is; but also for those who do know Him, and who, in spite of their knowledge, are “crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making Him a mockery.” (Heb.vi.6.)

Point III.

My answer

“Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bosra, this beautiful One in His robe, walking in the greatness of His strength?” He gives the answer Himself: “I that speak justice, and am a defender *to save*.” (Isaias lxiii. 1.) It is my Jesus, my King, riding into Jerusalem, His own city, to die for me. And He wants me at the beginning of Lent to recall it all, and to answer the question once again for myself: *Who is this?* I know so much better than either the city or the multitude. Yet it is not an unknown thing for me, too, to lose my chances sometimes. When He comes and makes suggestions, I do not always respond to them, though I know quite well Who it is. He wants His little ones taught, His sick attended to, His poor helped, His prisoners visited, His sad ones cheered, His mourners consoled, His lost sheep sought. And He appeals to me, for He wants to say to me one day: “As long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me.” But I am a little apt to answer mechanically: “This is Jesus, the Prophet,” and then to let the next thing that self wants sway me in another direction. Let me determine during this Lent to

answer with the Bride in the Canticles: “This is my Beloved, and He is *my Friend*.” (Cant. v. 16.) *I* know Him, and when He comes to me with His appeals for help, when He comes in my Communion, in my Confessions, in my Meditations, in my daily duties, my companions, my difficulties, my temptations, with my heart full of faith and love, I will put the question to *Him*: “Who is this?” just for the joy of hearing Him answer, “*It is I*, I that speak justice, and am a defender to save.” I have come to save you through *this* means. Do not lose your chance.

Colloquy. “Who is this? It is I, be not afraid.”

Resolution. To have the question: “*Who is this?*” continually present with me today.

Spiritual Bouquet. “Who is this? This is my Beloved, and He is my Friend.”

Elias and the Juniper Tree

First Week. Ember Wednesday.

“*He ate and drank, and walked in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights.*” (The “Epistle,” 3 Kings xix. 8.)

1st Prelude. Elias under the juniper tree.

2nd Prelude. Grace to persevere.

Point I.

The Prophet’s Depression

The story of Elias and his fast is one of the two lessons which form the “Epistle” for Ember Wednesday. The other tells us how Moses got strength to fast forty days and forty nights. Perhaps one reason why Holy Church, has brought before us these two great pillars of the Old Dispensation today is that, having before us these vivid pictures of what God *can* do for those whom He singles out to do His work in the world, we may pray with more faith and intensity for those who are about to be consecrated to Him by the Sacrament of Holy Order.

Elias “was afraid, and went whithersoever he had a mind;” (verse 3); this accounts for our finding him sitting under a juniper tree in the desert. Elias was passing through a time of depression and fear—it was the reaction following on a great victory. He had had a tremendous day, the day before. Single-handed, on Mount Carmel, he had met the worshippers of Baal, with their four hundred and fifty priests, besides four hundred prophets of the groves. By calling down fire from Heaven to consume his sacrifice, he had forced the fickle people to confess: “The Lord, *He* is God; The Lord, *He* is God.” Then had followed the slaughter of all Baal’s prophets; then at his prayer had come the rain which had been withheld for three years on account of the people’s idolatry—and then he had run before King Achab’s chariot right into the royal city. All knew him—he was a great man, for he had done great things for God and for His truth. But he had an enemy in Queen Jezebel, the chief of Baal’s worshippers, and she had sworn a vengeful oath to take his life. This is the explanation of his running away, of his sitting under the juniper tree, and “requesting for his soul that he might die.”

How often is this picture a true one of ourselves! By God’s help we have been enabled to do some piece of work for Him—all has gone well, and all are speaking well of us; then some *little* thing goes wrong, and

we at once slink away under the juniper tree, inclined to give all up! How childish! and yet how common! When shall we have learnt the lesson that desolation follows close on consolation, and *be prepared* for it? When shall we have learnt that God so often allows failure to follow success—*not* to discourage us and make us “request that we may die,” but that we may know that *He* is the Master and that we are His dependents, taking from His hands whatever He is pleased to give—consolation or desolation, success or failure. “I am the Lord, I change not,” and it is in order that we may learn this grand truth that He so often changes our circumstances and plans, and surroundings.

“It is enough!” says Elias, and worn out, he falls asleep.

Point II.

The Prophet’s Strength

He is awakened by the touch of an angel, who bids him “Arise and eat”; and he sees prepared for him “a hearth-cake and a vessel of water.” God is always gracious—even when we are petulant and unreasonable. He knows that His servant is tired and worn out in His service, and He sends one of His own messengers to refresh him. Elias does not seem to think it strange. “He ate and drank, and fell asleep again.” A second time the angel comes: “Arise and eat, for thou hast yet a great way to go; and he ate and drank, and walked in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights, unto the mount of God—Horeb.” (verses 7 and 8.)

It is often so. Just when we have decided that things are too much, and that it is better to give all up, God wakes us up and brings us to our senses. How? By giving us another difficulty to be met, another trial to be borne, another temptation to face. He gives the necessary grace and strength, it is true, but with it the stern reminder: “Thou hast yet a great way to go.” *There* is the difficulty and it has got to be faced, and its very presence, as it is meant to do, braces our faith and our courage, and makes us quit the juniper tree.

Do I not see my lesson? It is no use, God says to me, giving up at the first difficulty; you began your Lent well, made great efforts to put yourself in the Spirit of Holy Church, faced your temptations nobly—and now this depression just because you have failed! Lent is not over, “you have yet a great way to go.” Arise and eat the Heavenly Food that I have provided. Know that the Blessed Sacrament is sufficient for every need. “In the strength of that Food” you will be able to go not only through the forty days of Lent, but all through your wilderness journey till you come to the true mount of God—the city which is above—the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Colloquy with Jesus, Who is ever ready to provide Food for the journey.

Resolution. To walk in the strength of that Food day by day, never doubting its sufficiency for every need.

Spiritual Bouquet. “Arise and eat, for thou hast yet a great way to go.”

Dogs, Children, and Crumbs

First Week. Thursday

“As I live, saith the Lord God . . . all souls are Mine.” (The “Epistle.”)

1st Prelude. The woman of Canaan and Jesus. (The “Gospel.”)

2nd Prelude. Grace to treasure, and also to be generous with, the crumbs,

Point I.

Dogs—the Woman

She is a Gentile—probably an idolatress. She is in great distress, for she has a daughter who is “grievously troubled by a devil.” She has heard of the power of Jesus over the devil—is that power, she wonders, to be exercised only for His own people? She is only a “dog” (a name given to the Gentiles by the Jews), an outsider, but there can be no harm in trying. So she goes right up to Jesus, states her case, and asks for mercy. “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David, for my daughter is grievously troubled by a devil.” And she waits humbly at His Feet.

No one is *outside* the Heart of Jesus who in trouble turns to Him. The desire of His Heart is that all such should come, and when they do, they will get, as this woman did, far, far more than they ask. If He is thus waiting to be gracious to those who know Him not, what is His tenderness towards His *children*! And yet I keep my troubles to myself, pretending that they are too small for Him to notice, or that it is no use telling Him! Children can learn many lessons from dogs!

“O taste and see that the Lord is sweet.” (The “Offertory.”)

Point II.

Children—the Disciples

“Send her away, for she crieth after us.” So say the children. Children often behave so to dogs, especially: when they are begging for some of their food. And the Master does not rebuke them. Things do not look very hopeful, but *she* hopes. Now the Master is speaking, and He is evidently siding with the children: I was sent for the sheep, not for dogs. She interrupts Him with an agonised cry: “*Lord, help me!*” Did she see in His Face a look that belied the harshness of His words? But He continues in the same strain. I cannot take the children’s bread and give it to dogs! How *could* He treat her thus, He *Who* is so infinitely tender and gentle? Because His Sacred Heart was yearning for her, and the joy which she was even now giving Him was only increased by keeping her waiting. Just as a mother takes pleasure in pretending that she is not going to give the longed-for gift to her little one, not because she enjoys the momentary pang of disappointment which she is causing, but because of the enhanced joy there will be on both sides when she produces the gift. He saw her love and her desire, and He wanted to increase them; He knew that He could count on her, and that opposition and difficulty would only give her fresh courage. He wanted to whet her appetite. He wanted to try her that she might have all the more merit; He wanted His goodness to be the more marked on account of His apparent severity; and last, but not least, He wanted to teach her how infinitely precious is the children’s bread. And so He says: “It is not good to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to the dogs.”

When I am inclined to think that my troubles and difficulties are “*endless*,” as I sometimes say, let me recall a few of the possible reasons that the Sacred Heart may have for allowing them, apparently, to be so.

But the Master’s treatment does not excuse the disciples. They were thoughtless, selfish, unkind, narrow-minded, and show me how I am *not* to behave to the “other sheep.” The bread is mine, and I have a right to a place at the Master’s table; but let me see to it that I never waste it, nor grudge it to others.

Point III.

Crumbs—the Bread of Life

She has found a way out of the difficulty, as women mostly can. She does not ask for the children's bread, her humility does not aspire to anything so great—*crumbs* will do for her, crumbs that the children drop and waste. And so with wondrous faith and hope she makes her last appeal. It is quite true, Lord, it would not be good to take the bread from the children, but *under* the table there are *little* dogs, and they eat the *crumbs*—the crumbs that *fall* by mistake from *their* master's table. What humility there is in every word! and what boundless confidence! for now she considers that He is *her* Master too, though she is only His little dog, underneath the table, looking for crumbs.

Her humility and her need have prevented her from noticing any rebuff on the part of either Master or disciples; and she, the idolatress, is now "*adoring*" her Savior. It is enough, the Sacred Heart asks no more; It is ever touched by humility, and It can wait no longer. "O woman, great is thy faith; be it done to thee as thou wilt." And she leaves His presence not only with her request granted, but raised to the level of the children with a right to sit at the Master's table, to eat the Bread of Life, and to live for ever.

Let us pray very earnestly, and do penance too, during these days of prayer and fasting, for the conversion of sinners and for the return to the fold of the "other sheep."

Colloquy with Jesus, Who is longing to give the crumbs to the "other sheep."

Resolution. To thank Him once again for the crumbs He dropped for me.

Spiritual Bouquet. "The bread that I will give is My Flesh, for the life of the world." (The "Communion.")