

LUX EDMUNDI: JULY, 2017: THOUGHTS ON THE FIVE JOYFUL MYSTERIES FOR CATHOLIC TEACHERS

THE FIRST JOYFUL MYSTERY: THE ANNUNCIATION (SEE LK 1:26-38)

When the Blessed Virgin Mary agreed to be the Mother of God, then and there, by the power of the Holy Spirit, “the Word became flesh” in her womb. The Word is the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, through whom, in whom and for whom, were made all things that were made, including the human race itself. In fact, Christ, the *Logos*, the Word of God, made flesh, is the paradigm and the template of humanity at its most authentic and complete. *Au fond*, education is all about teaching students how to be human. Catholic schools teach students how to be human through, with and in Christ. In faith and in fact, each one of our students is a “word” of God, uttered by the Father in the Son from all eternity, destined by divine Providence to be incarnate, as it were, as an *alter Christus*, another Christ, and we Catholic teachers are called by God to help shape each and every student committed to our professional care in the image and likeness of the Word made flesh.

THE SECOND JOYFUL MYSTERY: THE VISITATION (SEE LK 1:39-56)

In one of his sermons for the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, St. Augustine of Hippo reminds us that the Visitation has Mary, who is pregnant with Christ, the Word of God incarnate, coming to Elizabeth, her cousin, who is pregnant with John the Baptist, the voice crying in the wilderness. It is, says Augustine, wholly right and proper that the Voice should be given the Word it must proclaim; that, in effect, his People should hear the saving Truth of God and not some human message, which, however exalted or inspiring, simply cannot save. The implication for teachers is clear: We are neither the subject nor the object of our teaching. Christ, and Christ alone, is that. He, in fact, is the programme, the course, the curriculum, the syllabus, the subject, the lesson, we teach every day of our lives to those who sit before us. We are the Voice, not the Word. Ours, indeed, is a “disciple’s tongue” (see Is 50:4), that is, the tongue of one who listens to the Word before speaking it. We must learn before we teach. The day we stop learning is the day we become no longer fit for purpose as teachers. The day we stop learning Christ – the day we stop being and becoming Christ - is the day we become no longer fit for purpose as teachers of Christ; no longer really fit for purpose as teachers – much less as leaders – in any school under Catholic patronage.

THE THIRD JOYFUL MYSTERY: THE NATIVITY (SEE LK 2:1-20)

St. Luke tells us that the Infant Jesus, newly born, was laid in a manger, a crib, “a barred receptacle for fodder (*SOED*)”. From very early on, the Fathers and Doctors of the Church emphasised the appropriateness of him who is the Bread of Life being born in Bethlehem – a name they took to mean “House of Bread” - and being placed there in a feeding trough. They caught in the word “manger” an implicit but still unmistakable reference to the Eucharist, the Bread of Angels, the Bread come down from Heaven, Manna, the *viaticum*, the food sent his People on earth by their Father in heaven to sustain them on their pilgrim way through this world to the next. The “manger” may be thought to adumbrate especially the two-fold Liturgy of the Mass, where we are twice fed, as it were, first, by the Word of God, and, then, by the Body of Christ. To be genuine and effective as Catholic teachers and Catholic school leaders, we must be devoted to the Holy Mass. We must ourselves feed on the Word of God and on the Body of Christ if we, in turn, are to lead our charges to the “manger”, the “table” of the Lord in the “House of Bread”.

THE FOURTH JOYFUL MYSTERY: THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD IN THE TEMPLE (SEE LK 2:21-40)

It was because they were guided by the Holy Spirit that, in the hustle and bustle of the Temple in Jerusalem, Simeon and Anna recognised the infant Jesus as the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ, the Son of David, the King of Israel. As Catholic teachers, we must ever bear in mind that each one of those committed to our professional care is a child of our Heavenly Father, made in his image and likeness and re-made in the waters of Baptism in the image and likeness of his only-begotten Son, Christ Jesus, our Lord, born of the Father before time began, born in time of the Virgin Mary. We must ever bear in mind that, irrespective of appearances, of intelligence, of demeanour, every student we teach is, as we have noted, a “word” of God, an *alter Christus*, another Christ. Each is the Christ that we are meant to serve here and now; the living Christ whom, as he himself has assured us, is present especially in “the least”, the afflicted, the deprived, the repelled and the repulsive, the “leper”, the pariah, the in-your-face, insolent brat who couldn’t care less about you, me or anyone else, who puts us to the pin of our collar to hold our anger, but in whom we must still seek and see Christ. It’s not that there is no such thing as a bad child or that no child should have to face the consequences of her/his misconduct. It’s that, as he did to his disciples on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus sometimes comes to us as a “ghost” and it is only if we, too, are filled with, and guided by, the Holy Spirit that, like Anna and Simeon, we will recognise him present in some of our charges and in some of the difficult circumstances in which we and they encounter each other.

THE FIFTH JOYFUL MYSTERY: THE FINDING OF OUR LORD IN THE TEMPLE (LK 2:41-52)

The scene of Jesus amongst the Doctors has been represented in a variety of media and by artists of all kinds. Amongst the canonical writers, it is reported only by Luke. It is, though, treated, and more extensively, in a number of the Apocryphal Gospels. In these, the 12-year-old Jesus is clearly the master of his would-be teachers, in every respect, in every discipline, every time. A roughly similar approach is taken in later Christian readings of the episode, which go out of their way to emphasise the absolutely prodigious knowledge of this boy from Nazareth, probably because they do not want us to lose sight of his divinity. Luke has the boy Jesus “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions”, astonishing them indeed, but by “his understanding and his answers” rather than by his omniscience. Here, in fact, the Rabbis may be thought to accept him as one of themselves, not in their right to sit in the seat of Moses, but in their abiding duty to engage, day in, day out, with the *Torah*, the Word of God, the Covenant, and, thus, with the God who gave it to them. We have noted before Augustine’s insistence that, irrespective of office in the Church or state in life, all Christians have only one Master, one Teacher, one Rabbi; that, in effect, all of us, bishop and flock, priest and people, teacher and pupils, are always students together at the feet of Christ. We are, Augustine says, “*condiscipuli*”, “co-disciples”, class-mates, fellow-students, swotting Christ together, distinguished, not so much by our respective and visible roles as tutor and tutee, as by our invisible and respective capacities to know, love and serve God; so that, in effect, whilst I am, and must remain, the adult in charge in the class-room, in another sense, in the presence of a child who loves God and neighbour more and better than I can, I may be the boss but I am not the star of the class, not the superior Christian, not necessarily the brightest and best in the eyes of God. I must, therefore, proceed always with respect, for I may well be in the presence of my moral betters.