

# THE ROSARY

NOV. - DEC. 2006

Voice of the Rosary Confraternity

# LIGHT & LIFE

FATHER REGINALD MARTIN, O.P., DIRECTOR

Vol. 59, No. 6 - A WESTERN DOMINICAN PUBLICATION

By happy coincidence, this issue of Light and Life offers a reflection on the Incarnation at the same time our liturgical year calls us to celebrate the Birth of Our Savior and the Immaculate Conception of His Blessed Mother.

Mary is central to our faith, and we see her role in the history of our salvation more clearly in the days of Advent and Christmas than in any other liturgical seasons in the Church year. In the readings for the Masses of the early days of Advent the prophets express all the longing of God's people in the Old Testament. Mary embodies this longing, together with the holiness of our ancestors, their fidelity, and their trust in God's presence, even when He seems most distant.

Our civil year begins with great festivity, but it draws to a very quiet and weary close. This is not the case with our liturgical year. It ends with the triumphant acknowledgement of Christ as King of Creation and ruler of our hearts, and then draws us – quietly at first, and then with greater and greater joy – to a triumphant celebration of Christ's birth.

The days of Advent and Christmas recall the historical event of Christ's birth on that "cold winter's night that was so deep," even as they look forward to his return. "Lo, He comes on clouds descending, once for favored sinners slain." The Church has always valued music, and these hymns express – as perhaps nothing else can – the depth of our longing, and the glory we long to behold in Christ.

You are in our hearts at the Rosary Center. We thank you for all you have allowed us to accomplish this year, and we beg your prayers and support for all we are called to do. Let us pray for one another throughout the holy season of Advent, and especially during the days of our novenas to honor the Immaculate Conception of God's Mother.

## CONFRATERNITY FUND PAYS DIVIDENDS

Not long ago we told our readers that the Rosary Center established the Rosary Confraternity Memorial Education Fund, a special fund set aside to generate support for the education of Dominican students in the Western Dominican Province. We are proud to announce that the Rosary Center received its first dividend check from the Memorial Fund and sent it to the Treasurer of



*"You are all beautiful, my beloved,  
and there is no blemish in you."  
(Song of Songs 4:7)*

the Western Province. "It was not a huge sum," smiled Rosary Center director, Fr. Reginald Martin, "but it is a fine beginning, and I am confident the Rosary Center's many friends will help the Fund grow."

If you would like to make a gift to the Memorial Fund, simply send your check to the Rosary Center, indicating that it is a gift to the Fund. If you would like to make a gift to honor another person, or a special event, tell us whom we should notify of your gift. We will name you as the donor, but not reveal the amount of your gift.

## WHERE THERE'S A WILL

A couple of issues ago we invited our friends to remember the Rosary Center in their wills, and offered to provide more information to anyone who wished to email us with specific questions. One friend wrote to say that she was unable to find our email address anywhere in *Light and Life*. If you would like to contact us about a bequest – or for any other reason – you can reach us through the Rosary Center's website, [www.rosary-center.org](http://www.rosary-center.org). We enjoy hearing personally from our friends.

### THE ROSARY LIGHT & LIFE

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# THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

## THE CREED, PART III

### HE WAS CONCEIVED OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

#### THE WORD MADE FLESH

St. Thomas Aquinas turns to the gospel of John to introduce this section of this homily on the Creed. *“St John, having told us many subtle things about the word of God that are hard to understand, goes on to tell us of the Incarnation, saying, ‘And the Word was made flesh.’”*

#### AN EXAMPLE

St. Thomas always helps us grasp complex theological truths by way of simple examples. The Incarnation is a mystery central to our faith as Christians. We can never understand it fully, of course, but we can easily grasp aspects of it by way of analogy. St. Thomas invites us to approach God’s Word by looking at our own words. In our earlier reflection we considered the theological understanding of words and said that a word (whether God’s Word or one of our own) is a reality we conceive within ourselves.

But until our words are spoken, they are known to no one but us. When we speak a word we clothe it with our voice, and the word takes on an existence it did not have while it was still within us. The Father cherished His Word from all eternity, but until the Word took on human flesh, the Word was known only to the Father. We can say that Jesus is God’s Word, clothed in flesh, just as we can say that our speech is our words clothed in our voice. In each case, the hidden word is presented to the world in a form that individuals can perceive with one of their senses.

When a word is written, it receives the capacity to reach more of our senses, for we can see and touch it. God knows our needs, so He knows that we might have missed His message if all we possessed was a word spoken to our ears. The Old Testament is a history of our inability (or refusal) to listen to God speaking to us in this fashion. But once God’s Word was written on our flesh, it became a little harder to ignore. The human Jesus took up as much space as any of us, so His humanity was as tangible a reality as any of ours.

#### THE POWER OF WORDS

Before we continue our reflection on the Incarnation, let us consider the implications of what we have said so far. A word is something that receives life from us. A word is intimately related to us because it comes to be within us. But until I speak a word, it touches no one but me. Once a word is spoken, however, it takes on a life of its own. It can help and heal those who hear it, or it can wound and hurt.

Because a word is so intimately connected to the person who speaks it, the word also reveals a great deal about the speaker. The speaker in one of Robert Browning’s poems asks, *“What so wild as words are?”* and compares them to hawks sitting in wait for their prey. Parents are wise to counsel children to think before they speak. Our words not only touch others, for good or ill, they tell the world a great deal about us.

The same is true of God’s Word. Jesus is not only the visible form of God’s love for us, spoken to heal and save us, but He is the concrete manifestation of God Himself. At the end of the Prologue to his gospel, St. John says, *“No one has ever seen God, it is the only Son, who is nearest to the Father’s heart, who has made him known”* (Jn. 1.18). This means if we lacked other clues or signs of Who God is, and what His love means, we could turn to the gospel and this record of the words and works of Jesus would reveal the Father to us.

#### WHAT WE BELIEVE; WHAT WE DO NOT

The Creed is a short-hand summary of what we believe. It also refutes what we do not believe. Therefore, when we profess that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, we not only acknowledge these articles of our faith, we turn our back on anything that denies either Jesus’ divine origins or the reality of His humanity.

In the 21st Century we might ask who would deny truths so central to our faith, but the early centuries of our Church were alive with doubts about the nature of Christ, and some of these issues may still puzzle us today.

#### JESUS IS TRUE GOD

Few today would deny that Jesus was truly God, but some early Christians believed that Jesus only grew into His Godhead by His life of obedience and heroic sacrifice. The Creed reminds us that the Word was God from all eternity.

#### A COROLLARY

To profess our belief in Jesus’ birth by *“the power of the Holy Spirit”* reminds us that although Jesus was born exactly as all of us are, His was a unique conception. Our belief in Jesus’ conception by the power of the Spirit, rather than by an expression of human sexuality is not only the basis for the Church’s belief in Christ’s divinity, it becomes the foundation for our belief in the perpetual virginity of Christ’s Mother.

## JESUS IS TRUE MAN

When we look at our world – or our lives – and consider the sins we are apt to commit (and repeat), we may be tempted to wonder whether Jesus could truly have united Himself with something as error-prone as our humanity. The Incarnation is a sign of the Father's infinite love for the world He created, a love that is both greater than we deserve and greater than any love we are willing to offer ourselves. God's Word not only took on our humanity, with all its frailty and temptations, Jesus used elements of the material world to convey the gift of His Body and Blood in the Eucharist.

## THE CHURCH'S IMITATION OF CHRIST

In one of the prefaces for Christmas the Church prays, *"Your eternal Word has taken upon himself our human weakness, giving our mortal nature immortal value."* The Church's awe at this divine regard for creation is nowhere more evident than in the sacraments. Each of them employs words to convey God's love, and the primary sacraments, Baptism and the Eucharist, use material elements, *"gifts of the earth,"* to initiate and strengthen a believer's life with Him.

## THE POSSIBILITY OF ERROR TODAY

If modern Christians commit any of the classical errors of the past, they are apt to do so through carelessness rather than the deliberate desire to deny Church teaching. The Incarnation is a mystery, and the mysteries of our faith, by definition, defy our efforts to understand them completely.

Two possible errors may catch us unaware. The first is to forget that because Christ was fully human, He possessed a human soul. The human soul of Jesus is often overlooked, or we may imagine that Jesus' divinity took the place of His soul. The gospel assures us that Jesus was as capable of human emotion and human passion as any of us – we need look no further than the touching account of His grief at the death of Lazarus (Jn. 11.33, 35). Our belief in the humanity of Jesus is a belief that He, like any of us, is composed of a body and a soul.

A second error we may fall into is to forget that, in Christ, the human nature and the divine are united, but not mixed. As we encounter Jesus in the gospel and the sacramental life of the Church we may not be able to tell where the human nature leaves off and the divine begins, but this is not to say that the two natures were not distinct in Christ. In one of his Christmas homilies, St. Leo the Great preached,

*"...in both natures there is the same Son of God who assumes our nature without losing His own. By His own manhood He renews man while remaining unchanged Himself...the supreme and eternal being that lowered Himself for man's salvation, has raised us up to His own glory without ceasing to be that which He had been."*

## THE INCARNATION STRENGTHENS FAITH

St. Thomas Aquinas asserts, *"...if anyone were to tell us about a distant country which he had never visited, we*

*would not believe him to the same extent as if he has been there."* Our ancestors in the Old Testament did not lack for revelations of God, but just as a spoken word has less weight than one that is written, the revelation of God in Jesus is stronger than the revelation shared by the prophets.

St. John the Evangelist echoes this truth at the very beginning of his first letter to the Church: *"Something which has existed from the beginning, that we have heard, and we have seen with our own eyes; that we have watched and touched with our hands"* (1 Jn. 1). Jesus is one with God from eternity, yet in His humanity He is our window onto the eternal majesty of God's love and the eternal promise of God's kingdom.

## THE INCARNATION RAISES HOPE

Salvation must head the list of any of the goods we long for. The Incarnation is a demonstration of the immensity of God's love; it was not something God undertook to show off His inventiveness but to show boundless depths of His mercy. St. Augustine tells us,

*"Man who might be seen was not to be followed; but God was to be followed, who could not be seen...therefore God was made man, that He who might be seen by man, and whom man might follow, might be shown to man."*

The early Church writers believed that the Incarnation was a greater event than creation. In the beginning, they said, God simply called into existence things that had not been before. In the Incarnation, St. Thomas writes, *"He became man that man might become God."*

## THE INCARNATION INFLAMES LOVE

We could have no greater proof of God's love than the incredibly Good News that our Creator became a creature, that our Lord became our brother, and the Son of God became the Son of man. The one passage of the gospel that all Christians can embrace is St. John's unapologetic assertion, *"God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son"* (Jn. 3.16). If God was so moved by love of us, how much should our hearts burn with love of God?

## THE INCARNATION ENCOURAGES VIRTUE

In St. Luke's gospel account Jesus warns us, *"...of anyone to whom much has been given, much will be required"* (Lk. 13.48). In the Incarnation God's nature was not simply united with ours; our nature was united with His. God's Word emptied Himself by coming down from heaven so that we could be raised up into union with Him. This suggests that God has the right to expect a great deal from those He has elevated.

St. Leo the Great reminds us of this in the most famous of the Christmas sermons he preached in Rome. He said,

*"Christian, remember your dignity, and now that you share in God's own nature, do not return by sin to your former base condition...do not drive away so great a guest by evil conduct and become again a slave to the devil..."*

A theology professor tells a story attributed to Martin Luther, who said that a man refused to kneel in church. One day the devil appeared and struck the man to the ground. "You fool!" he said. "You refuse to kneel in the presence of the God who became man for you? Have you any idea what I would have done had He become an angel for me?"

We have become a new creation in Christ. His union with us gives our bodies inestimable value, and we cannot value our bodies – or the promise of their glory – too highly. "You were bought with a price," St. Paul reminds us, "so glorify God with your bodies" (1 Cor. 7.23).

### THE DESIRE FOR UNITY WITH CHRIST

In his homily on the Creed, St. Thomas observes,  
*... a man whose brother is a king in a far country will have a great longing to go to him to be with and stay with him. Thus, seeing that Christ is our brother, we should long to be with Him and to be united to Him.*"

The Incarnation establishes a point of connection between God and us. In Jesus we see God as He is, and we also see what we might become. The closer we draw to Christ, the more clearly we see Him, and the more clearly we see Him, the closer we want to come.

### THE EXAMPLE OF MARY

Mary's purity calls us to consider the immense value of creation. In the beginning God took the meanest stuff and used it for the summit of His creation, the human race. The sin of our First Parents, and the sins of their children down to the present generation, is a failure to live up to the promise of our creation. Mary turns that around, and shows us what heroism created matter is capable of.

When we acknowledge Jesus to be like us in all things but sin we understand that He is unlike us in one very important aspect of our humanity. Mary is like us in our need to be delivered from sin – she by a special act of God before her birth, we by our Baptism.

In the Incarnation we see the ultimate generosity of Mary, and her place in the Christmas tableau is a challenge and invitation to do as she did: to invite God's Word into our hearts, and to allow it to take flesh there so that, like her, we may present the human face of Christ to the world. ■



### POSTAL PALS

In the last issue of Light and Life we announced that the Rosary Center's "Postal Pals" had contributed nearly ten thousand dollars toward the postage for the boxes of rosaries we ship to missionaries in foreign lands. Our friends' generosity has exceeded the ten thousand dollar mark, and some of our "pals" have made five or more gifts to underwrite our foreign postage. Each thirty dollar contribution you designate for "Postal Pal" use pays the cost of mailing one box, containing three hundred rosaries. Sometimes a box is not quite full, so we are able to include prayer cards or other devotional aids along with the rosaries.

Rosary Center director, Fr. Reginald says, "as you might imagine, postage is a huge expense in our ministry. We save money by sending the rosaries in recycled boxes, but cannot pay less than the exact postage." We send a special word of thanks to our friends who help in this important part of our work!

### SOMETHING NEW FOR CHRISTMAS

The Rosary Center is pleased to offer a perpetual calendar, with a daily reflection on the life and example of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Unlike ordinary calendars, in which the pages must be discarded with the passage of the days, this calendar remains a steady reminder of the glory of God's Mother, and her place in our lives. The calendar is small enough to fit on a desk, and it makes an ideal gift. We are proud to offer it for \$12.95 plus shipping cost calculated from chart below.

Our friends who enjoy the classic texts of the Roman Catholic spiritual tradition will be interested in *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, by St. Louis de Montfort, which we are offering for the first time. St. Louis' writing played an important part in the devotional life of Pope John Paul II, and they will inspire anyone seeking a deeper commitment to Christ and His Blessed Mother.

Those who want to read St. Louis, but seek a shorter version of the saint's thought, will be delighted to encounter a simplified version of *True Devotion*, by Msgr. Vincent Walsh. Fr. Walsh's work includes every paragraph of St. Louis' masterpiece, but in a condensed form. Either edition of this important work is available for \$8.00.

### OUR PROMISE

The Rosary Center does not, nor will we, sell or share our mailing list. We value your support, we count on your kindness, and we will respect your trust.

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