

Love Is Calling

Reflections on the Priesthood and the Eucharist.

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A Catholic priest is a man empowered by Jesus Christ to offer to God the Sacrifice of the New Law, the Sacrifice of the Eucharist. Other wonderful Powers, too, are conferred at Ordination — such as the power to forgive sins; but the right to offer Sacrifice it is that constitutes a priest. He is a public minister, to whom authority is given to act as representative of the community, and, in its name, to offer to God the highest act of worship possible to man. On the priest, therefore, on his fidelity to duty, depends the existence of the Eucharist. On him, too, depends the administration of the other Sacraments.

But Christ also commissioned His Apostles — the first Catholic priests — to preach and so propagate His doctrine in the world. Within fifty or sixty years after Christ's death much of His oral teaching was, under divine inspiration, committed to writing; and those writings, along with the Old Testament, constitute the text book used by the Church in instructing her children. That text book priests, as preachers, must know thoroughly. Hence, the long years of preparation in the seminary devoted to the study of theology, which is simply the scientific exposition of Christ's doctrine, as contained in the Bible.

The priesthood, as such, is a social institution which exists primarily for the welfare of others — for the saving and perfecting of souls through the application of the supernatural means provided by Jesus Christ.

Religious life, on the other hand, has as its immediate end — primarily at least — the salvation and perfection of the individual; it is an organisation intended to enable men and women to live the Christian life as perfectly as possible.

A priest may, of course, be also a religious; but the priesthood, as such, does not necessarily demand the practice of all the evangelical counsels (though in the Western Church, celibacy is obligatory, and priests take a solemn vow of chastity). But religious life consists essentially in the public profession of the counsels of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience.

The Priest's Work.

This, however, does not mean that less stress is to be laid on the qualities and virtues required in a priest. He is Christ's public official, destined to fulfil duties for the spiritual welfare of the community.

For the proper discharge of these duties, qualities — natural and supernatural — are required that may not be necessary in those who live the retired life, say, of a Carthusian monk. A priest living in the midst of the world may be called upon to exercise a far higher degree of virtue, in order to be faithful to his duty, than those who serve God in a state more sheltered from temptation. Moreover,

since it is his vocation to preach God's Word, to direct the conscience of his flock, to advise them in their difficulties, to strengthen and encourage them in their struggle against sin, he must be equipped with the knowledge, prudence, experience, and tact without which such functions cannot be discharged. He has to mix with people of every rank of society — must be courteous to all, sympathetic with suffering, gentle with the weak, firm in correcting the sinner, full of mercy to the fallen. He must be a man of heroic self-sacrifice; for his duty requires that he be ready at any moment, day or night, to administer to the spiritual wants of his people, especially when death approaches.

It is a high and holy and noble vocation; it gives a man endless opportunities for practicing — sometimes in a heroic degree — charity to his fellows.

The simplest, and yet the most overwhelming, proof of the sublime dignity of the priesthood is the fact that, of all possible callings, it was that followed by Christ Himself. He is the first Priest of the New Law, and our priesthood is simply a sharing of His. The powers and prerogatives of the Catholic priest are, indeed, astounding, but they are explained by the fact that he is Christ's mouthpiece and representative. Just as the ambassador of a great empire, though in himself and as a private individual he may be of little consequence, still has the whole weight of that empire's authority behind him when he acts as ambassador; so with the priest.

In himself, he is a weak, fallible mortal, like other men, but when he pronounces the words of Consecration or the words of Absolution, he speaks with the authority of God Himself.

Encouraging Vocations.

Now, it is clearly our duty to do all we can to help in fostering and developing vocations — both to the priesthood and to religious life — in children and young people under our care. The success of the Church depends greatly on the number and fervour of her priests and religious. Jesus calls them especially to be the salt of the earth. Just as salt preserves food from decay, so, by aiming at a life of holiness, and by making available to others the supernatural means of sanctification provided by Christ, priests and religious help to check the tendency to corruption, which is inherent in fallen human nature.

It is true that on every man and woman lies this duty of resisting moral decay and sin, and anyone living a practical, Catholic life does actually and effectively promote this health-giving process. But, still, just as there are doctors and nurses specially devoted to safeguarding the public health, even though each individual has his own personal duty in the matter, so, in the spiritual world, there must be those who specially concentrate on the work of promoting the health of the soul.

And what a splendid purpose in life it is! And how many more would take up the toilsome work of Priest or Brother or Nun, if only they understood better the excellence and nobility of the calling! In every human heart, not utterly perverted by self-indulgence and sin, there exists a longing after higher things; as is evidenced by the splendid response made when a sudden call to heroic sacrifice is made — for example, in time of war.

Saint John Bosco said: "I know young people well; a large proportion of them have, in germ, the vocation to a higher life." That germ it is our duty to develop. And at no time was it more urgent than today, when such wonderful opportunities are opening up for the conversion of heathen nations.

The Catholic Church is at a turning point in her career. Mankind is being gradually linked up into a closer union by new methods of rapid transit and communication, and the barriers that hitherto walled off the uncivilised peoples of the globe are being broken down.

Unexampled opportunities for disseminating knowledge are placed at the disposal of all who care to make use of them. The enemies of Christianity are making use of them with restless energy, to attack our religion; and the Catholic Church needs a much larger and more energetic band of fire-fighters to check the progress of the conflagration of evil doctrines and evil practices at present sweeping the world and threatening to engulf our civilisation.

Those fighters are chiefly Priests, Brothers and Nuns and we should strain every nerve to recruit their ranks, which, especially in certain European countries, have been sadly depleted since the great wars of this century. Catholic parents should be led to consider it their greatest honour and privilege to devote to the service of God and the welfare of society one or more of their children. In no nobler way can they contribute to the extension of God's Kingdom on earth.

Lover's Token.

The Eucharist is Christ's most perfect gift — the special means He has devised to keep the members of His Church bound together by ties of love, and make us all His blood relations, as it were, and members of His family. Through this Gift, we feed on His own Body and Blood, and are incorporated with Him, nourished by Him, united to Him, and, through Him, to all the other members of His vast household. I think that one of the special results of Eucharistic Congresses has been to bring home to outsiders with startling force the unity of Catholic Faith in the Eucharist. They see devout men and women from various nations assemble together to make a public act of faith in the Real Presence, and, as they witness the reverence, the union of mind, the harmony in worship of the vast multitudes, they seem to grasp more firmly the great central fact that the Eucharist is the binding force of Catholic unity; that Christ's Blood it is that cements together so many millions of human souls into one great family of believers.

Each one of these worshippers of Christ has his own cares and anxieties; his own views, interests, tastes, difficulties, and repugnances — for the Catholic Church is a congregation of ordinary, fallible, faulty human beings. Yet, whatever else they may differ about, with regard to the deepest things of the mind — the things of Faith, the things of most consequence for time and eternity — they are all welded together, as by some mighty force, into an absolutely united whole.

Could one have a more striking proof of the marvellous effects of the Eucharist on man's interior life? The unity of Catholic belief proclaims eloquently and convincingly that the Master is at home and ruling His household.

And, as one watches such a Congress, the mind travels back musingly over the Eucharistic story of the past nineteen centuries and more.

To the inward eye, it is not merely the men and women of the twentieth century that are marching along, publicly proclaiming their faith in Christ's Presence. The modern pageant is but a part of a vaster procession that has been moving slowly onward ever since Christ lived — men and women all united in the same loving worship, all bowing in reverence to the same Eucharistic Presence. In that throng, you behold, with reverent mien and faces aflame with loving adoration, all the fervent worshippers and zealous defenders of the Eucharist of all the centuries.

You listen to the hymns that were chanted in Rome 600 years ago and more, at the first Corpus Christi procession in 1264, the marvellously beautiful hymns of Saint Thomas Aquinas; they are ringing today in our streets and churches — the same glorious words rising up from Catholic hearts to express the same living faith in the same Eucharistic Presence.

And Saint Thomas Aquinas is but one link in the chain. He was looking back over a thousand years of crowded Church life, and was feeding his soul on the Eucharistic teachings of the Doctors and Fathers of the early centuries. He joined hands with Saint John Chrysostom, with Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, with Saint Ambrose of Milan, Saint Augustine of Hippo, with all the Catholic teachers and believers of those far-off days, when Roman emperors still ruled the world before the great barbarian invasions had overwhelmed civilisation; when modern nations were as yet in the making, and the world was vastly different from what it is today. Very little remains now to tell the tale of those ancient times. But one thing does survive, and survives as vigorous and youthful today as it was in the days of Diocletian or Constantine — one tremendous force remains unshaken by all the shocks of wars and revolution — namely, Catholic belief in the Eucharist.

Like a golden chain, Catholic faith in Christ's Presence unites the new world with the old, the worshippers of Sydney or Melbourne with the martyrs of the Colosseum; Catholics of the twentieth century chanting High Mass in a great basilica, with Catholics of the third century stealing to the Catacombs to assist in secret at the same Holy Sacrifice, offered in the same words, by the same Catholic priesthood.

Omnipotent Words.

"This is My Body; this is My Blood." Half a dozen words, whispered softly in a supper room in far-off Jerusalem on the eve of the great national festival nearly two thousand years ago. And, lo! These words have never ceased echoing in the world ever since! There are no other human words of which we are absolutely sure that all day and all night long they are ceaselessly repeated by men's lips. For you are aware that at each moment the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is being offered up in various parts of the world by Catholic priests: "This is My Body; this is My Blood." And, behold; they are creative words, for they have changed the face of the earth. Incessantly they are calling into being that Divine Gift that has more powerfully affected man's destiny than any other gift of God.

Those omnipotent words opened up a new era in the history of mankind; they marked the setting up of a new Throne, the founding of a new Kingdom, the opening of a new Royal Palace, whence the greatest of Kings would rule His loyal and loving subjects for all time to come. And all the splendid pageantry of Church liturgy, the pomp and ceremony of her festivals, the majesty of her myriad cathedrals, the imposing grandeur of her congresses — all are but the outward expression of Catholic devotion and loyalty to Christ the King on His Eucharistic Throne.

Christ Must Rule.

Christ must rule. "The Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David, His Father, and He shall reign in the house of Jacob forever, and of His Kingdom there shall be no end." Christ must rule, but His rule is not one of force or violence; it is one of love. He has come to make you enamoured of His Divine beauty, to steal your heart; and, since His majesty as God would overwhelm you, He wraps it round with the mysterious darkness of the Eucharist. He comes in disguise, hidden beneath the sacramental veils.

The Eucharist, then, is Christ's Lover's Gift — namely, Himself. But it is for you to accept and make use of the Gift. He will not force Himself upon you, just as He did not force His company on people when on earth. He visited Martha and Mary very willingly at Bethania (Bethany), because He was sure of a loving welcome there. He bade Zaccheus come down quickly from the sycamore tree to receive Him, saying: "This day I must abide in your house." But He already knew the eagerness of Zaccheus, and that his heart was prepared to receive Him. He joined the two despondent disciples on the road to Emmaus, because they were sad at heart and bewailing His death, and He knew that, if He spoke words of comfort, He would be very acceptable to them.

To Be My Friend.

Man is a social being, and finds his chief happiness in social — that is, intellectual and friendly — intercourse with his fellow-creatures. The whole world of art, music and literature is the outcome of this craving of man's nature for companionship. Every poem, every musical composition, every painting or sculptured statue, is an effort to convey as vividly as possible to sympathetic minds the artist's feelings, thoughts, experiences, aspirations, convictions.

Hence, man's worst punishment is enforced solitude. This the governors of prisons well know. At Port Arthur, in Tasmania, the business of cutting off prisoners from all intercourse with other human beings was carried out with diabolical ingenuity; and the normal result of the treatment was that men went mad — their minds wrecked by the intolerable loneliness and solitude.

Jesus knows that we cannot live without companionship. During His life on earth, He Himself constantly sought the society of other men, chose friends, and kept them near Him, except during special seasons of prayer — such as the forty days in the desert. He came to reveal the fact that we are created for companionship — the companionship, namely, of God Himself. God wishes to have us as His friends in heaven, enjoying His Presence and conversation forever. If we fail to reach this, then our lot will be the eternal solitude of hell. But that appalling fate can be ours only if we decisively, deliberately, and finally reject God's offer of friendship.

A Loving Welcome.

A loving welcome — that is what He wants! How human He is, and how like ourselves! Is there anything can chill and freeze and torture the heart like coldness and indifference on the part of those who ought to show us love? And, on the other hand, how we expand under the sunshine of friendship, affection, and a warm welcome!

Well, let me say it reverently, so it is with Jesus. He, too, expands in the sunshine of our affection; He unfolds His plans to us; tells us His secrets, lets us taste the comfort and consolation and sweetness, which words falling from His lips must surely be weighted with, and so He fills us with the fragrance of His Divine Presence.

And, by making good use of this Sacrament and Sacrifice, O priests of God, you will join with the sacred company of His special friends. And Jesus will enter into the dwelling-place of your soul as willingly as He entered the happy abode of Martha and Mary at Bethania; He will call to you, as to Zaccheus, to come down quickly and give Him entertainment, and, when you are walking, sad at heart, along the road of life, which has its particular difficulties for priests, Jesus will join you and speak words of comfort to you and, after His visit, you will cry out, like the disciples: "Was not our heart burning within us whilst He spoke in the way and opened to us the Scriptures?"

Jesus came to be my Friend. A perfect friend is one who loves you and is solicitous for your welfare; one who supports your weakness, comforts you in sorrow, advises you in doubt, aids you in distress; one who influences you for good, is indulgent to your faults, yet tries to correct them. In a word, he is to you a source of light and strength, courage and consolation. Such a friend is not easily found. One may have many acquaintances, comrades, chums even, yet not one friend, perhaps, properly so called.

Jesus, the Son of God, came to be our Friend in the highest and most perfect sense of the word.

He said to His Mother when she found Him in the Temple: "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" Now, the business, which Christ's Father sent Him into the world to transact, was the conversion of sinners. "They that are in health need not a physician, but they that are sick. . . . I am not come to call the just, but sinners." (Matthew 9:12-13.) And, when sharing His own work with the Apostles, He said: "I will make you fishers of men."

Jesus Christ is the Master-Fisherman, and the bait He uses to attract His prey is the bait of Love.

He gives palpable and overwhelming proof of His interest in, and affection for, us; His anxiety for our welfare; His desire to enjoy our friendship. And the proof He offers is one recognised by all as the acid test of friendship — namely, self-sacrifice for the sake of the beloved.

The Catholic Church strives to keep the evidence of Christ's friendship ever vividly and convincingly before the eyes of mankind. The central theme of her preaching is God's love for us, manifested in the Incarnation. By coming as Man, Jesus annihilated the difference between Creator and creature. Now that He is on a level with us, we may enjoy His friendship without being dazzled and terrified by the majesty of His Divinity.

A Twofold Gift.

In order to carry out this plan (of being our friend), not only for those who lived with Him in Palestine, but for all generations to come, He founded His Church and instituted the Eucharist.

In two ways, Jesus, moved by love for His fellow-men, wished to influence each of us and prepare us for heaven: first, by teaching us His doctrines, ideas, and principles; in other words, by filling our souls with the light of Truth. To secure this result He instituted His teaching Church. From the Church we learn all the saving truths committed to her keeping by Jesus for our instruction. Secondly, by coming into personal contact with each of us in Holy Communion. By those visits, He makes us realise and try to live according to the doctrines taught by His Church. He strengthens our Faith, Hope and Charity; moves us to the practice of every virtue, and thus cements more firmly the bonds of friendships that link us to Him — the bonds whereby He hopes to hold us as His own forever. Holy Communion, therefore, is the Sacrament of Divine Friendship.

The Trumpet Call.

It happened before the Battle of Eylau, in 1807. Napoleon was driving the Russians before him as he moved forward towards the town of Eylau, when he found himself held up near Landsberg by a strong force of Russian infantry, posted in a defile, with several pieces of cannon in front. They were separated from the French by a deep ravine, crossed by a narrow bridge. Napoleon ordered a body of light hussars to cross the bridge and attack. They did so, but were met by such well-directed fire that they beat a hasty retreat. Napoleon then ordered a body of dragoons to advance and break the Russian square. They also failed. Then the cuirassiers were told to advance. These were the

heaviest armed troops in the army. Both horses and riders were encased in heavy plates of steel armour, so that when they charged at full speed the impetus was terrific. The General in Command, d'Hautpoul, was an enthusiastic admirer of Napoleon, and to be thus entrusted with a special commission was the most prized of distinctions.

The cuirassiers charged so furiously that the Russian lines were broken, the square swept away, and the road cleared for Napoleon's advance. When General d'Hautpoul rode up to the Emperor to report, Napoleon did a very unusual thing. He dismounted and embraced him before the whole division. Quite overcome by this extraordinary work of the Emperor's gratitude and approval, the general, when he had recovered a little, drew himself up, saluted, and spoke thus: "Sire, there is only one way in which I can show my appreciation of the honour you have conferred upon me today: I must die for your Majesty." Next day he rode into the thickest of the fight at Eylau and fell mortally wounded.

Heroism.

Think of what it meant for a Commander-in-Chief to know he had men like that serving him! With what confidence he issued orders when he knew his followers were longing to prove their devotion by dying for him! It seems extraordinary that men should set so little store on life as to be ready to fling it away like a bauble for a beloved leader; yet that is what the human heart is capable of. And experience has proved that, when a great call comes which stirs men's souls deeply, this spirit of self-sacrifice leaps to life, and men and women go smiling to death for the sake of victory.

Jesus Christ knew this, and He came to appeal to this quality in the human soul. He came to wake to living flame this fire of whole-hearted devotion and loyalty; and the story of the Catholic Church during the past nineteen centuries or so bears witness to the success of His appeal. For the Catholic Church subsists age after age, full of life and energy, in the midst of a hostile world, just because of that fire that is kept ever blazing in the hearts of her children by Christ's unique appeal. For His appeal is not merely that of the best and greatest, the wisest and most glorious Leader and Captain the world has ever seen, fighting for the noblest cause it has ever been given to men to fight for — it is all that, too, but it is infinitely more. For, through Christ's lips, God Himself is stooping to ask His creatures for service.

What Feeds the Flame?

Read the lives of saints, who were most remarkable for heroic charity — Saints Dominic, Francis Xavier, Peter Claver, Vincent de Paul, Alphonsus Liguori; study the records of the Sisters of Charity, the Sisters of Mercy, and innumerable other Orders of men and women who give up life's comforts and pleasures to spend themselves in the service of the poor, the sick, the wretched, the outcast.

Read the story of Father Damien [canonised in 2009], who went into exile among the Molokai lepers, and became himself a leper, in order to help these unfortunate wrecks of humanity; contemplate a little the inexhaustible story of Catholic heroism in the cause of charity all down the ages, and ask yourself the question: "What feeds this flame?" What is the source of that intense devotion to the poor and suffering which is characteristic of the Catholic Church in all ages? The answer is: "The enthusiasm, the wish to serve, kindled in the souls of His friends by Christ's Call, by the appeal of His teaching, His life and example. Their work is the carrying out in actual practice of the high and generous resolve which was formed in their souls when they answered His summons and swore allegiance to Him, and promised to follow Him faithfully till death."

Co-operating With God.

One of the glorious secrets which Jesus Christ came to communicate to mankind — a secret of overwhelming importance — is that God has definite work for each of us to do; that He is asking each of us to co-operate with Him to bring about certain supernatural results which He is anxious to secure. At first, perhaps, one may be inclined to cry out incredulously: "How can God need MY help for anything whatsoever? Is He not omnipotent? Is it not derogatory to His power and majesty to speak of Him as needing our help to accomplish His purposes?"

Yes, God is omnipotent, but, by His own free choice, He has brought about a state of things in which He needs OUR help and OUR co-operation so urgently and essentially that, if we fail Him, if we refuse our help (as we may), the work will not be done, and His plans to that extent frustrated. If you ask, "How can this be?" the answer is: "God has bestowed upon man the gift of Free Will, and He wishes to leave to man the full and unhindered exercise of that marvellous faculty. It is our FREE service that God wishes to have. He could necessitate us to love Him, but then our love would not be the result of our own free choice. So that it is true to say that each of us, weak and wretched though we be, has in his keeping a gift which God wants, which we can refuse to give Him if we choose, and which, if we refuse, God cannot force us to bestow upon Him — namely, the gift of our free acts of love and service."

Those acts constitute an empire over which you are absolute ruler. God will assist you by His Grace. He will give you all necessary interior helps and encouragement, but He leaves your will free. YOU must choose. He will not choose for you.

You Influence Others.

For it is evident that we can, and do, influence others, and direct them in their choices on the road of life by our work, by our example, by our advice. And God wants us to exercise that influence upon HIS side in the daily struggle that constitutes life.

The most powerful king or general that ever lived is dependent upon his army for success. Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Napoleon were helpless if deserted by their soldiers.

So with Christ. Although He is God, still it is as Man He is carrying on His campaign in this world; making use of human instruments, relying in a human way on the fidelity, the loyalty, the courage, the endurance, the skill of His soldiers for the success of His work.

So that the important thing to realise is that I, personally and individually, am invited by Christ to take a share in that work. He has a special portion allotted to me, and is waiting eagerly to see if I will answer His call and make that use of my life which He intended when He brought me into existence.

The Crisis.

The unceasing acts of reverence and adoration offered to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, which constitute the liturgical life of the Church, and which all her children are summoned to participate in at least once a week — those acts are forever renewing the faith of Catholics in the divinity of Christ.

Why does the Church accept the doctrine of the Eucharist? On the Word of Christ. Apart from His statements, she has no other proof for it. Why does she accept Christ's words so implicitly? Because she knows that He is God, and cannot err or deceive us.

Christ Himself made acceptance of His Eucharistic teaching a test of discipleship — a test of the extent to which men were ready to acknowledge His authority and believe in His Divine power. At Capharnaum, a year before His death, He repeatedly, emphatically, and insistently declared that all who wish to be saved must — in some mysterious, and yet unexplained, way — eat of His Flesh and drink of His Blood. People loudly voiced their disapproval of such teaching as wholly incomprehensible and absurd, much after the fashion of modern sceptics and unbelievers. Many even of His disciples were shocked, and cried out: "This is a difficult saying. Who can accept it?" And they turned away and walked no more with Him. Then Jesus spoke to His twelve chosen Apostles, and said, in very decided tones: "Will you also go away?" (See John, chapter 6.)

It was a crisis in the world's history. The moment had come to accept or reject Christ's Eucharistic doctrine. He seems to say: "This doctrine is difficult, I admit. But remember that all power is given to Me in heaven and on earth. I will make good My promise, provided you accept My teaching in simple faith and trust."

And then from the lips of Peter came the first act of faith in this new revelation: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed and have known that You are Christ, the Son of God."

At that moment, we may say, the Eucharistic Catholic Church sprang into being. That marvellous belief in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist had begun, which was to transform the world, and has sustained the souls of Christ's friends ever since.

Acts of Faith.

Why did Peter accept this strange, mysterious teaching about eating Christ's Flesh and drinking His Blood? Simply on Christ's Word; and, in accepting it, he was making a profound act of faith in Christ's divinity.

And why do Catholics of the twentieth century reiterate that belief? Why do they kneel in adoration before the altar and receive the Eucharist with such unhesitating conviction that they thereby partake of Christ's Flesh and Blood? Just for the same reason; because — they know that Christ is God, and accept His Word as guarantee for the reality and truth of this great Mystery.

You see, then, how, by His Presence in our midst, Jesus is ever stirring us up to acts of faith in the saving doctrine of His divinity.

Now, the part a priest is called upon to play in carrying out this Divine plan may be compared to Saint Joseph's duties as Foster-father of Jesus.

Saint Joseph's Office.

Saint Joseph was appointed guardian of the Divine Child. Entrusted with the bodily welfare of Jesus, His duty was to support Him, to earn money to buy Him food and drink, to protect Him when danger threatened, to fulfil towards Him all the duties of an earthly father.

The Catholic priest holds a similar position of trust. He, too, has charge of Christ's Body. His duty, also, is to protect It from attack; not merely from physical violence, but the far more deadly onslaught of those who deny His Presence or insult It. Jesus has come into the world (His own world, which was made by Him), not as a Conqueror, but as a Visitor, asking for hospitality. The only force He uses to effect an entrance is that of Love. It was so He came to Mary. His messenger, Gabriel, asked her for hospitality, and awaited her consent to receive Him. So, too, when Joseph, in

sore doubt, thought of putting away Mary, the heavenly messenger invited him to receive her as his wife, on the ground that she was the Mother of a Divine Child; and it was as such — namely, as being Mother by Divine interposition of a Son that was God Himself — that Joseph accepted her; and, of course, in doing so, in taking over the responsibility of being her husband, he accepted also the responsibility of providing for her Child. It required a strong act of faith to believe this astounding message, it needed heroic confidence to take up such a burden; but, by the special grace of God, Joseph's soul was strong in both these virtues. Thus, then, Jesus came as a Guest, asking for shelter and hospitality from Mary and Joseph.

The Priest's Vocation.

So, too, He comes to the priest. A vocation to the priesthood is like the angel's message to Saint Joseph. Along with the assurance of the miraculous Presence of the God-Man under the Sacramental Species which faith gives, there comes an invitation to undertake the responsibility of guarding that Presence during the rest of the priest's life on earth.

And the qualities most essential for success in carrying out this work are those which are so prominent in Saint Joseph — Faith and Confidence. It is a supernatural office, and only by keeping the supernatural point of view ever uppermost — that is by walking always by faith — can a priest fulfil his duty. And only by practising heroic confidence in God can he persevere in it, in spite of every obstacle.

Joseph, carrying the Divine Babe in his arms, to save Him for mankind, is a symbol of the priest carrying the Body of Jesus, pressed to his heart, in order to give Him to those in need of Him.
