

The Expectant Mother Looks at Life

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I

Motherhood offers joys and interests which no woman can find in any other vocation, but expectant mothers differ in their feelings about the prospect of a new baby or of "another baby." Some are very much pleased; others are dismayed. Perhaps most experience a mixture of pleasure and dismay. And life is apt to be so difficult at these times that an unmixed pleasure is hardly possible for the majority of women. But if great dismay is felt and little happiness, or none at all, we must find out why.

This short pamphlet cannot discuss in detail the terribly hard conditions under which motherhood is so often heroically undertaken. These conditions are of course man-made, *and not God-made*, and they cry for remedies which must be worked for persistently by Catholics who have opportunities for social service. In private life, too, friends and neighbours should be proud to do all that they can for the expectant mother, and should show that they esteem it a privilege to make her grand task easier.

But it is a mistake to think that the happiness of the expectant mother depends entirely upon good living-conditions, good health, and good friends. Women who are to a great extent denied these advantages often seem to triumph over their circumstances by a confident and joyful approach to motherhood. And it is interesting, but also sad, to find other women with good health and helpful surroundings who dwell mainly upon the drawbacks of their babies' coming, and who look upon the months of waiting as nothing better than a dreary stretch of time which must be got through somehow. Why are these outlooks so different? And why, too, do women who live in practically the same circumstances as one another differ so much in their outlook on the birth of a baby—as most certainly they do? Two women may have the same description of house, the same amount of spending-money, the same kind of friends and relations, and much the same degree of physical fitness; yet one is glad and proud that a baby is coming and the other is sad and depressed.

There is no doubt that our *outlook* on approaching motherhood can make or spoil our happiness and success in this great experience, so that we must do our very best to secure the right one; and I am certain that the right kind of trying can bring success to any or every expectant mother.

Now if we feel that our present outlook is wrong or incomplete we should not judge ourselves harshly; in this matter we must treat ourselves with the same fairness which we would try to show towards our friends. It may not be our fault; we may have got wrong ideas on the whole affair without meaning to do so. But one thing is certain; that we must exchange the wrong outlook for the right one, and the incomplete outlook for the complete one which alone can secure for us the happiness which this coming of a baby should bring. For the whole of this adventure of motherhood can enrich our lives in a way that nothing else could enrich them. And we must realize that this

enrichment begins and increases during the months of waiting, which are cheered and even transformed by an understanding of the treasures which they can yield.

It may be hard to know if we have got an absolutely right outlook or not. We may, for instance, feel a natural pleasure that baby is on the way, and yet fail to understand his full importance in our lives and neglect to make the most of our time of waiting; and if this is so we shall not really make the best of baby when he comes, however much we may enjoy him. Sometimes it is even easier for the woman who feels depressed about her approaching motherhood to find the completely right outlook, just because she knows that she cannot already have got it. But whether we are inclined to be pleased or depressed we need to do a little quiet thinking about all that this new baby should bring into our lives. And that is why I am venturing to suggest some thoughts for the expectant mother which I hope may help.

II

Of course we know that prayer is a first necessity for finding the right outlook on anything at all; in fact we know this so well that we sometimes forget to think enough about it. Every experience, and most certainly this great experience of childbirth, demands a fuller knowledge of prayer than we had before. And our motherhood cannot be accomplished happily and successfully unless we constantly raise our minds and hearts to God in connection with it, both by means of the prayers which we say and by our habit of thinking about His purposes for us and of trying to please Him through them. But if we do this we may be confident of many helps and blessings because we are seeking to carry out God's own plans for our family life, so that He will surely give us a better understanding of them, and grace to fulfil them rightly and happily. Our habit of prayer will also make our way clear as we go along, and will lift us above the anxieties of daily life; we may still, of course, have worries, but this nearness to God by prayer gives us a certain independence of our own troubles and even a degree of indifference to them, whereas without prayer they might wear us down.

Such troubles include for many mothers a general sense of heaviness and distaste, which may even make our habit of prayer unattractive to us and may also appear to deprive us of its consolations. That stage will in time be passed; but meanwhile we must remember that God does not ask us to feel devout but only to trust Him and that our wish to keep near to Him even when we don't seem to *feel* His consolations is bound to please Him greatly. "I don't enjoy my prayers just now," a woman once said, and a wise priest answered, "No—but God does." This faithfulness to Him during a dull, heavy, and difficult patch is really bringing us many graces which we shall presently recognize and which will make us very happy. For our habit of prayer is helping us *all the time* whether we can see that we are being helped or not, and is gaining for us all that we most need during our waiting months, both for ourselves and for our whole home life which might otherwise suffer through our personal difficulties. Those hearts and minds which we raise to God are made far more strong and far more excellent in every way by God, who *is* love, and who can teach us the love for Himself and for one another which is needed for every human experience.

All this is so true that we might be tempted to think that once we have formed this habit of prayer there can be nothing more to do towards gaining the right outlook on motherhood. In a sense that is so, but only if we put our whole being into the carrying out of God's intentions for us; in this way we complete our prayer by goodwill, and show our unity with those intentions by our eagerness in following His guidance and inspirations. We have a wish to please Him in this way from the

moment that we begin to pray at all, and the more our prayer and efforts continue the more surely does that "wish" become a firm *will*, whilst we are increasingly cheered by an ever brighter vision of His purposes for us.

And by our raising to God of both heart and mind we are enabled to put both into this great vocation of motherhood, so that we learn to love it, and to think increasingly about it. I feel certain that many mothers will arrive at valuable and useful thoughts of their own, in addition to those which we are discussing here; yet I hope that those which follow may prove helpful, and may suggest other thoughts which are equally so.

III

We will first think about the wonderful privilege which God has given to parents: a tremendous and awe-inspiring privilege, and at the same time a happy and homely one, since it is planned for every married couple as a part of their home-making.

This privilege actually gives to mothers and fathers a share in God's work of creation, every time that they have a child. Through the full expression of their love the child is conceived; it then develops within its mother according to God's marvellous natural laws; until finally, with the immortal soul which He has breathed into the little body, formed by human fatherhood and motherhood, it is born into the world. This is indeed a wonderful subject for thought; and the more we ponder the greater is our reverence for the new-born baby. He may be a delicious-looking infant, or a little wriggling, scarlet-faced imp; or he may be small and sickly and crying; so that we enjoy him or laugh at him, or our hearts perhaps go out to him in pity because he is ailing; he may be born into a struggling home or a prosperous one. But such circumstances can make no difference to his importance in the sight of God, or in our own eyes if we see rightly. For, whatever he is like, and whatever are his circumstances, this little baby of ours is born to a great heritage. And when he is baptized he takes his place as a son of God and an heir of heaven.

It is small wonder therefore that Catholic parents attach a tremendous value to early Baptism, and that a priest will gladly come to the house if the baby is considered to be in any danger. Usually, however, it does not hurt the baby to go to church within the first few days, and the only trouble is that the mother is not yet able to go out and see him baptized. But she can nevertheless be glad in the thought of the great Sacrament which is being administered to her child. I would recommend every expectant mother to read carefully a pamphlet called *Baptism and Churching* (this pamphlet has Notes by the Rev. C. C. Martindale, S.J., which include an explanation of how a child in danger should be baptized if it is unsafe to wait for the priest. It also gives the ceremonial for the Churching of women, emphasizing that this Catholic custom is in the nature of a joyous thanksgiving.—C.T.S., 3d.) and to think much about the wonderful meaning of Baptism, and also to take note of the beauty of the whole Christening Service. Some of the words seem solemn, perhaps, to apply to a baby, but they take account of his whole meaning in God's sight and his whole future; and the mother will feel a deep happiness over the prayers which are offered for the protection of her child for the whole of life's journey.

The great Sacrament itself is given when water is poured upon the child's head, and at the same time these words are said: "I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." The baby is now a Christian, a child of God, and a member of His Church.

The mother will think of all this even before the child is born. And when he does go to his Baptism her husband will if possible go also, and pray for his wife as well as for the infant whose coming should draw its father and mother together more closely than ever before. And this brings us to a most important bit of thinking which is absolutely necessary for this whole experience.

IV

In marriage two people are united by God, and He plans that their life together should be completed by children. If the birth of children is delayed, for whatever reason, both husband and wife will soon come to feel that their life, and even their love, are incomplete, although they may not realize why. And this feeling, which is also experienced by couples who know little or nothing of God, is evidence of the fact that their life together is incomplete until His natural laws for our living have been fulfilled. Therefore it is not wonderful that even people who have no knowledge of religion find that the coming of children can make a happy marriage happier, more interesting and more worthwhile, or else discover that they have obtained through parenthood the renewal of a married happiness which had seemed to be fading out. We who are Christians should be definitely and vividly conscious of God's whole design for family life, and we should understand the tremendous importance of everything in that design, which cannot in fact be realized properly if any bit of it is wilfully left out. (The *will* to follow God's *whole* design for family life does much also to help the couple who are disappointed in their wish for children, because they are preserving the Christian ideal in their hearts and because God blesses all good will and can Himself fill every void. If they lead a full spiritual life they can moreover pray with confidence that He will strengthen their married unity. They should also take all human means available to them for the making of a happy home and a good companionship with one another; also for friendly contacts outside their home, especially amongst young people and others who need sympathy and help. But this pamphlet, as its title suggests, is written for the great majority who are parents or who are likely to become so.)

The coming of children, therefore, perfects the united life of husband and wife by enriching and completing their relationship with one another, and also by the joys of the full family life which parents and children share. This is of course especially so with the first baby; but it is a fact that every child should add to our married happiness as well as having an important part in the lives of its brothers and sisters. Each child that comes should make a better and more complete family life, both for its parents and for the other children. And the new baby actually helps to educate the older children through their very care for it and love for it, if the parents are wise and encourage them to be proud of it and interested in it and helpful with it, which is also the best way of preventing that jealousy of the little newcomer which sometimes amuses onlookers, yet is in fact a very great pity.

But whatever their ages the give-and-take between brothers and sisters is an invaluable part of home-education, and any boy or girl who grows up with this kind of companionship is likely to become an attractive, unselfish, sympathetic person, who adapts himself to life far more easily than the only child.

Large families, too, are of peculiar value to the world and to every part of it, and the England of to-day is becoming fully conscious of her need for them, so that the conditions necessary for such families are being increasingly planned for. But when the history of the present world crisis comes to be written I trust that full tribute will be paid to those Catholic mothers whose Christian heroism enabled them to have and to bring up children when the right conditions were denied to them; for they have been a shining light in a world of darkness and in the face of a decadent public opinion

which they disregarded. They esteemed human life above its comforts and even above its necessities. Through days and it may be years of self-sacrifice they considered each child as an added dignity and as an added joy. In making a full Christian family life they served their country and the whole world. May they be honoured as they deserve, and may justice make their grand life easier now.

V

The ideal home life depends upon both mother and father. They unite as closely as possible in everything to do with their children; and this *united* interest should begin when the first baby is expected and should be increased by every child that comes.

If we all realized how necessary is this mutual response to the privilege of parenthood, and, also, how desirable it is that wife and husband should share the joys and trials of the whole experience, according to the capacity of each, we should be very much more careful not to lose the full excellence of our married companionship during the waiting months. And there is always a danger of this. Sometimes the sympathy between wife and husband which was so helpful when baby was first expected seems to suffer an eclipse, and the expectant mother begins quite unconsciously to separate herself from the close comradeship which is always necessary for their happiness, and which is most particularly needed now by both of them.

Such separation is a great pity, but a little forethought can prevent it. It occurs with some wives chiefly because they feel unable to go out with their husbands or share the same amusements as fully as they did before. When this is so it is important to realize that the interests of the big adventure of parenthood should be in reality far more engrossing than the ordinary pleasures of life, and are more able to strengthen married companionship than anything else. But, nevertheless, a husband and wife *should* share their usual recreations whenever they can, for these are a pleasant and helpful part of their life together. To enjoy a good play or cinema or even an interesting wireless performance, *and to take pleasure in one another's enjoyment of such things*, is excellent. It is, indeed, sad that some expectant mothers fall out of the habit of this shared enjoyment long before it is necessary, and take to living in a world of their own, just because there is much in their present experience which they feel that they must go through alone and which they believe their husbands incapable of understanding.

But really such ideas are a great exaggeration. Obviously the wife has trials which do not fall to the lot of the husband, but she is certainly not meant to face them without his sympathy and help. They are partners in a great unity in which each must try to support the other in everything that concerns their life together. And even when they cannot give one another companionship in the same ways as before, they can always enjoy the same *quality* of companionship; in point of fact, it should now be of a richer quality than ever, because of their plans and hopes for the little new life and their enjoyment of the completion of their own married love which it brings.

If, therefore, the expectant mother feels lonely, she should ask herself if she is beginning to lose the right relationship with the companion she most needs during these waiting months—her own husband. And she should pause to wonder if he, perhaps, is feeling lonely too. Men are in some ways shy creatures and many won't risk a snub. If, for instance, they find their wives incessantly talking with neighbours about baby clothes and other subjects which are apparently thought beyond their understanding, they will just melt away, often with rather sore hearts. The help of good and

experienced women friends is most valuable to a young wife, but it is not half so valuable as her friendship with her own husband, nor can it really do her half so much good. Any loss of mutual sympathy is in fact very damaging to both. This chapter of their life together is meant to bring them nearer to one another and not to separate them.

Loneliness can of course be forced upon an expectant mother if she has an unsatisfactory husband; but, even when this is so, the very fact of approaching parenthood may give this couple opportunities for a better understanding, more especially if the husband realizes that his wife needs his sympathy and *wishes* for it; it may be a very good thing if she shows him that she counts upon his kindness and help. If nothing can be done in these ways, then she must pray to God with confidence to help where her life's companion has failed her; but every woman needs to remember at these times that her husband is her life's companion and should if possible be brought into every part of it, and that they are meant to strengthen one another in every part of it too.

The close co-operation of father and mother is also, as I have already suggested, very necessary for the child. During this time of waiting the parents are preparing the home into which baby will come, and they are making the atmosphere which he will absorb. Long before he can consciously think or reason, his character, and it may be his whole future, is being determined by his parents' attitude towards God, towards life, and towards one another. Any mother can profit greatly by working out this idea for herself; always remembering that the child's first necessity is that it should have united parents whose love for one another, and for their children, is rooted in the love of God. It is they who must implant the confidence in God's providence which the little new son or daughter first apprehends through trust in the parents whom that providence has appointed. And unless these parents are themselves "at one" they will have a divided influence on the child which is liable to give it a wrong diffidence and a faulty outlook on life.

Sometimes, perhaps, the father would fail to understand his importance in the lives of his children while they are still quite small unless the mother helped him to realize how much their happiness, and their right development, and their whole outlook on life must depend upon a strong, patient, and affectionate father, and how easily it can be disturbed by a father who gives way to moods, who is sometimes perhaps weak and over-indulgent with them, and at other times irritable and impatient. Not that she should "preach him a sermon" about this, or about anything else! But when both parents are talking together about the expected child, and making plans for it, the mother can let her husband see how greatly she counts upon him for its future happiness, and how much it is going to mean to the child that he should take full responsibility as a good and wise father during its earliest years; he is never needed just for "later on" in the child's life, but always for "now." Truly united parents will each realize the special importance of the other in every aspect of the family life for which they unite; and such parents are laying the foundations of a home in which their children will grow up happy and confident; and which they will always love even when they are grown-up and married, and making other such homes for themselves; for its values are rooted in those beautiful realities which come from God and lead us to Him.

VI

In discussing united parenthood and the helpful companionship of wife and husband we must not forget that some mothers are denied this companionship when outside circumstances separate them from their husbands. This is outstandingly so when a country is at war. At such a time the young wife may be left alone when her first baby is expected, and often her conditions and surroundings

will be extremely trying. Hitherto perhaps she had the interests, distractions, and company of war-work. Now in her great task of motherhood—more important than any previous undertaking—she is apparently thrown back upon herself and her own resources. But actually she is sure of the most tremendous graces if she turns to God for them. He pities her loneliness as no friend or neighbour, however kind, could do, and He will bless her courage and strengthen her spirit. He will help to keep alive in her heart the love for her absent husband and for her unborn child, and her ideal of the full family life for which she hopes and prays. May that full family life return for her and also for the mothers who are having "more children" under similar circumstances; we must all think of them particularly when we pray to God for the day when "the fear of enemies being removed, our times by Thy assistance may be peaceful." Meanwhile, all friends and neighbours should appreciate their heroism. And their absent husbands should be immensely proud of them; but they surely are, since any husband who failed in this respect would be only half a man or considerably less!

VII

The thought of God should be in the whole atmosphere of the home which we make for our children, or try to make for them as fully as possible, and the outward signs that He is honoured in them, such as the Sacred Heart statue, the picture or statue of Our Lady, the use of Holy Water, and other Catholic practices, will all have their effect upon the new baby long before he knows how or why. It is interesting, too, that tiny children are never frightened by the Crucifix, and this may be because from earliest infancy the Sign of the Cross has also been a sign of blessing in their homes, and because they have seen their parents kiss the Crucifix with reverence and love.

Each child's patron saint will be honoured in these families, and so will its Guardian Angel. We no longer tell the child that its Angel flew in with it when it was born, because this is not true; but we should tell it as early as possible that its own special Angel came with it and is still watching over it—because this *is* true, and important. Among the first prayers said by the little cot should be the invocation: "Dear Angel Guardian, take care of Baby," for Baby is going to need this great protector for his whole journey through this difficult world, and the Angel must be asked to give it.

VIII

The steady sympathy between the expectant mother and her husband which is so needed during the time of waiting will call for a certain unselfishness from both, for each must be willing to overcome certain feelings which might wreck it if fully encouraged. The wife is often disinclined for things which she used to like, and even for pleasures which her husband has planned so as to cheer her; he, on his side, is puzzled by the uncertainties of mood which she cannot entirely prevent; whilst both may suffer through the necessity of giving up for a while the full intimate relationship of their married love. Often either or both will feel on edge and at their worst just when they are wishing to be at their best. Yet they *can* be well and truly at their best in all that matters most, because God gives supernatural help for daily living to couples who try to live according to His plan. Such help is in fact established for them by the Sacrament which unites them, and it remains or can be renewed throughout their married lives.

IX

We are also meant to seek and find our graces for family living in everything which the Church provides. For present purposes I have only space to suggest a few outstanding instances which may help the reader as a framework for her own thoughts.

We must seek the graces for parenthood through the Mass, which we unite with the priest in offering for our own human needs of mind and body, as well as for the needs of all others. We must seek and find a quiet and happy conscience through Confession. In Holy Communion we are nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ.

It is easy to see how everything in our religion must help these waiting months. We will go to Benediction; we will say the Rosary, finding a new significance in the Joyful Mysteries; and in saying them we shall feel our Blessed Lady very near to us in our own approaching motherhood. When we meditate on the Visitation we shall picture her seeking out her cousin Elizabeth, who also was with child; and we shall say with Elizabeth: "Whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" For we cannot doubt that the Mother of God will also bring her help and joy and comfort to ourselves. During these months we shall be increasingly conscious of her presence in our lives. There is a feast of Our Lady's own Expectation which is celebrated in some dioceses, whilst the feast of her Maternity is kept everywhere on October 11th, and in the Mass for that day we read of our Blessed Lady as "the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of holy hope. *In me is all grace of the way. . . .*" Through her, then, we may find all "grace of the way" in this part of life's journey, and we must be ever mindful of the wonderful, sinless Mother through whom our own motherhood may be made happy and successful and beautiful. It is well often to say in our hearts, "Our Lady, Grace of the Way, help us," or "Mother of Perpetual Succour, pray for us," or to choose an invocation from her Litany and repeat it during the day, or if we wake at night.

It is good, too, to read St Luke's account of the Expectation, Birth, and childhood of Our Lord; in fact it is an excellent practice to read a few verses from any one of the Gospels daily and think about them. There is no event or counsel in them which can fail to help our whole outlook.

Those who get depressed at night or sleep badly may also be greatly helped by saying *Compline*, or by choosing one particular psalm or antiphon from that Office, and thinking quietly about it. This makes a beautiful ending to the day and a peaceful beginning to the night. (*The Office of Compline*, with Notes by the Rev. C. C. Martindale, is published as a C.T.S. pamphlet at 3d.)

In England every expectant mother is allowed to receive a special Blessing of the Church which at one time was only given to those pronounced in danger; we have to thank the late Cardinal Bourne for obtaining permission for this. It is desirable to ask our parish priest for this Blessing, and it is usual to go to the church for it while we are still able to get about. (The prayers of this ceremonial will be found below.)

X

If only we keep near to God and to His Mother in our thoughts and lives we shall accept the whole splendid fact of our approaching motherhood with a deep-seated joy which cannot be spoilt even by serious hardships, and still less by those smaller daily trials which can be depressing unless we are cheered by the beauty and excellence which is planned for this completion of our married life. This attitude helps the whole experience profoundly. Even the physical discomforts of pregnancy are

eased by a mind which is itself at ease through its unity with God's intentions; some doctors indeed hold that the actual birth of the child takes place far more comfortably if the mental approach to the whole experience is cheerful and peaceful; in other words they would say that "the right outlook" makes labour infinitely less hard than when the mind is ill-attuned to the whole affair. And since we know that the mind can help or hinder the body in other ways, this may well be true. In any case we cannot doubt that the more we are united in spirit with God's intentions for our whole being, the easier and happier in every way will be their performance.

In regard to the physical aspects of conception and childbearing, our nearness to God who designed our human living will give us a certain simplicity of outlook on these natural facts which is very helpful. It is quite good to know these facts and wrong ideas of what is happening within us are apt to be confusing and mischievous. I can recommend a book by a Catholic woman doctor, called *Ideal Motherhood* (B., O. & W. Price 1s. 6d. This book also gives valuable advice on health and hygiene.), which presents them in a simple and interesting way, and which proves to us that, although the months of waiting must seem long and at times wearisome to the mother, they are, in fact, none too long for all the wonderful changes which are contributing to the making of her baby. All this is right knowledge and cannot spoil our reverence for the mystery of birth. (An explanatory note on reproduction may also be found in the C.T.S. pamphlet, *Preparing Our Daughters for Life*. 3d.)

XI

Let us then go forward confidently in this great experience, keeping very near to God and Our Lady; losing the "self" that used to have fears and agitations, and finding a "self" which is united gladly with God's great purposes for motherhood.

Let us also go through the months of waiting in strong and happy unity with the husband who is our life's companion, and with whom we must share the joys and trials and wonders of parenthood; and if he is compelled to be absent let us preserve and strengthen that unity by thinking of one another, writing to one another, and, above all, by praying for one another and for the ending of our separation. Let us also re-read the words of the marriage service which first unites wife and husband; and the Proper of the Nuptial Mass which suggests much help and comfort; all this is still "for us," however long we have been married.

And as the time for our deliverance draws near let us often pray in the words of the Offertory from that Nuptial Mass: "*In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; I said Thou art my God: my times are in Thy hands.*"

Blessing of a Woman in Pregnancy

(The prayers only)

1. Almighty, everlasting God, who hast enabled thy servants, in the confession of the true faith, to acknowledge the glory of thy eternal Trinity, and in thy supreme power to adore thy Unity; we pray that by the firmness of the same faith, this thine handmaid, N., may be kept ever safe from all misfortunes. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.
2. Lord God, Creator of all, mighty and terrible, just and merciful, who alone art good and kind; Thou who didst deliver Israel from all evil, making our fathers thine own beloved, and

didst sanctify them by the power of thy Holy Spirit; Thou who by the co-operation of the Holy Spirit didst prepare the body and soul of the glorious Virgin Mary so that she was worthy to be made the fit abode of thy Son: Thou who didst fill John the Baptist with the Holy Ghost and didst make him leap for joy in his mother's womb; accept the sacrifice of a contrite heart, and the fervent desire of thy handmaid, N., humbly praying for the preservation of the offspring which Thou hast enabled her to conceive: guard and protect what is thine against all deceit and harm of the cruel enemy; so that by the helping hand of thy mercy, her offspring may be happily born, be preserved unto holy generation, serve Thee always in all things, and attain unto life everlasting. Through the same Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord; who liveth and reigneth with Thee, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God for ever and ever. Amen.

3. Visit, we beseech Thee, O Lord, this dwelling, and drive far from it and from thy handmaid, N., here present, all the snares of the enemy; let thy holy Angels dwell herein to keep her and her offspring in peace, and let thy blessing be always upon her. Save them, O Almighty God, and grant them thy perpetual light. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

May the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, descend upon thee and upon thy offspring, and remain for ever. Amen.

The Unmarried Mother

A few words concerning the expectant mother who is unmarried, and is left alone to await her child's arrival, may not be amiss. For she, too, needs to find the outlook that can really help her. And she is likely to suffer more than the married mother, not merely through the opinion of others, but also because she cannot have the same consolations as those who have kept God's laws, nor the same glory of motherhood.

Nevertheless I would say this: that she, too, will be infinitely helped and strengthened by the raising of mind and heart and will to God; and that if she does this simply and humbly her whole attitude towards life and towards her expected baby will be renewed. She should own to God, and to herself (and to the priest in Confession), that she has done wrong; but she should understand that God wants to help her. And she should remember always that it is *His* view of the whole affair that matters most, and *not* what other people may think or say, whether they are hard, or whether through mistaken kindness they make too light of what she has done.

It is of course the unlawful relationship which was wrong; and once that has taken place it is *right* to follow God's natural law by allowing the baby to come, whereas it would be very wrong to seek to prevent it. Sometimes, unhappily, the circumstances of the unmarried mother will separate her all too early from her baby, but meanwhile she should make the most of her time with it; she should nurse it herself if possible, look after it, and pray for it both now and always. She is its mother and must give it all she can of a mother's love, for every baby suffers in proportion as this is denied to it. She must above all remember that her child can have the full privileges of membership of Christ's Church, and she will therefore make certain of its early Baptism, and that it is brought up in the Catholic Faith.

The unmarried girl who expects a baby may herself be very hopeful if she makes a full return to God and goes to Mass and to the Sacraments as often as possible. This renewal of her religious life will also increase her wish to atone for what has been wrong in the past, and her present trials and

discomforts can be a great means of expiation if she offers them trustfully for this intention and stands up to them as bravely as possible with the wish to please God by her courage.

Finally, we should none of us forget the Gospel story of Our Lord's compassion for the woman who had sinned. He despised the men who wished to punish her, and, when they had gone, He spoke to her those wonderful words, "Neither do I condemn thee." But He added, "Go, now, and sin no more." He showed no condonation for the sin, but infinite mercy to the sinner. And those of us who can befriend the unmarried mother must realize that, although we can't possibly say that no wrong was done, we should ourselves show the true charity of which Our Lord gave us the example, by a great personal kindness and by helping her to live rightly. Those who need us are "our neighbours," and she, most certainly, is one.
