

ARTICLE 55

Legio Sanctae Familiae – The Legion of the Holy Family

Marriage a gift from God

First Published in *'The Catholic Voice'*, Ireland, February 2016



Marriage! The Mercy of God

Adam & Eve are punished

“But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent beguiled me, and I ate.” (Genesis 3:9-13)

The Experience of Fear

For the first time in their lives, Adam and Eve experience fear. Cold naked fear! They are terrified by their separation from God and in their fear they refuse to accept responsibility for what they have done. Their fear is for themselves as they are unsure of what is going to happen and they seek to deflect God's wrath by trying to lay the blame for their situation on others.

The Blame Game

Adam seeks to tell God that it is His fault on account of the 'woman thou gavest to be with me'. He seems to be trying to tell God that if He had not created the woman, none of this would have happened. He is of course also blaming the woman. So God questions the woman and she, in her turn, lays the blame on the serpent.

The Birth of God's Mercy in Time

We then encounter one of the most important and most beautiful events in the history of mankind. The birth, in time, of God's mercy. Mercy is a very misunderstood attribute of God. As fallen human beings we are constantly seeking to explain God on our own terms and through the prism of our own knowledge and experience of humanity. We constantly tend to limit God and to try to make Him fit into our own preconceptions and understanding. In a way, we seek to control God in order to make him conform to our ways. I believe that this is born on account of our resistance to change and on account of our resistance to the self denying and suffering that is the necessary path towards union with God.

We see this clearly in chapter sixteen of St Matthew's gospel. Christ is just after confirming Peter as the head and foundation of the Catholic Church and He then explains that He must go to Jerusalem to suffer. This does not fit in with Peter's view of how God should conquer the world and as the newly declared head of the Church He seeks to instruct God.

Get Behind me Satan

“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men.” (Matthew 16:21-23)

Mercy is not one of God's 'essential' attributes because until the fall of man, there was no need for mercy. God cannot be merciful to Himself for He has no need of Mercy! The fallen angels are beyond redemption on account of their being purely spiritual creatures who in full knowledge chose to reject God. They would never accept God's mercy because of their intransigent pride.

Mercy is a sub-function of Justice

Mercy, unlike God's other attributes, cannot exist of itself. It is a sub function, if you will, of God's justice. If God were not Just, then He could not be Merciful, and it is here that our all too common misunderstanding of mercy usually begins. We have a tendency to see Mercy as the setting aside of God's Justice. But God can no more set aside His Justice, then He can set aside any of His other attributes, such as His Omnipotence or His Omniscience. God's Justice always demands satisfaction!

God's Justice Demands Satisfaction

Adam and Eve have committed a grave offence against God's Justice. God's pure Justice demands a satisfaction that Adam and Eve are unable to give and so they must be separated from God for all eternity in order to satisfy the demands of that Justice. This was Satan's plan but in his pride He underestimated God. He correctly understood that only man could satisfy the injustice committed against God by man and he reasoned that, as man was incapable within himself of satisfying the demands of justice, therefore he too was doomed to eternal separation from God.

But God is not limited. He is not confined within the limits of the devil's powers of reasoning or within the powers of man's reasoning and so God addresses the serpent in the Garden.

“Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

The Hope of the Incarnation

Thus God announces the incarnation and with the incarnation, God's Mercy is born. In time a Man will come on earth, born of a woman, Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate, to satisfy the demands of God's Justice so that mankind may once again be set free. Free to love and serve God. And because the serpent brought about the fall by beguiling the woman, God will create another woman whom He will clothe with the sun, He will set a crown of twelve stars on her head and the moon under her feet and all generations will call her blessed. She will be the mother of God, mother of His Catholic Church, and mother of all mankind. The blessed Virgin Mary!

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