



SAINT BENEDICT CENTER
Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
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The Immaculate Conception
December 8, 2016

Dear Friends and Benefactors,

Our Lord Jesus Christ is truly King. As Pope Pius XI taught, He is so by right of nature, that is, by virtue of His being the God-Man; but He is also King “by a right of conquest, which He acquired when He became our Redeemer.”

One way to conceptualize the life of Christ is as a warrior come down to conquer. Our Lord Himself does just that in the Gospel: “When a strong man armed keepeth his court, those things are in peace which he possesseth. But if a stronger than he come upon him, and overcome him; he will take away all his armour wherein he trusted, and will distribute his spoils” (Luke 11:21-22).

The “strong man armed” is the Devil, but the “stronger than he” is Christ, who overcomes that strong man. This is the interpretation of Cornelius a Lapide, in his *Great Commentary*: “The strong man then, in this passage, is the devil; the house is the world; the vessels are his arms; his goods, his instruments. The arms of the devil are frauds, deceits and allurements by which he entices men to sin; his arms are wealth, honours, riches. They are also inferior demons and wicked men, says St. Chrysostom. These the devil uses against us, to tempt and vex us. His goods are the souls of sinners, and the bodies of the possessed; also the souls of the Fathers detained in Limbo before Christ. All these Christ wrested and snatched away from the devil, and bound him in hell.”

Christ conquers Satan in His Passion, but He has conquered Him so many times before: when He cast out demons, when He forgave sinners, in the temptations in the desert, etc. Saint Robert Southwell, in his exquisite poem, “New Heaven, New War,” even describes the Holy Infant as warrior in the very Mystery of the Nativity:

This little babe, so few days old,
Is come to rifle Satan's fold;
All hell doth at his presence quake.
Though he himself for cold do shake,

For in this weak unarmèd wise
The gates of hell he will surprise.
With tears he fights and wins the field;
His naked breast stands for a shield;

His battering shot are babish cries,
His arrows looks of weeping eyes,
His martial ensigns cold and need,
And feeble flesh his warrior's steed.

The medieval philosophers held that *bonum est diffusivum sui*: goodness is diffusive of itself. This is most excellently realized in God, for creation is God's own goodness diffusing itself outside the Trinity. This creation comes from God, is His dominion, and was made to give glory to Him.

Sin and evil entered the world by the rebellion of the Devil, who went from being the Light-Bearer, *Lucifer*, to being “the Adversary” — in Hebrew, *Shatan*, or as we say it in English, Satan. This discordant note that began in the order of pure spirits entered into the material creation when that same ancient Rebel tempted Eve, and when Adam foolishly listened to his wife whom he was meant to lead. Original Sin is Adam's sin that is passed on. It is the sin of the head of mankind passed on to his members — that is, to us, his offspring.

Man is a microcosm of creation, having all the powers of lower creation (minerals, vegetables, brute animals), sharing also common faculties with the angels (intellect and will). All creation fell when man fell, which is why Saint Paul could say, “For we know that every creature groaneth and travaileth in pain, even till now” (Rom. 8:22). In saving man, Christ the Conqueror saves all creation, restores it, and lifts it up to God.

He did this, as already noted, by His Passion — paying the price of our redemption with His most precious Blood. This is that “right of conquest” by which Christ rules, according to Pope Pius XI. In order to apply the merits of His Passion to mankind and to perpetuate them through time, Our Lord established on earth the Kingdom of God, which, as long as it dwells here, must fight the enemies of our salvation: the world, the flesh, and the Devil. This is the reason that the Church on earth is called the Church Militant. To this Catholic Church, which is also His Mystical Body, He has given the means of salvation: the Faith to teach, the power of jurisdiction to govern in His name, and the sacraments by which to sanctify us.

According to Saint John (1:3), all that was made was made through the Word. Saint Paul affirms this in detail (Col. 1:16-17), and goes on to state that we are also reconciled through Him to God (Col. 1:18 –20. All that was made was made through and in the Word, and all that is saved will be saved through and in the Incarnate Word. Thus, Saint Thomas says that Christ, “as man, is the way by which we return to God.”

From the Fall onward, salvation history is the true story of the Reconquest of all creation for the One True God. A new head of mankind will come to redeem the old, and He will be the head of a regenerated humanity, a reborn humanity, which is also His Kingdom, His Church. To do this, He has to conquer the strong man armed — the Devil — and rifle his goods. As a ninth-century Christian hymn has it: *Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat*. His Church, too, will participate in that conquest.

We members of the Church Militant have to take the long view. This historical Reconquest lasts from the first promise of a Redeemer in Genesis 3:15 to the fulfilling of those words of the Angel to Saint John in the Apocalypse: “time shall be no longer” (Apoc. 10:6).

During that vast expanse of time, we will see little victories along the way, like Spain’s Reconquest (which only took 800 years!), like the conversion of nations, like the salvation of one soul at a time — but the ultimate victory happens in the end, when all things are subject to Christ the Conqueror (cf. Heb. 2:8) and He who *must reign* delivers His kingdom to the Father (cf. I Cor. 15:24-25). Then the number of the elect is filled, the demons and the damned are sealed up in hell, purgatory is emptied, and the saints are all endlessly adoring the Holy Trinity in Heaven.

So, ladies and gentlemen, the Reconquest is a long haul, and we had better hunker down and steel ourselves for the combat: “But he that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved” (Matt. 24:13).

In the meantime, we must do what is incumbent on us to assist Jesus Christ our King in His work of Reconquest. What does this entail? There is an awful lot! Orthodoxy must conquer heresy, Church unity must conquer schism, faith must conquer unbelief, virtue must conquer vice, grace must conquer sin and evil — at the order of the individual, the family, and society. Yes, even politics must be conquered for Our Lord Jesus Christ the King!

But what is the biggest Reconquest?

It is I — and you. Each of us can say, truly, *I must be completely conquered by Jesus Christ, so that I may belong to Him totally.*

He *will* conquer us — either willingly or unwillingly on our part. If willingly, we are saved; if not, we are damned.

I must be a willing accomplice with Our Lord — His ally — in my own reconquest. I must allow Him to conquer me, but more than that: I must want it.

And to make our Christmas letter more about Christmas, permit me to turn back to Saint Robert Southwell:

The Burning Babe

By Robert Southwell, S.J.

As I in hoary winter’s night stood shivering in the snow,
Surpris’d I was with sudden heat which made my heart to glow;
And lifting up a fearful eye to view what fire was near,
A pretty Babe all burning bright did in the air appear;
Who, scorched with excessive heat, such floods of tears did shed
As though his floods should quench his flames which with his tears were fed.
“Alas!” quoth he, “but newly born, in fiery heats I fry,
Yet none approach to warm their hearts or feel my fire but I!
My faultless breast the furnace is, the fuel wounding thorns,
Love is the fire, and sighs the smoke, the ashes shame and scorns;
The fuel Justice layeth on, and Mercy blows the coals,
The metal in this furnace wrought are men’s defiled souls,
For which, as now on fire I am to work them to their good,
So will I melt into a bath to wash them in my blood.”
With this he vanish’d out of sight and swiftly shrunk away,
And straight I called unto mind that it was Christmas day.

While our hearts enjoy the foretaste of the sweetness of the day of our Savior’s Birth from the womb of His Mother, Mary Ever-Virgin, let us prepare for Christmas, as the Church prescribes, with the cleansing of our souls and acts of penance.

One of the best ways to live the penitential spirit is by almsgiving. “Redeem thou thy sins with alms, and thy iniquities with works of mercy,” we are exhorted in the Book of Daniel (4:24). And, Saint Peter reminds us, likewise, that “charity covereth a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). This is especially true in the suffrages we have been offering (and continue to offer) for the souls in Purgatory.

Our apostolate is very much in need of your continued support. Without your alms and prayers we would be unable to reach so many souls, and many more, with the Catholic Faith, which alone can give supernatural life, light, and hope in a world steeped in darkness and despair.

May Christ the Conqueror, the Light of the world, bless you, with Holy Mary and Saint Joseph, this Christmas season and always.

In the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Br. André Marie, M.I.C.M.

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