

THE REDEEMER

AMBROSE FARRELL, O.P.

ON mount Calvary the side of the divine Saviour was transfixed. From that gaping wound blood gushed out, like a torrent, bounding forward over time, cleansing men's souls, expiating their sins, and lavishing upon them the riches of salvation.¹ These words written by Pope Pius XII recall his famous encyclical in which he wrote, 'on the Cross the Church like a new Eve, or mother of all the living, was born from the Saviour's side. Thus St Ambrose, speaking of the pierced side of Christ, says, "Now it is built, now it is formed; now . . . it is fashioned; now it is created. Now the spiritual house is erected into a holy priesthood." . . . By the blood which he shed on the Cross he removed the obstacle of the divine wrath and enabled all the heavenly gifts . . . to flow forth from the fountains of the Saviour for the salvation of men, and especially of the faithful. It was on the tree of the Cross, finally, that he purchased his Church.'²

This wonder was by our Saviour prefigured on the eve of his death, when at the last supper, 'taking bread, he gave thanks, and brake, and gave to them, saying: This is my body which is given (sacrificed) for you. . . . In like manner the chalice, the new testament in my blood, which is being poured out for you' (Luke 22, 19).

In this sacred action our Saviour expresses his mind, that the Holy Eucharist should be a memorial of his death and a monument of his victory. This it could be because he himself is the '*espiatore di ogni colpa*—the expiator of every sin'.³

Christ our Lord entered into the world as the fulfilment of all that the Jews of the Old Testament had been taught by their prophets to love, cherish, and expect. As the Saviour and Redeemer he came upon the scene as the realisation of their expectations and predictions, not only for

¹ Adhortatio Apostolica, '*Menti Nostrae*', 23 September, 1950.

² *Mystici Corporis*, 29 June, 1943.

³ Pius XII, Broadcast, Christmas Eve, 1949.

the Jewish people, the race of Israel, but for the whole of mankind.

His future was foreshadowed by the divine arrangement of his birth. His Mother was instructed by an angelic visitor to 'call his name Jesus', which means Saviour, and that 'he shall reign for ever . . . and of his kingdom there shall be no end'. His foster-father St Joseph, in his turn, received divine admonitions in preparation of his coming; he was to 'call his name Jesus. For he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet' (i.e. Isaias). On the night of his birth, the angels' message to the shepherds was, 'this day is born to you a Saviour'. At the presentation in the temple the dim eyes of Simeon beheld him as a beacon of light and the 'salvation' of the world.

St John the Baptist hailed him with the words, 'Behold the lamb of God, behold him who taketh away the sin of the world'. (John 1, 29.)

St John the Evangelist was later to write, 'This is the Lamb which was slain from the beginning of the world'. (Apoc. 13, 8.) The power of this Lamb is such as to slay the lion, for the adversary the devil goes about as a lion seeking whom he may devour (cf. 1 Peter, 5, 8). '*Ecce vicit leo de tribu Juda*' (Apoc. 5, 5). Indeed the Lamb himself is a lion, because he is a glorious victor. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, a victim of sacrifice offered by himself, for the sins of the world.⁴ He is the 'Lamb of God', the priest and victim are divine. In the words of St Peter, he 'bore our sins in his body' (Peter 2, 24), 'you were not redeemed with corruptible things . . . but with the precious blood of Christ' (id. 1, 18), and of St Paul, 'you are bought with a great price' (Cor. 6, 20).

Christ our Lord spoke of himself as the good shepherd, and goes on to say, 'I lay down my life for my sheep. . . . I lay it down of myself, and I have power to lay it down; and I have power to take it up again.' (John 10, 15.)

St Thomas, reflecting on the crucifixion, shows that there is no question of our Saviour being overtaken by an inevitable disaster. 'In order for Christ to show that the Passion

⁴ cf. St Thomas in *Ioan.*

inflicted by violence did not take away his life he preserved the strength of his bodily nature, so that at the last moment he was able to cry with a loud voice: and hence his death should be computed among his miracles. . . . It was also a subject of wonder in Christ's death that he died sooner than the others who were tormented with the same suffering. . . . For as of his own will his bodily nature kept its vigour to the end, so likewise, when he willed, he suddenly succumbed to the injury inflicted.'⁵

Our Saviour is uniquely the one and only Redeemer. He 'is come to give his life a *redemption* for many' (Mark 10, 45). 'Neither is there salvation in any other. For there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved', as St Peter said. (Acts 4, 12.)

This idea of redemption is essential for the understanding of Christ's work. The warrant for applying this notion to his sufferings and death is clearly found in Holy Writ. It is implicit in the Nicene Creed: 'Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven; and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost, of the virgin Mary: and was made man. He was crucified also for us.' In these words the very purpose of the Incarnation is affirmed.

In an age when slavery was common, it was not unnatural that the condition of fallen man should have been perceived as a state of enslavement. Man was in the grip of an evil from which he could not extricate himself. He was bound hand and foot as a prisoner, and the forces of evil encompassed him. Heathendom was a satanic empire of idolatry, immorality and every kind of corruption. Man under the slavery of sin instigated by the devil was like a man vanquished in battle by overwhelming forces, taken prisoner, and unable to free himself. The only way freedom could be won was by the payment of a ransom or price. Only one who was prepared to play the part of a kinsman could win deliverance, as it were by selling himself, as a substitute for the one held in fetters.

Redemption signifies a deliverance gained by a kind of ransom or price. The price paid is the blood of Christ shed for us. He who pays the price is the Redeemer. Unlike

⁵ *Summa*, III, 47, I, ad 2.

the fall of the angels, the sin of man is not irreparable, though condemnation and punishment befell our first parents with dramatic suddenness. Punishment follows rebellion against God, as surely and swiftly as guilt itself. 'Suffering and death are the penalty of sin: they are the compensation which the sinner must pay for the pleasure that he has taken in his evil deed.'⁶ But only the voluntary acceptance of the 'wages of sin' associated with the will of God can bring deliverance. Both justice and love were offended by sin. The tragedy of sin was immediately followed by God's love and mercy. The redemptive work of our Saviour was therefore not simply a requital of divine justice, but still more a drama of God's love and mercy. 'God who is rich in mercy, for his exceeding charity wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins hath quickened us together in Christ.' (Eph. 2, 4.)

Unredeemed man is a slave of sin, branded with guilt and loaded with a debt of punishment to be paid. He is powerless to make amends, or to do anything that will outweigh the insult offered to God's justice and love by his sin. For he is an enemy of God, and an outcast of creation. And by his sin the whole race of mankind has been contaminated. Sin has a certain infinity of evil, measurable only by the infinite majesty of the Person offended. The first sin embodied in itself all the wickedness and malice, of which all other sins are but a shadow.

Yet God's infinite love was not balked by the inability of man to redeem himself. 'In order that man, being born with original sin, might not have been made useless and in vain, God, from the very beginnings of the human race, had in mind a remedy to deliver him from frustrated existence, to wit, the Mediator, God and man, Jesus Christ.'⁷ 'Humanity had fallen corporately in one man, Adam; corporately it is raised up in one man, Jesus Christ.' In him the human race is given a new Head, 'and just as the sin of Adam recoiled upon all the members of humanity, so Christ renovates all his members in himself.'⁸

⁶ *Mary's Part In Our Redemption*, by Canon George D. Smith, p. 14.

⁷ St Thomas, *De malo*, 5, 1, ad 1.

⁸ Canon Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

Only a man could act on behalf of the human race, since only a man could himself undo the evil which sin has caused humanity. Yet no man was free from sin. God therefore himself became man, in the person of his Son, and so made human nature his own. Here at last was one who could save humanity, because he was not only man but God.

Since the Person who acted and suffered in the human nature of Christ was divine, all his acts were of infinite value, and alone capable of blotting out the guilt of sin, and of paying the ransom which sin deserves. By the Passion and death of Christ salvation was purchased for the world. He alone can be and is the Redeemer.

'To redeem, two things are required—namely, the act of paying and the price paid. For if in redeeming something a man pays a price which is not his own, but another's, he is not said to be the chief redeemer, but rather the other is, whose price it is. Now Christ's blood or His bodily life, which is the blood, is the price of our redemption, and that life He paid.'

Redemption, then, is a gesture of God's love and mercy, expressed in sacrifice whereby satisfaction is made. 'God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in him, may not perish but may have life everlasting. For God sent his Son . . . that the world may be saved by him.' (John 3, 16.)

The way of deliverance has been made available once and for all. Christ died even for the lost. But the fruits of redemption have yet to be appropriated, through the Sacraments, as a sevenfold river of grace, pouring from the sacred side of Christ crucified.