

## SEVENTH DAY.

### The Flower of the Birth.

"I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope. In me is all grace of the way and of the truth; in me is all hope of life and of virtue."—*Ecc.*, xxiv.

LET us go, in the spirit of faith and love, to-day to the thrice blessed home where the Immaculate Queen of the blessed was born.

Tread softly, for we are to enter a new Eden of perfect innocence and highest grace. In reverence let us go in, as if we were passing through the gate of a sanctuary, where a sanctity incomparable is hiding in a holy tabernacle.

Eighty days have passed since the birth of Mary. For a man child, as we read in Leviticus, the law ordained forty days of purification for the mother, and twice forty days for a maid child.

Anna went to the temple and offered two doves on the altar, one a burnt offering and the other a sin offering. She is purified, according to the law; she returns home, praising the God of her fathers, and her soul is filled with the peace of a great gladness.

On the face of the aged Joachim there shines a light as if it were a gleam of joy reflected from the heavens. The old man is thinking of the past. Strangely through

his memory move the words of a hundred prophecies. Dim presentiments about his child fill his soul; and somehow, if he does not know all, he seems to feel the glory of her future. The words of Isaias: "The Lord Himself shall give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel," have set him dreaming; and, somehow, while he gazes on the face of his little Mary, he scarcely knows why, the words of Jeremias: "The Lord hath created a new thing in the earth, a woman shall compass a man," seem to put on meanings new and very near to him.

In Anna's arms the infant is nestling; and the mother looks, as only mothers can look, with her heart in her eyes, upon her offspring. She, too, was a-dreaming, as she gathered her child to her breast in the clasp of love; and, like all mother's dreams, hopes and fears, desires and doubts, met in her soul, and yet did not destroy its peace.

Ah, yes! this is a holy place. If not the Lord, the Mother of the coming Lord is here, a little infant. How frail it seems! What a far-off look in its eyes! What a fair and beauteous face! How perfect the beauty of its body. No wonder in the soul within it the beauty of perfect grace is reigning. Look how the little hands are clasped, as if in prayer! but the lips move not. Nearly three months old now, with a perfect self-conscious soul from the first instant of conception,—but the body must grow, little by little, like the rest of children. There must be nothing startling, nothing extraordinary in the child's external life. She must be just like any other child; for the secret of her coming into this world, and why she came, must not yet be revealed.

How hidden everything is about the child! In her veins, even now, is flowing the very blood which Christ will take into His humanity, and which, derived pure from her, the all-pure, and united to His divinity, will become infinite in mercy and in merits when it flows for us in the day of Calvary. God makes no sign. His future mother is a frail little infant. Ah! how the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, in infinite love, must have watched over the predestined child! How Gabriel, her guardian angel, must have hovered near her!

How all the angels of heaven (for surely now they know of the mystery of Mary of Nazareth) must have glorified the Eternal in the contemplation of this, the most beautiful creature of all the Creation! And the world went on just the same as ever; the world that was losing the instincts of the supernatural, waiting, it is true, for the coming of the Messiah, but, indeed, little dreaming that His Mother had already come. It was all so still. No one saw, no one heard, no one knew of the mystery hidden in the dwelling of Joachim and Anna. It is God's way. He moves in His great designs strongly but sweetly. He made no noise when He created the heavens and earth, and He was stiller than ever at the cradle of Mary. Do not all grand and beautiful things move towards their purposes and reach their perfections in the silences?

Who hears the flowers growing, or the grasses, or the trees? Who hears the earth moving? Who hears the stars marching, like bannered hosts, through the heavens? Is not nature, when it moves in harmony, always still? Only when its elements are thrown out of order, and their forces clash, comes the din of confusion.

So in the world of supernature, the Spiritual and the Divine move on in a harmony beautiful as a hymn, heard in the heavens clearly, but too sweet to be heard by human sense; praiseful of God and peaceful for man. It is only when the weak will and strong passions of the human heart rise in rebellion against the laws of grace that the tumult comes in which God can never dwell.

But around Mary fell, from the first, the stillness and the peace of God. Why? Because her will was in perfect harmony with God's decrees and designs. Because, from the first moment of her life she was in perfect accord with the eternal will. Indeed, a mystery of silence folded all her life. What great strengths have their homes in the silences! Ask the world's thinkers, and they will tell you that their deepest thoughts, and best, came to them, like stars, in the silences of the nights. Ask the world's singers, and they will tell you that their grandest songs came sounding through their souls in the stillnesses of the dark. Enter the monasteries, back of whose closed gates live men gifted with glorious speech, and they have long hours of silences; and through those hours their feet walk faster towards God. Go into the convents of the virgins of the Church. They, too, have their hours and days of silence, in which the whisper of a word cannot be heard, and their hearts, like the lilies of the valley, are growing and whitening in the silence. Enter a Catholic church, without a single worshipper or with thousands crowded, what a silence?

The spell of the silence of the Tabernacle falls on them all. And that Tabernacle-silence; how mysterious, and yet how mighty? In the half-hour Mass in

the morning what a silence comes down upon the Altar when the priest reaches the moment of consecration, when infinite love and infinite power hide themselves in the stillness of a little white host? And the church itself, what a silence she keeps about the deposit of Christ's revelations in her possession. How the years pass—she the while listening to human discussions, with the quiet patience of Christ at Pilate's tribunal, before she rises and proclaims her dogmas.

Human churches, like the men who founded them, are noisy. In them is the everlasting chatter of discordant tongues about changeable opinions. They are always talking, and at random. The Church of Christ inherits the stillness as well as the speech of Christ, and she never says an unnecessary word.

How still are the rays of the sun that bring to us the light of heaven. In their coming they make no noise, but when they do come they clothe the world with robes of glory. So Mary was to bring to us the light of the sun of justice. Heard ye ever the snow-flakes falling? Silently they fall, and they weave a virgin-veil for earth. So the Virgin of virgins came silently, to weave out of her pure flesh the veil of Christ's humanity. How silently in the bosom of nature, where poor earth is as a virgin, is she, unknown to us, giving birth, like a fruitful mother, to emeralds, pearls, amethysts, diamonds and a hundred other beautiful children of clay?

Only those elements which are like man's variable will and restless passions make din and discord here below; the sea, with its stormy waves; the air, with its changeful winds; the rivers, with their rise and fall and noisy flow; the clouds, with their lightnings and thunders; fire, with its angry violences; and in the brute

creation, those animals only which, in voice and ferocity, seem to symbolize the destructive power of sin in man.

Have we strayed away from the little Mary in the arms of Anna? Not at all. We have never left the holy chamber. Look! the infant has fallen asleep. Let us not awake her! Speak low, No! pray low. Oh! infant, in whose heart the blood of our Redeemer is even now beating, dream your dreams divine, but dream in pity, too, and in love of us poor sinners! Come now from the sleeping child to the Altar where her Christ, and ours, is sleeping in the Eucharist.

It is the eighth of September, the Feast of the Nativity. This month the sun passes, in the zodiac, out of the sign of the lion into the sign of the virgin. So into her was to pass, and over us was to shine forever, the sun of justice; and the sign of the lion, which is the sign of that evil one, "who goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," would be subjected forever to the sign of the virgin in the zodiac of the heaven of grace.

According to a tradition, from the beginning, Mary was born on the eighth day of September. Listen to St. Ambrose. The eighth day, or octave, is not a day of time. It is a day of eternity. "The octave is the crowning of our hope." Our time is reckoned by weeks, and the week has but seven days. When the week ends we begin one again, and count from the first to the seventh day. Beyond the seventh we do not pass, and thus the eighth day is not in the measurement of time, and the day that passes beyond the calendar of the week of time is of eternity. See you not the mystical reason why the octave should be her birthday, for with her birthday dawned the eternal day of Christ. The dawn

came first; the sun is coming soon. So, back in the far ages, our Holy Church commemorates Mary's nativity on the eighth day of September. What other church celebrates it? The Greek church; yes. What other? None. If they celebrate the birth of Christ on Christmas day, why not celebrate the nativity of Christ's Mother? Does ever the sun of nature come without the dawn? and, in supernature's heavens, the sun of justice has, necessarily, his Aurora. If you keep the birth of the sun of justice in the noon of Christmas night, why not keep the feast of the dawn of the sun, in Mary's birth, in September? Ah! you want the sun, but you disdain its dawn! Have your way, but it is neither nature's nor supernature's way. We follow the way of both—the Catholic way.

Look! the priest is coming to the Altar, with the chalice and the bread. He is going to sing the Mass. Was it wrong for her to have been born? Is it then wrong to celebrate her birthday? Do you not keep the birthdays of the great and the illustrious, who were often, alas, great sinners? Do you not keep the birthday of your own mothers, and can you let the birthday of the Mother of Christ pass as any other common day, and all unnoticed? Go on! priest of the Son of Mary, and celebrate the sacrifice of Him who was sin's victim, and is our Saviour and Mary's son.

Ah! Holy Church, thou art beautiful in thy mind, for the light of truth is shining ever there; and thou art beautiful in thy heart, for the love of Christ is ever throbbing there; and thou art beautiful in thy memory of the holy ones of God, writing their names on the brows of all thy days; keeping feasts in their honor, but, above all, holding in eternal remembrance, at the Altar of the victim, His Mother's holy name.

Listen to the first words of the Mass in honor of Mary's nativity: "*Thy birth, oh Virgin Mary! Mother of the Son of God, has announced joy to all the world, because thou hast brought forth the Sun of Justice, Jesus Christ, our God, who, taking away malediction, gave benediction, and confounding death, gave unto us eternal life.*"

Are they not true, true as very Scripture? Do they honor or dishonor Christ, her son? From the lips of the priest they ascend to the heavens. Is Christ angry? Are the words a sin against Him? Is He afraid to hear His Mother praised, lest He might, thereby, lose a part of His glory? Why then did He make her so glorious? Why did He make her His Mother? Can He ever be jealous of her who conceived Him, gave Him birth, nursed Him, watched over His childhood, and stood at the foot of His cross? Has she not the right to be forever remembered as His Mother, and, if remembered, forever praised on earth? Priest, sing the *Gloria!* The song belongs to Him, but it was not sung until He had become hers. It belongs to both. Now go to the Gospel side, and sing the Gospel of the day.

Listen! "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Abraham begot Isaac; and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judas and his brethren," and down a long and glorious ancestry of patriarchs, prophets, princes and kings, from name to name, moves the inspired pen of Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist, until it pauses thus: "And Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called the Christ." The moment her name is written, His, the Christ's, is linked to it. Such was His and her ancestry.

But she was to have but one descendant, Jesus Christ our Saviour. She closes the "Book of the Generation of Jesus Christ." Take her name away, then take His. But she herself was, and is, the living book of the generation of Christ. How? Listen! In God was infinite and eternal thought. He expressed that thought in His Eternal Word—His only Son. But this thought, eternally conceived in the mind of God and eternally expressed, remained hidden in the Trinity. No one saw it, no one heard, no one knew it, save the three Divine persons. God willed to speak this Word outside of Himself and eternity, in time, and God willed to write this Word in a living book, that it might be heard and read forever. Mary received the secret thought of God and the invisible Word. Through her it was spoken in time and became Incarnate. In her pure flesh it was written and became visible. She does not express the Word as the Father does, but she bears it written in herself, and she makes it visible in the humanity of Jesus Christ, her son, to all the world.

While I am writing these words, the dawn of day is beginning to gild the eastern horizon, and to glimmer over the waves of the Gulf of Mexico. The waves, only a hundred yards away from where I write, are just waking from sleep. Last night they were very still. Not a wave sang or moaned on the pure, white shore, and now they seem glad for the coming of the day. Far out on the waters, the sails of the fishing boats have welcomed the beautiful dawn. I am thinking of Mary, not as the star of the sea, but I am thinking of her birth, as the dawn of the everlasting day of Christ. Perhaps, the sweetest hour of the day is that of the Aurora, *aurea hora*, golden hour, which banishes the

darkness of the night and brings the light of the day. Out there, on the moss-veiled trees, the birds are beginning to sing their morning prayers. Light to the waking waves and joy to the wakened wild birds, the fair Aurora brings. Why? The waves and the birds know why. The sun, in his glory, will soon be born out of the heart of the Aurora. What a virginal light it is! The Aurora is the day's virgin, and, while it is the pure child created by the coming sun, it seems to be the mother that brings forth the sun, which gives to the day its golden hours, to the earth its fairest beauties, and to the heavens its wondrous glory.

So Mary, in her birth, is the virgin created by the Son of God. In a little while the virgin, because she is a virgin, will become His Mother; and as the sun of day, when he rises above the horizon, does not destroy the light of dawn, but gathers its beautiful light into his own splendors and carries it with him up into the heavens; so when the Sun of Justice, clothed with the splendors of His Eternal Father, will rise over the world, He will gather into His glory and blend with His infinite light, as He ascends on high, the fair, sweet light of His Mother Mary.

And as the Aurora came before the sun, and follows the sun wheresoever he shineth, inseparable from his last rays as from his first, so the Virgin Mother, in her pure human light, will follow and be mingled with the light of Him who "enlightens every one that cometh into the world."

Oh fair light! oh sweet light! oh gentle light! shine on our days! Shine o'er our ways forever! and, as thou wert the beautiful dawn of Christ in this world, be the dawn of the day of thy children's blessed eternity.

## ASPIRATION.

ALL the glory of the King's daughter is within, in golden borders,—clothed round about with vanities. After her virgins shall be brought to the King. They shall be brought with gladness and rejoicing. They shall be brought into the temple of the King.

## PRAYER.

VOUCHSAFE, O Lord, we beg of Thee, to grant us, Thy servants, the gift of heavenly grace; that as in the childbirth of the Blessed Virgin, our salvation began, we may obtain an increase of peace.



## EIGHTH DAY.

## The Flower of the Name.

"I came out of the mouth of the Most High; the first-born before all creatures. I made, that in the heavens there should rise light that never falleth, and as a cloud I covered all the earth. I dwelt in the highest places, and My throne is in a pillar of a cloud."

THERE is mystery in names. All objects come to our understanding through their different names. The objects themselves are more than mere names, but they must be named in order to be clearly known, though when named, they may not be fully known. Names distinguish things each from the other. Names are the titles of things. What is nameless is unknown, and has no real existence for us. The nameless is a nothing. Names are symbols that cannot be separated from their objects without producing confusion in speech as well as chaos in the mind. Each object owns, in its own right, its own name, and cannot be robbed of it. The lily is a lily, and the rose is a rose, and each must keep its own exclusive title in order to be known. All speech is based primarily on nouns, which are names of objects. This is the fundamental part of every language, and the other parts of speech have meanings only as they refer to names. But names of intelligent beings are greater than names of mere material things; because the higher the object in the ascending scale of creation, the greater the name. The name of God is supreme and incommunicable. He alone can bear it.