

Father Goffine's instructions for the Sunday after Christmas.

From the Explanation of the Epistles and Gospels by Father Leonard Goffine.

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INTROIT. For while all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course, Thy almighty Word, O Lord, came down from heaven, from Thy royal throne (Wis. 18:14-15). The Lord hath reigned, he is clothed with beauty: the Lord is clothed with strength, and hath girded himself (Ps. 92:1). Glory be to the Father.

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COLLECT. Almighty and everlasting God, direct our actions according to Thy good pleasure; that in the name of Thy beloved Son we may deserve to abound in good works. Through our Lord.

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EPISTLE. (Gal. 4:1-7). Brethren, as long as the heir is a child, he differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all: but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed by the father: so we also, when we were children, were serving under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law: that he might redeem them who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father. Therefore now he is not a servant, but a son; and if a son, an heir also through God.

EXPLANATION. St. Paul desired to instruct the Galatians, many of whom still clung to the Mosaic law, that this was no longer necessary, because Christ had freed them from its hard bondage, which contained merely the rudiments, so to speak, of the one only saving faith, and had made them children and heirs of God, for which they should rejoice.

Ours is a far greater happiness than that which the Jews received, because we, through our ancestors, were converted by apostolic messengers of the faith from heathenism to the true, saving Catholic faith, and by this holy religion were changed from vassals of Satan, into children and heirs of God. What a great advantage is this! Must it not be dearer to us than all the kingdoms of the world? Let us thank the Lord for it, and be careful not to lose this prerogative of being a child of God, an heir to heaven, let us not by sin give ourselves anew, as voluntary slaves to Satan.

GOSPEL. (Lk. 2:33-40). At that time, Joseph and Mary, the mother of Jesus, were wondering at those things which were spoken concerning him. And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary his mother: Behold, this child is set for the fall, and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted: and thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed. And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser; she was far advanced in years,

and had lived with her husband seven years from her virginity. And she was a widow until fourscore and four years; who departed not from the temple, by fastings and prayers serving night and day. Now she at the same hour coming in, confessed to the Lord; and spoke of him to all that looked for the redemption of Israel. And after they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew and waxed strong, full of wisdom: and the grace of God was in him.

*Why did Mary and Joseph wonder at the things which were spoken of the child Jesus?*  
They wondered, not because that which was said of the child Jesus by Simeon was new to them, for they already knew why He was sent from God, but because of the marvelous ways in which God revealed the mysteries of the new-born Savior to Simeon, the shepherds, and to other pious people.

*How is Christ set for the fall of many?*

Christ is set for the fall, that is, for the eternal damnation, of all those who either reject His doctrine, or live not according to its teachings. They themselves, not Christ, are the cause of their damnation on account of their perversity and hard-heartedness. "If I had not come and spoken to them," says Christ, "they would not have sin: but now they have no excuse for their sin" (Jn. 15:22).

*For whom is Christ the resurrection?*

For those who believe in Him, and live in accordance with the teachings of His doctrine. These, if they persevere will at the Last Day rise to eternal life.

*Why is Christ a sign that shall be contradicted?*

Because, by His birth from a virgin, by His life and death, and especially by His heavenly doctrine, which is entirely opposed to the carnal spirit of this world, Christ became an object of mockery and blasphemy. Even now, according to the saying of St. Bernard, Christ is a sign of contradiction for many Christians who contradict His humility by their pride, His poverty by their avarice, His fasting by their gluttony, His purity by their impurity, His zeal by their indolence, etc., thus denying by their actions that which they confess with their lips, proving thereby that they are Christians but in name, of whom it is written: "Thou hast the name of being alive, but thou art dead" (Apoc. 3:1).

*What is meant by these words: Thy own soul a sword shall pierce?*

It means that the greatest grief should cut like a sword through the inmost parts of the soul, which came to pass, when Mary heard the calumnies and blasphemies of the Jews against her Son, and when she saw Him die on the cross between two thieves. Meditating on this

grief of the most loving mother Mary, St. Bonaventure exclaims: “Never was there grief so great, for never was there a Son so loved!”

*What else do we learn from this gospel?*

The widows should learn from Anna, who spent nearly all her life in the temple, to serve God by prayer and fasting; for a widow who prays not, but lives in pleasures, is dead, while she is living (I Tim. 5:6). Parents should learn from it, to be careful that their children not only increase in knowledge, but that they by a pious life advance in grace before God and man.

ASPIRATION. O Jesus, Thou new-born Savior, do Thou move our hearts to the fulfillment of Thy precepts that Thou mayst be set for our fall; for it would be much better for us, not to have known the ways of righteousness, than having known them, to have departed from them.

#### INSTRUCTION ON BLESSING

*And Simeon blessed them “(Lk. 2: 34).*

*What is meant by a blessing?*

A blessing on the part of God, means the giving to man some spiritual or temporal grace; a blessing on the part of an angel or a man, means the expression in prayer of a wish or desire that God would give to some particular person a corporal or spiritual grace. In the proper sense of the word, only God can give a blessing, because all spiritual and temporal good comes from Him; angels and men can only wish and ask of God that He would bestow His gifts.

*Have we examples of blessing in the Bible?*

Yes, for the angels blessed Jacob (Gen. 32:26), and Jacob blessed his sons and grandsons (Gen. 48:15), Melchisedech blessed Abraham (Gen. 14:19), and Rebecca was blessed by her brothers (Gen. 24:60).

*Is it well for parents to bless their children?*

Yes, for God frequently ratifies the blessings wished by the parents, as in the case of Isaac who blessed Jacob, and Jacob who blessed his own sons (Gen. 49). And, on the contrary, God permits the curses of parents to be fulfilled on their children as history shows. “The father's blessing establisheth the houses of the children; but the mother's curse rooteth up the foundation” (Ecclus. 3:11).

*What power has the priest's blessing?*

A very great one, because it is given by the priest, the vicar of Christ on earth, in the name of Jesus, and of the Church founded by Him, in which He has deposited the plenitude of

His blessings. The Church expresses this, when the bishop, anointing the hands of the newly ordained, makes the sign of the cross over them. “All that they bless, is blessed; that they consecrate, is consecrated and sanctified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The blessing of the priest is to be prized therefore, and an obstacle not set to it by a sinful life. Parents should ask his blessing for their children when he happens to visit them. Children were brought to Christ that He might lay His hands on them and bless them (Mt. 19:13).

See INSTRUCTION ON BENEDICTIONS, Sixth Sunday after Pentecost.

*What is the effect of God's blessing?*

In spiritual life it gives great joy and strength to practice virtue; and in physical life it gives fruitful prosperity in our occupations and undertakings. Therefore, all is contained in the blessing of God, and he who receives it, is richer than if he possessed the whole world.

We should endeavor by a pious life to secure this blessing, for it rests only on the head of the just (Prov. 10:6).

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