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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love Thee, save souls.

O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

From the Sermons of the Cure of Ars – St. John Mary Vianney

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD.

GOD WITH US.

*“And his name shall be called Emmanuel.”—Is. 7:14.*

Beloved brethren, assembled in the name of Jesus Christ:

On the plains of Bethlehem, the angels of heaven brought to the shepherds and to us a wonderful message of joy. “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people: For this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David” (St. Luke 2: 10, 11). Since the world was made no such message of joy had ever been brought to men. Men bring one another messages of joy. How many joyful sounds have already been heard upon earth, how many days of happiness are arranged, how many joyful messages are brought; but the sounds of joy are carried away on the air, to leave behind only slight remembrances, like faint lights; joyful days pass away, and days of visitation follow days of blessing, and joyful chimes are often changed to chimes of mourning. How often is the joy of one the sorrow of the other! How often does it happen that what to one is a cause of jubilation to another is an occasion for tears! And even if the curse of inconstancy and the reverse of earthly happiness did not sadden man’s joyful message, it would still be incapable of making the heart of man happy in its deepest depths; it does not send its rays right down to the bottom of the heart; it is hardly able to gild the walls of our soul with its feeble, caressing light. But the angels’ message on the

plains of Bethlehem was of quite another kind; it did not come from the palaces of earthly kings, or from the halls of pleasure, or from the markets of the earth; it came from heaven, bringing with it heavenly flowers, heavenly blessings, and heavenly graces. The angels, messengers from the choirs of blessed light, bring it on lips overflowing with jubilation; pure and undefiled, without shadow of deception and sorrow, rings out the jubilee down upon the earth, laden with sin, and it reaches into our innermost hearts. It is announced, not to one or the other, but to the beggar and the king, the child and the old man, the poor and the rich. The angels announced to the shepherds that it should be made known to all people, in the east and the west, in the north and the south; it shall ring forth and make joyful through all the ages; it shall never cease, not even when the world shall keep its vigil, and the book of humanity will be closed, and then it will ring on in eternity: a Saviour is born to you, who is Christ the Lord. Oh, who can depict the joy of a Christmas festival! Over our altars floats the joy of this joyful message, from the plains of Bethlehem it sinks into our hearts and breathes consolation and hope into our souls. The Saviour is born for us, a Saviour who will deliver us from sin, and from the thralldom of Satan, who reconciles us to God and opens heaven unto us. 'What this Saviour is His name tells us, that the prophet Isaias announced: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel, God with us." Yes, God with us, that is the meaning of the joyful message of the angel: God with us:

I. In His humanity.

II. In His childhood.

III. In His poverty.

This is what we will contemplate, dearly beloved; His name shall be called Emmanuel, God with us.

1. —God with us in His humanity. The angels announced that the Saviour was born, who is Christ the Lord. That is to say, that the second Person of the Trinity had taken a human nature, a human body, and a human soul, the same as we have. He has become one of us. He is like us in all things, with the exception of sin, says the Apostle. That is the first step of the mercy of God, which we devoutly adore, in the crib at Bethlehem.

Sin separated man from God; between man and God there yawned a deep chasm, which man was not capable of bridging over. The Lord God had already given the world proofs of His mercy, before the Incarnation of His Son, but it was on account of the coming Messiah. Without it there was only before us the avenging justice of an angry God, who punishes the sins of the father from generation to generation. Full of longing, the fathers of past ages looked for the day in which the Lord God would pour out the greatness of His compassion upon the sinful fallen generation. Most beautifully does the prophet Isaias console mankind in their languishing misery: "Say to the faint-hearted: Take courage, and fear not: behold, your God will bring the revenge of recompense: God Himself will come and will save you" (Is. xxxv. 4). God Himself! Who can measure the greatness of this

compassion? A prince is certainly merciful if he sends a messenger with gifts to the poor in their forsaken garret. This is what God could have done. He could have sent us a Moses to break the chains of our slavery. He could have sent us a prophet Jonas to preach penance to us. He could have let Elias appear to us again, to bring the word of God like a burning torch. That would have been great mercy, but God wanted to do more than this. The Apostle Paul describes it in these words: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all, in these days, hath spoken to us by His Son, whom He hath appointed Heir of all things, by whom also He made the world" (Heb. 1: 1, 2). Now every human heart takes part in the jubilation of Elizabeth, at the visit of the Blessed Virgin: "And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (St. Luke 1: 43). God comes Himself. If a prophet or an angel had come, man's longing for God, for a more intimate communication with God, would not have been satisfied. In every human heart there exists this question, which the psalmist expresses in these words: "*Ubi est Deus?*" "Where is God?" "Where is my God?" says the child at its mother's knee! Where is my God? says the youth, in his striving after happiness. So says the old man, when he is dying. The Apostle St. Paul says that in the times before Christ the people went *quaerere Deum si forte attraherent eum*, looking for God in the valleys, on the summits of the mountains, on the banks of the rivers, and in the depths of the forests, erecting altars, to bring God down to them. All this longing of the people, all this desire of the human heart, was fulfilled in the crib at Bethlehem. God Himself comes. How will He come? In His majesty? In the brightness of His divine glory? Then we men would not be capable of bearing His look and His presence. Will He come, perhaps, as in a cloud over the Ark of the Covenant in the temple at Jerusalem? This would not be sufficient for the mercy of God. He wished to be more to us! Will He perhaps come in the semblance of a body amongst us men, as some heretics have supposed? No, God Himself comes, after having taken a real human body and a human soul. So far as His mercy led Him so far has He made Himself like unto nothing. The Apostle describes it with these words: "*Qui cum in forma Dei esset exinanivit semetipsum formam servi accipiens, in similitudinem hominum factus et habitu inventus ut homo.*" "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man" (Phil. 2: 6, 7). God Himself comes; He becomes man like one of us. Who can comprehend the greatness of the mercy of God in His abasement? Let the eagle become a worm, and at the same time preserve his eagle nature, you give him the greatest torture, because he can no longer move his wings. Give the lion, with his lion nature, the form of a snail, and he would roar with pain. What a fetter is our body for our soul! But it bears no comparison to the abasement which God laid upon Himself when He took a human body and abased Himself like unto a man. Why this abasement? Because the Son of God wished to come as near to us men as possible. God with us, one of us. There flows from the Incarnate Son of God the blessings of divinity upon all men, the members of the same family, members of the mystical body of Christ. As if the sun sank into a drop of water in the ocean, and

through this drop would light up all the other drops in the ocean. As if noble graft was ingrafted upon the wild olive tree, all the branches and twigs would partake of the strength of this graft, says St. Augustine, so have we men, since the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, a part in His glory, in His graces, and His merits. God with us, *descendit, ut levaret* (Augustinus). He abased Himself to exalt us. The blessing begins already in the crib. Now the condition of the poor and the sick bed of the sick become meritorious in Christ our Saviour. Now, every tear which is shed by faith, and through contemplating Him, with these is God well pleased. God with us, now is freedom brought to men, for God is a God of freedom. The chains are loosened with which the slaves were fettered. The lowly and the poor have the rights of man restored to them. After the Son of God becoming a brother to the lowliest amongst men, the dignity and equality of man is given by Christ to the world. God with us. What the Incarnate Son of God suffered, the atonement made by Him to the Heavenly Father, is the portion of every man; He is the Redeemer of all. God with us, the Incarnate Son of God, understands the hard lot of man. He prepared Himself a chalice of sufferings to make satisfaction for us. Everything which belongs to us men serves Him for the performance of this work of mercy. The crib, the thorns, the scourge and the spear, are in His hands the tools of our redemption. God with us, then will the Incarnate Son of God go the way of His conquest over this curse-laden earth. In Him the mercy of God travels the way from Galilee to Judea, healing the sick, raising the dead to life, commanding the winds, stilling the waves of the sea, seeking the sinner, like the shepherd going after his lost sheep, and finally taking away the sting from death. God with us, the Incarnate Son of God, will live a life of mercy towards all men, until the Day of Judgment. In Him and with His incarnate hands the mercy of God flows on the waters, so as to prepare this water as a bath of regeneration for my child in holy baptism. It extends to the olive tree, to prepare from its fruit the holy oil for the Sacrament of Extreme Unction for the sick and for the anointing of the priests. It takes hold of the breath of the priestly mouth, to say to the sinner, bending under the weight of his sins: Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee. God with us. The mercy of God will, in His Incarnate Son, pass over the vineyards of this earth, and come into our fields of wheat, to lay hold of the bread and wine, and in their form, by the mystery of transubstantiation, from His body and His blood, to give us food and drink for our souls, so that His mercy may have its triumphant fulfillment, because by Holy Communion we are in Him, and He is in us. God with us; He will also live upon our altars and dwell in the midst of our hearts. His name shall be called Emmanuel: God with us.

II. —God with us in His childhood. The Son of God took another merciful step when He appeared upon earth as a child. The angels announced to the shepherds: You will find an infant. Without doubt, the Son of God might have appeared upon earth as a grown man. But He did not do this. He abased Himself, and lay in the crib as a helpless infant. The heathens have represented Jupiter with lightning in his eyes, falcons at his feet, flaming swords in his hands; no hand free to bless. Our divine Saviour wished to appear very differently. Not a threatening, mighty figure; not armed with lightning. No, He appeared as

a child full of love, full of tenderness, and full of joy. The child looks at every one; at sight of the child, all fear vanishes. All may approach a child without fear, the high and the low, the learned and the unlearned, rich and poor. How near has God come unto us! When Moses descended from the mountain the majesty of God shone from his countenance, and the mountains shook with thunder and lightning; they smoked and flamed; then the people begged in their fright: "Speak thou to us and we will hear; let not the Lord speak to us, lest we die" (Ex. 20: 19). The prophet Daniel says of the appearance of God: I was afraid and fell down upon my face. St. John says: I saw thy countenance, O God, and fell down at Thy feet as one dead. God has not approached us in such state. *Parvulus natus est nobis*, says the prophet Isaias (9: 6); a child is born to us. Now we can go to the throne of His mercy with confidence. At the crib all fear vanishes, the greatest criminal draws near to the child with assurance and confidence. What opens more easily than the hands of a little child? God with us in the form of a child leads us men to God and lets us find mercy. Of a truth, He has given Himself to us in weakness and lowliness. His triumph is a triumph of love, for He, the merciful God, became a child. What is weaker than an infant? Had the Son of God come with the power of this world, to conquer the world, then, perhaps, His victory would have been reckoned amongst the triumphs of earthly lords; He comes as an infant, without the pomp of this world, to vanquish the world. He comes without human help to besiege the hearts of men. What is nothingness in the world He has chosen, so as to put to shame that which is powerful. This infant, so helpless in the crib, holds the world in His arms; by this infant, the Son of God, everything was made that has been made; in Him is life, and the life is the light of mankind. He is the life that animates the Church; in Him is the strength of the martyrs, with which they shed their blood for love of Him; in Him is the virtue of every saint. He works through the priestly office; in Him is the strength, which makes the chief shepherd a rock on which the everlasting Church is founded. What a wonderful triumph Emmanuel celebrates; God with us, in the weakness of an infant, over all obstacles in the world. If I am weak, then am I strong. God with us in the form of a child; what is more humble than a child? The Son of God preaches to us in His infancy from the crib. Unless you become as little children you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. The child is not worldly and sensual. The child is unselfish, is humble, and pure of heart. O, when we come to the crib, let us bring our Saviour a childlike, repentant heart, and pray to Him that we may be as little children; that we, as children, may walk in the purity of our hearts, that we may be humble before God and men. There is a beautiful legend which says that a boy encountered the Mother of God in the flight into Egypt and begged for the favor of carrying the Divine Child in his arms. The mother of God accorded him this privilege. When the boy came to a stream and looked into the water and saw his face he noticed that the features of the divine Child were imprinted upon his own. We also will pray the divine Child, that He may imprint the spiritual features of His childish innocence and humility upon our souls, so that we may become as children. How beautiful it is to say of a Christian man: Before the world a man; before God, a child; in the eyes of the world, a man; in the constancy of his opinions and of his faith, a child. A child in his

love of prayer, for the child prays; in its love of humility, for the child is humble; in its love of purity, for the child shuns what is impure. Emmanuel, God with us, in His childhood He draws our hearts towards Him, vanquishes the world, and teaches us how to become as children, that we may obtain the kingdom of heaven.

III. Emmanuel, God with us in His poverty. Out of love for us the Son of God has taken a step further in his mercy. He took unto Himself our human nature. He was born amongst us as a little child, and He appeared amongst us in poverty. The angels announced to the shepherds: You shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger. Stable, crib, swaddling clothes, represent the greatest poverty, the poverty of dwelling, the poverty of the way of living. The kings and emperors of this world are born in palaces; heathendom had built for the unknown God whom it sought a temple in all the glory of the world, because it could not make to itself any other idea of God than that He would appear in earthly splendor. The Son of God appears upon earth, and rejects all earthly possessions, all wealth, for He needed them not, as Tertullian says: Had He so desired it, He could have made Himself a house on earth in which splendor and wealth dwell, *gloria et divitiae in domo ejus*. Why did He choose poverty? Undoubtedly He is nearer to us in poverty, more God with us than if He had appeared in wealth. To us poverty is our very existence. How poor and helpless is even the rich man; if he had the disposition of his health, his fate, and his life, he would be perplexed. How poor is the king when he is visited with pain; he may have to go begging for a word of consolation, and a sympathetic heart, and how much poverty is there in the lives of the majority of men. How poor is work, which is the lot of man. Therefore, the Saviour wanted to be nearer to the poor man; that is why He appeared upon this earth in the utmost poverty. When Cyrus had vanquished the Persians by the sword he possessed dominion over them, but when he wished to win the hearts of the Persians he clothed himself as a Persian. That is how our Saviour wished to win our hearts. Therefore, He took upon Himself our weakness, our lowliness, our poverty, so as to approach us as nearly as possible as a poor child. Emmanuel, God with us. Now all hearts feel drawn towards Him, especially those of the poor. The poor have a special right to the love and the association of the incarnate Son of God. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven; that is the great sermon which our Saviour preached in the poor stable, which He announced from the poor crib. No mother can provide a poorer bed for her child than that provided for the Son of God upon earth in the crib. Now, through Him, the Son of God, poverty is no longer despicable, no longer shameful, no longer mean; through Him is poverty ennobled, exalted, and sanctified. Blessed are the poor in spirit; a rich stream of peace flows from the Saviour's crib into the hearts of the poor of this world. There the poor, kneeling before the crib, are contented with their poverty. The heathen philosophers could not unravel the mysteries of poverty and suffering. The wisdom of this world cannot attempt to make the cross of poverty light, no statecraft of the earth, with all its theories of making the people happy, can draw the thorn of bitterness out of the hearts of the poor. There is only one thing that can content the poor in their poverty: it is Christ, the Saviour, born poor into this world. Since He wandered poor upon this

earth, Christendom has contented poor, as Lazarus was contented outside the rich man's palace. Since then Christendom has generous poor, like the poor widow who dropped a penny into the alms box in the temple. Since then Christendom has patient poor, as the poor thief upon the Cross was patient in his sufferings. Blessed are the poor in spirit. How near the poor are to the divine Child Jesus! St. Francis, inspired with the poverty of the divine Infant, chose poverty as his bride, and, as his queen, begged from God for poverty as the partner of his life, and sung its most beautiful praises. O, you, who are poor on this earth, come to the crib of the divine Saviour. He will console you, make you happy, and give you peace, so that you may be blessed in your poverty. Blessed are the poor in spirit, that, as St. Bernard says, preaches the stable, that calls to us the crib, that announces as Gospel the tears of the divine Infant. It is enough for all; we learn from the poor child Jesus that it is a delusion of the world that possessions can make us happy; that money can give us liberty, that wealth can redeem us. Let us tear away our hearts from all inordinate attachment to earthly goods; let us use the goods of this world as steps to bring us nearer heaven, by performing works of charity. Let us, by a spiritual renouncement of all inordinate attachment to money and possessions, by overcoming all immoderate desires for wealth, make our heart into a crib, so that we may have a dwelling that we can offer to the divine Saviour, as he seeks and desires a dwelling of poverty, so that He may return into our hearts, He, who is in the most perfect manner our Emmanuel, our God with us, and in us. In this way, if we humble ourselves, will our divine Saviour take possession of us. Then will the angels sing in our hearts, as they did on the plains of Bethlehem, that message of joy and peace to men of good will upon earth.

His name shall be called Emmanuel, God with us, with us in His humanity, in His childhood, in His poverty. To the Blessed Suso was shown the Christ Child on Christmas night, lying on thorns, and he was told that he who wished to have the Christ Child for his own must take him out of the thorns. And we will take the divine Infant out of the thorns of His abasement, out of the thorns of His childlike humility, out of the thorns of His poverty. Then we will beseech Him to renew and strengthen in us the spirit of self-renunciation, the simplicity of our hearts, the love of poverty, so that the divine Infant will make us His own, and be and remain with us through all eternity, our Emmanuel, God with us. Amen!

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