

## THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

*And the third day there was a marriage made in Cana of Galilee: and the mother of Jesus was there (Jn. ii, 1).*

God is love. God is creator. God's creation is the expression of his love.

Man is created in the image and likeness of God. Man too is lover and creator. But for him, to love and to create is hard.

It is hard to love, because so often when he sees a beautiful thing man wants to clutch at it, possess it, dominate, domineer, use it for himself, destroy it.

It is hard to create, because creation comes only from love.

There is no love and no creation without worship and humility and fear; and in order that we may have these things God takes us by the hand, and leads us to the trackless and waterless places, and gives us the gift of pain.

Man's destiny is to create, in the image and likeness of God. We are not men and women unless we are makers, whether what we make be ships or sealing wax or cabbages or kingdoms. But for most men and women the primary creation is procreation; the primary work of art is married life. God gives us in each case the ecstasy of creation: the joy that follows the agony of making, the joy that follows the anguish of child-bearing. If we had only these gifts of joy and ecstasy we might forget the giver, and rest in the gifts and regard them as our own possession; we might cease to love and worship, and become beasts of prey. Love is worship. 'With my body I thee worship'; the body conveys the message, but it is the whole I that worships, the whole of the body and its deepest roots, the whole of the spirit and its deepest roots, in one act of recognition and acceptance of oneness, of adoration and offering. We can admire, in passing, a bluebell, a stallion, a galaxy of stars, the curve and colour and texture of a thigh; but if we admire and pass by we shall not construct an Iliad. If we stop and are still, and fall upon our knees, and worship with our whole being the beauty that is before us and the Godhead that is in it and about it, and allow it to take possession of us, then we have at least the stuff of poetry in us, art-poetry or life-poetry, and we shall be lovers and creators in the image and likeness of God because we shall have broken our hearts.

'And Jesus also was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.' Our Lord's presence at Cana, and his turning of the water into wine for the marriage feast, is a hallowing of material things. We are not spirit alone, but body-spirit; we are makers not in the spirit alone but in material things and in the flesh. And the grace of God that is given us in the sacraments is given us to hallow our whole lives, not apart from but in and through our human nature, in and through the simple things of the life of everyday. Our Lord's presence at Cana is the Christian answer to those who condemn material things as evil, condemn the body as evil, condemn marriage. For them, love is to be a purely spiritual thing; and it must be a joyless thing, because it lacks fulfilment, its only end is death, not life. Christian love is made in the image and likeness of the blessed Trinity, where the Spirit of Love comes forth from the Father and Son. It is a joyous thing because creative, outgoing, fixing the attention, the heart, on something other and greater than the self—the unity of the two-in-one, and the fulfilment of the two-in-one, the three-in-one, the family.

There are two ways of romanticising, and so of destroying, human love. One is the way of the enemies of marriage and all material things. The other is the way of those who close their eyes to the pain and toil and monotony of life, who run away from reality and build a world of fantasy in its stead, a world from which difficulties and problems and conflicts are excluded, and the days pass by in a haze of cloudless happiness and glamour, and it is always spring. The wages of this sin is death. Creation, art-poetry, which does not spring from the worship of what is real is a sham; but procreation, life-poetry, which does not spring from the worship of what is real is a tragic sham. To embark thus on married life is to hitch one's waggon to a tinsel star: the deception may be prolonged; it may give a pleasure which for the moment will pass muster as happiness; but reality, or the hand of God, will obtrude itself finally, and the whole fabric will dissolve, and perhaps it will be too late, then, to build again with solid bricks and stones. We are not children in a feckless limbo, but men and women in a world of travail, where every loveliness is flecked with sorrow and every ecstasy is begotten of pain, and the seeds of vision and love and happiness are watered with tears. We are lovers and creators only if we have broken our hearts, waves broken against the rocks of reality, and falling about them to whisper our worship like the murmur of the sea.

Marriage is the normal vocation of man and woman. God leads us to it through our human nature; and his grace hallows and trans-

figures it through hallowing and transfiguring our human nature; and our human nature means, not primarily the heights of passionate ecstasy or the profundities of human tragedy, but the simplicities, the pedestrian joys and burdens, of the common man. God leads us to it because we need it; but he leads us to it, if only we will follow, in such a way that we shall not forget we need him too.

God leads us to it because we need it. We need it first of all because we are incomplete in ourselves. We are incomplete normally without the fulfilment of the body, the fulfilment of love, which transfigures the flesh and makes it glow with an inward fire and gives it a beauty which age can only make more perfect. We are incomplete without the fulfilment of the mind, a fulfilment which comes of the marriage of true minds; for the minds of man and woman work normally in different ways, and each is completed in the other. We are incomplete without the fulfilment of the heart and will, a fulfilment which is found in the oneness of two whole beings, not romanticising one another, not clutching to possess one another, but knowing one another with the clearness of vision of a child, accepting one another, worshipping one another in their God-given oneness, and entering into the joy and sorrow of their love.

But we are incomplete also unless we not only receive life but create it; and as the work of art is made by the loving worshipful union of man with flower or beast or man, so life is created by the loving worshipful union of man with woman. When we are completed in ourselves by oneness with another, and creators together of new life, then, if we are holding God's hand, if our life, our thought, our love, are lived in his immensity, we are made whole in his image and likeness, we are alive.

But we are born into life through pain. The artist must first break his heart, and then, in his joy and sorrow, set himself to the hard labour of making. The man and woman must first break their hearts and then, in their joy and sorrow, set themselves to the hard labour of married life. Life, like prayer, may have its moments of speechless ecstasy; but is made up not of those but of endless drudgery and difficulty. Man and woman complete one another in body, mind, heart; but perfect union and harmony are seldom if ever achieved without struggle and sorrow. 'With my body I thee worship,' they may both say truly; but one will long for a greater or more passionate physical expression of worship than the other. 'The marriage of true minds'; but interests will conflict or at least not coincide; there will be deep disagreements; there will be all the labour, sometimes the agony, of approaching, touching, entering, comprehending another mind. There is in germ, in desire, a oneness of

will, the will of each the will of both; but through what conflict and failures and rebellions achieved! For the end here is not an easygoing and uneasy compromise—You have your way this time and I'll have mine next time; the end is identity of will, of the deep personal will, at all times; and the deepest love and richest grace can with difficulty achieve it in a lifetime. Then there are all the pains and cares and burdens of child-bearing, of creating and building the family. True, drudgery is transfused with glory where there is love; but it remains a labour that may break the body and weigh down the mind. There is the terrible burden of finding money to feed and clothe and care for; the problems of education, the terrible responsibility of training the child to begin eventually a life of his own. And then, finally, there comes the moment when one must face the fate of all precursors, and send away the disciples one has loved and trained, to follow another.

It is primarily in order that these things be hallowed and fruitful and turned into love and worship and eternal life that grace is given us. It is primarily in order that these things be transfigured and glorified that a special sacrament of marriage is given us. If we run away from them, as without grace we very well might, we may indeed find a fleeting happiness in a fantasy paradise, but the end is disillusionment and wretchedness. If we accept them as the stuff of life, the material of worship, of our particular worship—worship of God, worship of the family in God—then at the end, and not only at the end, 'God will wipe away the tears from the eyes of the saints, and there shall be no more any mourning or weeping or any sorrow, for the former things shall have passed away.' If we build in worship and bravery we build for a beatitude, now and hereafter, that will come to us without our seeking, and beyond our desiring. We build in, and for, a timeless glory; for husband and wife are the 'ministers of God's omnipotence,' co-operating with him in the mystery of creating an immortal being; they share in the work of carrying forward the life of the Church, since they share in the work of creating those who are to be to-morrow's God-bearers in the world, men and women who shall go down from the sacrifice of the altar, as their parents have done, to carry God into the world. They share in the life of the Church because they share, as husband and wife, in the work of manifesting the Gospel: showing forth to the world the beauty and warmth of the Gospel of love, not in word but in deed and in truth, in the beauty and warmth of the Christian hearth, of the united worship and the sacrificial life of the Christian family, the three-in-one. They share in the life of the Church because, as husband and wife, they manifest the strength and glory

of the Christian's oneness with the Crucifixion: not a remote acceptance of a vicarious atonement, but the joyous acceptance of a sharing in the pain that burns out blindness and stupidity and grossness and whatever is petty and shallow and sham, and which, because in his divine person it was infinite, gives a sort of infinity of grace and grandeur to the drudgery of every day.

Love-making—and with it the whole common life of work and play and thought and speech and prayer—is the first act of husband and wife as creators. Together they create through these things the first new thing, the unity of the two-in-one. But this new thing is not complete in itself: of its very nature it looks beyond itself, is creative of something other than itself. As the artist is not complete until the inward vision, which makes him one with the reality seen, is expressed in stone or words or music, so the lovers are not completed by their first act of creation until it begets a second: until the two-in-one are fulfilled in the three-in-one, and the image of the blessed Trinity is completed. And here too the physical creation includes, symbolises, itself calls forth, the wider act of creation: the building of a home, a family life in which many are one, the building of a city-state in miniature, a city whose life is freedom and service, whose purpose is the beatitude of love and wisdom and worship, and whose guardian and executive is love.

Worship is the chief part, the crown, of its purpose; by worship it is deathlessly established in God. The family that is thus by its worship created and endlessly self-creating, not only in its own oneness, but in its oneness with God, is a city built upon a rock: a city-state in miniature, but the Church in miniature too. For every act, every thought and word and work, at every stage and at every moment of its common life, is an act of worship, earning for itself a deathless permanence, giving to God an everlasting glory; helping also to build up in strength and beauty the common life of the whole Church. For the three-in-one whose life is thus made holy in worship are creative as the Godhead whose image they are is creative: driven to create beyond the bounds of their own inner life, because their love is self-diffusive like the spirit of love itself; and will not rest in a private, enclosed beatitude, but sheds its warmth and light in an ever-widening arc of love and community and service upon the world.

So, in a fourfold work of creation, the Christian family life is fulfilled: first, the forging of the unity of the two-in-one; then the trinity completed in the love that proceeds from them; next, this trinity itself made whole in oneness with God; and finally, turning in its fullness to the creation of truth and goodness and beauty and

oneness in the world, helping, as humble stewards of the love and power of the Godhead, to turn the water of life into wine.

In a world that is grasping, greedy, self-seeking, these things need to be told to the young. In a world that will speak to them of marriage as a romantic passion hedged about, for them, by the blind restrictions and pruderies of churchmen, these things need to be told to the young. They need to be told of the realities of physical love, of the demands it will put upon their generosity and their humility. They need to be told of the daily drudgery of married life; they need to be told that marriage is not a glamorous fairy tale, but a life-work which involves all the patient toil and sweat that no great life-work, no great art, can escape. But they need to be told, too, that it is a vocation, a divine destiny, which God's special grace will make easier for them, and more glorious; they need to be told that, in order to make them truly wise, in order to make them real lovers and creators, in order to open their eyes and their hearts to himself and his creation, God will lead them near to heartbreak; but they need to be told too of the deep abiding happiness, and the moments of dazzling glory, of the joys that will come to them, not only in the next world when their troubles are over, but in this world too. They need to be told of their greatness as ministers of God's omnipotence, as creators of what will not pass away, as creators with God of Christ's Mystical Body. They need to be told that they must expect failures, misunderstandings, in themselves and in one another, for the perfect work is not made in a day; but they need to be told too that the failures need not be final, but, on the contrary, like every sin, can be made the material and the instrument of a deeper awareness and a more perfect love. They need to be told that there will be many times when they will cry their eyes out with fright or with sorrow; but they need to be told too that there are many times when they will cry their eyes out with joy. They need to be told not to be afraid, if they are faithful to the sacrament, of idolatry or of God's rivalry; for their love is his will and their worship of him, and is only deepened and strengthened by their prayer if they pray, as they should, hand in hand. They need to be told not to be afraid of their love and their passion, as though it were easy for them to offend God, from whom their love and passion come. They should, on the contrary, start from the thought that all their love-making will be prayer and worship, provided only that they are faithful to their love and their mutual reverence and worship, provided only that they remain true lovers, and do not allow themselves to fall, separately, into selfishness or greed. They need to be reminded of those lovely homes in

the world where the doors seem always to be open and the rooms always full, full of all sorts of oddities as well as all sorts of loveliness, full of the waifs and strays of society as well as the immediate circle of friends, full because you can find there at all times the unassuming glory of Christian charity, the warmth and welcome of home. They need to be reminded that that is the ideal for them too; and that their life in its entirety is to be an invitation to a marriage feast, the marriage of Christ with the world.

'God is love: and who abideth in love abideth in God and God in him.' It is not for us to wonder whether the wine may give out at the marriage feast; we are only stewards. There were six waterpots at Cana; and 'Jesus saith to them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.' That is our calling: to fill our lives with love in his service, up to the brim. When we have done that, in faith and love and worship, we shall find that his grace has turned the water into wine; we shall find, perhaps in this life also, a happiness that is beyond our dreams. But even if we do that, even if his love cannot wait till we are with him before giving us his loveliest gifts, still we shall find hereafter what the chief steward found at the feast: 'Thou hast kept the good wine until now.'

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## FAMILY WORSHIP

Not men alone, but all human institutions, customs and habits of life partake of the effects of Christ's Redemption, and receive after their own manner a supernatural character. Man has a purpose in this life which transcends the boundaries of this earth, he is a child of God in no metaphorical sense, and his worldly business participates in his heavenly life in so far as it is the means of his attaining his supernatural end. The commonest failing among Christians is to put on one side our divine sonship and to be content with the earth and what it alone has to offer. Materialism means recognising only matter and the power of matter, and putting aside the spirit. Christians acquiesce in materialism when they put aside the 'higher things,' as they are often vaguely called, and are content to live in this world for the sake of making money, living comfortable lives.

In a world which appears to recognise only money, arms, and strength as symbols of the right, we can still find men appealing for