

LUX MUNDI

BY

JOHN TAULER

The Gospel of this (*Laetare*) Sunday is the one which tells of Our Lord's feeding five thousand men with five barley loaves: John 6.

Ego sum lux mundi—I am the light of the world (John 8)



WHEN our Lord addressed these and similar words to the Jews, he was contradicted and attacked by his hearers. They said, he is a Samaritan, he has a devil. In today's Gospel, on the contrary, it is recorded that after our Lord had miraculously fed the crowd with five loaves and two fishes, he was surrounded by the Jews who were enraptured with the great miracle, and they said: 'This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world'.

It has seemed to us opportune to speak briefly of that light which our Lord claimed to be. That light has enlightened all created lights. The sun, moon, stars, man's bodily senses, the intellectual light of reasonable creatures, in other words reason and intelligence draw their brilliance from it; by that light all creatures are led and brought back to their origin. And if they did not return to it, considered on their own without this true and essential light, they would assuredly be but thick darkness. Again our Lord said to every faithful soul: Give up your own light for my sake; compared to my light it is but darkness, the very opposite of my splendour. For I am the true light, and in the place of your darkness I will put my eternal light, my joy, my beatitude, my essence and my life. All this will become thine, even as it is my own. Indeed was not that the prayer that Christ on earth addressed to his Father: 'Holy Father', he said, 'keep those that you have given me, that they may be one as we are one. I in them! and you in me!' (John 17). He does not say, 'that they may be united', but that they may be one, in us, as we are one: not of course by nature, but by grace, and that in a manner which is absolutely incomprehensible.

And so, as all elements are drawn towards their natural place, so all created things, rocks, fire etc. tend to return home. And yet man alone, the most excellent of all creatures, the wonder of all wonders, man in whose favour Almighty God has in his mercy created heaven, earth and all that they contain, not to satisfy his self-indulgence, but to supply his needs; man who, alone, is able to use the universe to serve his Creator more easily, what of him? I say, he would neglect his God, his Author, his powerful and good

Master, for vain, unstable and perishable creatures; he is in no hurry to return to his eternal beginning; he will not tend towards his final end; he will not seek the true light of God!

To show up still more this unseemliness, two things might be considered:

The first concerns the obstacles that prevent us from attaining to our glorious end and returning to God our Origin. The second will show us how we should return to this source, the way and the means.

And first of all it must surely be some very grave and important thing that keeps man back from attaining his end?

There are two kinds of men who thus allow themselves to be impeded. Some are completely worldly and given to the pleasures of this life: they seek all their happiness in creatures and in the outer senses and they use up in this way not only precious and irretrievable time but even their bodily strength. These unfortunates are wrapped in immense darkness and have their backs turned to the divine light. Others are spiritual men, enjoying a great reputation and giving exteriorly an appearance of great sanctity. These (so they think at least) are far in advance of these exterior obscurities; but in the hidden depths of their interior they are not very sincere, they are filled to overflowing with self-love and self-will, having no end or objective but self. It is very difficult to distinguish these people from the true friends of God, for they abound, as much and more than these others, in devotional practices, prayers, fasts, vigils and all sorts of austerities; so much so that they are taken for saints. But those who have received the true spirit of God can easily recognise them. Nevertheless there is one thing that publicly distinguishes them from God's true friends, and that is that these people, at every turn and without mercy, judge others, even the saints, without ever judging themselves.

Moreover, that Pharisaical disposition which makes these people seek themselves in everything, in God as well as in creatures, and have no end but self is so deeply rooted in their corrupt nature that there is no corner of their souls that is not infected with this vice; seemingly, it would be easier to cross mountains of iron than to conquer, by mere natural means, these hearts taken up with self-love. In view of nature's weaknesses, there is only one means of succeeding with these blind souls and that is if God himself would seize possession of them and fill them with himself. But that happens to very few, not through God's fault, but because men fill their hearts with every vice to the exclusion of the presence and grace of God.

Reason itself teaches us besides that man can find no rest

in perishable creatures, but that he must lean upon these profane things only to get above them and raise himself to God. But alas everywhere the world is full of this evil tendency, leaving God and attaching itself to creatures. And so people living near to us, as well as those remote from us, are doing themselves untold harm. Moreover the hearts of the friends of God are wrung with sorrow to see men for the most part running to perdition, despising their own best interests and those of God himself. Hence it remains for us while we are in this mortal body, to set to work with all our strength to look carefully into this our fallen nature, to extinguish and destroy it. Even when we have rooted it out we must not think ourselves secure, for although the spirit must get the upper hand of our members it will not entirely conquer them; this bad background will not be entirely destroyed; there will always be something to mortify. Since this is so, I think it must be clear to all how much this tendency to evil estranges us from the divine light and from our Source and our Origin, which is God. Those who are taken up with this corrupt nature turn towards their natural light and remain attached to it. And there is nothing astonishing in that, for the enjoyment we can get from the natural light of our intelligence is so great, that no other pleasure of this present life can be compared to it. Pagan philosophers knew this light and delighted in it; but as they preferred to rest in this light instead of using it as a means to raise themselves to the uncreated light which is God their foolish hearts, according to the Apostle's expression, were darkened and they wandered in unending obscurity.

So far we have spoken of the obstacles that turn us aside from the uncreated light and from God, our Origin. Let the little that we have said suffice. I want to point out to you now the way, or the shortest, truest, easiest means of reaching that light and that origin. Now the most efficacious means is certainly self-abnegation; it is to seek God with a love that is so pure and detached, an intention that is so upright and sincere, that self and self-interest no longer count for anything but that God's honour and glory are considered in all. It is to accept everything, good and bad, sweet and bitter, as coming directly from the hand of God and from nowhere else; it is to refer all that happens to us to God, offering it all to him directly and immediately in such wise that between God and ourselves there is a permanent ebb and flow. This is the straight and true way in which the true friends of God are distinguished from those who are perverted and false. Indeed these latter always ascribe to themselves all the graces and gifts of God; they see in it all only their own possession and advantage; they are far from doing homage to God, as in duty bound, by showing him

gratitude and love, forgetting themselves so as to enter into God solely and entirely. The more they do these things the more truly are they the friends of God. For, in short, whoever entirely lacks these dispositions and is on the contrary full of an inordinate and unjust love of self, will remain so to the end and never will he deserve to see the resplendent light of the Eternal Divinity.

Notice again that very often our fallen nature will mix itself up secretly and consequently dangerously, with the divine light in such wise as to be no longer distinguishable. And often it happens that in thinking to seek God one is seeking self and has nothing else in view but one's own lower nature. We can understand that this must be so. Indeed when trials and misfortunes come, the true friends of God take refuge in him with all their sufferings, accepting all these things solely from his hand, bearing them courageously with him, in him and for him; as soon as troubles are lost as it were in the bosom of God, sufferings are no longer sufferings, but, according to a remark of the Apostle St James, there are joy and happiness in suffering for God. On the other hand the false friends of God, puffed up with self-will, loving and seeking nothing but self in everything, know not where to turn when trouble comes their way; they go here and there seeking advice, comfort, remedies, and finding none they readily fall into despair and long for death. It is to be feared that great trials will come to these unfortunate people, especially at the hour of death. As, indeed, during life they have not sought and loved God purely, when the hour of death comes which all find so formidable, they will not know how to find God in their hearts. Hence is it astonishing that they fall into the abyss of hell? They have not set their lives upon the solid rock which is Christ. I will not forbear to assert that their fate is a hundred times more doubtful than that of people who live an ordinary life in the world. These at least admit themselves to be sinners and fear God humbly, as did the Jewish crowd who willingly followed in our Lord's footsteps. But the High-priests, Pharisees and Scribes, whose lives exhaled great sanctity, were incessantly opposing our Saviour; they criticised him, judged him, until finally they condemned him to an ignominious death.

We can say nothing to such people. If you take it into your head to rebuke them for their faults and want to correct them, they withstand you to your face, they are indignant, they rebel or rather they make off, as formerly did the Pharisees and Scribes when our Lord wrote, with his finger upon the sand, the faults that in their pride they would not acknowledge, and so, one after another, beginning with the eldest, they all left the temple. It is infinitely easier to come to the assistance of, or give advice to simple souls,

for these recognise their faults; it is easy to find a remedy for those who admit they are ill; once warned of their sins they avoid them, they live in fear and humility and give themselves up to virtuous deeds.

As remedy, help and comfort in the midst of all these obstacles of which we have just been treating, our merciful Creator, out of pure love, has sent us his only Son, the Word of his heart, our Lord Jesus Christ. He has sent him so that his holy life, his perfect virtues, his example, his pure doctrine, the sufferings of all kinds that for the sheer love of our salvation he constantly endured, might be the means of our going out of ourselves, of drawing us to him and putting to sleep our natural light which is but darkness, so as to follow the essential and eternal light.

This is not all: God has left us the holy Sacraments. First of all he planted the Faith in us by Baptism and Confirmation. Then if we came to lose grace, he allowed us to be reinstated in it by instituting the Sacrament of Penance, which consists of contrition, confession and satisfaction. Finally he gave us the holy Eucharist and Extreme Unction. All that is liberally granted to us so that we can return to our origin, to our first principle, to God. According to St Augustine's words: 'This great resplendent Sun has placed beneath him another Sun which by its shadows softens the too brilliant light. It does not hide it, it tempers it so that in this way, by the smaller Sun, we may be able to contemplate the greater one.' This great Sun is God the Father, who has beneath him another Sun of smaller size. This one is his Word and his Son, as considered in his human nature. Of course by his divinity he is equal to the Father, but he willed to humble himself and annihilate himself by his humanity. This humanity does not hide, but it tempers the brilliance of the divinity and makes it possible for us to contemplate it. It is in fact 'the light that shineth in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it' (*John* 1). For no one is able to endure the divine light except by being truly poor in spirit, stripped of and detached from all self-love and self-will. And so it follows that we find men who have passed thirty and forty years of their lives in the most complete exterior privations without ever having reached this pure and exalted depth, without ever having felt it or been on the scent of it. They may doubtless have a well-developed intellect and yet be in total ignorance of this innermost centre, the taste of which remains utterly unknown to them.

And now let all take care to apply all their powers, all the strength and energy that they possess, in soul and body, to acquiring, feeling and tasting this great light. So they will be able to attain truly to their origin, where this light continually shines. For this light

they will ask naturally and supernaturally; they will desire it with all the ardour of their being, to attain to it they will spend all their strength, they will beg the true friends of God to help them; they will cling to them so that they will draw them with themselves towards the al.-powerful Good God.


May this infinitely tender God grant us all this grace. Amen.



MOTHER JULIAN HERSELF

BY

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.

 RULE was written at the very end of the twelfth century for two or three sisters, anchoresses, and was designed to train its readers in the more perfect life of contemplation. But it treats of the first stages of the spiritual life, and, as we have seen, it only rises above the humdrum of the purgative way in its final section. Now we are to consider the doctrine of a woman who had no doubt been trained by that or a similar 'Riwle', and had so far profited by it as to have first been favoured by a series of visions in which she was passive in her acceptance of the 'Revelations', and finally, to have reached the highest forms of prayer. We are thus given the opportunity of studying the effects of the *Ancren Riwle* in their perfect stages; we are here taught the outcome of the natural growth of the spirit if it follows the straight lines of an authorised rule.

We may call this 'The Way of Wisdom' and place Mother Julian firmly in the Unitive Way, because of the main theme of her visions. Doubtless some of these appearances are imaginative and 'sensible', but that is accidental to the essential doctrine of the *Revelation of Divine Love*. Her knowledge and sight come, as her own title informs us, from the touch of love, from affinity with divine things. Her knowledge is an affective knowledge; she has been led to see things in their highest causes. Mother Julian is not concerned with her growth in the spiritual life; she does not consider her own prayer. All that may be found in the *Cloud of Unknowing* and *Epistle of Privy Counsel*, works which provide a comprehensive companion to the *Revelations*. *The Cloud* considers the unseeing way of prayer in which the soul is established in the Unitive Way. Mother Julian, on the other hand, describes the vision of all things in the love of God which should be the counterpart of