

# Reflections on the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary Inspired by the *Theology of the Body*

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## The First Luminous Mystery: The Baptism in the Jordan

"Christ sanctified Baptism by being Himself baptized."<sup>1</sup> As we reflect on Christ's Baptism, let us also reflect on our own Baptism and the effect it had in us. Through original sin, we, as men, are "deprived of participation in the Gift, ... alienated from the Love that was the source of the original gift, the source of the fullness of good intended for [us]."<sup>2</sup> By the power of Christ's Cross, present in Baptism, we can be free from this deprivation and alienation. After Baptism, "grace is within" a soul, and sin "is banished from the heart as an enemy from a fortress."<sup>3</sup> With sin dwelling outside the soul rather than within, we can better withstand the tempter's attacks. Through the Baptism instituted by Christ, we become reconciled with God. We must not forget, however, that this reconciliation is far beyond a "resetting" of our relationship with the Trinity. In the end, we must remember: "Christ does not invite man to return to the state of original innocence ... but he calls him to find ... the living forms of the 'new man.'"<sup>4</sup>

## The Second Luminous Mystery: The Wedding at Cana

There are two aspects to this mystery that are particularly beneficial to our spiritual lives. The first is the power of Mary's intercession. She was given to us by the Father "to be our queen and mother," and her prayers help us to "come to share the glory of [God's] children in the kingdom of

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1 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 3.11.

2 TOB 27:2. (References to TOB are to Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, tr. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006). References are to the address number and the section number of the address.)

3 St. Diadochos of Photiki, *On Spiritual Knowledge* §76 (*Philokalia*, I:279); St. Theophan the Recluse, *The Path to Salvation* I.4. (References to the *Philokalia* are to *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, ed. St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, tr. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, 5 vols. (London: Faber & Faber, 1979-2024).)

4 TOB 49:4.

heaven."<sup>5</sup> Her prayers are so powerful in interceding for us to Christ that she is called the "Key to the Kingdom of Christ."<sup>6</sup> Thus we are taught to ask for the intercession of the Queen of Heaven, Mary our Mother. The second aspect is the sanctity of marriage. "The Lord confirmed that marriage is something of value ... because he attended a wedding."<sup>7</sup> Christ's attendance and assistance at a wedding is an action that expresses His approval and blessing of marriage, the vocation for "the rank and file, not for the officers of Christ's army."<sup>8</sup> "Do you laugh because I tell you that you have a 'vocation to marriage'? Well, you have just that--a vocation."<sup>9</sup> Marriage is "the wise and provident institution of God the Creator": it is "an integral part and in some sense the central part of the 'sacrament of creation.'"<sup>10</sup> It is not an institution that has become obsolete due to Christ's revelation of the heavenly ideal of virginity: it is also "an integral part of the new sacramental economy."<sup>11</sup> In the end, we must remember that Mary, the Queen of Heaven, is a great intercessor for us, the "Bridge leading earthly ones to heaven," and that Christ approves Matrimony as a sacrament of the New Covenant; we ask that He may help us see "the holiness of this vocation" and, if He so desires, "respond to the call of God Himself, contained in the mystery of the 'beginning.'"<sup>12</sup>

## The Third Luminous Mystery: The Proclamation of the Kingdom

Jesus Christ's proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven involved many aspects. The overall theme can be seen as repentance and conversion. Conversion means a turning from one path to another. What are the turns Christ calls us to make? For one, "Christ, the Teacher, urges us not to give the kind of human interpretation of the whole law, and of the single commandments contained in it, that does not build the justice willed by God, the Legislator."<sup>13</sup> As an example, "real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal."<sup>14</sup> Christ also proclaimed a new ethos, "the ethos of the Gospel," which is "deeply connected with consciousness of the 'beginning,' and thus with the mystery of creation in its original simplicity and wealth," but is also "realistically addressed to 'historical man,' who has become the man of concupiscence": it involves "a realistic judgment about

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5 Opening Prayer, Memorial of the Queenship of Mary (August 22).

6 Akathist Hymn, Eighth Chant.

7 St. Augustine, *The Excellence of Marriage* III.3.

8 St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way* #28.

9 St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way* #27.

10 Pope St. Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* §8; TOB 96:6.

11 TOB 98:3.

12 Akathist Hymn, Second Chant; TOB 116:4.

13 TOB 24:1.

14 Rom 2:29 (RSV-CE).

the human heart."<sup>15</sup> Thus Christ, in his teaching, meets us where we are and reminds us of what we once were. But He does not stop there: "Christ speaks in the perspective of the redemption of man and the world ... This is, in fact, the perspective of the whole gospel, of the whole teaching, even more, of the whole mission of Christ."<sup>16</sup> Christ calls us to redemption, a redemption that involves communion with the Trinity. As He teaches in the verse so often connected with this mystery: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."<sup>17</sup> The Greek word for repentance is "metanoia," which means "change of mind," specifically "the conversion or turning of our whole life towards God."<sup>18</sup> In the end, that is the core of Jesus' teaching: we must turn away from ourselves and this world and instead towards Him, that we may be redeemed. We must also never forget that repentance is not a one-time occasion: "the act of repentance is unending," thus we must always dedicate ourselves to this "constant task of repentance."<sup>19</sup>

## The Fourth Luminous Mystery: The Transfiguration

At His Transfiguration, Jesus is seen by Peter, James, and John with a face that "shone like the sun" and with garments that "became white as light."<sup>20</sup> This shows that He has moved beyond His earthly body in some way, and in some way He has thus moved beyond His bodily self, for "bodily man is perceived by us above all in experience," and Christ's true appearance in the Transfiguration is beyond what man can experience.<sup>21</sup> In the Transfiguration, Christ shows His divine nature, "that which lies beyond all vision and knowledge" and thus cannot be fully shown forth in the body.<sup>22</sup> Thus Christ is reminding us that we cannot fully know the Trinity due to Its divinity, for it is "something above and beyond speech, mind, or being itself."<sup>23</sup> But Christ is not only teaching us what we cannot reach: He is also providing us with a foretaste of what we will attain. "God became man so that man might become God."<sup>24</sup> Obviously, men will always stay men and God will always stay God, but He will make us "partakers of the divine nature," which means that there will be "human participation in the divine life of God."<sup>25</sup> The mixture of the ineffable divine nature and the circumscribed human nature shown forth by Christ is only possible for us men in

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<sup>15</sup> TOB 34:2.

<sup>16</sup> TOB 49:3.

<sup>17</sup> Mt 4:17 (RSV-CE).

<sup>18</sup> *Philokalia* I:364 (Glossary).

<sup>19</sup> St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Practical and Theological Texts* §75, 80 (*Philokalia* IV:40-41).

<sup>20</sup> Mt 17:2 (RSV-CE).

<sup>21</sup> TOB 4:4.

<sup>22</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology* §2 (PG 3:1025A).

<sup>23</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names* I.1 (PG 3:588A).

<sup>24</sup> St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* §54.3.

<sup>25</sup> 2 Pet 1:4 (RSV-CE); note on 2 Pet 1:4 in the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: New Testament*.

the next life, after the resurrection, which is only possible for us due to "the power of the Giver of life, who is not bound by the law of death."<sup>26</sup> In the next life, "the definitive fulfillment of the human race," we will participate in "a wholly new state of human life itself."<sup>27</sup> Though "man will keep his own psychosomatic nature" (that is, a nature composed of both spirit and body), our bodies will undergo a "spiritualization," which "signifies not only that the spirit will master the body, but ... that it will also fully permeate the body and the powers of the spirit will permeate the energies of the body."<sup>28</sup> This spiritualization is no work of ours, though: it will be "a fruit of grace, that is, of God's self-communication in His very divinity ... to the whole of man's psychosomatic subjectivity."<sup>29</sup> Of course, all these words are abstract and mysterious, for "on the basis of man's experiences and knowledge in temporality, that is, in 'this world' ... it is difficult to construct a fully adequate image of the 'future world.'"<sup>30</sup> Reflecting on Christ's Transfiguration and on these difficult and mysterious ponderings may help shed some light on it, though. In the end, Christ's Transfiguration gives us a glimpse of man's eschatological destiny in the resurrection, which "will consist in the perfect participation of all that is bodily in man in all that is spiritual in him."<sup>31</sup> Let us ponder these future mysteries and reflect on them while remembering that they remind us of our duty to care for our souls, "for what is now treasured up within the soul will [on the last day] be revealed outwardly in the body ... and ... the bodies of the righteous [will] be glorified through the ineffable light—the power of the Spirit—that is already present within them."<sup>32</sup>

## **The Fifth Luminous Mystery: The Institution of the Eucharist**

At the Last Supper, Jesus gave the apostles the His Body and Blood, a mystery that will never be fully comprehended by the human mind. Christ's Body is the Blessed Sacrament. In general "the body enters in to the definition of sacrament, which is 'a visible sign of an invisible reality,'" but Christ's Body enters in a real and full way: Christ's Body is the sacrament.<sup>33</sup> The sacramentality of the body comes to an unexpected climax in Jesus' giving of His own Body as the Most Holy Sacrament; though in all sacraments "God gives Himself to man in His transcendent truth and in His love," He does so even more profoundly in the Eucharist.<sup>34</sup> The Eucharist, which is Jesus

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26 TOB 65:3.

27 TOB 66:2, 3.

28 TOB 66:5, 67:1.

29 TOB 67:3.

30 TOB 69:6.

31 TOB 67:2.

32 St. Symeon Metaphrastes, *Paraphrase of the Homilies of St. Makarios of Egypt* §61 (*Philokalia* III:311).

33 TOB 87:5.

34 TOB 87:5.

Christ Himself, is a gift to us: "not only the fruits of redemption are a gift, but above all Christ Himself is a gift: He gives Himself to the Church as to His Bride."<sup>35</sup> This giving offers us strength to continue the Christian journey, for "Christ nourishes the Church with His Body precisely in the Eucharist."<sup>36</sup> Thus we must accept this nourishment of Christ in order to live out our Christian lives faithfully, to let the actions of our body show forth the faith within our souls. Let us not forget the final goal of the Christian life: the attainment of Heaven. The Eucharist will assist us with this goal, for it is "a straining toward the goal, a foretaste of the fullness of joy promised by Christ ... Those who feed on Christ in the Eucharist need not wait until the hereafter to receive eternal life: they already possess it on earth."<sup>37</sup> In conclusion, let us be reverent towards Jesus Christ's great gift of Himself which gives us nourishment and a taste of Heaven on earth, and let us remember: "Our Lord is in the Tabernacle only that He may enter our hearts."<sup>38</sup>

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35 TOB 94:5.

36 TOB 99:1.

37 Pope St. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* §18.

38 Venerable Clara Fey, *Heaven on Earth*, ed. Joseph Solzbacher, tr. Mary Colman (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1958), 28.