

Thus and only thus, therefore, do ye, the congregation of the righteous, direct and elevate your minds. Into one way alone shall ye turn your spirit. For God seeth not after the manner of men nor with the human eye of limit and fallibility. God looketh unto the core, man only upon the outer side: and by this same rule, doth man not see and God doth. Thou hearest that God hath made and God hath seen, and hath seen that his work is good. What insolence then to pass judgment by the human eye of the things that he hath wrought, or (O human soul!) by argument and science to account them as thine own! Rather, what God saw and saw was good, that shalt thou deem above loose parley and all wanton use.

To God, all glory and all power! Amen.



SERMON FOR OUR LADY'S BIRTHDAY—II

ST BERNARD

HOW can that be', said Mary, 'since I have no knowledge of man?'—and in these words showed herself holy in body and spirit, a virgin without stain and vowed to remain so. The angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.' 'Don't question me about it', he said. 'This plan is far beyond my reach, and no thought of mine can attain it. It is the Holy Spirit, not an angelic spirit, that will come upon you, and you will be overshadowed by the power of the Most High, not by any power of mine.'

Mary must not be content with a place among the angels; the parched earth cries out to her for relief that they could never give, and she will scarcely have left them behind when she will find what her soul longs for. I do not say 'scarcely' to imply that God is not infinitely greater than all his creatures, but because she will find nothing standing between him and the angels. So Mary must pass above virtues and dominations, cherubim and

seraphim to the God they worship ceaselessly, crying aloud 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of hosts'. Thus this holy offspring of hers shall be known for the Son of God, he who is the source of all wisdom, the Word of the Father, dwelling in high heaven. This is the Word that through her will be made flesh. From eternity he has been able to say, 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me'; then he will be able to say, too, 'From God I took my origin, from him I have come'. 'At the beginning of time the Word already was', already the spring was flowing, but as yet only in the bosom of the Trinity, for God 'had the Word abiding with him, dwelling in unapproachable light'. From the beginning, too, it was our welfare that God had in mind, not our undoing. But God's thoughts are his own secret, we cannot know them, for who has ever understood the Lord's thoughts or been his counsellor? And so it was that God showed his concern for our welfare by sending us a Saviour, 'And the Word was made flesh' and dwells among us at this very moment, living by faith in our hearts, living too in our thoughts, and even by his great condescension in our imaginations, while before the Incarnation man had no way of representing God without falling into idolatry.

Before the Incarnation God was altogether beyond man's knowledge, unapproachable, invisible, unthinkable, but now he wishes man to know him better, wants men to see him and think of him. You wonder how? He reveals himself to us lying in the manger, or cradled on his mother's lap, preaching on the hillsides, spending the nights in prayer. We see him hanging on the cross with the pallor of death on his brow, yet free from death's tyranny and master of the underworld; see him too as he rises on the third day and shows his apostles the marks of his triumph—the print of the nails in hands and feet, and finally, see him ascending into heaven before their very eyes. All this really happened; it shows forth God's lovingkindness and should lead us on to holiness. It is God that did and suffered all this and he is my God: it is true wisdom to think of all this, true prudence to cry aloud the memory of such tender love, the long-awaited fruit of that rod of Aaron now ours in all its fulness. It was Mary that picked this fruit and gave us to eat, and it was in high heaven that she picked it far above the angels, for she received the Word from the very heart of the Father, as we read, 'Day echoes its word to day'.

The Father can clearly be called Day since his saving power is 'from day to day'. But what of Mary? She too beyond all doubt is a day of dazzling splendour, she whose coming shows like the dawn, fair as the moon and bright as the sun.

So we can see that Mary, 'full of grace', was already on an equal footing with the angels, and when the Holy Spirit came upon her, she soared far above them. The angels rejoice in charity, in purity and in humility, and all of these shone forth in Mary, as we have already shown in so far as we are able; now we must see how she surpasses the angels. Did God ever say to one of the angels, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you. Thus this holy offspring of yours shall be known for the Son of God'? 'Truth is arisen from the earth' we read, not from any angelic creature. He did not take upon himself the nature of the angels, but that of the sons of Abraham. It is a high privilege for an angel to be God's servant, but Mary has been found worthy of a far greater honour, that of being God's mother. And so the crowning glory of this virgin is her motherhood, and she is as far above the angels as a mother is above a servant. She, already full of grace, found such favour with God by reason of her burning love, her spotless purity and selfless humility that she conceived without knowledge of man and bore a son without the pains of childbirth. Yet that is as nothing: her Child is called the Holy One; he is the Son of God.

Now, dear brethren, for our part we must make sure that the Word who came to us from out of the Father's mouth through Mary's womb does not go back empty-handed: we must, through her again, give thanks for all we have received. Until we see her face to face she must never be out of our minds; the waters of grace must flow to their source to flow back again more strongly still. If they do not return to their source they will dry up altogether, and we, being found unfaithful in little things, shall not be judged worthy to receive the greatest prize of all. The memory of her is obviously a little thing compared with her presence; little, that is, when measured by what our heart longs for, but great in comparison with what we have earned. It falls far short of our desires, though altogether more than we deserve, and that is why the Bride gives heartfelt thanks for this small gift. She asks to be shown the pasture-ground of the Beloved under the noonday heat, and when the mere shadow of this is granted—a taste of the

evening sacrifice instead of the banquet at noonday—she does not grumble or lose heart as usually happens, but thanks God and gives herself in all things more completely to his service. She knows that if she is faithful while she has only this dim memory for guide she will beyond doubt enjoy one day the light of his presence. You, then, who keep the Lord in remembrance, never cease crying aloud, refuse to be silent—those who rejoice in God's presence have no need of spur, and when the psalmist cries out to them, 'Praise the Lord, Jerusalem; Sion, exalt thy God', he is congratulating them rather than urging them on—but those who have only faith to guide their steps do need to be urged on or they may cease to call upon him and may greet him with silence. For God will speak to them, will send a message of peace to his people; to his loyal servants that come back, now, with all their hearts to him. Lovingly he will treat those who love him, and with the loyal keep troth, and in just the same way he will listen to those who listen to his voice, and answer those who speak to him. You also greet him with silence if you cease crying aloud, cease, that is to say, from praising him. Isaias says: 'Never cease crying aloud', refuse to be silent till he has established Jerusalem, and spread her way of praising God over all the earth, a way of joyous and gracious praise—unless perhaps we have the idea that the angels who dwell in that heavenly Jerusalem take pleasure in praising not God, but one another, and fall into foolish flattery.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; may the praise you receive there be echoed on earth. As it is, while the angels in heaven do not seek praise from one another, men on earth want nothing else. Damnable perversity! God grant that only they who lack the knowledge of God or have forgotten him may be found guilty of it. As for you who keep the Lord in remembrance, never cease from crying his praises aloud, until that praise is firmly founded and brought to perfection here on earth. It is true that there is a silence that cannot be blamed, but should rather be praised; in just the same way there is speech that is not good, otherwise Jeremias would not have said: 'If you would have deliverance from the Lord, in silence await it'. Silence is good when it puts a stop to boasting, blasphemy, murmuring and detraction. For instance, someone may be weighed down by the day's burden and the heat and murmur in his heart, criticizing

those who, because they know they will have an account to give, keep unwearied watch over his soul. This, true enough, is a cry, but more surely than any silence it will still the voice of God's word to which it will not grant a hearing. Another, through faintheartedness, may fail to trust patiently in God; this is blasphemous speech and for it there is no forgiveness either in this world or in the world to come. A third, perhaps, loves to let his mind dwell on high things, on marvels that are beyond his reach; he says to himself, 'My own right hand hath done it', thinking he is of some worth when in truth he is nothing at all. What can one who has a message of peace say to a man like this, a man who says, 'I am rich, I have come into my own; nothing, now, is wanting to me'? Truth himself has spoken his mind concerning such a one: 'Woe upon you who are rich, you have comfort already', but 'Blessed are those who mourn; they shall be comforted'. Cursing, blasphemy and boasting, in these let us be dumb; in silence such as this it is good to wait for God to come and save us. 'Speak on, Lord', we say, 'your servant is listening.' But if we do open our mouths to curse, blaspheme or swear, we speak not to him but against him, as Moses said, 'It is against him that you have complained; we count for nothing'.

We must, then, keep silence from all talk of this sort, but we must not be altogether dumb, must not greet him with silence. Instead of boasting we must confess our sins to him to win pardon for the past, instead of murmuring give thanks to gain still richer graces here and now, and instead of losing heart pray to him for heaven and the life to come. Briefly, be sorry for your past sins, be grateful for what you have now, and pray earnestly for what lies in the future, and so he will never refuse to forgive, will always sustain and be faithful to his promises. So never cease to cry aloud, do not greet him with silence. Speak to him and he will reply and you will be able to say: 'All mine, my true love, and I all his'. The voice that says this is full of joy and the saying itself is sweet, it is not a murmurer that speaks but one with the gentle simplicity of a dove. Do not object: 'What, should we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?'. The Bridegroom himself says, 'We can hear the turtledove cooing already there at home', so it can no longer be called a strange land. He who can say: 'All mine, my true love, and I all his', is aptly compared to the dove which, with remarkable chastity, remains faithful to

one mate in life and in death. In just the same way, neither death nor life will be able to separate such a soul from the love of God. Nor can anything turn this tremendous lover aside from the one he loves; he is faithful though she may fall into sin and turn away from him. Great masses of cloud—all our wickedness—did indeed come between God and us, trying to blot out his light, but the warmth of his love quickly dispersed them. He remained faithful, calling aloud: 'Come back, maid of Sulam, come back; let us gaze upon you once more'. If he had not done so we would never have returned. In return we must be completely faithful and let no trials or difficulties turn us away from him.

The kingdom of heaven opens to force, and the forceful are even now making it their prize, so we too must wrestle with the angel like Jacob or we may be overcome. Our whole life is a wrestling match, summed up in: 'All mine, my true love, and I all his'. God has given proof of his love for us and waits for ours in return. He puts us to the test in many ways, often turning aside and hiding his face from us, though not in anger; he wants to try our worth, not cast us off. In that great love of his, he has waited patiently for us, we too must wait patiently, wait for the Lord to help us and be brave. Our sins could not exhaust his patience, and if we patiently accept his correction he will reward us with his blessing. We must wait for that blessing until the dawn, until it is full daylight and Jerusalem's song of praise to God is firmly established on earth. For we read: 'And one appeared who wrestled with him (Jacob) until the day broke.' Oh, Lord, speedily let me win your mercy; and in you lies all my hope. I will not be quiet, I will not give you silence as a welcome until the day breaks, the day of eternal life. I should dearly love to give you refreshment as well as welcome, since we read that you go out to pasture among the lilies—'All mine, my true love, and I all his; see where he goes out to pasture among the lilies': and a few verses earlier we are told that the flowers begin to blossom and the turtledove to coo at the same time. Only the place where the beloved eats is mentioned, though, not his food: we are not told what he eats, and perhaps it is not lilies at all but simply that he eats surrounded by lilies, gladdened by the sight of them, not making them his food. Certainly the fragrance of lilies is more delightful than their taste, and they please the eye rather than the palate.

The Beloved, then, goes out to pasture among the lilies until the day breaks and rich fruit takes the place of delicate blossom. This life is the time of blossom, not of fruit, since we live in hope of beatitude instead of possessing it, and with faith, instead of a clear view to guide our steps. We rejoice more in what we hope to have than in what we now possess. Again, how easily is blossom marred. We have a treasure indeed, but its shell is of perishable earthenware, and the flowers of virtue are threatened with danger on every side: sharp thorns that only too easily can pierce a lily through. That is why the Beloved says: 'A lily, matched with these other maidens, a lily among the thorns, she whom I love'. The soul that cried out, 'Among the enemies of peace, for peace I labour', was surely a lily among thorns. But even though the innocent man flourish as the lily flourishes, the Bridegroom will not come to feed where there is only one: he is no lover of singularity, and it is this same Bridegroom who loved to dwell among the lilies, that says: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them'. Jesus always loves to take the middle place; the Son of Man, mediator between God and men, is the enemy of all eccentricity.

All mine, my Beloved, and I all his. See where he goes out to pasture among the lilies; we must, then, make sure to have these lilies growing in our hearts, making haste to root out the thorns and thistles and plant lilies instead, and perhaps one day our Beloved will come and take his meal with us.

But it was with Mary that he found his fairest pasture, there where he found lilies without number—the fragrant blossoms of spotless purity, unparalleled humility and a charity that towers high above that of all other creatures. We, too, may possess lilies, though not to be compared with hers, yet the Beloved will condescend to come among these also, if, as we have seen, we give proof of our gratitude by serving him blithely, and, offering pure prayer from a pure heart, cleanse our souls from sin by confession. Then 'the scarlet dye of our guilt will show snow white, the crimson stains will be like clean wool'.

Finally, whatever we have to offer to God, let us entrust it to Mary's care, and so she who brought the gift to us will offer our gifts in their turn to him from whom all grace came. God is all powerful and could have poured his grace into our souls in any way he wished, without using Mary as an aqueduct, but in

so doing he has given us at the same time a stairway up to heaven. Perhaps our hands are stained with blood, or else we have made them filthy by taking bribes instead of flinging them from us. If, then, we do not want our gift spurned, let us offer whatever trifle we wish to give him through Mary's hands, those hands that are so dear to him, that are always welcome to his sight. They are whiter than any lily, and the lover of lilies will not complain of anything that it was not found among the lilies if he finds it in Mary's hands.



JOACHIM OF FLORA AND 'THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL'

H. G. BUDGE

THE Abbot Joachim, who founded the Abbey of Flora among the mountains of Calabria in 1189, is one of the most original and interesting figures of the Middle Ages. He was famous in his own generation for his prophetic vision and saintly life, and was a source of inspiration to his followers for two hundred years. Dante assigns him a place with the great teachers of the thirteenth century, in his *Paradiso*, where Saint Bonaventure points out the shining spirit at his side as:

'Calabria's Abbot, Joachim, endow'd
with soul prophetic.'

The great Florentine had lost his faith in Papal and Imperial powers to enlighten the darkness of those times, and may well have embraced Joachim's hope of a spiritual renewal of Christendom by a sudden illumination of the divine purpose in history.

Joachim's influence spread through Italy and beyond in the latter part of the twelfth century. Eminent persons sought his counsel. When King Richard I was at Messina during the Third Crusade, he sent for the sage to discourse with him on the mysteries of the future. Joachim was no respecter of persons, as witness the fact that on one occasion he rebuked the Emperor Barbarossa