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Bethlehem Ever Present in the Tabernacle

During the Christmas season, we see the Three Wise Men bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. What can we bring the Christ Child? We can offer him the work of all human activities.

01/02/2010

*"Christmas season, first days of 1939.
To be reborn and continue forward, to
begin and carry on. In material things*

inertia means not changing: not moving what is at rest, not halting what is moving. But in spiritual matters, to carry on and continue forward is never inertia. We return to the same, always the same: God with us, the Christ Child. And, guided by the Angels, we go to adore the God Child, whom our Lady and St. Joseph present to us. Through all the ages, from every corner of the earth, weighed down and yet spurred on by the work of all human activities, magi will continue arriving at the Bethlehem ever present in the tabernacle. Put care into your work; prepare your offering—your work, your duty—for the Epiphany of each day."[1]

The adoration of the Magi, the Baptism of our Lord, the marriage feast at Cana, are three manifestations of the divinity of the Word made flesh, three epiphanies that take place in time but savor of eternity, because Jesus Christ is the

same yesterday and today and forever.[2]

In a beautiful letter written in December 1938, a little more than ten years after the founding of Opus Dei, our Founder contemplated the Christ Child in Bethlehem. After affirming once again that the interior life, our journey to draw close to our Lord, means to begin and begin again, St. Josemaria unites the mystery of the adoration of the Magi with our professional work. By the offering of our work, our ordinary occupations take on a divine, eternal dimension.

We too are somehow those Magi. Guided by the star of our vocation, we too draw near to Bethlehem, coming from *every corner of the world*. The Magi, who are not members of the Hebrew people but Gentiles, prefigure the great convocation that will eventually be the Church, the People of God. They

come from the East, from beyond the Jordan, asking for the King of the Jews. The chief priests and the scribes know that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem,[3] but they don't bother to go greet him. Herod is troubled and all Jerusalem with him. [4] But only these strangers make the trip. To love is more than to know; knowing does not suffice to reach Jesus.

Forty days after his birth, when the divine Child had been presented in the Temple, the aged Simeon proclaims the salvation of the nations and foretells the one who is to be **a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.**[5] Divine light for all nations and, by this very fact, glory for Israel.

The shepherds (Hebrews) and the Magi (pagans) are the first of a multitude that will no longer admit

any difference between Jew and Greek, between slave and freeman, between man and woman.[6] With the Magi, the prophecy of Simeon regarding the Gentiles begins to be fulfilled. Centuries later, we too form part of this People gathered together in the New Covenant. "A people made up of Jew and Gentile, making them one, not according to the flesh but in the Spirit. This was to be the new People of God." [7] The bread of the lost sheep of the house of Israel becomes bread for all.[8]

The Magi bring gold, frankincense and myrrh. What do we bring to the Christ Child? We draw close to Bethlehem *weighed down and yet spurred on by the work of all human activities.*

Weighed down

We come *weighed down*, because hard, continuous, demanding work weighs on us. Work, to which man is

always called, with sin has come to entail effort, struggle and pain. With disobedience, death entered the world, which Christ also willed to suffer. Like the Magi, we bring myrrh. And like Nicodemus, we bring a mixture of myrrh and aloes to the foot of the Cross. We will take his body and wrap it in linens with the best aromas we can find:[9] the myrrh of self-denial out of love for Christ and souls, of love for the Cross in our daily work, even though it is hard and because it is hard. Our work, a participation in the sufferings of Christ, is also a balm to cure, to cleanse and soothe the terrible wounds opened in his Most Holy Humanity by our sins. Nothing was lacking in the Passion of Christ for our salvation. But so that its merits might be applied to us, we have to complete in our flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for his body which is the Church.[10] What a joy to be able to share in the

sufferings of Christ so that Christ might be formed in each member of his mystical body, which is zeal for souls, redemptive love on the part of a Christian. Our labors bring about the salvation of many souls.

Where is the King of the Jews?, Herod asked. Where will we go, weighed down by our work? We will go to Bethlehem ever present in the tabernacle. There, as fruit of the Mass, God's work, as fruit of the Cross, he is substantially present.

The bread of life, bread come down from heaven, bread for the life of the world,[11] now awaits us in the Bethlehem of the tabernacle, where there is more humility, more self-abasement than in the manger or on Calvary. The Magi found Jesus in *Bethlehem*, which means *house of bread*. The grain of wheat that in dying will bring forth much fruit lies on a bit of straw.[12] We go to Bethlehem with

the gold of our detachment from our successes and failures, with the incense of our desire to serve and understand others—charity, purity: the *good aroma of Christ*—and the myrrh of our sacrifice of each day.
[13]

Spurred on

We go *spurred on by work*, because work is our path to reach Jesus. It is for us the way to Bethlehem, where the Incarnate Word is born, where heaven and earth meet, in Mary's womb, and then in the humble manger in Bethlehem. We go striving to unite work and prayer, prayer and work: the world with God.

We go happily, with a cheerful step. In spite of the difficulties that are never lacking (and that sometimes make us suffer), work is for us life, task, gift, growth, service to God and others. That is why we try to love it, to do it joyfully, with enthusiasm:

with professional zeal. In this sense, work is a motor that spurs us on. It is good to leave home with a rapid step, with the desire to accomplish the human task that constitutes our professional vocation and, at the same time, situates us in society.

He is the carpenter, the son of the carpenter,[14] who worked for 30 years in Nazareth. He is the Son of God who transformed bread into his Body. The work of the Cross cost him so much! *Abba*, Father, not my will but yours be done.[15] And we renew that submission of our will each day when the priest, lending his voice and his entire person to our Lord, and acting *in Persona Christi Capitis*, in the Person of Christ the Head, repeats the words of the Institution of the Eucharist: **This is my body which will be given up for you.** Thus we go, weighed down and spurred on, following in the footsteps of the one who went up to Jerusalem

bearing the weight of our sins,
spurred by the desire to save us, to
give himself.

**Quam dilecta tabernacula tua,
Domine virtutum!**[16] Spurred on
by our work, we go to the tabernacle,
to the house of the Lord of hosts, for
the strength we need for our
peaceful battles to acquire the
virtues. We offer him this struggle,
since there is nothing good we have
done that has not come from him. St.
Paul asks: What do you have that you
have not received?[17] The virtues
we have tried to acquire in our work
come from God: industriousness (**my
Father is working still, and I am
working**[18]), patience,
responsibility, care for little things,
the effort to finish tasks, the desire to
help the others grow and the
humility to appreciate others' work,
cheerfulness, service. The struggle to
acquire these virtues, operative
habits that forge our personality and

little by little identify us with Christ, consists in the effort to begin and begin again.

For love

As we work it is He who works, who suffers and who gives himself. He is the one who loves. We go to the house of Bread, the eternal Bethlehem of the tabernacle where we find the only Son of the Father, the eternal Word of God. On the paten, we unite our tasks to the bread—fruit of the earth and of our work. And in the chalice, we unite the drop of water of our life to the wine—fruit of the vine and of our work.[19]

Put care into your work, St. Josemaria tells us. A work that is well done, cared for in all its details. Work that corresponds to the little duty of each moment. *Do what you ought and put yourself into what you are doing*,[20] putting refined care into preparing

our offering. We go to the tabernacle, in the parish church, in a church near our work or along the way. We go there in order to shorten the time before the next Mass, preparing the offering of our day with the impatience of a person in love, with the desire to make a Mass of each of our days, to pray for our family members and friends, in order to feel loved... and to love![21] In a special way, at the hour of trial or when we have to take a step ahead, perhaps a more costly one, towards a greater interior abandonment, *the moment has come to go to the tabernacle to speak with our Lord so that he show us his wounds, which are like the credentials of his love; and with faith in these wounds, which we cannot see physically, we will discover as the Apostles did, the need for Christ to suffer and so to enter into his glory. We will embrace more clearly the Cross as a divine gift, and we will come to understand our Father's*

words: "let us strive to see the glory and blessing hidden in suffering."[22]

The tabernacle is Bethlehem, house of bread, always too poor for our Lord. It is Bethlehem because he is there with his soul, with his body, with his blood and his divinity,[23] because he offers himself as he did in Bethlehem, for us to contemplate and adore him. We do not approach him with empty hands, but with the work we have finished and that which remains to be finished. The Visit to the Blessed Sacrament is a pause for adoration: *Jesus, here is Juan the milkman. Or: Lord, here is that wretched fellow who doesn't know how to love you like Juan the milkman.*[24] We speak to him about the offering we are preparing: I am a doctor, a manual worker, a judge, a teacher...and I come to give you what I am and what I do. I come to ask your forgiveness for what I have failed to do. We go to him with the

angels and, as in Bethlehem, we find there our Lady and St. Joseph. The father and mother of a family will bring their children to greet Jesus in the tabernacle. A professional man will bring his colleague, a student his friend, teaching by our example how faith leads one to go seek our Lord, who is waiting for us.

Faith, purity, vocation

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be. *I wish, my Lord, to receive you with the purity, humility and devotion with which your most Holy Mother received you, with the spirit and the fervor of the saints.*[25] After adoring God our Father in heaven, we invoke the Mother of God and our Mother, asking her to teach us to give glory to the Blessed Trinity with our entire life. Mary gave us Christ's Body; she gives us Christ in the Eucharist. Her hands received the gold, frankincense and myrrh that the

Magi offered to Jesus. In her hands our offerings are purified and our wretchedness is cleansed. Our Lady makes the gold of our faith shine; she enkindles the incense of our purity with her maternal love, and imparts a pleasing aroma to the myrrh of our self-giving. Holy Mary keeps alive the fire of our fidelity and our apostolate. With her by our side we will give light and warmth. We will be lamps of faith, of ardent charity, divine light that illumines the path to Bethlehem.

We travel towards the final and eternal divine epiphany, the final revelation that is described in the last book of the New Testament. When the Book of Revelation was written, Christian truth seemed threatened by a growing doctrinal confusion, and the first universal, systematic persecution against the Church had been unleashed. The emperor, a creature of clay drunk

with human glory, wanted to be adored as Lord and God. But the shadows of vainglory will disappear in the river of the waters of life, clear as crystal, issuing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Those who will see his face will not need lamps, because the Lord God will shine on them and they shall reign forever and ever.[26]

In the meantime, the divine blaze spreads like wildfire, from heart to heart: apostolic fire that feeds on daily fidelity, with the humility that perseveres in the faith, with the Bread that makes purity more secure, with the vocation strengthened by the Word, by prayer. Gold, frankincense and myrrh. Faith, purity and our path: three untouchable points that we reflect upon each week with our Lord and that we like to speak about when receiving spiritual direction. And so we begin again, each day, each week,

preparing our offering for the
Epiphany of each day.

Guillaume Derville

Footnotes:

1. Cf. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Camino*, critical edition, edited by Pedro Rodríguez, 3^a ed. Rialp, Madrid 2004, p. 1051 (commentary on point 998).
2. Cf. *Heb* 13:8.
3. Cf. *Mic* 5:1-3.
4. Cf. *Mt* 2:4-6.
5. *Lk* 2:34.
6. Cf. *Gal* 3:28.
7. Vatican II, Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 9.
8. Cf. *Mt* 15:24-28.
9. Cf. *Jn* 19:39.

10. Cf. *Col* 1:24.
11. Cf. *Jn* 6:35, 41, 51.
12. Cf. John Paul II, *Message for World Youth Day XX (Cologne, August 2005)*, August 26, 2004, no. 3.
13. Cf. *Christ is Passing By*, nos. 35-37.
14. Cf. *Mt* 13:55; *Mk* 6:3.
15. Cf. *Mk* 14:36.
16. *Ps* 84 [83]: 2.
17. Cf. *1 Cor* 4:7.
18. *Jn* 5:17.
19. Cf. Roman Missal, Eucharistic Liturgy.
20. *The Way*, no. 815.
21. Cf. *The Forge*, no. 837.
22. Bishop Javier Echevarría, "Pastoral letter to the faithful of the

Prelature and cooperators for the Year of the Eucharist," October 6, 2004, in *Romana* 2004 (no. 39), p. 221.

23. Cf. Council of Trent, session XIII, can. 1.

24. Cf. Guillaume Derville, *Rezar 15 dias con San Josemaría Escrivá* [15 Days Praying with St. Josemaría Escrivá], Ciudad Nueva, Madrid 2002, pp. 71-72.

25. Cf. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Camino*, critical edition, edited by Pedro Rodríguez, 3^a ed. Rialp, Madrid 2004, p. 689 (commentary on point 540).

26. Cf. *Rev* 22:1-5.