

PART ONE

THE PROFESSION OF FAITH

SECTION TWO

THE PROFESSION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

CHAPTER TWO

I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, THE ONLY SON OF GOD

ARTICLE 3

"HE WAS CONCEIVED BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY"

Paragraph 3. The Mysteries of Christ's Life

512 Concerning Christ's life the Creed speaks only about the mysteries of the Incarnation (conception and birth) and Paschal mystery (passion, crucifixion, death, burial, descent into hell, resurrection and ascension). It says nothing explicitly about the mysteries of Jesus' hidden or public life, but the articles of faith concerning his Incarnation and Passover do shed light on the whole of his earthly life. "All that Jesus did and taught, from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven",¹⁷¹ is to be seen in the light of the mysteries of Christmas and Easter.

513 According to circumstances catechesis will make use of all the richness of the mysteries of Jesus. Here it is enough merely to indicate some elements common to all the mysteries of Christ's life (I), in order then to sketch the principal mysteries of Jesus' hidden (II) and public (III) life.

I. CHRIST'S WHOLE LIFE IS MYSTERY

514 Many things about Jesus of interest to human curiosity do not figure in the Gospels. Almost nothing is said about his hidden life at Nazareth, and even a great part of his public life is not recounted.¹⁷² What is written in the Gospels was set down there "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."¹⁷³

515 The Gospels were written by men who were among the first to have the faith¹⁷⁴ and wanted to share it with others. Having known in faith who Jesus is, they could see and make others see the traces of his mystery in all his earthly life. From the swaddling clothes of his birth to the vinegar of his Passion and the shroud of his Resurrection, everything in Jesus' life was a sign of his mystery.¹⁷⁵ His deeds, miracles and words all revealed that "in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily."¹⁷⁶ His humanity appeared as "sacrament", that is, the sign and instrument, of his divinity and of the salvation he brings: what was visible in his earthly life leads to the invisible mystery of his divine sonship and redemptive mission.

Characteristics common to Jesus' mysteries

516 Christ's whole earthly life - his words and deeds, his silences and sufferings, indeed his manner of being and speaking - is *Revelation* of the Father. Jesus can say: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father", and the Father can say: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"¹⁷⁷ Because our Lord became man in order to do his Father's will, even the least characteristics of his mysteries manifest "God's love. . . among us".¹⁷⁸

517 Christ's whole life is a mystery of *redemption*. Redemption comes to us above all through the blood of his cross,¹⁷⁹ but this mystery is at work throughout Christ's entire life:

- already in his Incarnation through which by becoming poor he enriches us with his poverty;¹⁸⁰
- in his hidden life which by his submission atones for our disobedience;¹⁸¹
- in his word which purifies its hearers;¹⁸²
- in his healings and exorcisms by which "he took our infirmities and bore our diseases";¹⁸³
- and in his Resurrection by which he justifies us.¹⁸⁴

518 Christ's whole life is a mystery of recapitulation. All Jesus did, said and suffered had for its aim restoring fallen man to his original vocation:

When Christ became incarnate and was made man, he recapitulated in himself the long history of mankind and procured for us a "short cut" to salvation, so that what we had lost in Adam, that is, being in the image and likeness of God, we might recover in Christ Jesus.¹⁸⁵ For this reason Christ experienced all the stages of life, thereby giving communion with God to all men.¹⁸⁶

Our communion in the mysteries of Jesus

519 All Christ's riches "are for every individual and are everybody's property."¹⁸⁷ Christ did not live his life for himself but for us, from his Incarnation "for us men and for our salvation" to his death "for our sins" and Resurrection "for our justification".¹⁸⁸ He is still "our advocate with the Father", who "always lives to make intercession" for us.¹⁸⁹ He remains ever "in the presence of God on our behalf, bringing before him all that he lived and suffered for us."¹⁹⁰

520 In all of his life Jesus presents himself as *our model*. He is "the perfect man",¹⁹¹ who invites us to become his disciples and follow him. In humbling himself, he has given us an example to imitate, through his prayer he draws us to pray, and by his poverty he calls us to accept freely the privation and persecutions that may come our way.¹⁹²

521 Christ enables us to *live in him* all that he himself lived, and *he lives it in us*. "By his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man."¹⁹³ We are called only to become one with him, for he enables us as the members of his Body to share in what he lived for us in his flesh as our model:

We must continue to accomplish in ourselves the stages of Jesus' life and his mysteries and often to beg him to perfect and realize them in us and in his whole Church. . . For it is the plan of the Son of God to make us and the whole Church partake in his mysteries and to extend them to and continue them in us and in his whole Church. This is his plan for fulfilling his mysteries in us.¹⁹⁴

II. THE MYSTERIES OF JESUS' INFANCY AND HIDDEN LIFE

The preparations

522 The coming of God's Son to earth is an event of such immensity that God willed to prepare for it over centuries. He makes everything converge on Christ: all the rituals and sacrifices, figures and symbols of the "First Covenant".¹⁹⁵ He announces him through the mouths of the prophets who succeeded one another in Israel. Moreover, he awakens in the hearts of the pagans a dim expectation of this coming.

523 *St. John the Baptist* is the Lord's immediate precursor or forerunner, sent to prepare his way.¹⁹⁶ "Prophet of the Most High", John surpasses all the prophets, of whom he is the last.¹⁹⁷ He inaugurates the Gospel, already from his mother's womb welcomes the coming of Christ, and rejoices in being "the friend of the bridegroom", whom he points out as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world".¹⁹⁸ Going before Jesus "in the spirit and power of Elijah", John bears witness to Christ in his preaching, by his Baptism of conversion, and through his martyrdom.¹⁹⁹

524 When the Church celebrates *the liturgy of Advent* each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming.²⁰⁰ By celebrating the precursor's birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his desire: "He must increase, but I must decrease."²⁰¹

The mysteries of Jesus' infancy

527 Jesus' *circumcision*, on the eighth day after his birth,²⁰⁹ is the sign of his incorporation into Abraham's descendants, into the people of the covenant. It is the sign of his submission to the Law²¹⁰ and his deputation to Israel's worship, in which he will participate throughout his life. This sign prefigures that "circumcision of Christ" which is Baptism.²¹¹

528 The *Epiphany* is the manifestation of Jesus as Messiah of Israel, Son of God and Savior of the world. The great feast of Epiphany celebrates the adoration of Jesus by the wise men (*magi*) from the East, together with his baptism in the Jordan and the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee.²¹² In the magi, representatives of the neighboring pagan religions, the Gospel sees the first-fruits of the nations, who welcome the good news of salvation through the Incarnation. The magi's coming to Jerusalem in order to pay homage to the king of the Jews shows that they seek in Israel, in the messianic light of the star of David, the one who will be king of the nations.²¹³ Their coming means that pagans can discover Jesus and worship him as Son of God and Savior of the world only by turning towards the Jews and receiving from them the messianic promise as contained in the Old Testament.²¹⁴ The Epiphany shows that "the full number of the nations" now takes its "place in the family of the patriarchs", and acquires *Israelitica dignitas*²¹⁵ (is made "worthy of the heritage of Israel").

529 The *presentation of Jesus in the temple* shows him to be the firstborn Son who belongs to the Lord.²¹⁶ With Simeon and Anna, all Israel awaits its *encounter* with the Savior—the name given to this event in the Byzantine tradition. Jesus is recognized as the long-expected Messiah, the "light to the nations" and the "glory of Israel", but also "a sign that is spoken against". The sword of sorrow predicted for Mary announces Christ's perfect and unique oblation on the cross that will impart the salvation God had "prepared in the presence of all peoples".

530 The *flight into Egypt* and the massacre of the innocents²¹⁷ make manifest the opposition of darkness to the light: "He came to his own home, and his own people received him not."²¹⁸ Christ's whole life was lived under the sign of persecution. His own share it with him.²¹⁹ Jesus' departure from Egypt recalls the exodus and presents him as the definitive liberator of God's people.²²⁰

The mysteries of Jesus' hidden life

531 During the greater part of his life Jesus shared the condition of the vast majority of human beings: a daily life spent without evident greatness, a life of manual labor. His religious life was that of a Jew obedient to the law of God,²²¹ a life in the community. From this whole period it is revealed to us that Jesus was "obedient" to his parents and that he "increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man."²²²

532 Jesus' obedience to his mother and legal father fulfills the fourth commandment perfectly and was the temporal image of his filial obedience to his Father in heaven. The everyday obedience of Jesus to Joseph and Mary both announced and anticipated the obedience of Holy Thursday: "Not my will. . ."²²³ The obedience of Christ in the daily routine of his hidden life was already inaugurating his work of restoring what the disobedience of Adam had destroyed.²²⁴

533 The hidden life at Nazareth allows everyone to enter into fellowship with Jesus by the most ordinary events of daily life:

The home of Nazareth is the school where we begin to understand the life of Jesus - the school of the Gospel. First, then, a lesson of silence. May esteem for *silence*, that admirable and indispensable condition of mind, revive in us. . . A lesson on *family life*. May Nazareth teach us what family life is, its communion of love, its austere and simple beauty, and its sacred and inviolable character. . . A lesson of *work*. Nazareth, home of the "Carpenter's Son", in you I would choose to understand and proclaim the severe and redeeming law of human work. . . To conclude, I want to greet all the workers of the world, holding up to them their great pattern their brother who is God.²²⁵

534 The *finding of Jesus in the temple* is the only event that breaks the silence of the Gospels about the hidden years of Jesus.²²⁶ Here Jesus lets us catch a glimpse of the mystery of his total consecration to a mission that flows from his divine sonship: "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's work?"²²⁷ Mary and Joseph did not understand these words, but they accepted them in faith. Mary "kept all these things in her heart" during the years Jesus remained hidden in the silence of an ordinary life.