

7 THE GOOD NEWS: GOD HAS SENT HIS SON

SON OF GOD, SON OF MARY,
MYSTERIES OF CHRIST'S LIFE
—CCC, NOS. 422-570

A GOOD MAN IN OLD NEW YORK



"Pierre Toussaint, you are the richest man I know. Why not stop working?"

"Then, Madam, I should not have enough for others."

Pierre Toussaint was born in Haiti in 1766 and raised as a slave at a time when it was a French colony. A small group of slave owners made fabulous fortunes from trading sugar, coffee, indigo, tobacco, and fruit. Seven hundred thousand black slaves, brutally beaten and terrorized, made this possible.

Baptized and raised a Catholic, Toussaint was one of the lucky ones, a house slave instead of a farm hand. Treated humanely by the Berard family, he was brought with them to New York when they fled the upcoming slave rebellion. They arrived around the time that George Washington was inaugurated as the first president of the United States.

Berard assigned Pierre as an apprentice to a Mr. Merchant, one of the city's leading hairdressers. Pierre found he had a talent for this work and soon became a success at it. Wealthy women spent vast sums to acquire the elaborate hairstyles of the day. The Berards allowed Pierre to keep a portion of his earnings.

Back in Haiti the slaves rebelled and drove out the French government. An attempt to retake the country by Napoleon's invasion force failed. The Berards lost their property and source of income. Berard died and left his wife without much to live on. Toussaint quietly took over the support of Mrs. Berard and the household. In gratitude, she freed him from

his slave status, after which he married Juliette Noel. He used his considerable income to support charitable causes. He conducted a fundraising effort among his rich clients of differing religious persuasions to build a Catholic orphanage. Mother Elizabeth Seton sent three sisters to start the orphanage. He ministered personally to victims of a plague.

He labored to dispel religious and racial prejudice in the city. One of his customers, Emma Cary, wrote about his dignity and Catholic witness:

His life was so perfect, and he explained the teaching of the Church with a simplicity so intelligent and courageous that everyone honored him as a Catholic. He would explain the devotion to the Mother of God with the utmost clearness, or show the union of the natural and supernatural gifts in the priest.⁶

Pierre worked up to the last two years of his life before dying at age eighty-seven in 1853. Along with many others, the New York newspapers mourned his passing. The *New York Post* reported, “Toussaint is spoken of by all as a man of the warmest and most active benevolence.” He was buried with his wife Juliette and niece Euphemia in Old St. Patrick’s cemetery on Mott Street in New York.

Pope John Paul II declared him Venerable—an important step in Toussaint’s cause for canonization—in December 1996. Since then his body has been reburied in the crypt of the archbishops in St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City. If canonized he would become the first black U.S. canonized saint.

As a married man, he was able to show us how a spouse may admirably fulfill God’s call to holiness. He was a true and heroic disciple of Jesus Christ.

Scripture tells us that no sooner had our first parents sinned than God hastened to promise them the hope of redemption. God loved us so much that he sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, to save us. In this chapter we review the mysteries of Jesus found in the Gospels and doctrinal teachings about him that were taught by early Councils of the Church. Venerable Pierre

6 Quoted in Boniface Hanley, OFM, *Ten Christians* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press: 1979), 34.

Toussaint was motivated by profound love of Jesus Christ, and his inspiring story aptly leads us to a prayerful study of our blessed Lord.



GOSPEL PORTRAITS OF JESUS

If we want to know Jesus, we should know the Scripture. This is certainly true about the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which were written “that you may [come to] believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name” (Jn 20:31).

We ponder Christ’s person and his earthly words and deeds in terms of *mystery*. His earthly life reveals his hidden divine Sonship and plan for our salvation. His parables, miracles, sermons, and wisdom sayings help us “to see our God made visible, and so we are caught up in love of the God we cannot see” (First Preface for Christmas).

The Gospels tell us a lot of what we know about Jesus. In two of the Gospels, we hear of his birth in the town of Bethlehem, to a young virgin named Mary. None of the Gospels tell much of the first thirty years of his life. We know he lived in the town of Nazareth with his mother and foster father, St. Joseph, and that he learned to be a carpenter like his foster father. The Gospels concentrate mostly on the events of his public life or ministry, which began when he was around the age of thirty. Jesus spent the last three years of his life traveling around the lands of ancient Israel, teaching the people of the Kingdom of God and confirming his identity as the Son of God through the miracles and wonders he performed. He gathered around him many disciples from whom he selected twelve who became the Apostles.

In the Gospels, we see and hear Jesus summon others to accept, live, and share the Kingdom of God. The proclamation of the Kingdom of God was fundamental to Jesus’ preaching. The Kingdom of God is his presence among human beings calling them to a new way of life as individuals and as a community. This is a Kingdom of salvation from sin and a sharing in divine life. It is the Good News that results in love, justice, and mercy for the whole world. The Kingdom is realized partially on

earth and permanently in heaven. We enter this Kingdom through faith in Christ, baptismal initiation into the Church, and life in communion with all her members.

The words of Jesus, expressed in his parables, the Sermon on the Mount, his dialogues, and the Last Supper discourse are calls to holiness through accepting his Kingdom and salvation. Jesus did not abolish the Law of Sinai, but rather fulfilled it (cf. Mt 5:17-19) with such perfection (cf. Jn 8:46) that he revealed its ultimate meaning (cf. Mt 5:23) and redeemed the transgressions against it (cf. Heb 9:15). The miracles and other deeds of Jesus are acts of compassion and signs of the Kingdom and salvation.

In the mystery of the Transfiguration, we gain a foretaste of the Kingdom. A hymn of the Byzantine liturgy spells it out for us:

You were transfigured on a mountain. Your disciples contemplated your glory, Christ God, so that when they saw you crucified, they would understand that your passion was freely willed. They would announce to the world that you are truly the splendor of the Father. (*Kontakion* for the Feast of the Transfiguration, Byzantine tradition)

Above all it is in the Paschal Mystery, which is the saving Passion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus, that we participate most profoundly in the mystery of Christ. Here is the heart of the Kingdom and salvation to which we are called. In Christ, we die to self and sin. We rise to participate in his divine life through the Resurrection. This is made possible for us through the Sacraments.

Our access to the Gospels is made possible by doing faith-filled reading of the sacred texts, by listening to them in the Church's liturgy, and by witnessing their meaning in our lives and in the lives of others. We can benefit greatly from the number of available Scripture commentaries and Bible study groups that are sponsored by local parishes.

TRUE GOD AND TRUE MAN

Who is Jesus Christ? He is the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He is true God and true man.

The unique and altogether singular event of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God. . . . During the first centuries the Church had to defend and clarify this truth of faith against the heresies that falsified it. (CCC, no. 464)

Because of various heresies that departed from the Apostolic Tradition, the Church needed to defend and clarify the true being of Christ. The first major heretical movement, Gnosticism, denied the humanity of Christ. Its advocates taught that the body was an unworthy dwelling place for God. They thought that the Incarnation could not have happened. The Church asserted Christ's true coming in the flesh, born of the Virgin Mary. Moreover, in a real body, he truly suffered and died on the Cross.

The son of God . . . worked with human hands; he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin. (GS, no. 22)

It is important to understand that Jesus had a human soul. He was also endowed with true human knowledge, which always worked in harmony with the divine wisdom to which Jesus' knowledge was united. Jesus also possessed a true human will, which always cooperated with his divine will.

A second major heresy, called Arianism because it was taught by a man named Arius, claimed that Jesus was not God. This Alexandrian priest argued that the "Word" which became flesh in Jesus was not God, but a created being, marvelous but created nonetheless. Arius and his disciples believed it was unfitting to even think that a human being could

CHRISTOLOGICAL TEACHINGS OF EARLY COUNCILS (CF. CCC, NOS. 465-468)

Nicea (AD 325): Jesus Christ is the Son of God by nature and not by adoption. He is “begotten,” not made, of the same substance as the Father.

Ephesus (AD 431): Since the one who was born of Mary is divine, Mary is rightly called “Mother of God.”

Chalcedon (AD 451): Jesus Christ, Son of God, is true God and true man. His divine and human natures remain together without confusion, change, division, or separation.

Second Constantinople (AD 553): There is only one person—a divine person—in Jesus Christ. The human acts of Jesus are also attributed to his divine person.

be God. To counter Arius, the Council of Nicea (AD 325) reaffirmed the faith of the Church that Jesus was really God, “begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father.”

A third heresy, Nestorianism, denied the unity of Jesus Christ as God and man. The Nestorians argued that the divine Son of God dwelled inside the human Jesus of Nazareth, but that they were not really one as one person. They insisted that Mary could be called “Mother of Jesus” but not “Mother of God,” as if the man Jesus and the divine Son were two separate persons. The Council of Ephesus (AD 431) rejected this heresy and professed that Mary is the Mother of God, the *Theotokos* (Birth-giver of God; sometimes translated as “God-bearer”). Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God who became man in the womb of Mary. The one who was born of Mary is the same one—the same person—who has existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit from all eternity.

FROM THE CATECHISM

1. What does the name *Jesus* mean?

Jesus means in Hebrew: “God saves.” . . . Since God alone can forgive sins, it is God who, in Jesus his eternal Son made man, “will save his people from their sins.” (CCC, no. 430, citing Mt 1:21)

2. Why is Jesus called *Christ*?

The word “Christ” [*Christos*] comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew *Messiah*, which means “anointed.” It became the name proper to Jesus . . . because he accomplished perfectly the divine mission that “Christ” signifies. (CCC, no. 436)

3. How does Jesus model discipleship for us?

In all of his life, Jesus presents himself as *our model*. He is “the perfect man,” 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 persecution that may come our way. (CCC, no. 520, citing GS, no. 38)

Understanding that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine is very important. The Church has consistently defended this teaching against attempts to present one or the other as somehow less. If the Crucifixion and Resurrection were events that involved God only, then we are not saved. If Jesus was not divine, he would have been just another good man whose death and Resurrection would not have saved us. It is necessary to believe that the mystery of the Incarnation means that Jesus was both fully God and fully man.

JESUS IS THE SAVIOR OF ALL

There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.

—Acts 4:12

At the beginning of the third millennium, the world celebrated global awareness and the diversity of cultures. The revolution in communications, transportation, and computer technologies is making us all aware of peoples and diversity in ways seldom experienced so directly in times past. The United States itself is a primary case study in continuing cultural diversity, especially witnessing the arrival of large numbers of Hispanics and Asians.

Amid the excitement generated by global awareness, it is helpful to point out that God's plan to save the world has been global from the very start. Christ's final words to his Apostles precisely present a global scale to their mission: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19).

The energetic missionaries of the Church have brought the Good News of Jesus Christ to every part of the world. Time after time the Church has incarnated the Gospel in yet another new and fascinating culture. If anyone is an expert in cultural pluralism, it is the Church, whose Gospel outreach has evangelized ancient Judea, Greece and Rome, Egypt and North Africa, the tribal communities that flowed into northern Europe, the Medieval and Renaissance worlds, the far-flung lands of Asia, and the new fields opened up by the discovery of America. In recent times, the Church's revitalized mission to Africa and Asia is yet another chapter in her proclamation of Christ to the world.

While we correctly celebrate the rich variety of cultures, we also are reminded that unity and harmony in Christ constitute the greatest value and hope for the human community. There should be no clash of cultures or civilizations, but rather the growth of universal respect for everyone's human dignity. We search for unity as we honor ethnic and cultural diversity. This is a unity that reflects the unity of the Holy

Trinity itself. The mission of the Catholic Church is the Lord's plan to unite all people in the love of Jesus Christ, the Savior of all. This unity can never detract from the uniqueness of cultures that pluralism recognizes and respects.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is it important for you to appreciate the truth that the person, words, and deeds of Jesus as seen in the Gospel accounts are mysteries revealing to us the hidden plan of God for our salvation? Conversely, what happens when this is forgotten?
2. The New Testament and the early Church Councils affirm in faith that Jesus is true God and true man. What is the value for our faith life in appreciating this truth of Revelation? What happens if we forget any aspect of Christ's identity?
3. What is your experience of cultural diversity? How has such diversity influenced your sensitivity to others? Why is God's plan for the unity of all peoples through the love of Christ an even greater value?

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS

- “The whole of Christ's life was a continual teaching: his silences, his miracles, his gestures, his prayer, his love for people, his special affection for the lowly and the poor, his acceptance of the total sacrifice of the Cross for the redemption of the world, and his Resurrection are the actualization of his word and the fulfillment of Revelation” (CCC, no. 561).
- The name *Jesus* means “God saves.” “There is no other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved” (Acts 4:12). The title *Christ* means “anointed one” (*Messiah*).
- The title *Son of God* refers to the truth that Jesus Christ is the unique and eternal Son of the Father. At Christ's baptism and Transfiguration, the Father says of Jesus, “This is my beloved Son” (Mt 3:17; 17:5). To profess Jesus as *Lord* is to believe in his divinity.

- The only Son of the Father, the eternal Word, became man at the appointed time, without ceasing to be God. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
- Jesus Christ is true God and true man united in one divine Person.
- “The son of God . . . worked with human hands; he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary . . . he is like us in all things except sin” (GS, no. 22).
- In the Incarnation, we behold the mystery of the union of the divine and human natures in the one person of God’s Son. Somehow, in a way we cannot completely grasp, Jesus had both human knowledge and a human will and divine knowledge and a divine will.
- As disciples of Christ, we are called to conform ourselves to him until he is formed in us.
- The mysteries of Christ’s infancy and hidden life invite us to identify with Christ’s obedience to Mary and Joseph as well as the example of his holiness in the daily work of family and work in the long years at Nazareth.
- The mysteries of Christ’s public life draw us to learn discipleship from the teachings of his baptism, his temptation in the desert, his preaching and witness of the Kingdom of Heaven, his Transfiguration, his voluntary journey to Jerusalem to face his Passion, and his entry into Jerusalem, where he completed the work of our salvation through his death and Resurrection.

MEDITATION

Why Did the Word Become Flesh?

The Word became flesh to save us from sin and reconcile us to God. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

By the Incarnation we are made aware of the depth of God’s love for us. “In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him” (1 Jn 4:9).

When the Son of God became man he became a model of holiness for us. “This is my commandment: love one another as I love you” (Jn 15:12).

God became man that we may partake in the divine nature. “He has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature” (2 Pt 1:4)

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God,
have mercy on me, a sinner.



I can never cease to speak of Christ for he is our truth and
our light.

—Pope Paul VI

