

Plain Sermons by Contributors to 'Tracts for the Times'
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SERMON XC.
CHRISTIAN JOY.
(PREACHED ON CHRISTMAS DAY.)

PSALM cxviii. 34.

“This is the day which the LORD hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it.”

ON all days, and at all times, indeed, my brethren, should the amazing act of GOD’S loving-kindness, which hallows this our festival, be present to our minds; for it includes in itself, it is the pledge, as well as the commencement, of every other act of mercy; it heightens them all; it sets them all before our eyes, as we can most hear to look at them. We are so much accustomed (blessed be GOD) to hear from infancy of the Incarnation of the SON of GOD, of His taking our nature upon HIM, of His being born of a virgin, that unless we take pains to impress upon our minds what this means, we are in danger of forgetting the surpassing greatness of GOD’S love and condescension therein conveyed. And, therefore, has GOD, through His Church, ordained this day, a day especially of joy and gladness, in addition to our weekly festival of the LORD’S day, that having refreshed our souls with the memory of our great deliverance, we may go onward with renewed strength to meet the trials of another year. It is, indeed, “a day, which the LORD has made;” a peculiar day; a day, in which HE has made a new and inconceivable thing, a mystery, which the angels desire to look into; whose greatness, they who can conceive it most, must feel to be most unsearchable; for it cometh from the unfathomable depths of the Divine Love.

GOD manifest in the flesh! we are accustomed to the words, my brethren, yet if we think we can comprehend, or measure the truth, which they contain, as yet we know nothing: it is, when having dwelt upon them with a subdued and chastened spirit, we confess that GOD’S judgments are unsearchable, and His ways past finding out, it is then that we begin to understand them: our confession of our insufficiency is the very condition and the first step to our understanding of things divine. GOD manifest in the flesh! what is this *in itself*, but that HE Who was “in the Form of GOD” “took upon HIMSELF the form of a servant;” HE Who was, and is invisible, became the object of our mortal senses; HE whom the Heaven of Heavens could not contain, confined HIMSELF within an earthly body; the ETERNAL united HIMSELF with our transitory nature; the IMMORTAL clothed HIMSELF with mortality; the Holy SON of GOD took upon HIM the likeness of sinful flesh; HE Who was with GOD, and was GOD, became man; HE, by Whom all things were made, took of His mother the nature which HE had created. These are only different ways of saying the same great truth, “GOD manifest in the flesh,” of impressing upon ourselves the same great contradiction, the union of Holiness with unholiness, GOD’S Infinity with our nothingness: so, where our understanding fails, there we may begin to adore; so may we bless GOD for the boundlessness of His mercy, and thank HIM that we cannot fathom it.

“GOD manifest in the flesh!” What is this *to us*, but that our CREATOR came down to His creatures in order to raise us up to HIM; that the HOLY ONE descended to sinners to restore to them their lost purity; that Truth came down to us who were in error; Light to us who sat in darkness; Life to us, who were in the shadow of death.

Not alone to die for us, did the SON of GOD leave the glory of His FATHER, but to live for us, and in us, to conquer our great enemy Satan, in the very nature which he had defeated and corrupted; to burst in His own Person the bonds by which we were held captive; to cut off the taint of descent, which we had derived from our first father’s transgression; to give our nature a new origin and birth, that, as “by His Death HE destroyed death,” so by His Birth HE might amend the condition of our birth. By being born HE took our nature, that we by being re-born might partake of His, that we might become members of CHRIST, and temples of the HOLY GHOST. Much as HE had bestowed upon us by creating us in His likeness, much more exceedingly did HE bless us, when HE took upon HIM our likeness, the form of a servant: for as a bishop of the ancient Church says,¹ “the birth of CHRIST is the origin of the Christian people, the birth-day of the LORD is that of His body the Church.” As then we are crucified with CHRIST in His Cross, raised in His Resurrection, placed by His Ascension at GOD’S right hand, so are we born with HIM now: for whoever is regenerated in CHRIST is no longer in the stock of his earthly father, but ingrafted in his SAVIOUR, Who became the SON OF MAN, that we might become sons of GOD.

Great then, and wonderful, are the blessings, which this day recalls to us, our redemption sealed to us, (for HE Who humbled HIMSELF to take the nature of His creature, the likeness of sinful man, how should HE not finish the work of mercy, which HE came to perform)—our redemption sealed, the enemy of our souls vanquished, our nature reconciled to GOD, and GOD to our fallen nature; yea, our nature reborn, regenerate, raised above what it was when GOD pronounced it good, since now it is inseparably united with the Ever-blessed SON of GOD; and thus, as many of us as are truly united with HIM, are, as St. Peter says, “partakers of the Divine Nature.” And for this cause, our Church, following the example of GOD’S Word, and of the ancient Church, (as you will have observed in the Collect and the Gospel of this day, and again, as you will perceive in the second lesson selected for this evening,) has sought to connect in our minds the memory of our SAVIOUR’S birth, and that of our own new spiritual “birth, unto righteousness,” which HE bestowed upon us in Baptism, which in as many of us as have not stifled the workings of GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT, has been springing up in us into eternal life; in as many as, having fallen, have been again restored, has been the pledge, the source, the origin of that restoration; in all who are advancing heavenwards, is the sole spring of that advancement. “ALMIGHTY GOD” (she teaches us to pray), “Who hast given Thy Only-Begotten SON, to take our nature upon HIM, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin, grant that we being regenerate” (i. e. who have been born again), “and made Thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by Thy HOLY SPIRIT.” HE has so united these truths in His Church, as having blended them in His Word.

As by St. Paul HE has united our new birth with our Baptism, “the washing of regeneration,” so by St. John in the Gospel does HE with the birth of our LORD. For when about to declare the fulness of the mysteries of the incarnate WORD, HE tells us, that” to

¹ S. Leo, from whom several other expressions are taken.

as many as received HIM, HE gave power to become the sons of GOD, even to them that believe in His Name, which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of GOD: and the WORD was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” HE sets before us GOD the WORD, becoming man, that men believing HIM, might from HIM receive power to become sons of GOD. By St. Paul HE teaches us how we were made partakers of that birth, by His free, electing, irrespective love, which when we had nothing good, had done no works of righteousness, “saved us by the washing” of our “regeneration,” or our new birth, renewing us by the HOLY GHOST, which HE shed on us abundantly, through JESUS CHRIST our SAVIOUR.

This is, indeed, then, “a day which the LORD hath made,” in which we should rejoice and be glad: it is a day of joy to all, since the SON of GOD came to free all who were bound, and we were all the servants of sin; HE came to give life to the dead, and we were all “dead in trespasses and sins:” it is a day of joy to the sinner, because it proclaims pardon and peace to him; to the sanctified, because it is the source of his holiness; to us all, because it tells that we shall be judged by HIM, Who knows our infirmities, and stooped to our weaknesses. Such is its joy, that the Church has appointed that it should change even our weekly fast, in memory of our SAVIOUR’S sufferings, into a feast and day of joy. The day of His bitter agony becomes a day of child-like joy.² Our fathers hallowed it as a day of joy; the rich still wish to make it a day of joy to the poor, or, as far as they can, wish that want or cold should not prevent its being such: we usher it in with signs of joy, we wish each other that it maybe a time of joy; in this season of the year, when all nature seems to be dead, we still collect together the few remains of life, and deck our houses, and this house of GOD, with the emblems of life and joy; families, at other times separated, reassemble now, as far as they can; their re-union is a source of joy, and an emblem of the union of that one great family, which GOD is forming in heaven and in earth, never again to be severed, because united in His SON; we have from childhood learnt to look on this season as a season of joy; we bear witness to ourselves (would that it might not be against ourselves!) that we should “rejoice and be glad.” But is it really so? Joy, whereof Scripture speaketh, is not what the world calls joyousness, not mere outward joy, much less that mirth, which is obtained by noisy mingling with others, and by forgetfulness of ourselves, or by that thoughtlessness of mind, which, by remaining in wilful ignorance of many lurking corners of itself, the motives of its actions, its real state towards GOD, and its everlasting sentence, contrives to persuade itself that all will in some way be well, that GOD will not keep to His threatenings, but that HE will have mercy upon those, to whom HE has in His Holy Word declared, that HE will show no mercy. I speak not of such unhappy, hollow rejoicings as these; mirth is not joy; “the end of that mirth,” Scripture says, “is heaviness.” GOD allows us outward joys, HE deals tenderly with us, as with children; only the source of all our joys must not be outward, but from within, from HIM: all must come from HIM, be enjoyed in HIM, in the sense of His Presence, lead up to HIM: (HE is our Life, our Lord, the Husband of our spirits:) all joy is idolatry which stops short in His creatures; all joy is adulterers joy which joys in aught without HIM. The joy, whereof Scripture speaketh, is a deep, tranquil, inward, abiding joy, to which all other joys are to minister, which arises in the Christian from the knowledge that he hath been made a child of GOD, from the sense of GOD’S continual mercies, from looking to things eternal, from the hope that he is a living member of his

² Preached when Christmas Day fell on Friday.

redeeming LORD, from looking for his LORD'S return, that when this passing scene shall soon be closed, sin, and infirmity, and negligence, will lose their last grasp upon him, the body of this death be swallowed up in life, and he shall be translated to the Presence of his SAVIOUR and his GOD.

This joy, springing, as it does, from the inward fountain placed within the heart, that well of water, which bursteth up into everlasting life, depends not upon any thing without: it had its origin in the knowledge of GOD'S mercies in CHRIST, in having been redeemed out of the evil world, and having been placed by Baptism in CHRIST'S fold; it has been strengthened by every other act of mercy, whether of preserving us in the fold, or recalling us when we had wandered from it; it has increased with every victory which GOD has enabled the Christian to obtain over the enemies of his salvation, the Devil, the world, and the flesh; it has been strengthened, whenever our SAVIOUR has imparted His precious Body and Blood to us: how then should it depend upon things outward, except as far as they serve to the inward life? "Neither tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword," says the apostle, "can separate us from the love" which CHRIST bears us. "Yea, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through HIM that loved us." How then should they diminish our joy? The Christian's rejoicing is that his SAVIOUR, his GOD, Who for his sake became man, has, yea does, love him; that wherever he goes, his SAVIOUR accompanies him, as a friend; shields him from temptation, supports him lest he fall, yea, "when thou passest through the water, HE shall be with thee," "in the valley of the shadow of death HE shall be thy shepherd; His rod and His staff shall comfort thee." The Christian's joy is in GOD, by Whom, forsaking HIM not, he shall not be forsaken; yea, Who, amid all his frailties, forsaketh him not that he should forsake HIM; how then should a stranger intermeddle with his joy? It is in the CREATOR, the Abiding, Unchangeable, the Living, the True; how should that joy be shaken by His creatures, which, in so far as they are not in HIM, are fleeting, changeable, dead, unsubstantial? It is in HIM Who is our Abiding place; what can it fear? our Possession; what can it lose? our Peace; what can trouble it? our Rest; what can disturb it? our Life; what can destroy it? How should life, or death, or any other creature be able to separate him from the love of GOD, which is in JESUS CHRIST his LORD?

Such is the Christian's joy; alike, whether alone or in society, in sickness or in health, in ease or in distress, in comfort or in suffering,—alike, did I say? nay, more powerful when alone, for then is GOD more present to his soul, and his soul more drawn to his GOD; deepened by distress, or sickness, or suffering, since these his afflictions are so many fresh proofs of his FATHER'S love, (for "whom the LORD loveth HE chasteneth,") so many more signs of his REDEEMER'S loving-kindness towards him, that he is deemed worthy of being "purged, that he may bring forth more fruit." "All things are its;" all minister to it; things past, and present, and to come; mercies past, privileges present, earnest of hopes to come; yea, and its deepest source is what in human sight is the deepest suffering.

Such is the Christian's joy; and though it may not be expressed in words, and its sources perhaps may not be accurately understood, it may be, it is felt by every child in CHRIST, who seeks to love its SAVIOUR, and keep His commandments. Nay, shame be upon us, it more often shines on the suffering death-bed of the dying child, than on the undisturbed decay of those of elder years; and that, not because these little ones are unconscious of sin, but because their unseared consciences are quickly apprehensive of it,

and yet still more vividly (I speak of those who have been Christianly brought up in their baptismal engagements)—still more livelily do they feel and take refuge in their REDEEMER’S love, Who for their sake became a little child, that they might be His.

Where then is this joy? or why do we not see it every where? It is placed by St. Paul among the first-fruits of the SPIRIT, “love, joy, peace;” as the fruits of having “had access given us to that grace wherein we stand;” our LORD HIMSELF tells us, that “with joy” shall men give up everything besides to gain the treasures HE giveth. It is a Christian grace; yet how few Christians even understand how it can be! how few can understand any other source of joy, than those natural motions of the human heart, its natural pulses, quickening with the affections with which GOD cheers our earthly life. How would men rightly shrink from thinking their joys a Christian virtue; how little think that men can joy in pain, and grief, and tears, or that the sorrow of repentance,³ or “tribulation,” can be “joy.” How rare is it to find people, who would on reflection seriously say, that they had joy. And yet the joys, whereof the Apostles speak, were amid, and in sufferings, for which we have no words nor thoughts; their “lives in jeopardy every hour,” themselves “for GOD’S sake, were killed all the daylong,” “accounted as sheep for the slaughter,” and yet, “glorying in” these their “tribulations.”

Truly, we must confess that our Christian love has waxed very cold, and with it have decayed our peace and our joy, and the fruits of that love.

Why, then, do so many not share the Christian’s joy? The answer is too plain, my brethren; because persons are either not Christians, or are but almost Christians, or are half, weak, imperfect Christians: *they*, according to St. Paul, have this Christian joy, who “having been justified,” or made righteous, “by faith, have peace with GOD;” *they* have it, St. Peter saith, who “not having seen JESUS CHRIST, love HIM, in Whom, though now they see HIM not, yet *believing*, they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” Our joy then is, that we have been adopted as sons in the SON, that we are no longer at enmity with GOD, that our wills are, on the whole, no longer rebellious against His will, but that we are at one with HIM here, and trust to dwell with HIM for ever. Joy is the very Presence of GOD the COMFORTER within the soul, knitting it to GOD. Whatever, then, turns men aside from GOD, relaxes our union with HIM, must in the same degree destroy our joy; whatever causes HIM to withdraw His Holy Presence, must withdraw His Comforting Presence. “Thou hidest Thy face, they are troubled.” To live in mortal sin, which destroys life, must destroy joy. They who sow to the flesh, must reap as they sow; they who sow the works of the flesh cannot reap “the fruits of the SPIRIT, love, joy, and peace.” Joy is in past pardon; how can it be when that pardon is for the time forfeited? in present Communion with GOD; how can it be, when mists of sin stand between man and his GOD? in hopes of future mercy; how can it be, when any thoughts of the future must be rather a “fearful looking for of judgment?” The Christian alone can have the Christian’s joy. Rather, it is GOD’S greatest mercy to the sinner, that he should not have joy. To be out of GOD, and yet to have joy, were devilish; it must be joy in evil. GOD formed man for HIMSELF; and so while any traces of his origin yet remain, he can have no rest, except in GOD; as long as any life remains, it must be disquieted to be separated from HIM, in Whom it lives. And, therefore, Satan strives to stifle these cravings, feeds them with this world’s hopes and fears, displays an unreal world around them, gives the soul objects to seek which it can never attain, that in them it may forget itself and HIM

³ “Grant me ever to grieve, and of my grief to joy.”—Ancient Prayer

Whom it could attain, GOD. This is the real source of that hot seeking after this world's pleasures, pomps, vanities, fierce short-lived joys, voluptuousness, display, excitement; it is to ease the aching heart, to take it off itself, to drown its misery in being separated from HIM Who is its end; this, the greatest danger of the tumult wherein people live, lest they succeed in their miserable efforts, and so close themselves within their cares, and riches, and pleasures, that they leave no opening for the light of Heaven to burst in, and disclose the ghastliness of their joys, their utter misery. And so in such, as have not shut out GOD altogether, HE takes the intervals of their earthly joys, and gives them weariness of heart, that they may learn that here is not their rest; besides those more sudden strokes, whereby HE stuns men, and deafens them to the world, that they may hear His Voice, HE mingles unsatisfactoriness with their pleasures, sends depression upon excitement, restlessness amidst gratification, satiety on enjoyment, that the poor soul, wearied by very vanity, may at last seek out HIM, its true joy and rest.

And so, in proportion, in all those lesser degrees of worldliness and sin, with which persons, who have yet some thoughts of heaven, waste their hopes. Joy is of GOD, and in GOD. Complete joy will be, when we are complete in GOD; and, in this our pilgrimage, it commences, grows, decays, is weak, or sickly, or overcast, or withdrawn, as we are more or less in HIM. The highest saints, on whom their SAVIOUR'S Countenance most fully shone, still had their seasons of dreariness, and exclaimed, "How long wilt THOU absent Thyself, O LORD? for ever? How long wilt THOU hide Thy face from us?" and the faint uncertain gleams of that Countenance vouchsafed to such as most of us, lighten our darkness, or are withheld, as we are in earnest seeking to do His will, or are remiss. But stedfastness of purpose, an earnest desire to serve HIM with a whole heart, is the condition of all joy. To have His joy poured within us, we must be capable to joy in GOD. And they only can joy in GOD, who are at peace with HIM; they only at peace who love HIM above all besides.

They, then, cannot have joy, who, even although free from deadly sin, are again and again falling by divers temptations, whose besetting sins continually overtake them, and prevail; who admit within them feelings, which they disallow, thoughts, which they know to be wrong, habits which they condemn; and find themselves, year by year, growing no better, and if no better, then, it is to be feared, even worse. How can they have peace? and if no peace, what joy? for what is to have peace with GOD, but to have a will in unison with GOD'S will, to approve what HE approves, to abhor what HE hates? how then can he be at peace with GOD, who is still pleased with those things which displease GOD, who still in part desires those things with which he knows GOD to be offended? how can he be at peace with GOD, over whom GOD'S enemies have yet so much sway? how with himself, since he still bears in part the image of GOD, and must take part against, and condemn himself in those things which he yet alloweth? This it is which mars men's joy and peace; this, which prevents our carrying about a paradise within us, and this our earth being again the garden of the LORD, that we are content to remain such hesitating, weak, undecided, Christians, content (as if it were a necessary burthen, and not one which we put upon ourselves), content to bear with us to our graves, our infirmities, our failings, our sins, instead of fighting manfully, as we have vowed to do, "against sin, the world, and the devil, and to remain CHRIST'S faithful soldiers and servants to our lives' ends."

But if this imperfect service mars men's peace and joy, much less can they have

it, who seem scarcely to propose to themselves seriously, the rendering any service at all; who seek not to consecrate their daily tasks to GOD, to perform them "in GOD." And yet such seems the character of most men; the thought of GOD (as far as they do think of HIM even then) seems like a holy dress, which they put on morning and evening, or at church, and then for the rest of the day and week lay aside. These seek their contentment in the ordinary round of life, its daily occupations and business, its food and raiment, kindly affections and intercourse, without one effort, apparently, to hallow all these things, by the habitual thought of GOD. How should they have joy? Our LORD bids us "seek first the kingdom of GOD and His righteousness," and then HE promises, "all things whereof we have need shall be added unto us." Man reverses this order, and His loving REDEEMER'S precept: he seeks first his own earthly wants, comforts, conveniences, pleasures; he still seeks first all the things which the heathen sought; and then, in the second, as something which must be done for the sake of another world, he would take in religion; he would fain be religious enough to escape hell, and by consequence to enter into heaven. Is it strange, that these have no joy, who seek for joy in their own way, and not in that in which GOD has promised that they shall find it? Joy is the privilege of the real entire Christian, not of that man who would first please himself, and then GOD. For this is not a question of being less or more religious; it is of being religious or not. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." The *first* object of our affections must be the object. We must love *most* GOD or the world, things seen or things unseen, the pleasures of the flesh or the joys of the SPIRIT; and according to our choice such shall we ourselves be. The things of this world can only be understood through the Cross; he who looks on it as something in itself, misreads it all; he sees it from a false centre, and all is confused to him; sickness, distress, sorrow, every cross and toil of life, must to such an one be strange things, not the appointed order of GOD'S Fatherly discipline; if this life's happiness be our end, then whatever abates it, seems a hard thing; it deducts from his sum of joy; such an one has not resigned himself, how should he resign what seems to be his? how should he be really resigned, who has not learnt that first lesson of the Cross, that this world is nothing to him, but has been crucified to him, and he to it, in the Cross of his LORD? He who makes the passing comfortably through this life his first object, has his treasure and his heart here; he may, by fear of punishment, or by circumstances, be kept from what he would call gross transgression; he may render this or that outward service, may do this or that benevolent action; but his whole life will partake of the evil of his first choice. His must be a slavish service, his will must constantly be at variance with his MAKER'S, since he has made this world his chief good, whereas GOD would have him live in this world as being the citizen of another and better country; he knows nothing of the privileges, and cannot render the obedience of sons: he renders not even the obedience which many of the heathen in the midst of their darkness rendered: he is a slave and not a son.

Oh, how is the face of life altered, as soon as a man has in earnest made his first object to do his FATHER'S will, to prove his thankfulness for redeeming love: oh, how do, what before seemed grievous burthens, bodily sickness, domestic trials, privations, losses, bereavement, the world's scorn, man's unthankfulness, nay, if it must needs be, shame for past sin, or whatever grief his FATHER may put upon him, how do these things change! For when man himself is changed, all is changed to him. Not of Apostles only is that true, "dying, and behold we live; chastened, and not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; having nothing, and possessing all things." It is fulfilled now day by day, in

men of like feelings, passions, frailties, as yourselves, whose histories up to this point had been the same as many of yours, would to GOD that all our ends might be like theirs! To those, whose hope is in Heaven, every thing becomes a means of discipline, an instrument of preparing their soul to meet their GOD, of strengthening their cheerful acceptance of their FATHER'S will: their irksome tasks, privations, sickness, heaviness of heart, unkindness of others, and all the sorrows which their FATHER allots them in this world, are so many means of conforming them to their SAVIOUR'S image; and while they acknowledge not in words only, but in deeds, and in truth, that they are less than the least of GOD'S mercies, and that the heaviest of His inflictions is but a faint image of what their sins deserved, then doth every thing which GOD doeth with them seem to them "very good," even because HE doth it. Then doth GOD "make the bones which HE hath broken to rejoice." They who once joyed in gains, joy in losses; they who joyed in the feverish pleasures of this life, now have their chief joy that they are dead to them; they, who, alas! joyed in what was sin, joy in penitence; they who once loved the world too much, joy in the withdrawal of the world from them; the temporary goods which they abused, they now joy not to use; they who once wished to be first, now joy in being last, if so be they may be but last in that blessed company, of which the last and least shall for ever joy in GOD. Those whom the world would look on with compassion, or with loathing, as it did on Lazarus, are already, as it were, in Abraham's bosom; for their SAVIOUR watches over them, and His holy angels minister to them.

Not, my brethren, that all are at once to expect this joy: they have i, who as yet have been kept within CHRIST'S fold: knowing or unknowing, you feel it, in every act of duty, which you are enabled by GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT to do: if you persevere steadily, your joy will increase until you come to the joy of your LORD: but whoso has wandered from that fold, made this world their idol, they have a painful course to go through, painful according to the extent of their wanderings, yet softened by a sense of peace: the struggle whether man will return may convulse the whole frame, but every repentant step in the return to his FATHER'S house, long and irksome as the way may be, is accompanied with a thrill of joy.

Oh, wake then, ye that slumber on in this torpor of evil habits and of sin! wake, before you are awakened by the trump of the archangel; wake, to consider, and feel, and see, the dignity of that nature, which you are immersing in things of sense, dulling by your daily carefulness and troubles about many things, wasting amid the idle, vain, frivolous things, about which people are wont to think or to converse, but which nature your SAVIOUR did, as on this day, take, took it pure and spotless in the Virgin's womb, purified it by constant obedience to His FATHER'S will, and has now placed it at the right hand of GOD. Lift up your heart; ascend, for one instant, thither in heart and mind; view the Eternal Son of GOD, clothed with Majesty but in your nature; view the multitude of the blessed angels, and of those who have gone before you, down to the last infant, who had been by Baptism incorporated into CHRIST'S Church, the last repentant sinner, who through his tears was washed in his SAVIOUR'S Blood; hear them carrying on the angelic hymn, which was as at this time first sung, and which doubtless the holy angels, as they witness this festival of the Church of CHRIST, still continually sing, "Glory to GOD in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men;" see those bright and pure spirits, longing to be rejoined by you, and desiring your coming; and then look down on the passions which are holding you captives, the desires, which you are serving, the cares and

unsatisfied longings which are destroying your peace, the petty troubles about which you are repining, the discomforts about which you murmur; the petty sins, gains, enjoyments, for which you are bartering your souls, and then say whether this be worthy of your new origin, your second birth; whether this suits the character of the sons of GOD, and heirs of everlasting life, and make your choice,—It is for ever.

Would that GOD would open your eyes, yea open more clearly all our half-closed eyes, that we might see things as they are, what we are meant to be, what is in store for us if faithful, what is to each of us the next step to gain it. Not as the world giveth, did our Blessed SAVIOUR give to His disciples (and to us, if we be such) His peace and joy; not as the world giveth, in the things of the world, but in HIM; not as the world giveth, sweet to the mouth, but afterwards bitterness, but (more commonly) bitter and painful at first, and then a deep tranquil peace; not as the world giveth, shortly to pass away, but with HIMSELF, in Whom and through Whom we have it, to abide for ever. Oh, seek it not then here. GOD HIMSELF is the joy of the blessed; GOD HIMSELF will be thy all, thy food, thy life, the object of thy affections, thy treasure; it will be thy bliss then to have no joy but GOD; it is man's real bliss now; why seek it here in any thing but GOD? it is most like the life to come, to be bared of all bliss but GOD; that the eye should gaze on, the ear hear, the thought dwell on, GOD alone! why then heap around us these manifold sources of joy, which distract the mind from GOD, and not rather in them, if we have them, strive to see, hear, taste, and love only GOD; if without them, feel that we are, by their very loss, the more severed to GOD?

Seek not your joy here, and ye shall have it here; seek it not in the world, and though yet in the world, ye shall have it; a foretaste of the greater bliss treasured up for those who love HIM and keep His commandments; seek it not in ease, in the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life, and ye shall have it, whatever outward lot HE gives you; yea HE shall teach you, as HE has ever taught His children, that it matters not what in this world ye have, enjoy, suffer, win, lose, leave; how the world thinks of us, whether we be looked up to, or looked down on, thought well or ill of, be praised or dispraised, what our outward station of life is; it matters only what we ourselves *are*, what we believe, think, speak, do; what cometh from within us, not what happeneth to us without us: nay, that true joy is to be found in sorrow rather than in this world's laughter; in poverty rather than in riches; amid losses rather than in gains; amid suffering rather than in ease; under His chastening hand, rather than when left to ourselves; when girt with His Cross, and “led whither we would not,” rather than when girding ourselves, and “walking whither we would.”

These festivals are meant to help you on to this better choice; “as you cannot serve two masters, so neither can you rejoice in GOD and in the world;”⁴ the joy in the one must continually absorb in itself the joy in the other; “he who joyeth in the world, joyeth not in GOD, and he who joyeth in GOD, joyeth not in the world;” ye may rejoice, being in the world, but the world must not be your joy; ye are not only in the world, ye are in GOD, and they whom you would love, unless they have alienated themselves from GOD, are in GOD, for “in HIM we live and move, and have our being;” they have an outward form, which is GOD'S workmanship, and an inward union with GOD, of which the mystery of this season is the pledge; bow not down before GOD'S creature, as an idol,

⁴ S. Aug. Serm. 171, on Phil. iv.

but in it love HIM the CREATOR; ‘rejoice before GOD, in GOD, for the sake of GOD;’⁵ be sure to love nothing which GOD loves not; then purify your other joys; seek in them all to increase your joy in GOD, and diminish your joy in their earthly portion; prove yourselves by denying yourselves, in the midst of earthly joys, some portion of them, that you may see whether in them you do indeed love GOD only, or wish only to love HIM; realize your eternal hopes; joy not in that which passeth away, but in HIM Who liveth and abideth for ever; not here where you are sojourners, but there where is your home; not here, whither your SAVIOUR came down indeed to redeem and sanctify you, but which HE has left, and which when HE has gathered His people together, HE will burn up; but there where HE is, and where HE provideth a place for you; not here where those you love cannot remain, but there where, year by year, they are being gathered; ‘not in the fading flower of vanity, but in the hope of eternity.’⁶

And that our joy, while we have any outward joys, be a joy in GOD, beware that it be not a selfish joy; sanctify the joys and enjoyments of this season, by sharing them with CHRIST’S poor. We celebrate this day not the birth only of our LORD, but His Cross; we are allowed to joy in His Birth, but it was to HIM a Birth to woe that we might joy, to poverty that we might be rich, to lowliness that we might rise, to death that we might live, to suffering that we might not suffer everlastingly. We dare not celebrate such self-denying, self-sacrificing love, with selfish joy; while we are rejoicing, other members of CHRIST are suffering amid our common joy, or joying in their LORD amid suffering. Let us then, according to our means, seek how we may, amid our joys, of which we are all unworthy, deny ourselves, in order that in this sharp and bitter season, in which our LORD vouchsafed to come into the world for us, we may minister to HIM, seek HIM out, where HE yet is, unseen by the world, as when laid in the cave at Bethlehem; seek HIM where He yet deigns to lie, sick, and a hungered, and athirst, and cold, and naked; and HE to Whom, unseen on His manger throne, we offer the gold of our charity, the incense of our prayers, the myrrh of our self-denial, will from His Throne in the highest heaven look graciously upon it, will soothe our sorrows, and purify our joys, yea, through joy and sorrow will purify ourselves, until HE fit us at last for the joy of His own everlasting Presence, “in Whose Countenance is the fulness of joy, and at Whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” To this, may GOD of His unutterable mercy bring us all, by whatever way may seem best to His Fatherly Wisdom, through JESUS CHRIST our LORD.

⁵ Id. Confessions x. 22.

⁶ S. Aug. Serm. 17.