

Our Lady, Seeker of the Lost...Christmas Sermon for the Mass at Dawn

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"...show unto the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus." (*Salve Regina*)

In the Name of the Father...

We know Our Lady under many titles: Mother of God, Mother of the Church, Queen of Peace, Cause of Our Joy, Refuge of Sinners. Perhaps one of her titles is less well-known: *Seeker of the Lost*. A mother's heart will not be at ease when a child is missing. Our Lady revealed her disquiet in this way during the episode in her Son's life we call the "Finding in the Temple." "Why have you done this to us?" she asks 12 year old Jesus, showing her maternal sorrow and anxiety as she searched for Him.

"To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve." These words from the *Salve Regina* express our condition—*banished* children—after man turned away from his Father and introduced into the soul that interior unrest that is the common human experience, save for our Blessed Lady, who was preserved from that struggle by her Immaculate Conception, so that she could be the vessel of grace who brings the Prince of Peace into the world. From the *Salve*: "Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our *exile*, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus."

"...our exile..." We suffer many things in this life...again, a common or universal human experience. We lose circumstances that we find congenial; we lose health; we lose someone dear to us. All of these can be quite painful. But the worst suffering comes *when we lose something by our own hands*...by our own willfulness, selfishness, even malice. This is the worst feeling of all, to know that we have damaged something precious to us by our own insensitivity, thoughtlessness, or perhaps greed. And so man is the author of his own exile from God: because he would not trust Him, would not listen to Him, would not be faithful to his nature as a creature.

From the *Salve Regina*, once more: "To thee do we send up our sighs, morning and weeping in this vale of tears." How often have we created the condition of our own unhappiness, and then called out to Heaven for relief...

To search out the lost children of God is in the heart of our Mother, Mary, because it is first in the heart of our Father in Heaven. Throughout Advent, we have heard, through the voice of the prophets, the message of the Father's reassurance: "I will not leave you orphans; I will come for you; I will not allow you to remain in exile, in the suffering you have created for yourself by sin; I will send my Son to save you, to forgive you, to lead you back to me."

St Paul wrote to St Titus that "the kindness and generous love of God" has appeared in human form, not though any merit of ours, "but because of His mercy." Jesus Christ has come...no longer are we "forsaken." (Isaiah)

And now that God has sought us, now that He has sent a Redeemer, it is for us *to seek Him*. The words of the shepherds, humble and simple men, are preserved for us in St Luke's gospel to mark for us a way forward: "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made know to us."

Dear people, every love story, every romance has this quality of seeking and finding, and so it is with the divine romance. Christmas is God's invitation to renew our search for Him, for the Savior, who has first sought us by leaving the safety and peace of the throne of grace in Heaven, so that He can become, "Emmanuel." Only He—God with us—is the fulfillment of the restless heart, the relief for the pain of loss, the tender mercy that heals the wound of our infidelity, of our sin. Only He—Jesus Christ—can bestow these gifts, these graces. We would be wrong to look elsewhere. Such would only further our exile.

"Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." Our Lady has by her own humility, trust, and love for God brought Jesus to us, and so she searches ever more deeply into the mystery of His goodness and generosity. And now, as our "Mother of Mercy" (*Salve Regina*) and Seeker of the Lost, she will bring us to her Son at the crib, where the faithful children of the Father gather to give thanks that we are no longer orphans.