

**The Third Two Sessions of “Why Catholic?” centered on “The Mystery of Creation” and “The Incarnation.” For those who did not get a chance to attend, the following represents a summary of those two teachings. In the weeks to come we will be discussing ways you can get involved in the next group of Why Catholic? Sessions.**

## THE MYSTERY OF CREATION

In the creation of the world and of man, God gave the first and universal witness to his almighty love and his wisdom, the first proclamation of the "plan of his loving goodness", which finds its goal in the new creation in Christ. Though the work of creation is attributed to the Father in particular, it is equally a truth of faith that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit together are the one, indivisible principle of creation.

God alone created the universe, freely, directly and without any help. No creature has the infinite power necessary to "create" in the proper sense of the word, that is, to produce and give being to that which had in no way possessed it (to call into existence "out of nothing"). God created the world to show forth and communicate his glory. That his creatures should share in his truth, goodness and beauty - this is the glory for which God created them. God created the universe and keeps it in existence by his Word, the Son "upholding the universe by his word of power" (*Heb* 1:3), and by his Creator Spirit, the giver of life. Divine providence consists of the dispositions by which God guides all his creatures with wisdom and love to their ultimate end.

Christ invites us to filial trust in the providence of our heavenly Father (cf. *Mt* 6:26-34), and St. Peter the apostle repeats: "Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you" (*1 Pt* 5:7; cf. *Ps* 55:23). Divine providence works also through the actions of creatures. To human beings God grants the ability to cooperate freely with his plans. The fact that God permits physical and even moral evil is a mystery that God illuminates by his Son Jesus Christ who died and rose to vanquish evil. Faith gives us the certainty that God would not permit an evil if he did not cause a good to come from that very evil, by ways that we shall fully know only in eternal life.

God willed the diversity of his creatures and their own particular goodness, their interdependence and their order. He destined all material creatures for the good of the human race. Man, and through him all creation, is destined for the glory of God. Respect for laws inscribed in creation and the relations which derive from the nature of things is a principle of wisdom and a foundation for morality.

"Father, . . . you formed man in your own likeness and set him over the whole world to serve you, his creator, and to rule over all creatures" (*Roman Missal*, EP IV, 118). Man is predestined to reproduce the image of God's Son made man, the "image of the invisible God" (*Col* 1:15), so that Christ shall be the first-born of a multitude of brothers and sisters (cf. *Eph* 1:3-6; *Rom* :29). "Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity" (*GS* 14 § 1). The doctrine of the faith affirms that the spiritual and immortal soul is created immediately by God.

"God did not create man a solitary being. From the beginning, "male and female he created them" (*Gen* 1:27). This partnership of man and woman constitutes the first form of communion between persons" (*GS* 12 § 4). Revelation makes known to us the state of original holiness and justice of man and woman before sin: from their friendship with God flowed the happiness of their existence in paradise

## THE INCARNATION

The name Jesus means "God saves". The child born of the Virgin Mary is called Jesus, "for he will save his people from their sins" (*Mt* 1:21): "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (*Acts* 4:12). The title "Christ" means "Anointed One" (Messiah). Jesus is the Christ, for

"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power" (*Acts* 10:38). He was the one "who is to come" (*Lk* 7:19), the object of "the hope of Israel" (*Acts* 28:20). The title "Son of God" signifies the unique and eternal relationship of Jesus Christ to God his Father: he is the only Son of the Father (cf. *Jn* 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18); he is God himself (cf. *Jn* 1:1). To be a Christian, one must believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (cf. *Acts* 8:37; *1 Jn* 2:23). The title "Lord" indicates divine sovereignty. To confess or invoke Jesus as Lord is to believe in his divinity. "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (*1 Cor* 12:3).

At the time appointed by God, the only Son of the Father, the eternal Word, that is, the Word and substantial Image of the Father, became incarnate; without losing his divine nature he has assumed human nature.

Jesus Christ is true God and true man, in the unity of his divine person; for this reason he is the one and only mediator between God and men. Jesus Christ possesses two natures, one divine and the other human, not confused, but united in the one person of God's Son. Christ, being true God and true man, has a human intellect and will, perfectly attuned and subject to his divine intellect and divine will, which he has in common with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Incarnation is therefore the mystery of the wonderful union of the divine and human natures in the one person of the Word

From among the descendants of Eve, God chose the Virgin Mary to be the mother of his Son. "Full of grace", Mary is "the most excellent fruit of redemption" (*SC* 103): from the first instant of her conception, she was totally preserved from the stain of original sin and she remained pure from all personal sin throughout her life. Mary is truly "Mother of God" since she is the mother of the eternal Son of God made man, who is God himself. Mary "remained a virgin in conceiving her Son, a virgin in giving birth to him, a virgin in carrying him, a virgin in nursing him at her breast, always a virgin" (St. Augustine, *Serm.* 186, 1: PL 38, 999): with her whole being she is "the handmaid of the Lord" (*Lk* 1:38).

The Virgin Mary "cooperated through free faith and obedience in human salvation" She uttered her yes "in the name of all human nature" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* III, 30, 1). By her obedience she became the new Eve, mother of the living.

"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 little and the poor, his acceptance of the total sacrifice on the Cross for the redemption of the world, and his Resurrection are the actualization of his word and the fulfillment of Revelation" (John Paul II). Christ's disciples are to conform themselves to him until he is formed in them (cf. *Gal* 4:19). "For this reason we, who have been made like to him, who have died with him and risen with him, are taken up into the mysteries of his life, until we reign together with him"

No one, whether shepherd or wise man, can approach God here below except by kneeling before the manger at Bethlehem and adoring him hidden in the weakness of a new-born child. By his obedience to Mary and Joseph, as well as by his humble work during the long years in Nazareth, Jesus gives us the example of holiness in the daily life of family and work.

From the beginning of his public life, at his baptism, Jesus is the "Servant", wholly consecrated to the redemptive work that he will accomplish by the "baptism" of his Passion. The temptation in the desert shows Jesus, the humble Messiah, who triumphs over Satan by his total adherence to the plan of salvation willed by the Father. The kingdom of heaven was inaugurated on earth by Christ. "This kingdom shone out before men in the word, in the works and in the presence of Christ" The Church is the seed and beginning of this kingdom. Its keys are entrusted to Peter.

Christ's Transfiguration aims at strengthening the apostles' faith in anticipation of his Passion: the ascent on to the "high mountain" prepares for the ascent to Calvary. Christ, Head of the Church, manifests what his Body contains and radiates in the sacraments: "the hope of glory"