

Verse 17- *And behold a voice, &c.* From the opened heaven a dove glided down upon the head of Christ, and whilst it sat upon Him, there came the voice, "This is my beloved Son." The voice explained the symbol of the dove, that it had reference to Christ, and to Him alone. This voice, "in the Person of the Father, was framed by the ministry of angels," say Victor Antioch. (*in c. I S. Marc.*). Here was first revealed to the world the mystery of the Holy Trinity, which had been darkly indicated to the Jews. The Father manifested Himself by a voice, the Son was seen in the flesh, the Holy Ghost was visible in the form of a dove, that it might be signified that the faith of the Holy Trinity was about to be unfolded, and that the baptism of Christ was conferred in Their Name. For although all these things—viz., heaven opened, the forming of the voice, the descent of the dove—were, as regards operations, *ad extra*, as theologians say, common to the whole Trinity, yet each several Person was represented by the aforementioned symbols. (See S. Augustine, *Serm. 38 de Temp.*)

This is my Son. Greek *ὁ υἱὸς*—i.e. the Son of God the Father, by nature, not by adoption, as the angels and holy men are sons of God. Therefore the Son of God is not a creature, but the Creator, consubstantial with God the Father, as was defined by the Nicene Council.

Mark and Luke have, in different words, but with the same meaning, "Thou art my Son." And it is probable that these last were the exact words used, not merely because of the *consensus* of two Evangelists, but because, when Jesus was looking up into heaven, and praying to the Father, it is probable that the words would be immediately and directly addressed to Him. So Jansen, Maldonatus, and others.

My beloved Son. Gr. *ὁ ἀγαπητός*, i.e., *only and chiefly beloved*, through whom all others are beloved. For no one is beloved by God save those whom Christ loves. The Syriac has *most beloved*.

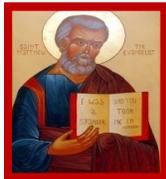
In whom I am well pleased. As it were, "Thou only, O Christ, art perfectly, in all things, and infinitely pleasing unto Me; and no one is pleasing unto Me save through Thee. For by Thee I am well pleased with all the human race, with whom I was offended because of Adam's sin." The Heb. *הֵרַצָה* signifies both to please and to be propitious, or reconciled.

"Because Thou art the Brightness of My glory and the express figure of My substance (Heb. i. 3.), Thou art immeasurably pleasing unto Me. In Thee nothing ever displeases, but all things please Me. Thou art He in whom I have always delight. And for Thy sake all Thy disciples and followers—that is to say, all holy Christians—are pleasing unto Me." There is an allusion to Noah, who alone of his generation pleased God. (See Gen. vi. 9; viii. 20.)

As, therefore, Noah was well-pleasing unto God—especially when he offered the sacrifice unto Him, with which He was propitiated, and promised that He would no more destroy the world by the waters of a flood—so, much more, when Christ offered Himself to God as a peculiar and special victim, did He cause God to be propitious to the whole human race. "By this Voice was Christ constituted by God the Father the universal Doctor and Legislator of the World."

The voice added, *Hear ye him.* "Hear Christ, believe in Him obey Him. He hath come forth from My bosom. He will show you My mysteries, things kept secret from the foundation of the world. He will open to you the way of peace, the way to heaven, the way to happiness. He will preach to you the glad tidings of the kingdom of heaven, even such divine things as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have they come into the heart of man." Hence, when the Magdalen sat at the feet of Jesus, and diligently listened to Him, it was said to her, "Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken from her."

Very well saith S. Leo (*Serm. de Transfiguratur.*): "This is My Son who is from Me, and with Me from everlasting. This is My Son, who is not separated from Me in Deity, divided in power, severed by eternity. This is My Son, My very own, not created of any other substance, but begotten of Myself. This is My Son, by whom all things were made. This is My Son, who sought not by robbery that equality which He hath with Me. He attained it by no presumption, but, abiding in the form of My glory, and in order that He might fulfil Our common purpose for the restoration of the human race, He bowed down the unchangeable Godhead, even to the form of a servant. In Him, therefore, I am in all things well pleased, and by His preaching I am manifested, and by His humility I am glorified. Hear ye Him, therefore, without delay, for He is the Truth and the Life. He is My strength and My wisdom. Hear Him of whom the lips of the prophets sung. Hear Him who hath redeemed the world by His Blood; who by His Cross hath prepared for you a ladder by which ye may ascend up to heaven."



A COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

CHAPTER 3: 11-17

For the Catholic Church, God's Revelation is found in Sacred Tradition, understood as God's Revealed Word handed down by the Living Teaching Authority established by Christ in the Church. That includes both Written Tradition (Scripture) and Unwritten Tradition received from Christ and handed down Orally by the Apostles and their Successors. The Church founded by Christ on Peter, and only that Church, has been Empowered by Christ to 'Interpret' His Teaching Authoritatively in His Name.

Scripture is *Inspired*; *Inspiration* really means that God Himself is the Chief Author of the Scriptures. He uses a Human Agent, in so marvelous a way that the Human writes what the Holy Spirit wants him to write, does so without Error, yet the Human Writer is Free, and keeps his own Style of Language. It is only because God is *Transcendent that He can do this - insure Freedom from Error, while leaving the Human Free. To say He is Transcendent means that He is above and beyond all our Human Classifications and Categories.*

Matthew writes his gospel account to give us the view of Jesus as the King. He records Jesus' authority in calling the disciples: "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19), and he also records more than any of the others about Jesus' teaching concerning God's kingdom and heavenly rule.

Considered one of the most important Catholic theologians and Bible commentators, Cornelius à Lapide's, S.J. writings on the Bible, created a Scripture Commentary so complete and scholarly that it was practically the universal commentary in use by Catholics for over 400 years. Fr. Lapide's most excellent commentaries have been widely known for successfully combining piety and practicality. Written during the time of the Counter Reformation, it includes plenty of apologetics. His vast knowledge is only equaled by his piety and holiness.

Continuation of Matthew 3: 11-17

Verse 11- *I indeed baptize you, &c.* These words must not be connected with what precedes, nor were they spoken immediately afterwards by John. But they were spoken as suitable to an occasion of which S. Luke gives an account and explanation (iii. 15): "And as the people were of opinion, and all were thinking in their hearts of John, that perhaps he might be the Christ: John answered, saying unto all: I indeed baptize you with water: but there shall come one mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to loose. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire" From the sanctity of his life and the fervour of his preaching, and from his baptizing, the people suspected that John was the Messiah, or the Christ. For none of the other prophets, except John and Ezekiel, had made use of baptism. (See Ezek. xxxvi., where he foretold that baptism would be a sign of Christ: "I will pour upon you clean water, and you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness.") John therefore puts an end to this suspicion, and declares that he is not the Christ, but the forerunner and

Again, the dove is the symbol of the reconciliation and renewal of the world, which the Holy Spirit has wrought through Christ. Hence His symbol was a dove, bearing a green olive-branch to Noah, signifying that the Deluge and God's anger were at an end.

Lastly, because the dove is an amicable and social bird, it denotes the union of the faithful in the Church, which the Holy Spirit effects through the baptism of Christ. So S. Thomas. In fine, the dove is very fair, it delights in sweet odours, and it dearly loves its young. So too Christ is most fair, He delights in the odour of virtues, and dearly loves His children.

As the Holy Spirit thus descended upon Christ, so has He often descended in the form of a dove upon illustrious Christians, more especially upon doctors, bishops, and pontiffs of the Church, and thus, as it were, consecrated them. S. Eieucadius, the disciple of S. Apollinaris, Apostle of Ravenna, when a dove had flown upon his head, was ordained Bishop of Ravenna. After a life illustrious for sanctity he migrated to heaven, A.D. 115. (Philip Ferrar in his *Catalogue of the Saints of Italy.*)

Thus a dove flew down upon the head of S. Aderitus, in the presence of the clergy, and designated him the successor of S. Apollinaris, and second Bishop of Ravenna. S. Marcellinus in like manner, was designated bishop of the same city, A.D. 230. S. Fabian, in consequence of a dove lighting upon his head, was elected Bishop of Rome.

When S. Gregory was writing his works, the Holy Spirit, in the likeness of a dove, was seen to instil into his ear what he wrote.

So S. Basil, who wished to be baptized in the same river Jordan as Christ was, in celebrating Mass, was surrounded by a celestial light, and gave orders for a dove to be made of pure gold, and a portion of the consecrated Host to be placed in it, and suspended it above the altar. So Amphilochius. He adds that S. Ephrem saw the Holy Ghost, in the likeness of a dove of fire, sitting upon S. Basil, wherefore he exclaimed, "Truly is Basil a column of fire; truly the Holy Ghost speaks by his mouth."

Flavian the patriarch, by the command of an angel, consecrating S. John Chrysostom to be a priest, beheld a white dove fly down upon his head. Leo Augustus relates this in his life of S. Chrysostom. (See Baronius, A.D. 456, n. 7.)

This was the reason why the impostor Mahomet tamed a dove, and accustomed it to fly to him, by placing *in his ear grains of corn*, which the dove picked and ate, and by this means he persuaded the people that the Holy Spirit was his friend, and dictated the Koran to him, and revealed the most secret purposes of God. He also caused the dove to bring him a scroll, on which was written in letters of gold, "Whosoever shall tame a bull, let him be king." But he had brought up a bull, which of course he easily tamed, and was thereupon saluted as king by the foolish people. So the authors of the Life of Mahomet.

And lighting upon him. Piously says S. Bernard (*Serm. I de Epiphan.*), "Not unsuitably came a dove, to point out the Son of God; for nothing so well corresponds to a lamb as a dove. As the lamb among beasts, so is the dove among birds. There is the utmost innocence in each, the utmost gentleness, the utmost guilelessness. What is so opposed to all malice as a lamb and a dove? They know not how to injure or do harm."

(Egyptian, *in the form of a dove*). You will ask first, was this a true and real dove, or was it only the appearance and likeness of a dove? SS. Jerome, Anselm, and Thomas, Salmeron, and others, think that it was a real dove; and this is probable. It is, however, equally, or rather, more probable that it was not a real dove, but only the shape of a dove, formed by an angel, agitated and moved so that it should descend upon Christ. The reason is that all the Evangelists seem to indicate this. S. Matthew says, *as if a dove*; Mark, *as it were a dove*; John, *like a dove*; Luke, *in a bodily shape like a dove*. There was therefore the appearance and similitude only, not the reality of a dove. Nor was there any need of a real dove, but of its likeness for a symbolical signification, that by such a symbol those gifts of Christ of which I shall speak presently might be designated. In such wise were the heavens opened, not in reality, but in appearance, as I have already said. This was the opinion of S. Augustine, S. Ambrose, S. Chrysostom, Theophylact, Lyra, &c.

You will urge, Was it then a phantasm, a merely fancied dove? I reply, By no means. It was a real, solid body, having the form of a dove, as S. Augustine teaches, *de Doctr. Christian.* c. 22; not indeed assumed, hypostatically, by the Holy Spirit, as the Humanity of Christ was assumed by the **WORD**, as Tertullian appears to have thought, *lib. de Carne Christi.*, c. 3. But it was only an index and a symbol of the Holy Ghost. It was thus taken because the dove is a most meek, simple, innocent, fruitful bird, very amiable, but very jealous. Such in like manner is the Holy Ghost, who endowed the soul of Christ at the very moment of His conception with these qualities of meekness and the rest. And what was now done was, by this sign of the dove, to signify that the Holy Ghost had done this, and to declare it to the people publicly. You will inquire in the next place, why the Holy Ghost descended upon Christ in the form of a dove, upon Apostles in the shape of tongues of fire? S. Chrysostom answers, 1. Because Christ came in the flesh, and into the world, meek like a dove, for the remission of sins, and for the release of sinners. But in the Day of Judgment, He will come as a severe Judge, to punish the wicked. 2. And more literally, the Holy Spirit was given to the Apostles in the likeness of fire, because He endued them with fervour and ardour in preaching. (S. Augustine, *Tract. 6 in Joan.*)

Again, the dove represented excellently well the Holy Sevenfold Spirit, or His sevenfold gifts which He poured upon Christ as Isaiah predicted (xi. 2), "And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and godliness, and he shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord." All these gifts are appositely signified by the dove. For as S. Thomas expounds (3 p., q. 39, art. 6, ad. 4), the dove carries by flowing streams, and when in the waters she beholds the reflection of a hawk she is able to escape it. Here is the gift of wisdom. 2. The dove selects the best grains of corn, and places them by themselves in a heap. Here is the gift of understanding. 3. The dove brings up the young of others. Behold the gift of counsel. 4. The dove does not tear with her beak. Behold the gift of knowledge. 5. The dove is without gall and bile. Lo! the gift of piety or godliness. 6. The dove maketh her nest in the rocks. See the gift of true strength. 7. The dove utters a mournful plaint instead of a song. Behold the gift of fear, wherewith Christ and His saints wait for sins, whether their own, or those of others.

indicator of Christ, and that his baptism was a prelude to the baptism of Christ, and a preparation for it.

So he says, "I indeed baptize you in," or "with water," that is, with water only. This is a Hebraism, for the Hebrews denote the instrument by the preposition or letter *ב*, or *in*, which is understood in Latin. So the Hebrew said: *במים*, *bammayim* "in," or "with water, unto repentance," that I may stir you up to repentance, and that I may prepare you by corporeal ablutions for the washing of the soul to be received in the baptism of Christ. The baptism of John therefore was a profession of penance. Whence those who were about to be baptized by him confessed their sins, not that there was thereby a condonation of their faults; for this they were to wait for from Christ, by means of His baptism and true contrition.

He that cometh after me. Gr. *ὁ ἐρχόμενος*, *i.e., the coming One*, He whose advent is at hand, who is nigh us, even at our doors.

Mightier than I. Gr. *ἰσχυρότερος*, *i.e., stronger, more powerful, more excellent*, and who in gifts far excels me. For He is mighty by His own divine and heavenly strength, wherewith He influences not only the body, as I do, but the soul by the Spirit of His grace, and purifies it from every spot of sin. Whence Isaiah (chap. ix.) among other titles of Christ gives him that of *strong*. "He shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God: the Mighty." (Vulg.) "And verily was He Strong, who, by the wonderful power of His Divinity, overcame the devil, and took his prey out of his hand, and overthrew his kingdom and transferred it to Himself; who opened the doors of heaven, and swallowed up death in victory; who abolished sin, and brought in grace and glory." (Toletus.)

Again, Christ was mightier than John in miracles, because by a single word He raised the dead, drove out demons, healed the sick, changed the elements, whilst John by penance tamed the flesh that he might subdue it under the Spirit. Thus was the strength of Christ the weakness of John.

Whose shoes, &c. Mark adds (i. 7) "falling down." S. Luke has "Whose shoes' latchet I am not worthy to unloose." Each is true, each denotes the menial office of servants, who kneel down, and put on or take off their master's shoes, and carry his shoes, when he puts on his slippers. John therefore here confesses that he is the servant and slave of Christ, that Christ is his Lord, yea his God.

Mystically, shoe denotes Christ's Humanity, which to serve, by carrying it on his shoulders, or bearing it in his hand, he acknowledges himself unworthy. For this humanity, by union with the **WORD**, was of boundless dignity and majesty. Whence S. Bernard: "The majesty of the **WORD** was shod with the shoe of our humanity." For since shoes are worn upon the extremities of the body, and are made of dead animals, according to S.

Gregory and S. Jerome they rightly signify the Incarnation of Christ. By shoes Theophylact understands Christ's coming down to the earth, and descent after death into the *Limbus Patrum*.

He shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost Christ shall pour forth the Holy Spirit, with all His gifts, in such abundance upon you, that He shall wash you from all your sins, and fill you, and, as it were, overwhelm you, with grace and charity, and His other *charismata*. Christ did this visibly at Pentecost. When He was about to ascend into heaven, alluding to these words of John, He said to His Apostles, "John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." (Acts i. 5.) But invisibly He does it in the sacrament of baptism, and confirmation, which is, as it were, the perfection and consummation of baptism. The contrast, therefore, between John and Christ is this—John baptized with water only, but Christ with water and the Holy Ghost. John washed the body, Christ the soul. And as the soul excels the body, so does the baptism of Christ excel the baptism of John, which was only rudimentary. So the Council of Trent (*Sess. 7 Can. 1*), and the Fathers generally. Hence Doctors speak of a threefold baptism—1, of the river; 2, of breath; 3, of blood. The baptism of the river is when any one is baptized with water. Of wind, or spirit (*flaminis sive spiritus*, Lat.), when a catechumen in a prison, or a desert, where there is no water, is truly contrite for his sins, and wishes for baptism. For such a one is justified by contrition, which includes the desire of baptism. Of blood, when any one not baptized dies a martyr for the faith; for he is baptized in his own blood, and cleansed from all his sins.

With the Holy Ghost and with fire. So it is in all the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, Persian, Egyptian, and Ethiopic versions. It is as though the Baptist said, "My baptism is by water, Christ's by fire; and as fire is more powerful than water, so is His baptism more efficacious than mine." Certain heretics, called Hermiani and Seleuciani, were wont, for this reason, to baptize their converts with fire, as S. Augustine testifies (*Hæres. 59*).

1. You ask, what is this fire? 1. Origen (*Hom. 24 in Luc.*) understands it of a purgatorial fire, that Christ will cleanse His faithful, dying in venial sins, in the fire of purgatory, according to the words, "The fire shall try every man's work;" and, "He himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire." (1 Cor. iii.) So also Suarez out of SS. Jerome and Bede.

2. S. Hilary by fire here understands the judgment of Christ, that it will be sharp, clear, and dreadful, like fire.

3. S. Basil (on Isaiah, chap. iv.), Damascene (lib. 4 *de Fide*, c. 10), and Toletus, understand the fire of hell, by which Christ punishes the reprobate; whence the Baptist says, "He shall burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

4. Some by fire understand *tribulations*, by which, as by fire, Christ washes His faithful people from their sins.

that it might be signified that the same Christ, who once led the Israelites over Jordan into the land of promise, will, by baptism, bring His faithful people to heaven. "And as under Joshua the waters were driven back, so under Christ, as our baptized Leader, are our sins turned back," says S. Augustine. Again, Elias divided the waters of Jordan when he was about to be taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire, that it might be signified that those who pass through the waters of Christ's baptism shall have an entrance into heaven opened to them by the fire of the Holy Ghost. Thus S. Thomas.

Verse 16- *And Jesus, being baptized, &c.* Luke adds, *Jesus being baptized and praying*. Whence it is plain that not by virtue of John's baptism, but by the merit of Christ's humility and prayer, the heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him.

Forthwith. This word is best referred, not to the words *coming up out of the water*, but to *the heavens were opened*.

Lo! the heavens were opened. Mark has, *He saw the heavens opened*. He—that is, Jesus—John too, and others who were present, doubtless saw them, since it was for their sakes this was done. Whence Matthew says, *They were opened, i.e., unto him or for him*. This is, they were seen to be opened in His honour, that God might make manifest that heaven is open unto all through Christ, says S. Chrysostom.

Also that the heavenly power of baptism might be pointed out, because by it carnal men become heavenly and spiritual, and by it are called and, as it were, taken by the hand to heaven. So S. Thomas.

You will inquire, in what way were the heavens opened unto Christ? It is replied, it was not the actual substance (*soliditatem*, Lat.) of the sky which was opened and rent in twain, for this is naturally impossible and supernaturally unneeded. Neither were the heavens opened by a merely imaginary vision, as they were opened to Ezekiel (i. 1); but there was in the upper region of the air a hiatus visible to the senses, from which visible aperture both the Dove and the Voice of the Father appeared to come down upon Christ. Such hiatuses appear not infrequently in the atmosphere, concerning which see Aristotle on meteors.

Hieron. Prado, the Jesuit, on the words *the heavens were opened*, says, "There was an appearance as though the sky were opened and divided by thunders and lightnings, and from the opening the Father's voice burst forth as thunder. For thunder is always accompanied by lightning; indeed, lightning is the cause of thunder, although the thunder is always heard after the lightning, because sound travels more slowly than light."

And saw (Syriac, *looked up at*) *the Spirit of God descending like a dove*

S. Augustine (*Serm. 154 de Temp.*) says that the day on which Christ was baptized was a Sunday, though John Lucidus (lib. 7, c. 2) was of opinion that the day was Friday. What is certain from tradition is, that Christ was baptized on the 6th day of January, the same day of the month on which he had been adored by the Magi thirty years before. Whence the Church commemorates the event on that day. The Ethiopians on the 6th of January, in memory of Christ's Baptism, not only sprinkle themselves with water, but immerse themselves in it. The faithful in Greece also were accustomed, about midnight before the 6th of January, to draw water from the nearest river or fountain, which, by the gift of God, remained sweet for many years, as S. Chrysostom expressly testifies (*Hom. de Baptism. Christiano*, tom. 5, *Opp. Græc.*). S. Epiphanius (*Hæres.* 51) adds, that on that day the Nile was turned into wine. "About the 11th day of the month Tybus (our 6th of January) Christ's first miracle was wrought in Cana of Galilee, when water was made wine. Wherefore in various places, until this very time, the same thing takes place as a divine sign for a testimony to unbelievers. Various rivers and fountains which are turned into wine are the proof of this. Cibyris, a fount of a city of Caria, becomes wine at the very hour in which Christ said 'Draw out now, and bear to the governor of the feast.' Gerasa in Arabia is another example. I myself have drunk of the fountain of Cibyris, and our brethren of the fount of Gerasa, which is in a temple of the Martyrs. Many testify the same concerning the Nile."

Moreover, that the water of Jordan received by reason of Christ's Baptism in it the gift of incorruption, Gretser testifies, "Let us add this," he says, "that the waters of Jordan, after Christ had consecrated them by His Baptism in them, have been endowed with the gift of incorruption." That illustrious prince, Nicolas Christopher Radzivil, in his *Hodæporicum Hierosolymit.*, says, "The water of the Jordan is extremely turbid, but very wholesome, and when kept in vessels does not become putrid. This I have found to be the case with some which I have brought with me."

Christ appears to have been baptized and washed by John, not only as to His head, but with respect to the rest of His body. I think so, because such was the manner of the Jews, who were accustomed to denude themselves of their clothes, and undergo their ceremonial baptisms and lustrations naked. Jesus therefore condescended to appear naked before John, and he underwent this indignity for our sakes, that Adam's and our nakedness and shame, induced by sin, He might clothe and cover by His grace. Whence also, as Bede testifies, a church was erected by the faithful on the spot where the clothes of Christ were deposited when He was baptized. Bede adds, that the same place was adorned with a noble monastery and church which was dedicated in honour of John the Baptist.

Gregory of Tours (*lib. de Gloria Martyr.*, c. 17) writes about the same place: "There is a place by Jordan where the Lord was baptized. The water flows into a certain bay, in which, even now, lepers are cleansed. When they be come thither, they wash frequently until they are cleansed from their infirmity. As long as they remain there they are fed at the public expense. When they are cleansed they depart to their own homes. This spot is five miles from where the Jordan loses itself in the Dead Sea." The place is called in S. John's Gospel Ænon, near to Salim. It was not far from Zarthan and Jericho, where the children of Israel under Joshua passed over on dry ground,

5. And, correctly, by the Holy Ghost and fire is meant the Holy, Fiery, and Inflaming Spirit, who is fire—that is, like fire—and, as fire, burns, and kindles. It is a hendiadys. The Holy Ghost, as it were fire, purges the faithful from their sins, kindles and illuminates them, raises them towards heaven and strengthens them, unites them closely to Himself, and, like fire, transforms them into Himself. Hence, at Pentecost, the Holy Ghost glided down upon the Apostles in the appearance of tongues of fire. Hence S. Chrysostom: "By adding the mention of fire, he signified the efficacy of the Holy Ghost, the vehement and unconquerable strength of His grace." Hence, in the primitive Church, the Holy Spirit was often wont to descend in the visible appearance of fire upon those who were baptized and confirmed, to denote the complete purgation of their sins, and the fiery love and the words of fire with which the Holy Ghost inflamed them. According to that in Deut. iv. 24, "God is a consuming fire;" and, in Jer. xxiii. 29, "Are not my words as a fire? saith the Lord."

Verse 12- Whose fan, &c. The fan is that with which farmers winnow the corn which has been thrashed, in order that the wind may carry away the chaff, and leave only the good corn behind. Fan, in Greek, *πτύον*, that which, as it were, spits forth the chaff. It is derived from *πτύω*, to spit out. The fan denotes the judgment of Christ, by which, as the fan separates the wheat from the chaff, He separates the good from the bad. The *floor* here does not signify the place, but rather the corn collected in the floor, which is cleansed by the separation of the chaff. By metonymy, that which contains is put for the contents. The *floor*, then, denotes the Church, or the company of the faithful.

The Fanner is Christ the Judge; the fan is His judgment, by which he fans and examines the thoughts, words, and deeds of every one. The chaff are the wicked. The wheat are the just and the saints, whom He will gather into His barn, the kingdom of heaven, where with them, as with wheat, He will feed and delight the Holy Trinity, the Angels, and all the Church triumphant.

John rises from Christ's first advent of grace to His second advent of judgment. And he signifies that this judgment is pressing on, and is nigh at hand, by saying, "His fan is in His hand." So S. Ambrose on Luke iii. 17. For although many hundred years may yet elapse before the judgment day, yet all those years, if compared with eternity, are but as a very little while, or as nothing. Moreover Christ, the Lord and Judge, holds in His hand the spirit, soul, and life of all men, to take them away if He will, to judge, bless, or condemn them.

He will burn up &c. And if the chaff, how much more the tares? The wicked are here called chaff, because, like chaff, they are very light, worthless and useless, and good for nothing save for fuel of Gehenna. For unquenchable, the Greek *hasáσθεστω*, *unextinguished, eternal*. Hence a stone which

always burns is called asbestus. The figure of speech here used is *miosis*, for little is said, much is meant. The fire of hell is a *ἀσβεστος* inextinguishable, not only because it cannot be quenched, but because it does not consume the wicked whom it burns; nay, it excruciates them living and feeling with endless torments. The error of Origen is here condemned, who thought that the pains of hell would not be eternal, but after the completion of the great cycle of Plato would come to an end.

There is an allusion to Isaiah lxvi. 24, "Their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched;" and xxxiii. 14, "Which of you can dwell with devouring fire? Which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" Where see what I have said. S. Chrysostom gives examples. "Do you not discern that sun which ever burns and is never extinguished? Have you not read of the inanimate bush, which was burnt with fire, and not consumed?" And S. Austin (*contra Donatist*. Lib. post Collat. c. 9) says, "Now I have proved sufficiently, that there are animals, which are called *Pirautæ* because they can live in the fire, and be burnt without being consumed, in pain without death, by the marvellous power of the Creator. And if any deny that this is possible, they are ignorant of Him by whom whatsoever is wonderful in all nature is effected."

Think of, then, and dread this fire of hell, which no water, no tears can extinguish: yea, though all rivers, all abysses, all seas, were collected together, they could not quench it: which all demons, all creatures, with all their powers, could not even diminish in the very least degree, "because the breath of the Lord as a stream of brimstone doth kindle it."

Verse 13- *Then cometh Jesus, &c. Then*, when the Baptist was stirring up all to repentance, and baptizing as a preparation for receiving the grace of Christ, *then*, I say, Christ came, that Him whom he had commended when absent, he might point out being present, even as the day-star goes before and indicates the rising of the sun.

From Galilee

, or as S. Mark says from Nazareth, where he had lived with His mother in a private station until He was thirty years of age. Then He came to John, that He might be by him declared to be the Messiah, that is, the Teacher and Redeemer of the world: and that He might, upon John's testimony, inaugurate His public office of teaching, and bringing in the Evangelical Law, for which He had been sent by the Father.

To be baptized. You will ask, what were the causes of John's preaching and baptism, and why did Christ wish to be baptized by him? There was a threefold reason, says S. Jerome. 1. That because He was born a man, he might fulfil all the righteousness and humility of the law. 2. That He might give a sanction to John's baptism. 3. That sanctifying the waters of Jordan by the descent of the Dove, He might show the coming of the Holy Ghost to the laver of the faithful.

4. A fourth reason was that by the Holy Spirit's coming down upon Christ in the form

forehead, you may be very sure he is not a saint, even though he should work miracles. For when he is neglected he shows his pride, anger, impatience, and so makes himself vile and contemptible."

4. *All righteousness, i.e.*, every increase of righteousness, that is to say, of virtue and sanctity. Christ indeed could not increase in interior grace, for with that He was always perfectly filled from the first moment of His Conception and union with the Word; but He showed daily ever greater and greater signs of virtue, and ever more and more humbled Himself. For Christ came down from heaven into the Virgin's womb, from the womb to the manger, from the manger to Jordan, from Jordan to the Cross, as He would teach us in Ps. lxxxiii. 8: "They shall go from virtue to virtue: the God of gods shall be seen in Sion." (Vulg.) So S. Augustine (*Epist. 50, ad Dioscorum*), "I would, my Dioscorus, that thou shouldst in all piety subject thyself to Christ and the Christian discipline, nor fortify for thyself any other way of reaching and obtaining the truth than that which has been fortified for us by Him who knoweth the infirmity of our footsteps, forasmuch as He is God. And so it is said of that most famous orator Demosthenes, that when he was asked what was the first rule to be observed in oratory, he replied, Pronunciation; and when he was asked what was the second, replied, Pronunciation; and being asked what was the third, still answered, Pronunciation. So if thou shouldst ask and ask again concerning the precepts of the Christian religion, I should answer that nothing else but humility would make you perfectly fulfil their obligations, although, perchance, I might be obliged to speak of other duties. To this most salutary humility, which, that our Lord Jesus Christ might teach us, He humbled Himself, to this, the greatest adversary is, if I may so say, a most uninstructed science."

Lastly, he fulfils all righteousness who endures the unpleasant ways and manners and tempers of others, according to those words of St. Paul, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." He who loves those who hate him, blesses those who curse him, does good to those who injure him, honours those who despise him, vanquishes his enemies by the warmth of his love; who with Paul desires to be anathema for his enemies; and to be all things to all men that he may gain all for Christ, he is truly humble and is like Christ.

Then he suffered him. That is, when he heard this, John yielded and baptized Christ. "If God received baptism from man, no one need disdain to receive it from his fellow-servant," says S. Jerome. And S. Ambrose says, "Let no one refuse the laver of grace, when Christ refused not the laver of penance." Beautifully, too, says S. Bernard, "John acquiesced and obeyed; he baptized the Lamb of God, and washed Him in the waters; but we, not He, were washed, because, for washing us, the waters are known to be of cleansing power."

ambitious of the lowest place, so shalt thou be exalted with Christ and deserve the highest. For Christ, subjecting Himself to John, was declared by John, yea, by all the Holy Trinity, to be greater than John, to be the Son of God. Say, therefore, with Christ, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." S. Ignatius, the founder of our Society, was a follower of Christ when he gave this golden axiom:

"With e'en the least, let no true Christian fight, But still to yield be e'er his chief delight."

For the grace, honour, and glory of a Christian is humility, that is to say, to yield, to suffer himself to be vanquished, to yield the place of honour to another. Wherefore the greater is he who is the humbler. For, as S. Gregory says, "Pride is the place of the wicked, humility the place of the good." Christ here teaches us to follow an ordinary life, not to seek exemption from the common law and lot, and to be accounted as one of the common people, according to the words in Ecclus. iii. 20, "If thou wouldst be famous, be as one of the flock;" yea, descend to the lowest place, and prefer all men to thyself.

3. *All righteousness, i.e.*, the highest justice. Thus God says to Moses (Exod. xxxiii. 19), "I will shew thee all," *i.e.* the highest "good" (Vulg.) namely, Myself. For the lowest degree of righteousness is to submit oneself to a superior, the middle degree to submit to an equal, the highest to an inferior. even as Christ submitted Himself to John. Christ, I say, who is the Holy of Holies, bowed His head to John for baptism, as though seeking from him sanctification and purification, like the rest, who were sinners, who came to his baptism.

Excellently says S. Gregory (3 p. *Pastor. Admonit.* 18), "Let the humble hear that the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; let those who are lifted up hear that pride is the beginning of all sin. Let the humble hear that our Redeemer humbled Himself, being made obedient even unto death; let the proud hear what is written of their head, 'He is a king over all the children of pride.' The pride of the devil was made the occasion of our ruin, the humility of God was found to be the assurance of our redemption. Let the humble therefore be told that when they abase themselves they rise to the likeness of God; but let it be said to the proud that when they lift up themselves they sink down to the likeness of the apostate angel. What then is more base than to be haughty? And what is more exalted than humility; which, while it puts itself in the lowest place, is united to its Maker in the very highest?"

S. Gregory says elsewhere: "This is the highest righteousness and sanctity, when we are in respect of our virtue the loftiest, in respect of our humility the lowliest." S. Thomas Aquinas, being asked by what mark a really holy and perfect person might be known, answered, "By *humility*, by contempt of himself, contempt of honour and praise, by bearing ignominy and reproach." "For if," he said, "you see any one, when he is neglected and despised, and has others preferred before him, show a sense of pain or indignation, to be of a downcast countenance, to turn up his nose, wrinkle his

of a dove, and by the Father thundering from heaven, He might afford Himself an irrefragable testimony. So S. Jerome.

5. Christ, by receiving baptism from John, would allure all men to His own Baptism, and would show them its benefit, viz. the coming and gift of the Holy Ghost.

6. Christ took our sins upon Him. Therefore as guilty and a penitent He stood before John, that He might wash away and cleanse our sins in Himself. Whence Nazianzen says (*Orat. in sancta luminaria*), "John baptizes, and Jesus comes to him, sanctifying even him who baptizes, that especially He may bury the old Adam in the waters." And again, "Jesus ascended up out of the water, drawing and lifting up with Himself a drowned world."

7. That Christ, who had determined to found the new commonwealth of Christians, in which none should be admitted except by baptism, should Himself, their Chief, be baptized, that He might in all things except sin, be made like unto His brethren. That is a famous saying of Cato, "Submit to the law, which thou thyself hast enacted."

8. As Abraham formerly, by God's command, instituted the sign of circumcision, so Christ would give a new pledge to His Church by sanctioning baptism. Thus S. Thomas thinks (3 p., q. 66, art. 2) that when Christ was baptized, He instituted the Sacrament of Baptism, not in words, but in deed. For then there appeared all the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, in whose name we are baptized. The Father was manifested by His Voice, the Son appeared in Jordan, the Holy Ghost was seen in the form of a Dove.

But it is more correct to say that Christ when He was baptized only directed attention to His own Sacrament, and its matter, water; but that He instituted it shortly afterwards, when He began to preach publicly. For He does not seem to have instituted Baptism publicly at the time He said to Nicodemus coming to Him privately and by night, "Except any one be born of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." And this is the opinion of S. Chrysostom, S. Augustine (*Serm.* 36 & 37, *de Tempore*) S. Gregory Nazianzen (*Orat. in S. Nativit.*), and others, who at the same time assert that Christ by His Baptism sanctified all water, and by His corporeal contact with it endued it with regenerating power, not as though He infused into water any physical, but only a moral quality, because water was then, *ipso facto*, by the intention of Christ, designed for the sanctification of men by washing them in the Sacrament of Baptism.

Tropologically, Christ by His Baptism at this time wished to teach us that a holy and perfect life must begin with baptism, and that this should be the great object of all who teach others, such as doctors and preachers.

Verse 14- *But John forbad him.* John recognized Christ by a secret instinct and revelation of God, by which he knew Him as to his face, which he had seen and known thirty years before, when he leapt in his mother's womb for joy. You may ask, "Why then was there a sign given to the Baptist (John i. 33) by which he was to recognize Christ, viz., the descending and abiding of the Holy Ghost upon Him?" I reply, This sign was given to the Baptist, not that he should for the first time know Christ, but that it should more fully confirm him in that faith and knowledge, and that by the same, as by a sure testimony of God, he should point out and commend Christ to the people.

I have need to be baptized, &c. That is, to be spiritually washed from my sins, and perfected by the Spirit of Thy grace. *Have need* here does not signify an obligation of precept, as though the Baptist was obliged to receive the baptism of Christ. For this precept of baptism was given and promulgated by S. Peter on the Day of Pentecost, and therefore after John's death. Some gather from this place that John was soon afterwards baptized by Christ Himself, as were also the Blessed Virgin Mary, SS. Peter, James, and John, and the rest of the Apostles. This is stated by S. Evodius, who succeeded S. Peter in the Chair of Antioch, in an Epistle of his, entitled τὸ φῶς.

In favour of this idea are also Nazian. (*Orat.* 39 towards the end); "Christ knew," he says, "that He would Himself shortly afterwards baptize the Baptist;" also S. Chrysostom, who says, "John baptized Christ with water, but Christ baptized John with the Spirit." Whence the author of the *Imperfect Comment.* says, "It is plainly written in apocryphal writings, that John baptized Christ with water, but He baptized John with the Spirit."

Abulensis thinks, on the other hand, that John was not baptized by Christ. And he proves it by the marveling of John's disciples, who soon afterwards told John that Christ, whom he had baptized, was Himself baptizing, and that all men were coming unto Him. For this would have been needlessly told to John if he had been baptized by Christ, and he would have given this reply to his disciples. So that it is a doubtful point whether John was baptized by Christ or not.

Verse 15- *And Jesus answering said, &c.* It becometh us, *i.e.*, Me to receive, thee to confer, baptism. Others understand us in this way: "It behoves us who are teachers to set an example in ourselves. Nothing, however apparently unimportant, must be omitted. I shall institute baptism. It is the part of him who commands, to do before others what he commands." Whence S. Luke says of Christ (Acts i. 1), "Jesus began both to do and to teach." "This is righteousness," saith S. Ambrose, "that what you wish another to do, you should yourself first begin, and encourage others by your own example." Whence S. Gregory, "Of true humility is ever sprung secure authority."

Moreover, not only Christ receiving, but John conferring baptism fulfilled all righteousness, because, contending in humility with Christ, he suffered himself to be vanquished, by being as it were put upon an equality with Christ. And so he, as it were, being vanquished by Christ in humility, vanquished Christ by yielding to Him

and obeying Him. As S. Dominic, wishing to give his right hand to S. Francis, whilst Francis opposed it and strove to take his left, said at length, "You overcome me in humility; I conquer you by obedience."

It is very probable that in the act of baptism John pointed out Christ to the people, since the form of John's baptism would be something of this kind: "I baptize thee in the Name of Him who is to come;" or, "Believe in Messiah who is about to come." This is inferred from chap. xix. 4. Thus it would seem that when Christ came, and was being baptized, John would say, "This is Messiah of whom I said that He was about to come."

S. Jerome observes—"Beautifully is it said, 'Suffer it now,' that it might be shown that Christ was baptized with water, and that John was about to be baptized by Christ with the Spirit. And by-and-by Christ might say, 'Thou baptizest Me in water, that I may baptize thee in thine own blood shed for Me.'"

For so it becometh us to fulfill (Arabic, to perfect) all righteousness. Instead of *righteousness* the Syriac has *all rectitude, i.e.*, whatever is just, right, holy, and pleasing unto God. And it is not right to decline or depart from such things, even though they seem lowly and abject; and even though they be not provided for by any precept, but are matters of counsel only. But again, *all righteousness* is whatsoever God the Father hath commanded. So Vatabl. For that is just which God sanctions and commands. And it would seem that as God the Father commanded Christ to die, so also He gave Him a precept to submit to John's baptism.

Hence, secondly, the *Gloss* says, humility is all righteousness—humility which subjects itself to all—superiors, equals, and inferiors. On the contrary, pride, by which a man prefers himself to all, not only inferiors and equals, but superiors, is all unrighteousness. For it takes away their just rights, and deprives them of the subjection which is their due. For as in every act of righteousness, *i.e.*, of virtue, humility comes in, in that a man submits himself to reason and virtue, so pride mixes itself up with every act of sin, in that a man prefers himself, and his own will and desire, to the law and will of God. Humility therefore fulfils all righteousness, because it is the head of all right and justice which a man owes to God, his neighbour, and himself. He submits himself to God by religion, to his neighbour by charity. He subjects the body to the soul, the soul to the law of God. Wherefore the humble hath peace with all; the proud with all hath strife and war. At this present day how many lawsuits and contentions are there between clergy and prelates for places, titles, precedence! How both sides pertinaciously contend for what is due to each, to the great scandal of the laity, and with little gain of victory to either side. For what dost thou gain if thou overcomest in the lawsuit, save some small worthless point of honour, and in the meanwhile makest a far greater loss of reputation, peace, and conscience? Learn from Christ, O Christian, to believe in, yea, even to be