



IN THE TIME OF THE LAUGHING MAN

August 2022

Dear Friend of Clear Creek Abbey,

Although it is somewhat “unorthodox” in its deeper orthodoxy, I thought you might appreciate the following meditation written by one of my monks at the abbey. Here goes...

Of the four elements which the ancient Greeks considered to make up the universe (earth, air, fire and water), all except earth are seen in Holy Scripture as signifying the Holy Spirit: blowing air and fire at Pentecost,¹ and water in John 7:37-39. Christian art, in portraying the Holy Spirit, seems to prefer to draw upon a different Scriptural symbol, that is, the dove, as seen at the baptism of Our Lord, when the Holy Spirit comes down “as a dove”.² And the Most Holy Trinity is sometimes portrayed (and sometimes beautifully so) as comprising an older man (God the Father), a younger man (God the Son), and a dove (God the Holy Spirit). But this can pose a difficulty for some, perhaps; for while one can communicate relationally with an older or with a younger man, how can one have a relationship with (someone symbolized as) a bird? In point of fact, of course, the Holy Spirit is a Divine Person, not a bird (note that Scripture says “as a dove”), but what can be our angle of approach? And indeed, we need to ponder this, for the liturgical calendar which we use here at Clear Creek, and which is based upon the traditional calendar, refers to the entire time after Pentecost, as, well, the “Time after Pentecost”. This is extraordinary. Thus, the whole rest of the year, from Pentecost (June 5th this year) until the start of Advent (November 27th) is put by the Church all in the light of the Holy Spirit. All the Sundays are numbered in reference to Pentecost, and are called “Sundays after Pentecost”. How do we, as liturgical beings, reference our own lives to the Holy Spirit, to the One Whom the Nicene Creed calls the Dominum et Vivificantem, the “Lord and Giver of Life”?

According to an elderly monk who had seen some older manuscripts of the life of St. Nicholas of Flue, the 15th century Swiss mystic, it seems that the Saint was once vouchsafed a vision of the Trinity in which the three Divine Persons appeared. There was an older man: God the Father; there appeared alongside him a younger man: God the Son; and then there was...a laughing man, God the Holy Spirit. A laughing man. The Holy Spirit’s plans are big; we never can say that we have Him “figured out”. He is never out-smarted, out-witted, stymied, outflanked. He has everything under control—in our lives and in the Church—and for our good, for our joy which is one of His fruits.³ The liturgical year is lived out in light of the reign of the Holy Spirit, and we have now “accelerated out of the curve” of the great temporal feasts which follow Pentecost (such as Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christi, and the feasts of the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts) into the

¹ Cf. Acts 2:2-3.

² Cf. Matthew 3:16, John 1:32.

³ Cf. Galatians 5:22.

“straightaway” of the rest of the liturgical year. We live and move and have our being in the reign of the Almighty Laughing Man.⁴

On the very last page of his masterpiece, *Orthodoxy*, G.K. Chesterton suggests “with reverence” that, while Christ in the Gospel never hides His tears or His anger, there is one thing which He did restrain: “There was some one thing that was too great for God to show us when He walked upon our earth; and I have sometimes fancied that it was His mirth.” But what if Chesterton was only partly right? That is, what if God’s laughter was revealed not during Christ’s earthly life but rather at (and after) Pentecost? Faith comes by hearing, as St. Paul tells us;⁵ and for those who have ears to hear, maybe it is the same with God’s laughter, revealed on Pentecost, the birthday of the Church. Do we have ears to hear the Holy Spirit laughing with His friends (friends like the good St. Nicholas of Flüe) and also laughing His enemies to scorn?⁶ “The laughter of the heavens,” says Chesterton, “is too loud for us to hear.”⁷ Our Lady, who is both Spouse of the Holy Spirit and “Cause of Our Joy”, will help us learn to listen. In her own way, she too can say, and can help us to say, “God has made laughter for me.”⁸

As this is being written, we just celebrated the 54th anniversary of Pope St. Paul VI’s wonderful encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, of July 25, 1968. It was a clarion call of joy and openness to life in the midst of a world which hates life and joy, or is at least suspicious of life and joy. In response to the Socratic question (which is the same question asked by so many of our floundering contemporaries), “Is there a way we ought to live?”, *Humanae Vitae* says in substance, “Yes, there is. Thou shalt love life. And thou shalt love the Lord and Giver of Life.” This is, by the way, the same answer which the liturgy gives in its own way, for example in the glorious light of Easter. Fr. Paul Marx, the Benedictine priest and monk who founded Human Life International and who was a great preacher of *Humanae Vitae*, used to say: “If you live God’s plan for marriage and family life, the world will laugh at you. But you will laugh last. And you will laugh forever.”⁹ Why is this? Because you will have spent your life (and your love) cooperating with the Laughing Man.

Sister Lucia of Fatima said that the final battle would be for the family, but that the battle was already won.¹⁰ Saint John Henry Newman somewhere reminds us that all who take part with the Apostle Paul are on the winning side.¹¹ Perhaps it could likewise be said that all who take part with the Holy Spirit are on the laughing side. And you will laugh forever, because you have lived holding the hand of the Laughing Man. “There is nothing worth the wear of the winning,” remarked Hilaire Belloc, “but laughter and the love of friends.”¹² But the Holy Spirit is our greatest friend.

So may we all learn to laugh, not as lovers of this world, but as those who laugh last, who laugh with the Saints, who laugh for joy in God—who laugh even to tears.

+ br. Philip Anderson, abbot

⁴ Cf. Acts 17:28.

⁵ Cf. Romans 10:17.

⁶ Cf. Psalm 2:4.

⁷ In the same chapter, “Authority and the Adventurer”, of *Orthodoxy*.

⁸ Genesis 21:6.

⁹ The author heard Fr. Paul Marx say this on many occasions.

¹⁰ See the interview with His Eminence Carlo Cardinal Caffarra on February 16, 2008.

¹¹ See *The Idea of a University*, Part I, Discourse 1, n. 6.

¹² “Dedicatory Ode” in *Verses*, quoted in *The Essential Belloc* (Charlotte NC: Saint Benedict Press, 2010), p. 86.

Exciting news: Our latest recording of chant, under the title *Rorate Cœli: Marian Sounds of Advent*, will be released on September 8th. Preorders can be made by following the links at ClearCreekMonks.org/AdventCD or by calling Sophia Institute Press at (800) 888-9344.