

Infant Jesus of Prague

(Feast day: May 29, 2005)

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DEVOTION TO THE INFANT JESUS

DEVOTION to the Infant Jesus of Prague is devotion and veneration to the Son of God, who chose a stable for a palace, a manger for a cradle, and shepherds for worshippers. He grants special graces to all who venerate His Sacred Infancy.

Known as the “Infant Jesus of Prague”, the image was of Spanish origin. In the 17th century, it was presented by a Spanish princess to a Carmelite monastery in Bohemia. For many years it has been enshrined on a side altar in the Church of Our Lady of Victory in the city of Prague, the present day capital of Czech Republic. It is of wax, and is about nineteen inches high. It is clothed in a royal mantle, and has a beautiful jewelled crown on its head. Its right hand is raised in blessing; its left holds a globe signifying sovereignty.



Shine to the Child Jesus, Prague.
“The Child Jesus is waiting for you
at His Shrine”

Many graces have been received by those who invoke the Divine Child before the original statue so it has been called “The Miraculous Infant Jesus of Prague”. “The more you honour me, the more will I bless you”, this was the promise of the Divine Infant Himself. We read the following in an old book printed in Kempt: “All who approach the miraculous statue and pray there with confidence receive assistance in danger, consolation in sorrows, aid in poverty, comfort in anxiety, light in spiritual darkness, streams of grace in dryness of soul, health in sickness, and hope in despair.” In thanksgiving for the numerous graces and cures received, the miraculous statue at Prague was solemnly crowned on the Sunday after Easter, in 1665. What is said of the original statue may be applied also to the images of the “Little King” which are venerated the world over.

A. Infant Jesus devotion in the life of the Saints

In the beginning of the Church we have evidence of devotion to the Infant Jesus on the part of individual saints. St. Jerome was attracted by the mysteries of the birth and childhood of Jesus. He even went to dwell in Bethlehem living near the cave which Christians showed as being the birth place of Jesus. In the Middle Age, St. Francis of Assisi observed the feast of the birth of the Infant Jesus with great rejoicing. For him, it was the feast of feasts,

because on that day the Son of God became a poor little child. To celebrate the feast of Christmas in a new and original way, he asked one of his friends, Giovanni Vellita, to prepare a manger filled with hay and made wooden images of an ox and an ass. This was to be the first crib where Francis, his Brothers and many of the country folk came together with torches on Christmas night to celebrate the holy feast.

In the sixteenth century St. Teresa of Avila did the most to make the Infant known. From that time onwards the devotion came to be directed to the divine child as King. St. Teresa found great spiritual benefits in meditating on the Child Jesus in the mysteries of His infancy. That devotion to the Child Jesus was later adopted by all the convents of her reform.

St. Therese of the Child Jesus (1873-1897), also known as St. Therese of the Child Jesus or “the Little Flower” was dedicated to the Child Jesus. She is remembered mainly for her “Little way of spiritual childhood”. Her “little way” is based on the simplicity and trust of a child in her relationship with God.

B. Meaning of this devotion

Far back in the Old Testament time the prophet Isaiah spoke of a little “shoot” that was to bud from the stock of Jesus (*Is.11*). The spirit of the Lord would rest on this one of David’s line and at His coming there would be messianic peace throughout the land, for “a little child shall lead them.” The evangelists of the New Testament see this prophecy fulfilled in Christ. He is the true Prince of Peace so long awaited – Son of Mary, who is of David’s line. He is at the same time the eternal Son of God.

God has placed in men’s hearts an instinctive response to the helplessness of childhood. It is His will that this response, as all others, be made to His Son, who “being rich became poor for your sake, in order that by His poverty you might become rich” (*2 Cor.8,9*). God ordained that Jesus should know all life’s stages: infancy, childhood, youth, that He should be like us in everything except sin. Our Lord knew the frailty of babyhood. He had to be nursed and carried about in Mary’s arms, to watch with wondering eyes the world unfolding to His growing intelligence. There is no stage of growth that Jesus has not sanctified for us by living it Himself. Childhood seems to hold a special place in His heart. As a grown man, it was a child He took in His arms to hold up as a model for His disciples. “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” They had asked Him. Christ’s answer was: “I tell you, unless you change and

become like children, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven! Anyone, therefore, who is as unassuming as this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt: 17, 1-5).

This teaching should not be misunderstood. Jesus is not commending childishness, timidity, lack of spiritual maturity. The Infant of Prague is pictured wearing a crown, with a globe in one hand, and this is not without meaning. “The government is on his shoulder”, we sing in the entrance hymn of the third Mass for Christmas Day. The Child of Bethlehem was born with a mission of salvation. Being a follower of Christ demands courage, decisive action, maturity. Coupled with these there must always be humility, candour, confidence – those virtues of childhood. It is these virtues that Jesus recommends. A child accepts himself for what he is. Undismayed by falls and setbacks, he gets up again and begins all over. A child is confident: he trusts his parents, believes what they tell him and asks simply for what he needs. A child is honest; his forthright candour and simplicity in dealing with others can help us to see what our relationship with God and our neighbour should be.

Our Lord often called His followers “little ones”. They were His “little flock” to whom the Father gave the kingdom (Lk.12, 32). This is a title of humility and love, a title suited to the Master who used it, for He is “meek and humble at heart”. Devotion to the Christ Child is a means of appreciating this humility and love, a means of having in us the mind of Christ Jesus, as St. Paul urges (Phil. 2,5).

The Child of Bethlehem was born to die for us, to make us children of God; “to as many as received Him He gave the power of becoming sons of God” (Jn:1, 12). Devotion to Him impresses its own special character on our piety, blending the joy of adoration with a sense of intimacy. This Child is the omnipotent God, yet He is also man in all the weakness of our flesh. He is the immortal God, yet as man He will die for us. The whole of creation is modelled on Him who is the image of the Father, yet He is born on earth and grows up in a small Palestinian village, a little local town of no fame. His Father in heaven is the eternal God, yet His father on earth was a carpenter, a man who worked with his hands and taught his Son to do the same. These contrasts of majesty and humility, of power and weakness, give harmony and depth to the tenderness of our devotion to Christ in His childhood, mingling in our hearts a trusting and affectionate love with total adoration.

THROUGH THE CHILD TO THE FATHER

Devotion such as this to our Lord’s infancy leads us to His Father. Christ came to earth to lead us back to His

Father in heaven. There was always the loving reverence of a child for his father in our Lord. He spoke of Him with filial pride and gravitated towards Him throughout His life. When Mary and Joseph found Him in the temple after their anxious search the boy Christ answered their worried question: “Did you not realize that I must be about My Father’s business?” His last words on the Cross were those of surrender to Him: “Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit.” His Father’s will was food and drink to Christ: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and finishing His work” (Jn. 4, 34). Always He showed utter confidence in His Father: “Father, I know that You always hear Me” (Jn. 11, 42). It was His mission to reveal God the Father’s merciful, steadfast love for us, His estranged children, to reclaim us for Him.

Hand-in-hand with Christ we, too, “go to the Father (Jn: 16, 28). Love for our Infant Saviour teaches us to accept...as He did... our littleness, our poverty as creatures’. It teaches us, as St. Paul was taught, that “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in infirmity” (2 Cor. 12,9). This devotion shows us that God’s power is attracted by our very weakness, for when dealing with our human frailty, God’s power is His mercy. The proud and arrogant, God scatters, “He has put down the mighty from their thrones,” as our Lady sang in her Magnificat. But the little and humble He loves. “He has exalted the lowly” (Lk:1,52)

This devotion to the Christ Child also teaches us a daring confidence in our heavenly Father. He shows His power most of all, as the Collect prayer for the 10th Sunday after Pentecost reminds us, by pardoning and granting mercy. It is from His Son that we learn how much our Father yearns to show us His love and hear our prayers. “If one of you asks his father for a loaf, will he hand him a stone, or for a fish, will he hand him a serpent, or if he asks for an egg, will he hand him a scorpion. Therefore, if you, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give...” (Lk:11, 11-13).

God created us in order to have those to whom He could give. We praise our Father by receiving His gifts. Our Lord narrated to us the great joy of finding a lost sheep. God’s joy in us is the joy of a saviour. We cannot give Him anything He does not already have. He receives something only when we accept his gifts. The joy of our Father in heaven, then, is the same joy of a father on earth when his child asks his aid lovingly and confidently. When our prayer comes to Him through Christ, His beloved Son, He will not fail to hear it, for “in this is the love, not that we have loved God, but that He has first loved us and sent His Son as propitiation for our sins (1 Jn: 4, 10).