



CHAPTER 2: 27-45

The Gospel of Luke

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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.

Luke's gospel is a compilation of various interviews with eye-witnesses and close followers of Jesus (Luke 1:1-4). The author, Luke, probably did not become a Christian until several years after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He is first mentioned (implicitly) in Acts 16:10 (Acts is another book of the New Testament which Luke wrote). He did not, therefore, meet Jesus in the flesh and he himself was not an eye-witness.

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 Luke 2: 27-45

Ver. 27.—*And he came by the Spirit into the Temple.* By the impulse of the Holy Spirit, moved and incited by the Holy Spirit, say Euthymius and Theophylact. And the same Spirit who urged him thither gave him the sign by which he should know Christ among so many infants that were then being offered in the Temple, or, rather, showed Him to him, inwardly prompting him and saying, Behold, this is Christ, whom I promised thee that thou shouldst see before thy death.

Timothy, a priest of Jerusalem, in his *Oratio de Simeone*, thinks that he must have seen the Virgin surrounded with light in the midst of the other women, and by this mark understood her to be the Mother of the Messiah. The Carthusian (Denis), too, says, "Perhaps he saw some divine splendour in the countenance of the child."

Hence we may learn how God guides the mind and the paths of His saints that they may fall in with the good predestined for them by Him. Wherefore we must pray diligently, especially when about to undertake a journey, for this direction, that we

permission, went to them, but soon withdrew quietly to the Temple—God so directing—in order that His parents, though at other times always solicitous about Him, should be unaware of this, and think that He was in the company of His kinsfolk.

Ver. 44.—*But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance,* who had gone on, and with whom Mary and Joseph who were about to follow a little later, would that evening lodge and, as they thought, there find Jesus.

Ver. 45.—*And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking Him.* Jesus having been seen by none of His kinsfolk on the way, His parents understood that He must have remained in Jerusalem; and so they sought Him there with great anxiety. Origen gives the reason, and Theophylact and Titus follow him. "But did they seek Him so anxiously? Did they imagine that the Child had been lost, or had wandered from the way?" Far otherwise, "For this would not have been characteristic of Mary's wisdom (she knew that Jesus was full of wisdom, yea, that He was God), and they could never have thought that the Child was lost, when they knew that He was Divine, but they sought Him lest by any means He might have gone away from them; lest perchance He had left them;" lest He should wish to remain not with them at Nazareth, but with others in Jerusalem, that He might there make haste to begin the ministry of teaching for which He had been sent by God. Origen adds, "They sought Him, lest perchance He might have gone away from them, lest He might have left them and betaken Himself elsewhere—or as seems most probable—lest He might have returned to heaven, to descend from thence when it should please Him . . . but she mourned because she was a mother, and the mother of a Son worthy of her immeasurable love—because He had departed without her knowledge, and quite contrary to her expectation."

S. Antoninus adds that the mother of Jesus feared lest He might have fallen into the hands of Archeläus, the son of Herod the Infanticide, who would slay Him. Euthymius and Francis Lucas think she feared lest Christ might have wandered from the road, since He did not thoroughly know all the way. For, though He knew its turns and windings by His Divine and infused wisdom, yet, according to the *experimental* knowledge which He, as a child, was following, He did not know it. Whether this be correct I leave to theologians to decide.

wisdom.” So also Origen, Theophylact, Euthymius, and Titus on this passage, and S. Ambrose (*de Incarn. Dom. Sact.* cap. vii.). Theophylact explains—Not acquiring wisdom (for what could be more perfect than He who was perfect from the beginning?) but discovering it little by little. For had He manifested all His wisdom whilst he was small in stature, He would have appeared, as it were, monstrous, and as though not really a child, but a phantasm of a child.

And the Grace of God was upon Him. In the Greek *ἐπ’ αὐτόν*. All the favour, goodwill, care, and love of God the Father towards the Child Jesus, as His Son, brooded, as it were, over Him from out of the heavens, to adorn Him with gifts and graces, to guide and dispose Him in all His actions, that all might see that He was ruled, and in all things directed by God, and that His actions were not so much human as Divine. So says Euthymius. In a similar manner it is said of John the Baptist, “And the hand of the Lord was with him,” Luke i. 66.

Ver. 41.—*Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover.* God had commanded that every man should go to the Tabernacle or Temple three times a year, there to adore God publicly and offer Him sacrifices, Exod. xxiii. 14 and Deut. xvi. 16. The Blessed Virgin, although not bound by the law, still, out of devotion, after her return from Egypt, joined her husband, and brought her son with her to the Temple, that she might teach mothers to bring their children, from their tender years, to the Temple, and to worship God. So say Bede, Maldonatus, Jansenius, Francis Lucas, and others. Nor did she fear Archeläus the son of the Infanticide Herod, both because she thought with good reason that, in so large a concourse of Jews, they would be able to escape observation for a few days, and also because she knew that God for whose honour she underwent this risk, had her in His mind and in His keeping. So says S. Augustine (*de Consens. Evang.*, lib. ii cap. x), and S. Luke implies as much in the next two verses. Some however, think, with some probability, that Jesus only went up to Jerusalem in the twelfth year of His age, for in that year Archeläus was exiled by Augustus.

Ver. 42.—*And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.* The Syriac has “*as they had been accustomed on the feast*”—namely, of the Passover.

Ver. 43.—*And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem.* In the Greek, *after they had finished, or gone through, the days*—namely, of the Passover; for this feast was kept for seven days, and S. Luke here implies that Mary and Joseph kept all these days at Jerusalem, though they were not bound by the law to remain so long—*tarried behind in Jerusalem*, there to shed some little ray of His wisdom and Divinity, as though longing to begin the ministry for which His Father had sent Him. For at the age of twelve childhood ends, and youth and perfect judgment begin. So says Bede.

And Joseph and his mother knew not of it, because Jesus asked leave of His parents, who were lingering a little in Jerusalem from motives of devotion or business, to visit His relations, as if he were about to go on with them, and, having obtained

may be preserved from evil, and blessed with good issues; saying with the Psalmist, “O Lord, show me Thy ways and teach me Thy paths,” Ps. xxv. 4 “Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments,” Ps. cxix. 35.

We read, in the life of S. Ephrem, that, when he was entering a certain city, he prayed to God that he might fall in with something that should edify him. A harlot met him, and stared so hard at him, that he asked with great severity why she acted so immodestly; and he received this answer, “Let woman look upon man, for from him was she made, but let man fix his gaze upon the earth, of which he was formed.” The man of God felt that the rebuke was just, and, being deeply touched by it, gave thanks to God because he had received from a harlot a lesson so salutary.

And when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for Him after the custom of the law.

In the Greek *καὶ ἐν τῷ εἰσαγαγεῖν*—when they *had* brought. This sentence is dependent on the next verse.

Ver. 28.—*Then took he Him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said.* Martial says of the dying swan—

“Sweet cadences the swan with voice that fails in death
Uttereth; his own dirge shaped of his own dying breath.”

And so the last utterances of the wise are the sweetest, their powers maturing with years. Again Cicero tells us in the first Tusculan Disputation, “Not without reason are swans dedicated to Apollo, since they seem to have from him a gift of prophecy, by virtue of which, foreseeing the good that there is in death, they die with joy and in the act of singing.” And Simeon here foresees, in this way the joy that through Christ is to come to him after his death, which must soon take place.

Ver. 29.—*Lord, now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word. Lettest thou*—in Greek *ἀπολύεις*, *loosen*, as it were, from the prison-chains of this body, that I may go to the liberty, peace, and rest which the fathers in limbo enjoy. *In peace*, so Tobias, ch. iii. 6; and Abraham, Gen. xv. 15, desired to die in peace. Euthymius here understands by *peace*—

1. The calming of his feelings, which had fluctuated between hope and fear with reference to his seeing Christ.
2. The peace of an intrepid soul that did not fear death.
3. His joy.
4. Peace may be taken to mean that security from the dangers of the world which death brings. S. Cyprian (*Tract. de Moralitate*, c. i) says, “joyful at his approaching death, sure that it must soon come, he took the Child in his

hands, and, blessing the Lord, lifted up his voice and said, Now Thou dost dismiss, &c., . . . thus proving and bearing witness that then is there peace for the servants of God, then an easy and tranquil mind when, delivered from out the whirlpools of the world, we make for the haven of our eternal habitation and our peace.”

Thy word. Thy promise, says Theophylact, when Thou didst promise to prolong my life until I should see Christ; now have I seen Him, therefore let me depart and die.

Symbolically, S. Augustine (*Serm. 20 de Tempore*) says, “Now, Lord, let me depart in peace, because I see thy peace—Christ, Who shall make peace between heaven and earth—between God and angels and men—between men and themselves.”

And Simeon obtained his wish from God, for soon after he went to his rest. S. Epiphanius (*De Prophetarum vita, c. xxiv.*) puts S. Simeon among the prophets. “Simon,” he says, “departed this life full of years and utterly worn out; yet did he not obtain at the hands of the priests the last honours of burial.” He gives no reason, however, why this should have been so, but it is thought that, in openly announcing the advent of Christ, he brought upon himself the envy and hatred of the other priests.

Tropologically, the Church sings this hymn of Simeon every evening in the Office of Compline, for two reasons—First, to admonish the faithful, and especially ecclesiastics, to think upon death, and so live as though they were to die in the evening; and, again, that they may acquire that yearning which Simeon felt to pass away from the vanities and troubles of this life to the true and blessed life in heaven, begging of God to be permitted to depart, and saying with Paul, “I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ.” “Behold how the just man,” says S. Ambrose, “as though shut in within the gross prison-house of the body, wishes to be loosed, that he may begin to be with Christ. But he that will be set free, let him come to the Temple, let him come to Jerusalem, let him wait for the Lord, let him embrace Him with good work as with the arms of faith. Then shall he be set free, that he may not see death, because he has looked upon life.”

Ver. 30.—*For mine eyes have seen thy salvation.* “*Salvation,*” in Greek *σωτήριον*, the word used by the Septuagint as a rendering of the Hebrew *יְשׁוּעָה* *iescua*, safety. “Safety” is used by metonymy for “Saviour.” By “salvation,” then, we are to understand the Saviour Christ, whom the ancient fathers desired to see, but Simeon alone saw, touched, and embraced.

Ver. 31.—*Which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people.* That all the nations of the Gentiles may draw salvation from Christ the Saviour. God has not hidden Christ in a corner of Judæa, but has set Him forth before all men, and soon will announce Him throughout the world by His Apostles, that all who will embrace His faith and law may be saved by Him.

Ver. 32.—*A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel.* Thou hast given Christ the Saviour that He may be a light for the enlightenment of the Gentiles,

Ver. 38.—*And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord.* In Greek *ἀνθωμολογεῖτο*, confessed to God *in her turn*, as though singing in answer to Simeon from the choir set apart for the other sex, praised the Lord, and gave Him thanks for the gift of Christ and His birth.

And spake of Him—of the Lord Christ, whom she had there present. Not only did Anna praise God, but she began to discourse to others of Jesus, asserting Him to be the Christ, and exhorting all to believe in Him.

To all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. The Redeemer Christ, who redeems from sin, death, Satan, and Hell, Israel, that is, the people of the faithful who believe in Him.

Allegorically, Christ, when born, appeared to three groups of persons in three ways—(1) to the shepherds, at the indication of an angel; (2) to the magi, under the guidance of a star; (3) to Simeon and Anna, guided by the Holy Ghost. Again, the shepherds saw Christ, the Magi adored Him, but Simeon and Anna embraced Him. So we first recognise Christ, then adore Him, and then, when we are no longer children in virtue, but old men, embrace Him with arms of love. So Jansenius teaches.

Ver. 39.—*And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth.* And from thence, fearing the Infanticide Herod, they fled, with the Child Jesus, into Egypt. The massacre of the innocents took place, says Euthymius, Toletus, and others, a little after the purification of the Virgin, and about the time of the Passover. S. Augustine, however (*de Consens. Evang.*, lib. ii. cap. v.), Jansenius, and Francis Lucas, think that they fled immediately from Jerusalem, and returning thence nine years after, went back to Nazareth, as S. Luke here says. See Commentary on S. Matt. ii. 13. Moreover, they returned to Nazareth, before their flight, in order to arrange their affairs there, and to prepare what was necessary for the long journey to Egypt. And there was abundance of time for their flight, since the interval between the 2d of February—the date of the Purification and the Passover, when the massacre is said to have taken place—is about two mouths.

Ver. 40.—*And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit.* The Greek, Syriac, and Arabic add “*in spirit,*” and Euthymius explains it that Christ did *not* receive greater spiritual strength *inwardly* day by day, since He was full of grace and the Holy Ghost from the first moment of His conception, but that He exhibited this strength more and more *outwardly* by word and work. The Latin version, the Latin fathers, and the interpreter reject “*in spirit,*” as also Origen and Titus among the Greeks.

Filled with wisdom. The Greek *πληζούμενον* means both *to be being filled* and *to be full*, so as to be equivalent to *πλήρης*. The Arabic renders “was being filled again with wisdom,” the Syriac “was being filled with

called by him Peniel or “Phanuel,” Gen. xxxii. 30.

She was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity—that is, from the time when she became of marriageable age; for infants, who have not yet reached this age, are not properly virgins. Again, from the time of her marriage which she contracted as a virgin. They were wont to marry soon after attaining puberty—in their fifteenth year, the age at which the Blessed Virgin was married to Joseph. Hence we gather (1) that Anna was married once, and that in the first years of her puberty; (2) that, before her marriage, she lived chastely; (3) that, when, after seven years of her married life, her husband died, becoming a widow at the early age of twenty-two, she, with remarkable continency in the flower of her life remained a widow until the age of eighty-four, or, as S. Ambrose interprets, until the eighty-fourth year of her widowhood. If this last interpretation be correct, she must, when she met Christ, have been one hundred and six years old. It seems that God prolonged the life of Anna to this great age with the special design, that she might see and bear testimony to Christ, even as He prolonged that of Simeon.

Ver. 37.—*And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years* (of age, or, according to S. Ambrose, of her widowhood), *which departed not from the Temple*. Not that she lived in the Temple, but she frequented it, and spent much time in it. So think Toletus, Jansenius, and Maldonatus. Others, however, think that she actually dwelt in the Temple; for hard by the Temple there were houses of religious women who served God “night and day”—as there afterwards were of deaconesses in the Christian Church, and still are of nuns. This appears from Exod. xxxviii. 8; 2 Maccabees iii. 20; and 1 Sam. ii. 22. These religious women were some virgins, and some widows, of which latter it seems, that Anna was one, as Canisius (*Marialis*, lib. i. xii) argues.

But served God with fastings and prayers night and day—that is, serving God, as the Arabic renders it. The Greek *λατρεύουσα*, worshipping with “latria”—latria being due to God only. Hence is plain the falsehood of the teaching of the heretics, that fasting is only a mortification of the body, and no worship of God, except in so far as it is understood to mean prayer; for S. Luke here says that Anna served God *both* with fastings *and* prayers. By means of her fastings and prayers she served God “night and day.” S. Chrysostom (*Hom. 42, ad pop.*) eloquently commands prayer made by night: “Behold,” he says, “the company of the stars, the deep silence, the great calm, and admire the dispensation of thy Lord. For then is the mind purer, lighter, and more subtle, more sublime and agile. The darkness itself and the great silence have the power of inducing compunction. And if thou lookest upon the sky, dotted with numberless stars as with eyes . . . bend thy knees, groan, pray thy Lord to be propitious to thee. He is the more appeased by prayers made in the night, when thou makest the time of rest the time of thy struggles. Remember the King, what words he said: “I am weary of my groaning, every night wash I my bed, and water my couch with my tears.” So Christ used to give the day to preaching, the night to prayer, Luke vi. 12. So too S. Paul, Acts xvi. 25, and 2 Tim. i. 3. So S. Anthony, S. Hilarion, and the other anchorites; nay, the Church also, as is plain from the “Nocturns” which monks still chant by night.

enlightening with His faith and worship the Gentiles who know not the true God, and also to be the glory and honour of the Jewish people. The Arabic has, “the light that hath appeared to the nations.” In the same way we have in Ps. cxviii. ii 8, “Open Thou” (that is, *illumine*) “mine eyes.” The allusion here is to the prophecy of Isaiah, made seven hundred years before, in ch. xlii. 6, “I will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles, to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house;” and in xlv. 6, “I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.” In the Mass, and particularly on the Feast of the Purification, we bless candles, light them, and carry them about, thereby (1) symbolising our belief in Christ as the light of the nations, and (2) praying that He will grant us in this life the light of His grace, and in the other life the light of His gladness and His glory. And it is for this reason that these lighted candles are put into the hands of the dying. See Amalarius, Durandus, and others, who have written on the Offices of the Church.

And the glory of Thy people Israel.

1. Because Christ, promised to *their* forefathers by God, took upon Himself the flesh of *their* race, and was a Jew.
2. Because He lived and died in Judæa, His life being made glorious by His teaching, His holiness, and His miracles.
3. Because He first founded His Church in Judæa, the first believers having been Jews, who afterwards gathered the Gentiles to themselves.
4. It was in Judæa that He rose from the dead and gloriously ascended into heaven, sending down thence the Holy Ghost with the gift of tongues. The allusion is to Isaiah xli. 13, “I will place salvation in Zion for Israel, my glory;” and lx. i, “The glory of the Lord is risen upon thee;” and *ibid.* 2, “His glory shall be seen upon thee.”

Ver. 33.—*And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of Him*. Joseph, who is called the father of Christ, not only because he was His foster-father, and was commonly supposed to be His natural father, but also because Christ had been born to him lawfully in wedlock, and of his wife Mary; and this marriage of Joseph with the Blessed Virgin was made and ordained by God for the sake of this progeny. So say S. Augustine (*De Cons. Evang.* c. i), Bede, Jansenius, and others.

Marvelled. For, though they knew that Christ was to be the Saviour of Israel, yet they did not know all that the Holy Ghost was here prophesying about Him by Simeon and Anna—that He was to be a light enlightening all nations, that He should be “for the ruin and for the resurrection of many in Israel,” that a sword should pierce the soul of the Virgin, &c. Besides, even had they known these things, they would have wondered at their being proclaimed aloud with such enthusiasm and ardour.

Ver. 34.—*And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary His mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against.* The form for the sacerdotal blessing is prescribed in Num. vi. 24, “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee,” &c.

Blessed them. That is, Joseph and Mary, not the Child Christ, say Maldonatus, Francis Lucas, and others; for the Child, as his Saviour and his God, he venerated and adored, desiring to be blessed by Him, and not presuming to bless Him. Jansenius, however, thinks that the word “*them*” includes Christ.

And said unto Mary His mother, rather than to Joseph, both because she was the true and natural mother of Jesus, while Joseph was only nominally His father, and also because Joseph seems to have died before the thirtieth year of Christ, when the things here foreshadowed were accomplished, so that the Blessed Mary alone experienced them in herself. To her alone, then, did Simeon here foretell both the happiness and the adversity which are to befall Christ and her, that in happiness she might not be lifted up too much, nor be cast down in her adversity.

Set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel. For *fall* the Greek has *πτῶσιν*, and so the Arabic. The allusion is to Isa. viii. 14, “And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel” (that is, “for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem;” and in xxviii. 16, “Behold, I lay in Sion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation;” the latter text is quoted, against the unbelieving Jews by S. Paul, Rom. ix. 33, by S. Peter, 1 Pet. ii. 6, and Acts iv. 11, and by Christ Himself, Matt. xxi. 42. Christ was laid and placed in the new, that is the Christian Church as a foundation and a corner-stone, that upon Him He might build all those that believed in Him, and of them build up the spiritual edifice of the Church, as He had promised to Adam, Abraham, Moses, and the other patriarchs and prophets. God did this *directly* with the intention of drawing all the Israelites to the faith of Christ, that He might so bring them into His Church and save them; but He *foresaw* that a great part of them would, by reason of their wickedness, speak against Christ when He came, and would strike against Him as on a stone of offence, and that so they would be broken, and fall into ruin both temporal and eternal. Yet He would not change His resolve of sending Christ, but would permit this rebellion and speaking against Him on the part of the Jews in order that it might be the occasion for S. Paul and the Apostles to transfer the preaching of the Gospel from them who resisted it to the Gentiles; and that so, instead of a few Jews, numberless nations might believe in Christ, be *built in* to Him in the Church, and be saved, as S. Paul shows at length in Rom. xi. Such was the design of God by which He set Christ as the corner-stone of the Church, to be *indirectly* “*for the fall,*” but *director* “*for the rising again of many in Israel.*” By *fall* is meant the destruction of the Jews who rebelled against Christ; by rising again, the salvation of those who believe in Him: for they that rebelled against Christ fell from faith into faithlessness, from the hope of salvation into despair and reprobation, from heaven into hell; but they who believe in Him have risen by his grace from the sins in which they lay prostrate to a new life of virtue and grace, looking for the hope of glory. Such is the interpretation of S. Augustine, Bede, Theophylact, Euthymius, Toletus, and

His words and works, although they concealed their desire to slay Him.

6. The fullest and most obvious explanation is that which makes the “*that*” expressive both of the purpose and its attainment, and refers it both to the sword and the words of the preceding verse, “This child is set for the fall,” &c. That is to say, that the Scribes and Pharisees, who, like the heretics of to-day, appeared to be the upholders of justice and truth, may show the world how antagonistic they are to the true Messiah and to justice, and what evil designs they cherish against Him. For, before the advent of Christ, they were in hopes that He would come with pomp and with wealth, even as Solomon, so that they might be raised by Him in honour and riches; but when they saw Him in His humility and poverty opposing Himself to their ambition and avarice, and publicly rebuking them for it, they set Him at nought and opposed Him, secretly scheming to bring upon Him the destruction which they at length actually compassed. Then was it revealed who in Israel were just, for these loved Christ sincerely and with constancy; and who unjust, for these persecuted and slew Him. So S. Augustine (*Ep.* 59), Bede, Jansenius, Maldonatus, Francis Lucas, and others. The explanation of Toletus also tallies with this to some extent.

Ver. 36.—*And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity.* She was an old woman, so that she was prompted by no youthful fervour, but bore testimony to Christ in a mature and grave manner. “Anna” in Hebrew signifies grace—of which Anna was full. The name “Grace” is still often borne by women, and was the name of her who at Firando, in Japan, generously met a glorious death, together with her four children and her whole household, for the faith of Christ.

A Prophetess—that is, a teacher, says Francis Lucas—one who instructed the young women in the law of God and in piety; for at this time the Jews had no prophets who foretold future events. But that Anna foretold the hidden things of the future is clear from v. 38, where she prophesied about Christ. For, though the Jews had no prophets until the time of Christ, yet God raised up prophets at that time, such as John, Zachary, Elizabeth, and Simeon. Hence S. Ambrose says, “The birth of the Lord received testimony not only from the angels, from the shepherds, and from His parents, but also from the aged and good; every age, and both sexes, and the wondrous nature of events, build up our faith. A virgin conceives—the barren brings forth—the dumb speaks—Elizabeth prophesies,—the wise man adores—the that is shut up in the womb exults—the widow confesses—the just man is waiting for His coming.”

The daughter of Phanuel. Phanuel was a well-known man at that time. “Phanuel” in Hebrew signifies “the face of God”—his daughter is “Anna”—grace; for grace proceeds from the face and from the mouth of God, and is breathed into the faithful. The place where Jacob saw God face to face, was

Blessed Virgin, but only Christ. But, in torturing Christ, they tortured His Virgin Mother, just as he who tortures the body tortures, the soul, for she was more closely joined to Christ in feeling than the body to the soul. Besides, the Jews persecuted all the relatives of Christ, as they did His apostles and disciples, out of hatred of Him. S. Bridget (*Serm. Angelic. cc. xvii., xviii.*) gives a pathetic account of the strength of this sword of the Virgin's sorrow.

Symbolically, S. Bernard (*Serm. xxix.*) interprets this sword or dart as love: for where there is sorrow there too is love; in love there is no living without sorrow, nor in sorrow without love. "The chosen arrow," he says, "is the love of Christ, which not only pierced, but pierced through and through, the soul of Mary, so that it left in her virginal breast not the smallest part void of love, but with all her heart, and all her soul, and all her strength, she loved. And truly, again, it penetrated through her to come to us, that of that fullness we might all receive, and she might be the Mother of that love whose father is the love of God. . . . And in her whole self did she receive the vast sweet wound of love. Happy shall I think myself if sometimes I may feel pricked with but the very tip of that sword's point, that my soul too may say, I am wounded with love."

That the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

An obscure sentence, and difficult of interpretation.

1. S. Hilary, who by "sword" understands the Day of Judgment, easily settles the 2.difficulty. The sword, he interprets, shall dissect and lay open the hearts of men—even of the Blessed Virgin. This is the force of the words of the Apocalypse about Christ, "And from His mouth there went forth a sharp two-edged sword" (c. i. v. 16).
2. Eucherius, taking "sword" as the spirit of prophecy, interprets that this sword was given to the Blessed Virgin that she might know the secret thoughts of men.
3. Euthymius—Many, seeing the miracles and the wisdom of Jesus, thought within themselves that He had descended from Heaven, and was not the son of Mary; but, when they saw her at the cross of Christ, mourning and in such tribulation, they 4.abandoned this idea, believing that she who felt His sorrows so deeply must be His mother indeed.
4. S. Augustine (*Ep. 59, near the end*)—"By the Lord's Passion both the plots of the Jews and the infirmity of the disciples were made manifest," for they forsook Christ and fled. This is apposite with respect to the Jews, but not so applicable as to the disciples, for the latter did not meditate flight beforehand.

Toletus interprets concisely—The sword that shall pierce thy soul, O Virgin, shall be the occasion of revealing the thoughts of many hearts that before lay hidden. For, long before Christ was slain, the leaders of the Jews had the intention of slaying Him, but dared make no attempt against Him, for fear of the people. But then the Jews had already before the Passion made manifest their thoughts about Christ, by cavilling at

many others; indeed, so Christ Himself, S. Peter, and S. Paul interpret in the places quoted above. S. Gregory of Nyssa also interprets "*ruin*" as the devastation of Judæa and Jerusalem by Titus; for this calamity came upon them because they set at nought and crucified Christ.

Symbolically, Theophylact says that Christ was set "for the ruin and the resurrection of Israel," that is, of the penitent soul that sanctifies itself by the grace of Christ, because this grace brings it to pass that pride, gluttony, and lust fall in the soul, while humility, abstinence, and chastity rise up in it.

And for a sign which shall be spoken against. In Greek *εἰς σημεῖον ἀντιγόμενον*, a sign of contradiction or of contention, as the Syriac and Arabic render it. Tertullian (*de Carne Christi, c. xxiii.*) renders it "for a contradictory sign."

The question arises, What is this sign?

1. Maldonatus and Francis Lucas say that Christ was set as an archer's target at which the unbelieving Jews and Scribes hurled not only evil words with the tongue, but also maleficent weapons with the hand. This target was one of *contradiction*, because the Scribes strove together and contradicted one another about striking and piercing it. So that Simeon alludes to Lam. iii. 12, "He hath set me as a mark for the arrow, he hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins."
2. S. Basil, Bede, and Theophylact understand the sign of the cross, making it refer to Isa. xi. 10, "In that day there shall be a root of Jesse which shall stand for an ensign for the people" The Hebrew word translated "sign" is, *סִימָה*, a *standard*, rendered by the Septuagint *σημειον*, which is the word here used by Luke. Christ, when lifted up on the Cross, is to be a standard-bearer, and shall raise the banner of the Cross, to which He will draw all the faithful as His soldiers to fight against Jews, Mohammedans, Pagans, and other impious soldiers of the devil, who contradict the Cross of Christ and fight hard against it. So Toletus interprets.
3. The most obvious interpretation is that Simeon is alluding to Isa. viii. 18, "Behold I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel." The wondrous, strange, and hitherto unheard of birth of Christ from a virgin is here called a "sign" or "wonder," and His Divine teaching, life, death, resurrection, and miracles, by which He clearly showed Himself to be the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Against this "sign" of Christ not only do Jews and heathens speak with the tongue, but bad Christians also by their wicked lives. So Origen and Jansenius. S. Basil, commenting on "Behold a virgin shall conceive" (Isa. vii.), favours this view. Tertullian also (*De Carne Christi*) makes the allusion to Isa. vii., "Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign: Behold a virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son. We recognise, then, the contradictory sign, the conception

and child-bearing of the Virgin Mary, of which these academicians say she bore a child and bore no child, she was a virgin and no virgin." And these cavillers he answers, "She bore a child in that she did so of her own flesh; and she did not bear, in that she bore not of the seed of man. And she was a virgin for man, not a virgin for childbirth."

Symbolically, Cajetan says, "Christ was the sign of the reconciliation of the human race with God." And Dionysius, "The sign of the covenant between God and man, that the flood was no more to be brought upon the earth." Others take "sign" as that with which God's sheep are marked. Christians are to be marked with the faith of Christ, His baptism, and His character as a sign, that they may be distinguished from infidels. Baradius thinks that the allusion is to the brazen serpent which Moses set up, for a sign, that those who looked at it might be cured of the serpent's bite, Num. xxi.

Ver. 35.—*Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.* "Sword," in the Arabic version, *lance*; the Greek *ζομφαία* means both *sword* and *lance* or *dart*.

What is this sword?

1. Some understand doubt in her faith; that the Blessed Virgin, when she saw Christ suffering so fearfully from the violence of the Jews, and dying on the Cross, doubted as to whether He would rise again, as He had foretold. In this sense speak Origen (*Hom.* xvii.), Titus, Theophylact, and others. This, however, is an error, for such a feeling were unworthy [of] the Deipara, and that she experienced it is counter to the common sense of the Church. For so the Blessed Virgin would have sinned by unbelief. Indeed, the authors cited are sometimes explained as meaning by "doubt," admiration, mental perturbation, and inward questionings.

2. S. Eucherius of Lyons (*Hom. in Dominicam*), understands the sword of the Spirit—the word of God, *i.e.*, the spirit of prophecy, as who should say, The sword of the prophetic spirit shall pass through thy soul, O Mary, to reveal to thee the secrets of Holy Scripture and the hidden thoughts of men, as in Cana of Galilee when thou shalt say, "Whatsoever He telleth you, do it," knowing that Christ will command them to draw the water which He is to turn into wine. So it is that the Apostle says in Heb. iv. 12, "The word of the Lord is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." And S. Ambrose understands it of the prudence of the Virgin, who was not without knowledge of heavenly secrets.

3. It has been supposed by some, as Amphilochius (*Hom. De Occurs. Dom.*) bears witness, that the Blessed Virgin really received the crown of martyrdom by the sword, but this is contrary to all belief in history.

4. The true interpretation of "*sword*" here is with reference to the sufferings inflicted on Christ, or rather contradiction spoken of a little before; for the *contradiction* of the

tongue is spoken of in Scripture as a sword, as in Ps. lvii. 4, "The sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword;" and Ps. lxiv. 3, "Who whet their tongues like a sword;" and Ps. cv. 18, "The sword hath passed through His soul" (Vulg.) This sword, then, is twofold. (1.) The sword of the tongue. For the Blessed Virgin, hearing the insults, calumnies, and blasphemies with which Christ was assailed by the Jews, even when He was crucified, suffered intense tortures, just as though a sword had been struck through her soul. (2.) The sword of iron - the nails and other torments which not only pierced the body and soul of Christ, but also pierced the soul of the Virgin. Just as when a man stabs with a sword at two persons who are next each other so as to kill the one and pierce and wound the other. Such is the interpretation of S. Augustine (*Ep.* 59, *ad* 4. *Paulinum*), Sophronius (*Hom. de Assumptione*), Francis Lucas, Jansenius, Toletus, Barradius, and others.

How great was the torture inflicted by this sword we may gather, with Toletus, from the fact that it was her Son Who suffered, whom the Mother of God loved more than herself, so that she would far rather have suffered and been crucified herself. Love is the measure of sorrow. *Secondly*, from the severity of Christ's torments and the wideness of their extent; for He suffered the most fearful agonies in all His senses and all His members, and all this the Blessed Virgin endured also by her sympathy with Him. *Thirdly*, the dignity of the Personage who suffered; for the Blessed Virgin pondered deeply the fact that this was the True God, the Messiah, and Saviour of the World. *Fourthly*, the long duration of His sufferings; for Christ suffered all His life long, until He breathed forth His Soul on the Cross. *Fifthly*, His loneliness; for He suffered alone, deserted by His Apostles and all His friends, by the angels, and by God Himself, so that He cried aloud, "My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?" For, though the Blessed Virgin stood by Him and suffered with Him, yet did the Mother's anguish but add a new pang to the Son's torments, and this grief again had its echo in the Mother's soul.

So it is that S. John of Damascus (*de Fide*, lib. iv. cap. xv.) remarks, "The pains she had escaped in childbirth she bore at the time of His Passion, so that she felt her bosom torn asunder by reason of the depth of her maternal love." It is for this reason that the doctors teach that the Blessed Virgin was a martyr, and more than a martyr. As Christ, in His Passion, was tormented more than all the martyrs, so too was the Blessed Virgin by her sympathy with Him; and by this torment she would have been overcome and would have died had not God preserved her life by His special support. As, therefore, S. John the evangelist, who was put into the vessel of boiling oil, is a martyr, because this suffering would, in the natural course, have resulted in his death, if God had not preserved his life by a miracle, so also is the Blessed Virgin.

It may be objected to this that the Jews did not wish to torture or kill the