



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem ©
* Knights of Malta *

Chancellor's Update

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Meaning of Passage

As we were leaving the third Mass of Christmas morning, we overheard a few people trying to interpret the meaning of the day's gospel. So we introduced ourselves and began to explain the part they did not understand from the Fathers of the Church.

John 1, V. 13. *Who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Augustine: Believers therefore, as they become sons of God and brothers of Christ, are indeed born; for if they are not born, how can they become sons? But the sons of men are born of flesh and blood, and of the will of man, and from the embrace of spouses. How the former are born he tells us, *who are born of blood*, as from the male and female. For from the blood of male and female are men born. Bede: We must know that in the Scriptures the word *blood*, when written in the plural, is wont to signify sin; hence *Deliver me from blood, O God* (Ps. 50. 16).

Augustine, Tr. 2 in John: In the words that follow: *Nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man*, the Evangelist places the word *flesh* to stand for the female, because Adam said of the rib, when Eve was made: *This now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh* (Gen. ii. 23). *Flesh* therefore stands for the wife, as sometimes spirit stands for the husband; because it is his part to command, hers to obey. What is worse than a house where the woman has dominion over the man? These therefore *are born*, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, *but of God*. Bede: The carnal birth of every single man arises from the embrace of spouses; the spiritual, from the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Chrysostom: The Evangelist records this, so that contemplating the humility and baseness of the first birth, which is by blood, and the will of the flesh, and coming to see the greatness of the second birth, which is by grace, and in honour, we may thus receive a deep enlightenment, and one worthy of His gift Who has begotten us, and henceforth manifest an earnest zeal.

V. 14. *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*

And the Word was made flesh. Augustine, Tr. 2 in John: When he had said, *Who are born of God*, lest we be overcome, and fearful, at so tremendous a favor, and lest it seem a thing incredible to us that men should be born of God; and as it were reassuring us, he says: *And the Word was made Flesh*. Why then be astonished that men are born of God? See here how God Himself is born of man.

Chrysostom, *Hom. 10 in John*: Or again: When he had declared that they who received Him *were born of God*, he gives the reason of this honour, namely, that *the Word was made Flesh*. For God's own Son became the Son of man that He might make the sons of men children of God. But when you hear that the Word was made Flesh, be not troubled. For He changed not His own Substance into flesh: to think so would be a grave irreverence; but, remaining what He was, *He took upon Himself the form of a servant*.

There are those who say that all that had to do with the Incarnation is but a seeming, and without reality. To meet this blasphemy he uses the words, *was made*; desiring by this to express, not a change of substance, but the taking to himself of true flesh. If they should then say: since God is Omnipotent, why could He not change Himself into flesh? Let us reply that change of any sort is far from His Perfect simplicity; for in Him change would be towards what is less, and He would not then be God.

Augustine, *De Trin.* 15, 11: As our word becomes in a manner the voice of the body, assuming that by which it is made manifest to mens' ears, so the Word of God becomes flesh, taking that form in which It likewise is made visible to mens' eyes. And as our word becomes a voice, yet is not changed into a voice, so the Word of God is indeed made flesh: but let no one say that It is changed into flesh: by taking on that form, not by being changed into it, does our word become a voice, and the Word of God become flesh.

From the Acts of the Council of Ephesus: Even the discourse we utter, in which we use varying tongues, is an incorporeal discourse; not visible to the eye, or palpable by the hand. But when the discourse has clothed itself in words and literary form, it is visible; it may be comprehended by the eye, and touched by the hand. So likewise does the Son of God become visible, Who, by His Nature, is Invisible; and what by nature is incorporeal, is now found palpable.

Alcuin: Since we also believe that an incorporeal soul is joined to a body, so that from the two one man is made, we may readily believe, that the divine incorporeal substance is joined to a soul in a body, in the Oneness of a Person; so the Word is not changed into flesh, nor flesh into the Word; since body is not changed into soul, nor soul into body. Theophylactus: Apollinaris of Laodicea stated a heresy regarding this passage. For he said that Christ did not possess a rational soul, but only flesh, having in the place of the soul His Own Divinity, Which directed and governed the body.

Augustine, *contra Arianos* 9: If they attack on this ground, that it is written, that *the Word was made flesh*, but that there is no mention of a soul, let them understand that *flesh* stands for *man*; as in figurative language the whole is represented by the part; just as it is said: all flesh shall come to thee (Ps. lxiv. 2); again that: *by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified* (Rom. iii. 20), which was more clearly said in another place: *Man is not justified by the works of the Law* (Gal. ii. 16). Accordingly, it was said: *The Word was made Flesh*, as if he had said: The Word was made man. (Taken from the Catena Aurea for the third Mass of Christmas Day)

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