

DOLOROSA

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The Birth of the Infant Jesus in the Cave of Bethlehem

A Meditation by Saint Alphonsus Liguori

The edict of the Roman emperor having gone forth, by which everyone was to go and enroll himself in his own country, Joseph and his spouse Mary departed, to go and enroll themselves in Bethlehem. O God, how much must the Blessed Virgin have suffered in this journey, which was of four days, over mountainous roads, and in the winter, with cold, wind, and rain!

As soon as they arrived there, the time of her delivery was at hand; wherefore Joseph went about the town looking for lodging, where Mary could bring forth her Child. But, because they are poor, they are driven away by everyone; they are even driven from the inn where the other poor had been received. They went away therefore from the town in the night; and having found a cave, Mary entered in there. But Joseph said to her: "My spouse, how can you pass the night in this damp, cold place? Do you not see that this is a stable for animals?" But Mary answered:

"O Joseph, it is nevertheless true that this shed is the royal place in which the Son of God chooses to be born."

And behold, the hour of the birth being come, whilst the Holy Virgin was kneeling in prayer, she saw all at once the cave illuminated by a brilliant light; she cast her eyes upon the ground, and behold the Son of God already born, a tender infant, crying and trembling with cold; whereupon she first adores Him as her God; she then places Him in her bosom, and wraps Him in the poor swaddling clothes which she had with her; and, finally, she lays Him on a little straw in the manger. Behold, how the Son of the Eternal Father chose to be born for love of us.

Saint Mary Magdalene of Pazzi says that souls enamored of Jesus Christ ought to kneel in spirit at the feet of the Holy Child, and perform for Him the same office that the beasts of the stable of Bethlehem did, which warmed Jesus with their breath; they should, therefore, warm him also with the sighs of love.

Affections and Prayers

O my adorable Infant! I should not have the boldness to prostrate myself at Thy feet, if I did not know that Thou Thyself invitest me to approach Thee. I am he who by my sins have caused Thee to shed so many tears in the stable of Bethlehem. But since Thou camest upon earth to forgive repentant sinners, forgive me also; for I repent with all my heart of having despised Thee, my Savior, my God, who art so good, and hast loved me so much. Thou dost dispense great graces to so many souls during this sacred night; do Thou, therefore, console my soul also. The grace I desire is the grace to love Thee from this day forth with my whole heart. O, inflame me wholly with Thy holy love! I love Thee, my God, become a child for me. O, permit me not ever to cease from loving Thee. O Mary, my Mother, thou canst do all things by thy prayers; I ask thee only this, to pray to Jesus for me.

