

3rd Sunday after Epiphany (why is atheism rising?)

"The Lord has reigned, let the earth rejoice!" ... "the Gentiles shall fear Thy name, O Lord, and all the kings of the earth Thy glory."

1. Today, Jan 25th is normally the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul as well as the octave of the Chair of St. Peter in Rome, a time to pray for the conversion of sinners (time to pray for Unity: one flock, one shepherd). As everyone knows, St. Paul was a zealous Jewish pharisee who persecuted the Catholic Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, shortly after Her visible birth on Pentecost. He had St. Stephen stoned to death... and was on his way to Damascus to arrest and attack the Christians living there. But, by the grace of God, he was knocked off his horse ... blinded by God as he approached the city until he received the saving and cleansing laver of Baptism. Then, he became the vessel of election, the Apostle to the Gentiles.
2. It seems to be commonly held and agreed upon by most of the fathers, saints and doctors that St. Paul's prophesies of the end times, found especially in his letters to the Thessalonians, indicate how the Jewish people will convert *en masse* toward the end of world. In the meantime, however, they (in general, as a people) remain under a veil and are as St. Paul was on the road to Damascus... they are blinded. Thus, they need our prayers.
3. This mysterious reality (the Jewish conversion) is wonderfully represented in this Ancient Latin Mass because the priest's paten represents the Jews. The Bread on the paten is the matter that will be transubstantiated into the Body of Christ through the words of consecration. This very bread will become the Christ—Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. So, the paten carrying the bread symbolizes how the Hebrew People, most notably, the tribe of Judah, gave us the Christ... since He is of the line and very flesh of David.
4. After the chalice is unveiled at the Offertory, the paten is held-up by the priest in such a way that only four fingers touch it... thereby symbolizing the four horns of the Old Testament altar. Then the priest briefly looks up to heaven but then down again as he quietly breathes the prayer *Suscipe, sancte, Pater...* over the bread... which speaks of the priest's "own countless sins, offenses, and negligences, and for all here present; as also for all faithful Christians, living and dead..." This is very similar to what the priests of old would do with sin offerings on the altar in the tabernacle... just before offering it up as a sacrifice.

5. After he is finished with this offering, the priest makes the sign of the Cross over the place where he then slides the offered bread onto the corporal and puts the paten half-way underneath it. After preparing the chalice, he places the purificator over the other half of the paten such that it becomes completely veiled. In a Solemn High Mass, the subdeacon receives the paten to place it under the humeral veil.
6. Why this veiling of the paten? This is because the paten represents the Jewish people. They gave us the Christ... BUT as predicted by St. Simeon in the Temple, Our Lord and His Cross are a sign of contradiction... causing the rise and fall of many in Israel. Having turned away from Him, as St. Paul himself says, these same Jewish people are now under a veil... blinded! He ought to know!
7. But it does not end there. Some time after the Consecration—the representation of the Passion and Death of our Savior—the *Pater Noster* is sung after which time the paten comes back ... it is taken out from under the corporal or given back from the subdeacon, and then... it is cleansed with the purificator before being placed under the now Consecrated Sacred Host, which is then broken at the *Fractio*.
8. Why this return of the paten? This is the conversion of the Jews. At some point they will accept the Christ as the Son of God, the Lamb that was slain but lives eternally, returned from the dead. They will be cleansed of their sin, the kiss of peace given to them, and the Savior will once again find rest in them as a people. Oh! how wonderful is this Mass... filled with mysteries and sound doctrine to edify us anew each time it is offered!
9. May the prayer of Pope Pius XI be ours too... who praying to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, said of the Jewish people: "Turn Thine eyes of mercy towards the children of that race, once Thy chosen people. Of old, they called down upon themselves the Blood of the Savior; may It now descend upon them as a laver of redemption and of life."
10. In keeping with this theme of conversion, sadly, in these very trying times, we are now seeing the rise of atheism... the spreading of unbelief throughout the world. This movement away from our Christian roots is producing a sort of social-religious vacuum in its wake. But as Aristotle rightly proved, there is no such thing as a vacuum. And this truth holds not just in physics but on all levels... economic, social, cultural, religious. As the West continues down the path of its insanity toward unbelief and embracing pseudo-science as its god, the vacuum is readily filled by

Islam and the occult (New Age). They seem to be the quickest vacuum fillers. Thus, the book stores and libraries are piling up with lots of books on the occult and Wicca while the Muslims are building more and more Mosques.

11. But let's turn to St. Athanasius to see a little more clearly why this is happening. In his profound work on the Incarnation, he explains that there are at least three ways man can come to know God without fail. First, God "provided the works of creation ...as means by which the Maker might be known" [...] man "could look up into the immensity of heaven, and by pondering the harmony of creation come to know its Ruler, the Word of the Father, Whose all-ruling providence makes known the Father to all" (ch. 3, §12). Why are there so many atheists today? Why so much unbelief? According to the demigods of modern science, everything in the heavens has a natural explanation! Instead of the harmony of the Created Universe guided by Divine Providence, all we now seem to know is various groupings of atoms and molecules that are always hitting each other by chance, it seems (all is relative and without order from above)... to produce the various effects we see. All is based on balls of various sizes, collisions and big bangs and explosions. St. Athanasius would not be surprised that modern man is now careening toward his own collisions and explosions of war both on the inside and the outside... Once he stated: "If the movement of the universe were irrational, and the world rolled on in random fashion, one would be justified in disbelieving what we say. But if the world is founded on reason, wisdom and [true] science, and is filled with orderly beauty, then it must owe its origin and order to none other than the Word of God."
12. We know from many sources: Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition and Magisterial teachings that in the beginning God created things in perfect harmony ... that man was in harmony inside himself when he was made from the slime of the earth and placed in the Garden of Eden. Then man fell... and disorder entered into him and the world around him too.
13. Yet, even after the fall of Adam and Eve, the saints show us by word and example that man is capable of regaining much of his original harmony. By analogy, the saint is like a steam engine that builds up much pressure from the fire of God's indwelling love and well-ordered passions... with great power resulting... such that the engine (the saint) is capable of moving large trains, filled with souls for heaven. But now, all that about love of God and neighbor... about self-control and virtue... well-

ordered passions is ridiculed and dismissed. Now, we are into venting... and letting off our steam... and experimenting with sin! Not just as individuals but as nations... The result? Power is lost... souls are scandalized, hurt or killed... finally damned. Atheism rises... Wars break out more and more. Why is atheism on the rise? Because the harmony of the universe has been replaced with a deficient scientific model.

14. Second, St. Athanasius says, "if this [reflecting upon God's Creation] was beyond them, they could converse with holy men, and through them learn to know God, the Artificer of all things, the Father of Christ..." Why are there so many atheists today? Because there are so few holy men! There are fewer and fewer faithful Catholics who fully embrace and teach the Holy Catholic Faith as it has always been held. Now it seems our holy men are those who most successfully water down the Catholic faith in order to reconcile the Church with the world. The salt has lost its taste, and is being thrown out to be trodden under foot! We are being trodden upon!
15. What is more, the holy men of old have been replaced by new leaders... namely by lettered professors, scientists and philosophers... all rationalists... sad to say, even sports heroes and Hollywood stars are given demigod status. When we look into these people's lives, we inevitably find them filled with corruption without any conversions. No matter, these people say very enticing things... these people say what is just right for itching ears living a decadent life.
16. What is more, when holy men do rise up, they are quickly suppressed ... sidelined, blackballed, belittled, called names by many, undergoing a sort of stoning not unlike what Paul did to Stephen. Why is atheism on the rise? We have few men among us truly seeking holiness.
17. Third, St. Athanasius says, "Or else... they could [come to know God by] the law and the prophets... a sacred school of the knowledge of God and the conduct of the spiritual life for the whole world." In other words, they could study the sources of the faith... Sacred Scripture, Tradition and the Teachings of the Church. This has truly converted countless souls. But wait, these too have now been laid aside as no longer relevant for our times while Biblical scholars and various modernist theologians have gutted the Sacred Scriptures and Doctrines of our Faith of all meaning.

18. To replace these sources of Divine Truth we now have our constitutions, declarations of the rights of man, various charters! This is even depicted on the façade of the US Supreme Court building where the Tablets of Moses as well as the Tiara and Cross of the Pope are thrown aside... displaced and replaced by modern republican laws and ideals. Why is there so much atheism? Divine revelation has been rejected, or at least gutted and explained away... Thus this saying of St. Thomas Aquinas: "*human wisdom is always set up against—in opposition to—the Divine wisdom, WHEN men consider human learning to be paramount in importance, and WHEN they endeavor to make the truths of faith subservient to the teaching of human sciences. This error is the origin of all heresy*" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Apology for Religious Orders*, chapter XII).

19. Since all three of these ways (looking at God's ordered and harmonious Creation, seeking the guidance and example of holy men, studying God's Divine Revelation)...shown by this great Father and Doctor of the Church, have been displaced and replaced by something of fallen man's imagination and the devil's crafty designs... atheism is now on the rise, with hell seeming to get the upper hand. Modern man is now blinded more than ever... unable to see His Creator in the wonders of His Creation; good and holy men are being suppressed and even stoned to death in some way or other; and, many heretical and pseudo-scientific ideas (most notably evolution) have become as gospel truths.

20. A time is coming, however, when this arrogant modern man will be unhorsed... God will not allow this to go on forever... We must suffer this with patience and do what St. Stephen did with St. Paul... defend the faith as it has always been known and loved... and be willing to suffer for it, even to the point of shedding our blood. In the meantime, let us take comfort in the fact that God will put an end to it when the time is right. This too shall pass. The Church will be completely victorious.

21. We can make sure we are numbered among Her victorious members by studying Creation as St. Athanasius recommends, by seeking true holiness to become that steam engine that retains its pressure...and power... leading many to heaven, and by studying God's Divine Revelation...found in the Sacred Deposit of the Faith.