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***Monthly Spiritual Message***

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**THE DIVINE PLAN**

From our reading of the gospels and the epistles, especially St Paul's, we learn that Jesus Christ, the God-man, was the being first thought of and first willed by God when God decided to make his goodness known by creating. We find a firm foundation for our conviction in Colossians 1:15-20. I ask you, please, to read the text before you proceed.

Clearly, St Paul is talking here about God the Son made man, the historical person Jesus Christ. God the Father decided that Jesus would be the one through whom and for whom all creation should exist. But the historical person Jesus who was born in a certain year and died in a certain year, St Paul says, is the head of a vast body extending through all space and time until the last day, and that is the whole Christ, the Church. God planned all creation to contribute to the whole Christ. When the whole reaches his full stature, when the Church reaches the fullness of love that God planned for it in the first place, then Jesus will present himself, the whole of his Church, to God the Father, and all creation will have achieved the purpose that God made it for.

The order of priorities in God's plan is one thing; the order in which he realized his plan in creation is another. In fact, it was realized in the reverse order of priorities. This isn't surprising; it is the way in which any intelligent person carries out a plan - the goal is always the last thing to be realized, after the preparations.

We can fail to recognize God's plan in creation if we notice only the order of events in time. From man's limited viewpoint, there first appeared creatures, then a man and a woman, then they sinned, then Jesus Christ was promised and lived, and continues to live on in his Church. It would seem from the order in which things happened that his coming was conditioned by human sin, and that his becoming man at all was merely an emergency measure to repair something that went very wrong in God's plan for creation.

But, in the light of St Paul's revelation to the Colossians, which gives us God's point of view, Jesus Christ must be seen as chosen by God the Father as the end-product of creation, before any creatures were actually made. The whole Christ will comprise all those who will eventually make up the Church.

St Paul describes the place of Jesus Christ in God's plan again in his epistle to the Ephesians 1:3-11, which I ask you to read and meditate on.

From these most precious revelations in Ephesians and Colossians, we see that the central place Jesus Christ has in God's plan for the universe involves the following:

- § All creatures exist for the sake of Jesus Christ;
- § All are made in the likeness of Jesus;
- § He is the appointed mediator between God the Father and all creatures.

- § He is the head of a body, and he gathers all things into unity in that body, the Church. (The Catholic Church as we know it must constantly strive to be identified with that ultimate Church).
- § He is the supreme king and Lord of all, appointed so by God the Father; and the eternal priest, offering the worship of all creation to the Father. He is the adequate adorer and glorifier of the Father;
- § Only through him can we human beings come to know the Father and reach him;
- § He is the perfect model of our loving response to the Father.

We who are searching to understand the meaning of our human existence will find it, fully and adequately, when we grasp with our mind and our heart all that Jesus Christ means with regard to all creation. This is what Jesus meant to St Francis, so much so that this vision of reality has been called Franciscan. It would be equally correct to call it Pauline (as we have seen, it was St Paul's vision), or Johannine (we shall see that it also sums up St John's insight), or simply, Christocentric (Christ-centred).

### **GOD CREATED OUT OF GOODNESS AND LOVE**

We may still be wondering why did God devise a plan for creating Jesus Christ, because we haven't touched on that question. So far, we have filled out the statement that God did devise such a plan, and that it was St Francis's deep awareness of this that made Jesus Christ mean so much, literally everything, to him. St Francis also had deep insights into why God devised such a plan, and the Franciscan theologians studied these insights systematically. God himself provides the answer to why he devised the plan, and St Francis found it again in God's revealing word, the scriptures, especially in John.

Before creation, and also after it, God *is*, eternal, and perfectly happy in the community of three Persons. So it wasn't to complete himself that he decided to create; it wasn't to fill out his happiness. St John has the reason: God is love. God foresaw the infinite number of ways that he could be imitated by creatures, different ways in which he could share his goodness and make others happy.

God is goodness. God is love. He wanted to create a receiver of his unselfish love and generosity who would also give love of the same quality. Divine love planned and created with divine wisdom. The enormous complexity of countless millions of creatures, each one imitating God in some way, would be built into a perfectly splendid unity, the whole Christ loving God adequately.

The object of his love-inspired plan, then, would be a perfect creature, a man, and a vast unified body of men and women, who would be identified with God the Son. He would be the perfect receiver and giver of love in the plan, and he would be the model according to which all other creatures were made.

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to all local Assistants of our Order in the Regional Fraternity**