

31. December

Seventh day of the Christmas Octave

"Creation awaits its liberation"

In our representations, the crib of Bethlehem is illuminated not only by the radiance of the Child Jesus, by the presence of Mary and Joseph, by the shepherds who hurried to meet Him, by the Magi who came from the East to offer Him their gifts and to adore Him... It has long been a tradition to include the irrational creation in the crib. The ox and the donkey are silent witnesses to the birth of the Lord. And the presence of these animals takes on a deeper meaning when we consider what St Paul says in the Letter to the Romans:

"For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now" (Rom 8:19-22).

Now, at the birth of the Lord, the animals can also accompany Him. And when the children of God appear, the suffering of irrational creatures will be over. At Christmas, when the Saviour comes into the world to make us children of God through the grace of redemption, even the irrational creation glimpses the hope of regaining its rightful place and being freed from its slavery. The irrational creatures also praise the greatness of the Lord through their existence and thus become a bridge to the recognition of the works of God.

"And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day. And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that

creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.” (Gen 1:20-25).

Creation, which has also suffered the consequences of the fall, is waiting for us as redeemed human beings to treat it with God's wisdom. It is therefore not only a question of preventing man from destroying his own environment without considering the consequences, but also of bringing out the original goodness of God's creation. St Francis of Assisi's Canticum of the Creatures gives us an idea of this. And Saint Paul speaks of a new creation:

“Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17).

This new creation also includes everything that God has placed under human dominion.

Then God said, *“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth”* (Gen 1:26).

So the presence of the ox and the donkey in the manger gives us a message. The Saviour has come into the world and in Him all creation will be renewed. Everything is to be touched by Him and through Him, so that every creature will proclaim the praise of God in its own way.