

The Virtues of Jesus Christ—Poverty

"Everything that is in heaven and on earth is God's." We know this explicitly through the words of Holy Scripture. God says of Himself: *Everything is mine, and the fulness thereof* (Psalms 49:12). But St. Alphonsus says that "heaven and earth are the least portion of the riches of God. The riches of God are infinite, and can never fail, because His riches do not depend on others, but He, Who is the Infinite Good, possesses them Himself."

But God, from being immensely rich, chose to become poor. He became poor for our sakes, as St. Paul says: *Being rich, He became poor for your sakes; that through His poverty you might be rich* (2 Corinthians 8:9). And why did He find it necessary to be reduced to such poverty? Mankind, in general, is "intent only on acquiring the riches and pleasures of this world." Jesus Christ became Man in order to teach, not only by words, but also by example. "And behold our Redeemer as an Infant, who at the very beginning of His life made Himself a teacher of poverty in the cave of Bethlehem."

From Bethlehem, the Holy Family was forced to flee to Egypt to escape Herod's mad fury. It is believed that they lived in dire poverty in Egypt. St. Basil said they had barely enough to subsist on. Another holy writer concurs: "Sometimes the Infant Jesus, constrained by hunger, went to ask Mary for a little bread, and that Mary sent Him away, saying that there was not any."

The Holy Family returned to Nazareth after their sojourn of seven years in Egypt and there, too, poverty was their lot. St. Cyprian says: "A poor cottage scantily furnished; such was the dwelling which the Creator of the world chose for Himself."

The poverty of Jesus Christ only intensified during the three years of His public life. He said of Himself: *The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head* (Matthew 8:20). Finally, after He was divested of all that He had when He died on the Cross, "St. Joseph of Arimathea was obliged to give Him a burial place; and others, out of charity, provided the sheet in which to wrap His dead body."

Jesus wishes to teach us that we are "pilgrims in this earth, and we are only here in passing." By His life, He taught us how to be detached from all that is fleeting, imitating His poverty, at least in spirit.

(Sources and Quotations: The Incarnation, Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ)