



ST. MARIE EUGENIE: ADVENT AND THE KINGDOM

One of the defining notes of Assumption spirituality is our **desire, prayer and action for God's Kingdom**. In advent, this desire for God's kingdom is strongly expressed in the Church's liturgical life. Throughout Advent the church points us towards both Christ's first coming, in humility, in a stable in Bethlehem, and his second coming, when his glorious kingdom shall be definitively established, Christ having won the victory over death, evil and sin.

In Advent 1882, St. Marie Eugene wrote a beautiful reflection, encouraging her sisters to **work and pray for the coming of Christ's reign**. She notes two main aspects of his reign; firstly, what she calls his '**social reign**', where the values of Christ's kingdom would be found in society, and secondly, **his reign in us**, in our hearts and in our lives.

In order to understand Marie Eugenie's Advent reflection, it is necessary to understand the situation in which she was writing. By 1882 the congregation of sisters St. Marie Eugenie had founded in 1839 was flourishing, but times were far from easy for them. An anti-Catholic government in France had already forced the expulsion of the Assumption Fathers from Paris and Nîmes, and the Sisters too were under threat. Seeking the reign of God was far from the minds of most people, even practising Christians.

ON CHRIST'S REIGN IN SOCIETY

*Never before perhaps has the reign of God been as unrecognised as today. But, despite all, it is certainly not the moment to be discouraged. Consider the lives of the saints: despite the difficulties of their times they were never discouraged. They never gave up praying for the coming of the Kingdom of God, that His Name be honoured, that He be adored, that the Gospel triumph in the world. ... **We must never stop asking that the universal social reign of the Lord come - no matter how bad the situation may be.***

*It is fitting then, that the faithful **beg God to establish His Kingdom in this world even though it does not seem to want Him**. It is fitting to pray with ardent desire and to say to the Lord: "Come with your gentleness which converts, with your power which subdues. Come with the charm of your Wisdom and your Beauty. Come with the splendour of your doctrine and your Truth. Come, enlighten the world, come and save us." These days we shall repeat often in the liturgy: "**Come, Lord Jesus, and save us.**"*

As well as praying for a truly Christian society, Marie Eugenie was determined to work for the **coming of Christ into people's lives and for the transformation of society**. Obviously there are many ways in which we all can work for the Kingdom, all of which Marie Eugenie would delight in.

She was a firm believer in each one working for the good in the 'little sphere' in which they are situated, in each person having a mission here on earth, a particular way in which they are called to contribute to the building of Christ's kingdom.

Her particular mission was that of **education**, particularly the education of young girls. She saw that educating girls, bringing them to a true knowledge of Christianity and a personal relationship with Christ, was a 'root from which truly Christian families would spring'. It was a long-term goal, and although the Assumption pupils were given an excellent all-round education, the goal was always the Christ's kingdom.

We are engaged in various works of zeal. We work with youth. Is our main concern that they pass their examinations, that they know more or less history and geography? No, our concern is that the reign of Our Lord be formed in them, that His Kingdom come in them, and that, by education, we form a Christian family, the marvel of a family in which the Christian spirit reigns in such a way that from birth the children are filled with all that should make them true Christians.

For Marie Eugenie action for the Kingdom should always be rooted in and nourished by prayer – all is to be entrusted to God in prayer, "*we are certainly too little to perform the works of God...*"

CHRIST'S REIGN IN OUR LIVES

Above all, Marie Eugenie urges us to look inwards and see how Christ's reign in our lives could be furthered. She encourages us to pray for His Reign in ourselves, in our hearts and in our lives. Recognising that Christ does generally have precedence in our lives, she encourages to seek out ways in which we do not totally let him reign – perhaps times where we convince ourselves that *our* will is *his* will, or when our pride, selfishness or laziness prevents us giving God first place in our lives.

Certainly, He already reigns in us, and we all say with all our heart that He is our sole Lord and our King. But is His reign total in us? Who does not feel that in his or herself there is something more to add to the Reign of Our Lord? We have to ask Him, then, to become ever more in us, the Master, the Saviour... We should pray that the word of John the Baptist is realized in us: "He must increase and I must decrease." (John 3:30) ...We should tend towards this ideal, and, since this is not always what we find in ourselves, we should ask with ardent longing that Our Lord reign totally in us and that His coming be renewed in us.