

named them. They expect God's mercy, as we do likewise on their behalf. We remember them prayerfully. Is it possible that this section of the Te Deum, then, is such a prayerful remembrance addressed to God by the Church militant for departed loved ones?

*We therefore pray thee help thy servants whom thou hast redeemed by thy precious blood.*

*Make them to be numbered with thy Saints in glory everlasting. O Lord, save thy people and bless thine heritage. Govern them and lift them up for ever.*

It would be nice to think so.

And so, after this prayer of hope and expectancy, with hearts already half raised to heaven, we return again to our earthly condition as the Church militant, as we have seen. As at the opening of the Te Deum, so now we acknowledge our debt of praise to God, dutifully and joyfully fulfilled: *'Day by day we magnify thee, and we worship thy Name' - ever, world without end, as it should be.*

Triumphant, expectant, militant, the Church is all the same one Church. One because God is Lord of all, and in the Person of his incarnate Son has redeemed us all. In and by his Spirit we are sanctified, and so are enabled to join with angels and saints in praising our God for ever.

Therefore, *'O Lord, have mercy upon us as our trust is in thee'* - each of us individually and personally - *'in thee O Lord have I trusted'* - so how could we ever be confounded, how could we stint our praise!

*'We praise thee O God. . . '*



# FAITH Praying and believing ON THE EARTH

UNSTINTED PRAISE

*a plea for the Te Deum\**

Now, as always, it is right and fitting, our duty and our joy as Christian believers, to praise and glorify God. He stands in no need of our worship, as the theologians say, but perhaps all the same it gladdens the divine heart just a fraction when repentent sinners turn to him and, lost in wonder, love and praise, begin to glimpse something of his grandeur. "There is joy in heaven," Jesus said. . .

O yes, **we** need to praise God. It is impossible not to since he is who he is. When things are dark and hard we **need** even more to do so; how else survive? It is sad, therefore, that one of the greatest paeans of praise from Christian antiquity seems to be losing something of its place in our worship. It's not that we don't sing the Te Deum at all, but, because we have analysed and dissected it, we rarely sing it nowadays in its entirety.

Granted, the original version **was** most probably shorter, and the present concluding part **is** really a selection of versicles and responds tagged on, according again to the scholars. Yet the complete hymn, as we had come to know it, is a magnificent unison of praise which we tamper with to our loss.

The rubrics now tell us that the last section may be omitted, and that is sad, for it means that we leave **ourselves** almost completely out of things. To pretend that we can do that when we seek to glorify God

is a false humility which God surely does not intend. The revelation of God's majesty leaves us stunned, admittedly, face to face with our own nothingness; but the revelation of his loving mercy raises us up, in quiet confidence, before the amazing truth that in him we shall indeed never be utterly confounded. From that point of recognition the cycle of praise begins anew. But let us look at things more closely.

For interest, we shall consider the Te Deum from three angles, meditating, as it were, on three overlapping themes, the whole being over-arched by the connecting theme of the Incarnation. These three aspects can in fact be linked with that triple definition of the Church which is often found in some of our older theological manuals ie the Church triumphant, the Church expectant and the Church militant.

The next obvious step is to find a copy of the Te Deum - preferably in one of the less recent translations, such as the Book of Common Prayer, (if not the original latin!) since the newer versions do tend to miss out on some of the finer nuances of meaning.

The Church triumphant firstly, then. That of course implies the consummated Church, the Kingdom of heaven, the final joy of the redeemed in the vision of God the blessed Trinity - the communion of saints in fellowship with the angels . . . The Te Deum is a glorious affirmation of our faith in that ultimate reality. Here already down below, we praise God in anticipation: *'All the earth doth worship thee, the Father everlasting,'* and we ourselves join in: *'We praise thee, O God' . . . 'the holy Church throughout all the world doth acknowledge thee' . . .* Indeed heaven and earth together are sensed to be full of the majesty of God's glory.

And who *is* this God? - none other than the thrice-holy Lord of Isaiah's vision (Chapter 6), *'the Father of an infinite majesty' together with his 'honourable, true and only Son,' and 'the Holy Spirit, the Comforter'*. It is the One, Holy Lord, praised eternally by the *'the Heavens and all the Powers therein'*, by the Cherubim

and Seraphim, and the multitude of angels who cry aloud in exultation. It is the One, Holy Lord praised equally by the Saints in heaven: the Apostles, the Prophets of the Old and New testaments alike, the Martyrs . . . and the blessed Virgin, whose hallowed womb was not scorned by the Son of God when he became a human being like ourselves.

It is, of course, this wondrous Incarnation alone, this birth in time of the eternal Son, which ultimately brings about the mystery we have termed the Church triumphant. And equally, it links us too, the members of the 'Church militant here below' with the heavenly realms: *'When Jesus had overcome the sharpness of death he opened the Kingdom of heaven to **all** believers'*.

But the story, as we know, does not end there. Jesus *is* indeed sitting at the right hand of the Father, but we also believe that he is to come to be our Judge. There is an abrupt change of tone in the Te Deum here which is often expressed very dramatically in musical renderings. Has the praise come to an end then? It has certainly passed into sober prayer in face of divine judgement. We are afraid of our sinfulness - the prospect of our own nothingness which we spoke of earlier. And so we cry to God: *'We therefore pray thee help thy servants' . . .*

Who are these servants though? You and I, and our Christian friends and relatives living alongside us? - the Church militant? Possibly, though *we* seem to come in again a little later: *'Day by day we magnify thee . . . O Lord, keep us this day without sin . . . let thy mercy lighten upon us'*. The Church militant has a good measure of prayer for itself then at the end of the Te Deum (hence the plea not to curtail it). In contrast, this brief section we are looking at for the moment, speaks in the third person: *'them, thy people, thy servants'*. Maybe, therefore it could apply to that part of the Church we sometimes speak of as the Church expectant - those folk who have already died 'in the peace of Christ' or at least half-hopefully so - the faithful departed as the Church has traditionally