

Sherlock Holmes' Salvation

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for
Jeremy Brett
(and all who have played the famous detective)

I. *The Visitor*

Pensively he looked upon the angel standing before him, as if he would draw him. How to account for his presence there? He had not come through the door, for it was surely locked; he had locked it himself before taking the needle from the drawer. The windows were closed and bolted - it was, after all, as the dead of winter this evening. And yet there he was.

He had not seen him come in, was unaware of his approach... yet there he was. Why? he wondered. Why should he be visited by such a creature? There must be a reason for this call.

At any rate, he had quite forgotten about the needle in his hand; he had, in fact, laid it down. Here was a puzzle to occupy the mind. He needed no other distraction.

He could not say he was not a believer in miracles, or in God. It simply was not in his purview. His concern was the facts, in their smallest detail, and what he could draw from their consideration. There did not seem a call for the contemplation of God in his empirical study. But now what choice did he have? For the situation had presented itself, it seemed, without his invitation, and was most captivating of the attention.

Perhaps he had prayed once. Though the memory was somewhat clouded, he did have recollection of uttering a plea for help, for release from the surrounding darkness, during his last escapade.

“You have asked for me to come,” the angel said, as if responding to his thinking. “And it is the Lord’s desire to help you. Do not be afraid.”

He did not find himself fearful, but other than this little miscalculation, the angel’s insight did seem remarkable. How is it he answers to thoughts? His ear cannot be that sensitive, can it?

“I am a spirit and not a man and share in the divine light of the Savior. It is He who has sent me to you to call you to His blood.”

His knowledge of the Bible was, of course, impeccable. No educated man would be without understanding of its contents. And so, he knew of what the angel spoke, though certainly it had never been so personal. He had often found wisdom in the pages of this book, and was wont to quote it. But his reading did not extend to faith, about which he was necessarily skeptical. The human heart can be easily duped if one lets down one’s guard.

He did not really want to take up the needle this evening, and had wished that he would not do so - but one must accept the inevitable. Yet he could not deny that at this moment the needle lay on the table, and his arm was not inclined to reach for it.

He realized the significance of the angel’s word to him: he knew what the blood of Christ meant. It is, of course, that in which sinners wash themselves, and are made clean. He was not offended by the inference that he was a sinner, nor could he deny it - for indeed he knew that all men are sinners, and his own sin was often before his eyes.

But the angel’s word, though not disagreeable, and even holding a certain comfort, could not be immediately accepted by him, for fear that a wrong move might be made.

Fear. Perhaps the angel was not so far off the mark; perhaps there was an uncertainty in him that approached fear. And perhaps within him was something deeper, something he would sooner not face.

He looked intently at the angel again, but, though he gave every appearance of a man, Holmes could find no revealing sign about him to indicate age or occupation or marital status... There was nothing to define his character - except the light.

Ethereal. Yes, it was undeniable. There was something ethereal about the light upon him, seemingly coming from him. Perhaps his nature could only be defined by heaven.

"Wisdom is mobile beyond all motion, and she penetrates and pervades all things by reason of her purity" (Ws.7:24). Scripture came to his mind. "He gave me sound knowledge of existing things, that I might know the organization of the universe and the force of its elements..." (7:17). He was now speaking aloud.

"Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature has been there for the mind to perceive in things that have been made" (Rm.1:20), the angel answered him. The Apostle's words. He knew them well, for he had at times pondered their relevance to his study, and to the things he seemed to see, to understand... to feel.*

"Sir, you have the better of me, for you seem to know me well, yet I know you not at all." He spoke directly to his visitor now, finally breaking his reverie.

"I am here to tell you that God loves you, that He cares for you and would shed His mercy upon your soul, if you would agree."

"Yes, but who are you?" His question came with no disdain, but genuine inquisitiveness.

"I am the angel of science, of the wisdom bestowed upon man by the Most High."

"Ahhh! Now I know you - and believe you well to be who you say. Yes. Remarkable, indeed." Holmes demeanor had become almost childlike as he looked upon the spirit with a certain wonder, appreciating him now all the more, though not yet really able to delve into his essential nature.

"It is good to see you. Good to meet you. You have aided me greatly over the years, I'm sure. And I am blessed by the favor of your company." He was now standing and carefully approaching his visitor.

"I have much to inquire of you, if you would be so kind." The angel remained silent. Holmes went on. "There is a universe of knowledge round about me and I have but scratched the surface of its significance," turning to the angel, "but none of it has escaped you." Stepping closer, "You understand all things." Looking into his eyes, "May I call you my friend? I scarcely believe there is another who could be so useful to me as you. Would you sit down?"

"I have someplace to take you, something to show you."

"Yes, my friend, please, reveal to me the depths of the ocean and the height of the heavens; the infinite recesses of the universe are at your hands!"

The angel waits a moment. Then speaks: "Will you go with me?"

Holmes, a little more soberly now: "I will. For I see you have my good interest at heart."

He reaches forward his hand, and the angel takes it in his own.

II. The Sacrament

A bell rings and Mass begins as Holmes and the angel stand toward the back of a church. It is a weekday, so there are not a lot of people in attendance.

“Why have you brought me here, my wise friend. It is true I am a baptized Christian, but religion has played little role in my life - though I have no particular quarrel with its mission. Besides, I detect that this is a Catholic Church, and I, of course, am an Anglican. Who is our friend here?” They are standing beside a statue.

“St. Jude. It is his feast.”

“The patron of hopeless causes - an appropriate day.”

The readings of the Mass begin to filter into Holmes’ consciousness as the two stand silently.

“You are strangers and aliens no longer. No, you are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God. You form a building which rises on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the capstone. Through Him the whole structure is fitted together and takes shape as a holy temple in the Lord; in Him you are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place for God in the Spirit” (Eph.2:19-22).

The angel: “Does the Apostle speak to you today.”

Holmes: “He may.”

The psalm proceeds.

“The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the firmament proclaims His handiwork.
Day pours out the word to day,
and night to night imparts knowledge...” (Ps.19:2-3).

Holmes: *"Tis well said."*

*"Not a word nor a discourse
whose voice is not heard;
Through all the earth their voice resounds,
and to the end of the world, their message" (4-5).*

*"What do you aim to do to me, good spirit?" He turns and looks
at Holmes without emotion, or a word. The Gospel soon begins.*

*"Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, spending the night
in communion with God. At daybreak He called His disciples
and selected twelve of them to be His apostles: Simon, to whom
He gave the name Peter, and Andrew his brother, James and
John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James
son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot, Judas son of
James, and Judas Iscariot, who turned traitor" (Lk.6:12-16).*

"The Gospel of the Lord."

All: "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ."

*"Really, good spirit, am I to be as an apostle of the Lord? Is this
what you would intimate to me? If so, I'm afraid I would be more
suited to Judas the traitor than the saint we celebrate this day!"*

*"I want you to pay close attention, Sherlock. I want you to tell me
what you see in a moment when the priest raises the host and when
he raises the cup. I want you to use all the wisdom with which God
has endowed you, and all the honesty, which you cannot forsake,
and tell me what you see in this Eucharist."*

*"You ask a lot, my friend. And in truth your request harrows me
to the bone... But I do not know how I can refuse."*

"You can refuse, Sherlock. If you will."

*He turns away a moment. Then, "Again I say, I know not how to
refuse. Though on my very life, I would flee your presence now if I
could find the path. It is too much you ask."*

Bells ring and Holmes looks up toward the altar. His eyes fix upon the host held aloft in the priest's hands. In these few seconds which span an eternity, all else disappears but his vision of the Sacrament. He then bows his head sharply down, overwhelmed, and falls to his knees.

As the bells ring again, his head rises to see the cup - it seems to reach to the heavens, indeed, and he sees the blood of Christ pouring upon himself. He is now in tears.

III. The Decision

"Why do you torture me so...?" As Holmes lifts his head from his hands, he sees that he is in his study again. The angel is with him still, seated nearby.

Still on his knees, he now addresses the angel. "Why have you come to me? Why must I bear such torment in my soul? Is it not enough that I dedicate my intelligence to the cause of justice; must you call me deeper into this truth, this mercy of God?"

The angel remains silent. Both look upon the needle on Holmes' table.

"There is a choice, is there not? And I suppose I did request your presence, your help, after all." A pause.

"But what can I do? To what do you call me? It seems you hold out to me the Catholic faith? But how can this be? I know nothing of such matters."

The angel is still silent.

"I won't deny that this experience has affected me profoundly. I know it is something I shall not, cannot, forget. But to become a Catholic? The world would think me quite mad!"

"Yes."

Turning distinctly to the angel: "You have an answer for every question, do you not?"

Holmes deliberates a moment within himself. Then, as he rises to sit in his chair, "Very well, then, I will."

"I will do it. I shall approach a priest in the morning and inquire as to becoming a bona fide Roman Catholic. What do you think of tha...?" he turns to the angel, but finds him gone. "Most curious."

Holmes stands and steps to his table. He looks a moment at the needle, then picks it up, raising it to his eyes. He lets out a kind of laugh: "Ha!"

He turns toward the trash can, holds the needle above it a moment, then drops it decidedly down.

A knowing smile crosses his face.

Epilogue

Holmes enters a church at communion time, moves into a pew toward the back, and kneels. He watches as the last few souls receive.

As the Mass ends, Holmes sits in the pew, looking around himself at the art and architecture. After a few moments the priest appears and walks up the center aisle as if to leave. As he passes, Holmes opens his mouth: "Father."

The priest stops and looks at Holmes. His face has a kind, familiar... angelic expression. Holmes wonders a moment, then says, "I should like to become a Catholic."

"Very good, my friend! Very good." The priest smiles and opens his arms, calling Holmes to rise and walk with him. The two stride back down the aisle toward the altar, conversing lightly, the priest's arm around Holmes' shoulders. The crucifix hovers above them.

** This quote and the two above it are from the Office of Readings for Thursday of the 30th Week, in the Liturgy of the Hours.*