

## INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME TWO:

### The Arrival of the King and His Kingdom

In Volume One of Connecting with History we watched as God prepared the world to receive His Son. All of the Old Testament points toward Jesus, the Messiah. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made."<sup>1</sup> First God formed a people to be his chosen ones. The Israelites carved out a place for themselves in a foreign land, a place that would become home to a new nation and a home for God made man to come and live for a time. Meanwhile the Gentile tribes and nations rose and fell. One nation after another came to power, only to be conquered by another, more powerful, nation. That is, until Rome rose up. The Romans had a genius for absorbing the wisdom of other cultures, particularly Greek culture, and making it their own. They were a people with ingenuity and practicality who learned to do things a better way. They were designers and builders: their arches, aqueducts, buildings and roadways not only made life more convenient for themselves, but many of them survive to this day as models of what the ancient world was capable of achieving. Like other powerful nations they were also conquerors. But unlike the others, the Romans did not destroy what they conquered they offered citizenship in their empire and protection from their enemies. The Roman armies marched for hundreds of miles in all directions taking over other tribes and nations, teaching them their language and their way of life. All roads led to Rome. Rome became the most powerful empire on the face of the earth. And with their rule came a time of prosperity and peace that the world had never before experienced: the Pax Romana. And yet, despite this earthly peace the people of the world lived in darkness and the dreadful fear of death.

Into this time of peace came the Prince of Peace. "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not."<sup>2</sup> The world and its history had been prepared for the coming of God, yet few people noticed when He arrived. He did not come in power and conquering glory. He did not look like the world's idea of a king. And yet He accomplished the mission that He had set out to do. He preached the Truth. He gathered his people – those who had ears to hear and eyes to see. He told them his plan for the world and trained them to accomplish it with him. The people of Israel were a conquered people, ruled by the Romans and refusing to submit to their culture, their strange gods and their language. Long had they waited for the promised messiah to come and no better time was there for their king to rise up and defeat this most powerful of forces. When that Messiah did come many expected him to conquer the Romans and free his people. Even among Jesus' own followers were those who were confused and disappointed when he told them to lay down their swords, love their enemies, and forgive those who persecuted them. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men."<sup>3</sup> And Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in Me, believes not in Me, but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in Me may not remain in darkness."<sup>4</sup> But he was betrayed by one of his own, taken, tortured and killed by the Romans. The light went out and the world was plunged into the blackest night of all its long history. Death had won, hope was gone. The earth groaned in agony and was still.

But that is not the end of the story. It is the beginning! For out of that terrible death and darkness, the death of God Himself, came life and light and the conquering of death. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."<sup>5</sup> Tongues of fire descended on the disciples and the light of that fire spread from person to person through the power of the Holy Spirit out into the whole world. God now lives within His chosen people just as He had lived in the land of his chosen people. Just as He prepared the people and land of Israel to receive Himself, now He prepares each of our hearts to receive His true Presence in the world.

As we witness the mighty Roman Empire crumble away into history as all earthly powers eventually do we see the humble beginnings of the new empire of God, His Church, take root in human history, never to be conquered. The Catholic Church is God's Kingdom on earth. It has taken over Rome and built an empire that is in this world, but not of it. It is the one kingdom that does not fall and disappear into memory. It is eternal. It is divine. But it is also made up of mortal men and women who sin and fall short of God's plan. For this reason it can often seem as if the Church has lost its way and will fall into oblivion. But just as Christ died and rose again, so does His body, His Church. "Christendom has had a series of revolutions and in each one of them Christianity has died. Christianity has died many times and risen again; for it had a God who knew the way out of the grave."<sup>6</sup>

At first glance this volume of Connecting with History may look like a Church History curriculum. It is, but it is also more. The Church lives in the world and its history is enmeshed in world history and events. Today's secular culture likes to separate and compartmentalize religion and "real" life; it tries to convince us that the two have no bearing on one another. But we, especially Catholics, know that that is a lie. The Catholic Church is deep in history and history without the story of the Church is not complete. So this is a world history curriculum; one that aims to unify religion and "real life" and make it real and true. We will travel the roads of the ancient world into the new world, but all roads continue to lead to Rome. We will learn the lessons history has to teach us about ourselves, about God's plan for this world and for each of us as members of nations, as individuals and as His people. May the Lord of history be with you always!

1. John 1: 1-3
2. John 1: 10-11
3. John 1: 4
4. John 12:44-46
5. John 1: 5
6. Everlasting Man, G.K. Chesterton, p.250