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SERMONS

ON THE

CHRISTIAN VIRTUES.

ADAPTED TO ALL THE SUNDAYS AND MOST OF THE HOLYDAYS
OF THE YEAR.

BY THE
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VOLUME I.

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FIRST SERMON.

ON THE GRACE OF THE HOLY GHOST.

Subject.

1st. How can one know that the Holy Ghost has really come to him? 2d. What has he to do that the Holy Ghost may remain with him always?—*Preached on Pentecost Sunday.*

Text.

Ad eum veniemus, et mansionem apud eum faciemus.—John xiv. 23.

“We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him.”

Introduction.

Blessed is the soul to which the Holy Ghost comes, and in which He takes up His abode! The best theologians agree with St. Thomas in teaching that the Holy Ghost really comes in His own person to the soul that receives sanctifying grace, and abides therein as long as that soul keeps itself in grace; just as the Second Person of the Godhead was really present in the virginal womb of Mary after she had conceived her divine Son. Nay, they say, if by an impossibility the Holy Ghost were not present everywhere, He would of necessity be present in the soul that is adorned with sanctifying grace, just as the bridegroom dwells under the same roof with his beloved spouse. This teaching is founded on the words of St. Paul to the Romans: “The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us;”¹ and to the Corinthians: “Know you not that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you?” therefore, “Glorify and bear God in your body:”² Blessed

¹ *Charitas Dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per Spiritum Sanctum, qui datus est nobis.*—Rom. v. 5.

² *An nescitis quoniam membra vestra templum sunt Spiritus Sancti, qui in vobis est? Glorificate et portate Deum in corpore vestro.*—I. Cor. vi. 19, 20.

is the soul, I repeat, to whom the Holy Ghost has come! What happiness it is for a poor mortal to be visited by the almighty God! And still more blessed is the soul in whom the Holy Ghost has taken up His lasting dwelling-place! What happiness for a poor mortal to be thus filled with the great God in His own person! But, my dear brethren, how can one know that such a great happiness has fallen to his lot, and that he will be in the constant enjoyment of it? This question I shall answer in the present sermon.

Plan of Discourse.

How can I know that the Holy Ghost has really come to me? This I shall explain in the first part. If He has come to me, what am I to do that He may dwell with me always? This I shall show to a certain extent in the second part.

“Come, O Holy Ghost,” is now our prayer with the Catholic Church; prepare our hearts for Thy coming, if we have not yet received Thee; and when Thou hast visited us, work upon our hearts, so that we may never suffer Thee to leave them again! This we beg of Thee through Mary, Thy most pure spouse, and the holy angels, Thy most faithful attendants.

Great lords
appear in
public in
two ways.

There are two ways in which a great dignitary can come forth to show himself in public; sometimes he appears without any pomp or circumstance, and incognito, as the expression goes, so that he tries to escape the outward signs of honor that are due to his person. In this guise he enters the houses of even his meanest servants and converses with them familiarly, as one friend would do with another, in order to pass the time away. On other occasions he comes forth surrounded by all the emblems of his high position, to the sound of drums and trumpets, saluted by salvos of artillery, and accompanied by courtiers and satellites, while crowds of attendants on foot and on horseback precede and follow him. His appearance then excites a great commotion; the soldiers run out of the guard-houses to present arms, and the people, great and small, rush to the windows to see him pass, and salute him with shouts of joy.

So, too, does
the Holy
Ghost come
to our souls.

Here, my dear brethren, we have a figure that will serve in some way to present to our weak intellects the coming of the Holy Ghost to men in this world. On this day of Pentecost He made, as it were, His solemn entry, publicly and visibly, into the city of Jerusalem, to the apostles and disciples of Christ, who

were assembled there, and on that occasion He appeared with unusual pomp and magnificence, in the midst of the mighty whirlwind, to show that a great sovereign was approaching. As we read in the epistle of to-day, He was preceded by a violent wind, that shook the house in which the disciples were assembled, and then a great noise was suddenly heard from heaven, which filled them with dread: "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting." At last there appeared fire in the shape of tongues, which rested upon the head of each one. "And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them."¹ How astonished the people of Jerusalem must have been, when they heard this noise in the house of the apostles, and how eagerly they must have run to see what was the matter! For at that time a vast crowd of people of different tongues and nations had come to Jerusalem, partly for business and partly on account of the great festival of Pentecost; and the apostles preached to them, so that they all understood what was said to them, as if it had been said in their own language. The people were greatly surprised at this, Parthians and Medes, Persians and Mesopotamians, Jews and Cappadocians, the inhabitants of Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, and Cyrene, Romans and Arabians, all heard the wonderful works of God in their own tongues, although they knew that the preachers were all Galileans, unlearned people, who had never studied any foreign language: "And they were all amazed and wondered, saying: Behold, are not all these that speak Galileans, and how have we heard, every man our own tongue wherein we were born?"² Thus did the Holy Ghost come into the world on that occasion. At different times, too, He appeared visibly descending on other holy men. The Annals of the Order of St. Dominic, in the life of St. Antoninus, relate that a certain holy matron saw the Holy Ghost descend in the form of fire to illumine the hearts of the brethren whenever they held a general chapter of the Order in the church. He was seen in the shape of a snow-white dove on the head of St. Gregory VII., while the latter was saying Mass. In the same form He rested on the shoulder of St. Gregory the Great, while that saint was writing

¹ Factus est repente de cœlo sonus, tanquam advenientis Spiritus vehementis, et replevit totam domum ubi erant sedentes. Et apparuerunt illis dispersitæ linguæ tanquam ignis, seditque supra singulos eorum.—Acts ii. 2, 3.

² Stupebant autem omnes, et mirabantur, dicentes: Nonne ecce omnes isti Galilæi sunt, et quomodo nos audivimus unusquisque linguam nostram in qua nati sumus?—Ibid. 7, 8.

his book on *Morals*. When the people of Ravenna assembled in the church to elect an archbishop, He flew about the church in the shape of a white dove, and rested on the head of the person who was to be chosen for that dignity. It is true that He does not come any longer in such visible form to us; yet He frequently visits the souls of those who love Him, according to His promise: "We will come to Him, and will make Our abode with him." And this He does without pomp or circumstance, incognito as it were, invisibly, without attracting attention, as one intimate friend visits another, so that one is even unaware of His coming and in-dwelling.

A proof of His coming is a change to a better state of soul.

What sign, then, have we to show that the Holy Ghost has thus come to our souls? Can we feel it on our tongues, so that we are able like the apostles to speak all languages? Truly, in later times the Holy Ghost has often conferred that gift on apostolic men who went to preach to foreign nations. St. Servatius was once preaching to a great crowd of people from different parts of the world; but they all understood him so well that each one thought he heard his own tongue. The wonder-working St. Vincent Ferrer preached the word of God in many different countries, and although he always spoke in his native Spanish, he was understood by Greeks, Sardinians, Germans, Hungarians, and English, as if he had used their own languages in addressing them. The same occurred when St. Antony of Padua was preaching to some pilgrims at Rome; he was understood by Greeks and other foreigners who were present, as if he had spoken to them in their native tongues. The *Annals* of the Franciscan Order relate that when the Venerable Brother Gentile found that he could not learn the Arabic, which was necessary to preach to the people of Babylon, he was about to return again to Italy; but an angel, in the shape of a little boy, met him on the way and said to him, Go back to Babylon, and God will give you that knowledge that you yourself could not acquire by any amount of study. He at once retraced his steps and found that he could speak Arabic with as much ease and fluency as if he had been accustomed to it from his childhood. In the early ages of the Church this gift was by no means rare, and St. Irenæus testifies to having often heard people speaking all languages.¹ But that gift was necessary in those days for the conversion and instruction of the heathens, more so than it is now. There-

¹ *Audisse se multos universis linguis loquentes.*—St. Iren., l. v., chap. 6.

fore, although we do not all receive it now when the Holy Ghost visits our souls, yet there are other signs which prove clearly enough that He is present in our hearts. The chief of them is given by St. Thomas. "The invisible mission," or coming, "of the Holy Ghost," he says, "is known by the progress that a man makes to a new state of grace,"¹ that is, when he shows evident signs of amendment in his life and conversation. For instance, a great sinner repents of and confesses his sins, and after doing penance experiences a special horror of those excesses to which he was formerly chiefly addicted, and by a diligent use of the proper means keeps himself free from them for a long time; a tepid, cold-hearted Christian, who formerly had no devotion, no taste for heavenly things, and whose only object was to gratify his senses, now feels a new impulse to serve God, greater fervor in his love, a zeal for heavenly things, etc.; this is a sure sign of the in-dwelling of the Holy Ghost; for, as St. Gregory says, "as soon as He enlightens the human understanding, He changes the will also, so that a man renounces all that he was, and becomes quite another being."² "Not," as St. John Chrysostom says, "that He changes our nature, but He amends our will."³ Such is the tenor of the words the Catholic Church to-day sends up to heaven with the Prophet David: "Thou shalt send forth Thy spirit, and they shall be created, and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth."⁴ How are we to understand the word "renew" here? In this sense, that the soul, which is meant by the "face of the earth," is changed from a bad into a good one, or from a good state into a still better one. Such, too, was the import of the promise made to Saul by the Prophet Samuel, while Saul was still a simple peasant-boy seeking his father's asses, and the Prophet was announcing to him the dignity that was in store for him: "The spirit of the Lord shall come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be changed into another man."⁵

There are still clearer examples of this, my dear brethren, in other parts of the Holy Scriptures. The Prophet Elias, one of

He came to
Elias in a

¹ Præcipue missio invisibilis attenditur quando aliquis proficit in aliquem novum statum gratiæ.—St. Thom. q. xli., art. 6 ad 2.

² Nam humanum subito, ut illustrat, immutat affectum; abnegat hoc repente quod erat; exhibet repente quod non erat.—St. Greg., hom. xxx. in Evang.

³ Non naturam immutans, sed voluntatem emendans.—St. Chrysost., serm. i. de Pent.

⁴ Emittes spiritum tuum, et creabuntur; et renovabis faciem terræ.—Ps. ciii. 30.

⁵ Insilet in te Spiritus Domini, et prophetabis cum eis, et mutaberis in virum altum.—I. Kings x. 6.

different
way from
that in
which He
came to the
apostles.

the most zealous men the world has ever seen, who was as a burning fire when there was question of furthering the glory of God, after having closed the heavens for three years, so that not a drop of rain fell during that time, in punishment of the impiety of king Achab, even the dews not refreshing the thirsty earth; after he had assembled in the one place eight hundred and fifty false prophets of Baal and mercilessly slain them with his own hand, as we read in the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of the Third Book of Kings, was obliged to take flight and hide himself in a cave in Mount Horeb. There he heard a voice from heaven saying: "What dost thou here, Elias?" And he answered: "With zeal have I been zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, . . . and I alone am left, and they seek my life to take it away: therefore have I hid myself here, and when I am gone, who will defend the honor of God?" "Go forth," was the answer he heard; "the Lord Himself will come and fill you with a new spirit. Stand upon the mount before the Lord, and behold the Lord passeth." Thereupon he was aware of a mighty wind that uprooted trees and cleft the rocks asunder: "a great and strong wind overthrowing the mountains, and breaking the rocks in pieces." Elias, filled with a reverential fear, thought that it was surely the almighty God who was approaching in the storm. But no; "the Lord was not in the wind." "After the wind came an earthquake that shook the mountains." After the wind and earthquake, there, certainly, he thought, is the Spirit of God. "But the Lord was not in the earthquake." He then saw a burning fire: "and after the earthquake a fire;" but not even there was the Spirit of God: "the Lord was not in the fire." Under what figure, then, did He come at last? "After the fire the whistling of a gentle air;" and behold, there was the Spirit of God breathing on the Prophet. And when Elias heard it, he covered his face with his mantle, and coming forth stood in the entering in of the cave, in order to hear what the Lord, who was present, had to say to him.¹ So far the narrative of the Sacred Writings.

For they re-
quired a

Now I ask, my dear brethren, why did not the Spirit of God come to Elias under the figure of the wind, the earthquake, or

¹ Quid hic agis, Elia? At ille respondit: Zelo zelatus sum pro Domino Deo exercituum quia dereliquerunt pactum tuum filii Israel. . . . Derelictus sum ego solus, et querunt animam meam, ut auferant eam. Egredere, et sta in monte coram Domino, et ecce Dominus transit. Spiritus grandis et fortis subvertens montes, et conterens petras ante Dominum.

the burning fire? The Lord was not in the wind, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, and yet, as we have seen already, the same Holy Spirit came to the apostles on this day of Pentecost in a mighty wind and in the form of fire. What is the reason of this difference? None other than that which the Angelic Doctor gives, and which I have quoted for you already; the Holy Ghost, when He comes to the soul, comes for the purpose of changing it into a new and better state of grace. What change was the Prophet Elias in need of? Did he perhaps require to be inflamed with a greater zeal for the divine honor? By no means; that would be throwing oil on the flame; for he was already filled with indignation against the wicked in his zeal for the glory of God. And therefore, lest his zeal should degenerate into cruelty, he required to be restrained and comforted, so that he might show more mercy in his future dealings with sinners, and thus it was that the Holy Ghost came to him in the form of a gentle wind, as if to cool his intemperate heat, and refresh him. Consider, on the other hand, the case of the apostles in the supper-room at Jerusalem; what change were they in need of? What state were they in at that time? They were all weak, cold, imperfect, of little faith, pusillanimous, fearful, ready to creep into any corner to get out of danger, as St. John says of them in his Gospel: "When the doors were shut, where the disciples were gathered together for fear of the Jews."¹ Not one of them dared to go out into the street, or to show himself in public, much less to utter the name of Jesus, for fear of being imprisoned and put to a cruel death like his divine Master. Here there was no occasion for the gentle wind, as was the case with Elias; for their zeal did not stand in need of cooling, like his. No! Come Holy Ghost, but come with a mighty wind, in order to arouse the disciples out of their sleep! Come, but with a great storm, in order to drive them into the wide world out of the room in which they are hiding! Come, but with a burning fire, in order to inflame those cold hearts with love and fervor! They require strength to fight against the sins and vices of the world; courage to stand unappalled before kings and tyrants; fiery tongues to preach everywhere the Gospel of Jesus Christ; patience and constancy to over-

different
change
from that of
which Elias
stood in
need.

Non in spiritu Dominus. Et post spiritum commotio; non in commotione Dominus. Et post commotionem ignis, non in igne Dominus. Et post ignem sibilus auræ tenuis. Quod cum audisset Elias, operuit vultum suum pallio, et egressus stetit in ostio speluncae.—III. Kings xix. 9-12.

¹ Cum fores essent clausæ ubi erant discipuli congregati, propter metum Judæorum.—John xx. 19.

come the difficulties and bear the persecutions and torments that await them. Come, O Holy Ghost!

How wonderfully they were changed by the Holy Ghost.

And behold, He comes with wind and fire, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. And what a wonderful effect His coming had on the disciples! "Let us consider," says St. Gregory, "the holy preachers of our faith, and see in what state the Holy Ghost found them, and in what state He left them."¹ What an immense difference there is between the two states! They who before were so cold and cowardly that they hardly dared to show themselves in public, ran out into the street into the midst of the people, and boldly preached the crucified Jesus: "And they began to speak with divers tongues according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak."² The people who heard them were so amazed that they knew not what to think; some looked on them as under the influence of wine. "And when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded in mind. . . . And they were all amazed and wondered, saying: What meaneth this? But others, mocking, said: These men are full of new wine."³ "Behold," continues St. Gregory, "Peter, who was formerly afraid of words, now rejoices in stripes."⁴ He who formerly trembled before a maid-servant now presents himself fearlessly before kings and emperors; he boldly reproaches the city of Jerusalem with its wickedness, and proposes to its inhabitants, as the God whom they must adore, Jesus Christ crucified, whom they murdered, and whom he himself had already thrice denied under the influence of fear: "But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and spoke to them: Do penance and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ."⁵ And what was the effect of his sermon? About three thousand people were baptized on that day: "And there were added in that day about three thousand souls."⁶ Wonderful indeed was the change worked in the apostles by the coming of the Holy Ghost.

¹ *Pensemus sanctos prædicatores nostros, quales hodierna die Spiritus Sanctus reperit, quales fecit.*

² *Et cœperunt loqui variis linguis, prout Spiritus Sanctus dabat eloqui illis.*—Acts ii. 4.

³ *Facta autem hac voce convenit multitudo et mente confusa est; stupebant autem omnes, et mirabantur ad invicem, dicentes: quidnam vult hoc esse? Alii autem irridentes dicebant, quia musto pleni sunt isti.*—Ibid. 6, 7, 12, 13.

⁴ *Ecce gaudet Petrus in verberibus, qui ante timebat in verbis.*—S. Greg. Hom. xxx. in Evang.

⁵ *Stans autem Petrus cum undecim, levavit vocem suam, et locutus est eis: poenitentiam agite, et baptizetur unusquisque vestrum in nomine Jesu Christi.*—Acts ii. 14, 22.

⁶ *Et appositæ sunt in die illa animæ circiter tria millia.*—Ibid. 41.

Now to our subject, my dear brethren. An evident sign of the coming of the Holy Ghost is the change of the soul to a new and better state of grace. Let each one now enter into himself and ask himself, how is it with my heart? what does it say to me? Have I at last truly amended my life, according to the sermons and exhortations of which I have heard so many, and the inspirations of the Holy Ghost that have been so liberally bestowed on me? To-day is the twentieth, thirtieth, fortieth, fiftieth time for me to celebrate the feast of Pentecost, and to pray and sing with the Catholic Church, "Come, Holy Ghost." During that time, have I remained firm and constant in the state of grace? Have I put off the old and put on the new man? Has my former coldness and tepidity in the divine service been changed into true zeal and Christian devotion? Have I since my last confession experienced a marked amendment in my former bad habits? My pride used to be so great that I was unwilling to make any concession to others; have I now become more meek and humble? I used to be so absorbed in temporal things that I hardly thought once during the day on God and heavenly things; I was careless of my salvation, and my sole concern was to make money; has that eagerness for the world now grown notably less, while my love for eternal goods is increased? Formerly my unmortified flesh led me into indulging in many impure thoughts and desires; in unchaste looks, touches, words, and songs; in dangerous love and friendship with persons of the other sex; have I now become more pure? Have I given up associating with that person? Have I abandoned the proximate occasion of sin? Have I kept away from that house, that place, in which I used to sin before? Formerly I was in the habit of indulging in that devil's language, swearing and cursing; have I corrected that bad habit? Formerly, through curiosity, or imprudence, or talkativeness, or envy, or uncharity, I was given to talk about all that I had seen or heard of others, whereby I frequently sinned against charity and injured my neighbor's reputation; have I now become more careful in that respect? I used to live in strife and contention with my neighbor, with my husband or wife; have I now become reconciled to them from my heart? Am I more friendly towards them? Is there a real Christian and conjugal love between us? Formerly I was addicted to excessive drinking, which caused much unhappiness in my family, ruined my temporal prospects, and led me into

Therefore he who finds himself in a better state may conclude that the Holy Ghost dwells in him.

many other sins; have I now become more temperate? Am I firmly resolved to live in a more Christian manner in future? I used to give scandal to many by my conversation, manners, and dress, and led many a soul from God to the slavery of the devil; do I now lead a more edifying life? Is the stumbling-block removed out of the way? Formerly I was so sensitive that I could not bear the least word of contradiction, and murmured and complained at the least trial or annoyance; am I now more patient and more resigned to the will of God? I used to allow every freedom to my eyes, ears, and other senses, and in all things I sought my pleasure and comfort; have I now a greater love for the cross and Christian mortification? Formerly I used to perform all my actions without a thought of God, or of a good intention; am I now more united with God in my actions? In a word, has my life become changed for the better? If so, then indeed it is well with me, for that is a clear sign that the Spirit of God has come to me, and that my soul is now the dwelling-place of the Holy Ghost, who has wrought this change in me.

While he
who re-
mains in the
old state has
not yet re-
ceived Him.

But if, on the other hand, things remain in the old state; if I bring the same sins from one confession to another; if I am just as vain, impatient, unchaste, talkative, sensual, avaricious, tepid in the divine service as before; in the same proximate occasion and dangerous intimacy as before; in the same habit of cursing and swearing, the same hatred and discord, the same drunkenness as before, alas, then the Holy Ghost is still far from me! He has not yet come to me, or rather I have shut the door against Him and have refused to receive Him; so that it is another spirit, a wicked one, the vain spirit of the world, the unchaste spirit of the flesh, some unruly spirit of hell that has taken up his dwelling in my heart. I will, then, do sincere penance, and drive that spirit away, and sigh forth to Heaven: "Come, Holy Ghost!" The door of my heart is open; fulfil in me the words Thou didst speak to Saul: "The Spirit of the Lord shall come upon thee, and thou shalt be changed into another man." But it is not enough for the Holy Ghost to come into my soul; for what better should I be if He were to depart from me again? What must I do, then, that the words may be verified in me, "We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him"? What am I to do that the Holy Ghost may remain with me constantly and dwell within me? This, my dear brethren, I shall briefly explain in the second part.

Second Part.

What do you do if you wish to keep a lighted candle from being blown out? You are passing along a rough, stony street, on a dark night, with a strong wind blowing; how carefully do you not watch the light you are carrying, lest it should be extinguished and leave you in darkness. For if the light goes out, you can no longer find your way. And how do you manage? You cover the flame with your hand as well as you can, so that the light is thrown on the ground at least. But when the wind is strong, even that precaution is not sufficient, for twenty hands would not keep it from being blown out. And so you would be left in an evil plight. What have you to do then? You put the candle into a lantern that is well closed in on all sides with glass, for if there is the least hole even in the lantern, the wind gets in, and all your care is useless, the light is blown out.

A light must be well protected, or the wind will blow it out.

Now, my dear brethren, we mortals are wandering along a dangerous road to a long eternity, and if we are not very careful, we may easily fall, or go astray in a thousand false paths which lead to eternal ruin, and, as far as the knowledge of the soul is concerned, we are travelling in the dark, unless a light shines on us from above. The Holy Ghost is this light, for the Catholic Church sings of Him: "Come, light of our hearts!"¹ Happy he who is provided with this light! As long as it shines on him, he is certain of being on the right road to heaven. But he must be careful that it is not extinguished. "Extinguish not the spirit," as the holy Apostle St. Paul warns us.² If you have received the Spirit of God, be careful not to lose Him. Hear what St. John Chrysostom says: "The Spirit is extinguished like a light, if you do not shut the door."³ By the door he means our outward senses, especially the eyes and ears, by which the greatest number of sins finds an entry into our hearts, the divine light of the Holy Ghost is extinguished, and He Himself is driven out of the soul.

So, also, if we wish to keep the light of the Holy Ghost, we must guard our outward senses.

Christian soul, you have now, as I suppose, confessed your sins with true supernatural sorrow: you come down through the church from the table of the Lord filled with the Spirit of God and with devotion, zeal, and splendid resolutions for the future, fully determined to devote yourself henceforth to the service

Especially the ears.

¹ Veni, Lumen cordium!

² Spiritum nolite extinguere.—I. Thess. v. 19.

³ Spiritus æque ac lucerna extinguitur, si ostium non occluseris.

of God. Methinks I see your holy guardian angel at your right side, calling out with joy to the other angels the words of the Gospel, in which the divine Shepherd rejoices at having found the lost sheep: "Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost."¹ See how beautiful this soul is, adorned as it is with the snow-white wedding-garment of sanctifying grace, with the precious garb of immortality, with the royal colors of the children of God! The angels look on you as their brother; heaven sees in you its heir and sovereign; God, your heavenly Father, regards you as His child; the Holy Ghost, as His bride, newly adorned and beautified. Beautiful soul! I congratulate you with all my heart! But you must go out of the church again. To-day or to-morrow you will go to that house or company in which, as you know from sad experience, you are apt to hear double-meaning words, or doubtful expressions that savor of impurity, expressions that should never be used amongst us, according to the warning of the Apostle: "All uncleanness . . . let it not so much as be named among you, as becometh saints: or obscenity, or foolish talking, or scurrility."² Oh, what a dangerous wind that is! Shut the door at once! Stop your ears! The Spirit of God, who is now dwelling in you, will be blown out like a light, if you do not shut the door, that is, your ears; your devotion will grow cold; your good resolutions will be forgotten; you will begin little by little to laugh at that sinful conversation and to take an inward pleasure in it, and so your light will be blown out again. To-day or to-morrow you will meet with those companions against whom the Wise Man warns us, when he says: "My son, if sinners shall entice thee, consent not to them; . . . walk not thou with them, restrain thy foot from their paths. For their feet run to evil."³ Your former comrades will laugh at you, if you refuse to join them as you did formerly; they will invite you, and do all they can to make you accompany them to that gaming or drinking house, where you know by experience that your innocence is apt to suffer harm. Ah, that is a dangerous wind for you! Shut the door at once! Close your ears! "Hedge in thy ears with thorns," says the Holy Ghost; "hear not a wicked tongue."⁴ The blandishments

¹ Congratulamini mihi, quia inveni ovem meam, quæ perierat.—Luke xv. 6.

² Omnis immunditia . . . nec nominetur in vobis, sicut decet sanctos: aut turpitudine, aut stultiloquium, aut scurrilitas.—Ephes. v. 3, 4.

³ Filii mi, si te lactaverint peccatores, ne acquiescas eis, . . . ne ambules cum eis; prohibe pedem tuum a semitis eorum. Pedes enim illorum ad malum currunt.—Prov. i. 10, 15, 16.

⁴ Sepi aures tuas spinis; linguam nequam noli audire.—Ecclus. xxviii. 28.

of such companions are false syrens' songs, that are intended to lure your soul on to the quicksands. The Holy Ghost will be driven out of your soul like a candle that is blown out, if you do not close your ears on such occasions, and persevere with constancy on the way in which you have commenced to walk. To-day or to-morrow you will meet with friends who will flatter and try to cajole you with sweet words and a pleasing demeanor; away from them at once! They are a dangerous wind for you! Keep the door of your heart tightly closed; nay, avoid the house in which you meet with such people as you would a pestilence; otherwise the light of the Holy Ghost that is in your soul will be completely extinguished.

But if the ears are so dangerous on such occasions, how much more dangerous are not the eyes, if they are not strictly watched! And still more the eyes; shown by a simile. Serpents fight with the elephant; but their first attack is directed against the eyes. "They try to attack the eyes alone," says Solinus, "because they know that they are the only vulnerable part."¹ The devil, the infernal serpent, is also well aware that the most dangerous doors for us are the eyes, and therefore he tries in every way to excite our curiosity, that he may thus succeed in pouring his deadly poison into our hearts and in blowing out the divine light of the Holy Ghost. Christian soul, you are now full of this light; be careful of it! Many a pleasing object will be offered to your eyes; you will be tempted by the beauty of others, by impure pictures and love tales; ah, what a dangerous wind that is for you! Turn away your eyes at once, or else you will lose the light of grace! O eyes, murderers of the soul! when you are too curious, what a beautiful light you put out! But, you think, why make so much bother about such a little thing? Is it such a great evil to look on the beauty of God's creatures? Must we always keep our eyes closed to it? Tell me this, my dear brethren; one of you sees an adder laying its eggs in a bundle of straw; these eggs are said to be most beautiful, snow-white, round and shining like a pearl; he takes one of the eggs in his hand and admires it. Put it away! I say to him; put it away at once! But why? he asks. What harm will it do to me if I take it in my hand, or even place it in my bosom? You will soon find out that! I should reply. Truly, if the egg remained always as hard and closed as it is now, you would suffer no harm from it; but in a short time the very heat of your hand

¹ Non aliud magis quam oculos petunt, quos solos expugnabiles sciunt.

would suffice to cause the egg to open, and to produce a living adder, filled with such a virulent poison that, if it were to bite you, not all the medicines in the world could cure you; for in a short time that poison would eat away your very heart. Oh, you think, if that is the case, I will have nothing to do with the egg. And in the same way I say also: if the whole mischief consisted in the mere fact of looking at a beautiful object, such looks would be harmless and no injury could result to the soul; but “the thought follows the look, pleasure the thought, and consent the pleasure.”¹ There you have the venom that kills the soul, the hellish wind that drives away the Holy Ghost and extinguishes the light of grace.

For nothing
excites de-
sire more
than the
sight of a
beautiful
object.

The reason of this is evident; for the image of a pleasing object is a sort of enchantment, that offers a kind of sweet violence to the will. Show to the man you wish to bribe a handful of ducats; there, you say, that is yours, if you do this or that for me; and he will easily allow himself to be persuaded to accede to your wishes, and that, too, frequently against his conscience. On the other hand, say to him: I will prove my gratitude to you hereafter; I will give you a handful of ducats as a reward; you will not influence him half so much, because he looks on your hereafter as an uncertainty. This enchantment the devil ventured to use even against the Son of God, in order, as he hoped, to induce Him to sin. He took Our Lord, as we read in the Gospel of St. Matthew, to the top of a high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the earth and their glory. ‘See, he exclaimed, see those beautiful landscapes, those wide kingdoms, those beautiful meadows and gardens, those magnificent towns and cities; all this I will give Thee, if Thou wilt only bend the knee before me.’² But why did he show the kingdoms and goods of this world to Our Lord? Could he not have described them to Him in detail, and expatiated on their value and beauty? But the crafty spirit knew well the difference there is between having a mere knowledge with the understanding of an agreeable object and seeing it before one’s eyes. For the beauty that one sees is already half coveted.

Many have
lost the

Even the most brilliant lights of heaven have been extinguished in that way; I mean, the holiest souls have been led into sin by

¹ Visum sequitur cogitatio, cogitationem delectatio, delectationem consensus.

² Assumpsit eum diabolus in montem excelsum valde; et ostendit ei omnia regna mundi gloriæ eorum.—Matt. iv. 8.

³ Hæc omnia tibi dabo, si cadens adoraveris me.—Ibid. 9.

an unguarded look. Eve, who was created in the state of sanctifying grace and full of the Holy Ghost, cast a glance on the forbidden fruit: "And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold." Oh, the hellish serpent had already attained his object! "And she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat."¹ David, a man after God's own heart, chanced to see at a distance, from the windows of his palace, the beauty of Bethsabee, and at once all his light, his holiness, and his fear of God left him. The elders of the Jewish people looked at Susanna, and the light of God became extinguished in their hearts. O eyes, I repeat, murderers of souls! when you are too curious, what a beautiful light you put out! With reason did the Prophet Jeremias exclaim: "My eye hath wasted my soul."² Supposing even that the sight of another's beauty does not at once cause you to indulge in an unlawful desire, do you think that the image which has once filled your imagination will so soon be expelled from it? By no means. The devil will know how to excite it again, either when you are alone, or in the stillness of the night, or even in church and when you are at your prayers. I refer you to your own experience in corroboration of this. From what other source do the most common and most violent temptations that assail the imagination come, if not from some object that, often quite unforeseen, presents itself to our gaze? And how much more are not such temptations to be looked for, when we deliberately fix our eyes on such objects? Impure thoughts and desires are only too apt to come of themselves without provocation, and to buzz around us like flies; twenty times we drive them away, and twenty times they come back again. What will it be when we open the door wide to them, and allow them to enter freely by our eyes? Ah, for God's sake, as St. John Chrysostom warns us, "let us not open the gate to our enemy, nor wilfully admit the seeds of wickedness!"³

Holy Ghost
in that way.

I cannot make a better conclusion than in the words which St. Paul addresses to the Thessalonians: "All you are the children of light, and children of the day; we are not of the night nor of darkness."⁴ Dear souls, filled with the Holy Ghost, whom you have received after a worthy confession and Communion, you are now completely renewed! Children of light, you are inflamed

Exhortation
to guard
well the
doors of the
senses, so as
not to lose
the Holy
Ghost.

¹ Vident igitur mulier quod bonum esset lignum ad vescendum, et pulchrum oculis aspectuque delectabile; et tulit de fructu illius, et comedit.—Gen. iii. 6.

² Oculi mei depredatus est animam meam.—Lam. iii. 51.

³ Ne hosti aperiamus portas, neque semina malitiæ recipiamus.

⁴ Omnes vos filii lucis estis, et filii diei; non sumus noctis, neque tenebrarum.—I. Thess. v. 5.

with the fire of the love of God; rejoice in the Lord and bless the Father of light; but be careful in future! “Extinguish not the spirit;” do not put out that beautiful light! Keep fast closed the doors of your senses, especially your eyes and ears, that the dangerous wind may not enter; fly carefully all the occasions in which you know by experience you are apt to fall; “and may the God of peace Himself sanctify you in all things, that your whole spirit, and soul, and body may be preserved blameless in the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ,”¹ whom may we meet like the prudent virgins, with well-filled lamps, and with Him enter into eternal glory. Amen.

¹ Ipse autem Deus pacis sanctificet vos per omnia, ut integer spiritus vester, et anima et corpus sine querela in adventu Domini nostri Jesu Christi servetur.—I. Thess. v. 23.

ON THE FEAR AND LOVE OF GOD.

SECOND SERMON.

ON LOVING AND SERVING GOD, BECAUSE HE IS OUR LORD.

Subject.

God is our Lord, therefore we should serve Him and love Him with our whole hearts.—*Preached on the First Sunday in Lent.*

Text.

Scriptum est enim: Dominum Deum tuum adorabis, et illi soli servies.—Matt. iv. 10.

“For it is written: The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve.”

Introduction.

And is it, then, necessary that an express command should be issued compelling man under pain of eternal damnation to adore his Lord and God, and to serve Him alone? God, who is infinitely beautiful, who is infinitely perfect, and in Himself worthy of all love; in whom there is nothing that can be hated, nothing that must not be esteemed and loved! What reason that has but the least inkling of this will not be at once forced to esteem and love this Good, and therefore to serve Him with all possible diligence? God, the best and most generous Lord, who showers benefits on us every moment of our lives! What heart can be so ungrateful as not to honor and love Him? God, our supreme, only, and true good, whom we hope and desire to possess one day forever in heaven; in whom alone we can find all that can satisfy us! What man is there, who loves his own happiness, who should not adore this Good, and love Him and serve Him faithfully? And yet, O God, Thou art forced to command us, saying: “The Lord thy

God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve!" Such were my thoughts, my dear brethren, when I began to prepare this subject of the fear, love, and service of God, which I intend to spend some time in treating of. And truly, what is there more surprising than that there should be a necessity of a special command in this matter? But when I consider the way of the world, and how the greater number, instead of loving and serving their God, only offend and insult Him day by day, I am no longer surprised. In order, then, to force men to render Him their due homage of love and service, God must have recourse to a strict command: "The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve," although what God is in Himself should impel us to this love and service without any further law. To-day I shall confine myself to these words of my text, "The Lord thy God," and I say—

Plan of Discourse.

God is our Lord, and therefore we should serve Him and love Him with all our hearts. Such is the whole subject of my discourse.

Mary, Mother of fair love! and you angels, who are inflamed with divine love, obtain for us from our God, most worthy of all love, that we may in future serve Him at least as our Lord, and love Him with all our hearts.

Every nation esteems and loves its sovereign.

Nature has inspired even the most savage and barbarous nations with a special esteem, respect, reverence, and love for their lawful sovereigns; they rejoice at the might and glory of their rulers; they wish well to them and are pleased when their power is extended. They cannot bear to see foreigners attempting anything against them, and look on it as an honor and glory to defend their sovereign even at the risk of their lives. And those are the sentiments even of people who have never seen their sovereign, nor heard what kind of a man he is, nor whether he is highly gifted, or of an amiable disposition. Nay, even harshness and severity on the part of the ruler makes no change in the dispositions of his subjects in this respect. It is enough for the latter to be able to say: he is our lord, our prince, our king, our emperor, our sovereign; therefore we must obey him; therefore we are ready to follow his least sign; therefore we rejoice with all our hearts at his prosperity and wish him every blessing. Nor are the same feelings of respect, love, and affection entertained to-

wards foreign princes and potentates, no matter of what kind they may be. If I read or hear that the emperor of China, for instance, is a great man, that he has won a battle, etc., what effect has it on me? None; it excites in me neither joy at his success, nor love for his person; for, I think, it does not make the slightest matter to me whether he is well or ill, whether he conquers or not, for he has nothing whatever to do with me. But, on the other hand, if joyful or sorrowful news is bruited about Europe concerning the Roman emperor, for instance, or the king of France, or the king of Hungary, or other European sovereigns, oh, then the hearts of the different peoples are naturally and unavoidably affected with either grief or joy, according to the nature of the news, although individuals suffer no harm and receive no benefit by the change in the state of affairs. Every honest man will stand up for his sovereign, wish well to him, esteem and love him, and that, too, very often on no other grounds than that he can say, "he is my king or prince." The world has heard before now of servants who, to save their royal masters from danger, changed clothes with them and allowed themselves to be taken prisoners in their stead and put to death.

So great is the respect which the authority of the superior inspires his subject with. Now, if a subject dared to speak disrespectfully of his king, to say nothing of insulting him to his face, or rising up in armed rebellion against him, what a horrible crime he would be guilty of in the eyes of the people, who would consider no punishment severe enough for him. Read the first chapter of the Second Book of Kings, and consider what is related there. There had been a fierce battle between the army of King Saul, whom God had rejected and resolved to deprive of his throne, and the forces of the Philistines. Three days afterwards there came to King David a young man with his person and clothes in the greatest disorder, and covered with dust, who, without losing a moment, threw himself at the king's feet and bowed down to the ground before him. "From whence comest thou?" said David. "I am fled out of the camp of Israel," was the answer. "And David said unto him: what is the matter that is come to pass?" He said: the people are fled from the battle; moreover Saul and Jonathan his son are slain. And David said: "How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan his son are dead?"¹ My lord, said the young man to him, as I was

He who acts
otherwise is
everywhere
condemned
and pun-
ished.

¹ Unde venis? de castris Israel fugi. Et dixit ad eum David: quod est verbum quod factum est? indica mihi. Qui ait: Fugit populus ex proelio; sed et Saul et Jonathas filius

coming over Mount Gelboe, I saw your sworn enemy, Saul, abandoned by every one and in utter despair, on the point of putting an end to himself by falling on his own sword. When he saw me, he called out to me, saying: "Stand over me and kill me; for anguish is come upon me." Through pity I granted his request; so "standing over him, I killed him; for I knew that he could not live after the fall; and I took the diadem that was on his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them hither to thee, my lord."¹ And what reward did the young man receive from David for his news? Full of wrath, the king cried out: What have you done? how did you dare to slay your king and master? "Why didst thou not fear to put out thy hand, to kill the Lord's anointed?"² Your wickedness is worthy of death. Away with the wretch who has committed such a crime! Ah, my king, I did it because he himself asked me; I meant well to him; I took pity on his miserable state, and in any case, he was on the point of death! What? you meant well with him? you acted through pity? What empty excuses are these! Even the remnant of life that was in him should have been respected by you. The kings and rulers of the world should not have violent hands laid on them; no common hand, especially that of a subject, should dare to be guilty of such irreverence to the person of a sovereign. You must die, therefore, in punishment of your crime. "And David, calling one of his servants, said: Go near and fall upon him. And he struck him so that he died."³ So great is the resentment of people towards subjects who attack their sovereign, that even David, that meekest of men, could not allow to go unpunished the injury done his sworn enemy, simply because the latter was a king.

God is the
only true
Lord.

"The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him alone shalt thou serve." See there, Christians, why we should fear and honor God, and serve and love Him with our whole hearts. If we had no other reason to impel us to do so, the mere fact of His being our Lord should suffice. And what kind of a lord is He? "Ah," says St. Augustine, explaining the passage of the Psalmist, "I

ejus interierunt. Dixitque David: Unde scis quia mortuus est Saul et Jonathas filius ejus.—II. Kings i. 3-5.

¹ *Sta super me et interfice me: quoniam tenent me angustiae. Stansque super eum, occidi illum; sciebam enim quod vivere non poterat post ruinam, et tuli diadema quod erat in capite ejus, et armillam de brachio illius, et attuli ad te dominum meum huc.*—Ibid. 9, 10.

² *Quare non timuisti mittere manum tuam, ut occideres Christum Domini?*—Ibid. 14.

³ *Vocansque David unum de pueris suis, ait: accedens irruerit in eum. Qui percussit illum et mortuus est.*—Ibid. 15.

have said to the Lord, Thou art my God;"¹ all the emperors, kings, and rulers of the world govern in a servile manner; they are masters and servants at the same time, because their power is united with want; they have received from God the power and right to rule over others and make laws for them; while all their pomp and magnificence they must get from the very persons whom they govern. They are in need of their subjects; they live on their labor; they must be fed and protected by them and maintained in the style suited to their dignity. If they were to lose their land and their people, there would be an end to their splendor, and they would become like other men. Therefore they possess but a small and insignificant portion of true sovereignty; for as St. Augustine says, "you are not really a master, as long as you are in need of a servant."² And he adds: the master and servant are alike in want; "they are both mortals and both needy;"³ for they are mutually in want of each other's help. "Therefore no one of you is truly a master, no one truly a servant."⁴ St. Asterius laughs at those who assume the title of lord or master, and use the words "mine and thine" when speaking of things that belong to them. "When I hear people saying, my house, my land, I cannot forbear being astonished that a man should, by using those words of a few letters, endeavor to arrogate to himself the possession of what belongs to another."⁵ Everything that a man has, whether movable or immovable, passes from one hand to another, from one owner to another. In all the years that have elapsed since the creation of the world, that land of yours has had more owners than it has plants or trees. Who is, then, the true and real lord, that perfect master, who is worthy of our love and service? Thou, O my God, as we must all acknowledge with Thy servant David: "Thou art my God, for Thou hast no need of my goods."⁶ Thou art the Lord of whom St. Augustine said: "He does not want us, but we are in want of Him, and therefore He is truly our Lord."⁷ "Thou alone art the Lord,"⁸ as the Church cries out to Thee every day in the holy Mass; and there is no other

¹ Dixi Domino: Deus meus es tu.—Ps. xv. 2.

² Non es verus dominus, quando indiges inferiore.—S. Aug. Tract. 8. in Epist. Joan.

³ Ambo homines, ambo egentes.—Ibid.

⁴ Itaque nullus vestrum vere dominus, et nullus vestrum vere servus.—Ibid.

⁵ Cum aliquos audio dicentes: domus mea, prædium meum, satis non possum admirari; cum tribus fallacibus literulis aliena sibi vindicant.

⁶ Deus meus es tu, quoniam bonorum meorum non eges.—Ps. xv. 2.

⁷ Ille non eget nostri, et nos egemus ipsius; ideo verus Dominus.

⁸ Tu solus Dominus.

beside Thee. Thou alone art the Lord of and in Thyself. From eternity, before the heavens and the earth were, Thou wert in and with Thyself just as great, mighty, rich, and happy a Lord as Thou art now; and if heaven and earth and all things were to sink back into nothingness, Thou, O Lord, wouldst not lose a tittle of greatness and power; for Thou alone art the Lord.

And a Lord
to whom we
belong com-
pletely.

Mark again, my dear brethren, how this Lord can be called our Lord in a far more perfect sense than earthly potentates can receive that title from their subjects. These latter belong to their sovereigns in such a way that they are bound to obey the laws of the land, and to perform the services required from them; but they do not receive their lives and being from their sovereigns. Princes and kings may say: these people are my subjects; this kingdom, this country, belongs to me, it is for my use and service. But the subjects cannot say: the prince or king belongs to us, he is for our use and service. But God is truly our very own Lord; we belong completely to Him, and He, great as He is, belongs completely to us. We belong completely to Him, not merely on account of the supreme authority by which He rules over and governs us, and which we as His servants and vassals must obey; but our souls and bodies and very lives belong to Him by the title of creation, because He has created us out of nothing; by the title of redemption, because He has bought us by His Blood; and by the title of preservation, for every moment He must, as it were, create us anew, nor can we make the least movement without His help and coöperation.

Consider the constant and indispensable necessity the child of two years is in of its mother's help. It cannot do the least thing of itself; it is unable to take the least step forward; it has to be carried on its mother's arm; if it is cold, it cannot draw near the fire; if it is hungry, it cannot appease itself, nay, not even can it declare its wants in words; if it falls down, it cannot raise itself up again; if it is threatened, it cannot defend itself; if naked, it cannot clothe itself; if clothed, it cannot undress; in all these things it stands in need of its mother or its nurse. In the same way and still more do we depend on God our Lord, and stand in need of His help. Consider, too, the countless motions and movements that are necessary every moment to support our bodily life. The blood must always course through the veins without resting a moment; the pulse must beat, we have to draw our breath, the stomach has to digest the food, the heart to beat, etc.

Not one of these things can happen without the present help and coöperation of the Lord our God. Finally we belong to Him by the title of that most just power by which He can do with us all He pleases without being in the least unjust to us. He can raise or lower me; He can endow me with riches or allow me to pine away in poverty; He can give me health and strength, and again deprive me of it; He can preserve my life, and take it from me just as He chooses; He can reduce me to nothing, if such seems good to Him, without being in the least accountable to any one; and all that He can do with far more power and right than the owner can dispose of his horse, or sell it, or give it away, or permit it to rest in the stable, or drive it on the most difficult roads, or put a bullet through its head, without its having the smallest right to complain.

And meanwhile, although we belong thus completely to God our Lord, yet He, too, is ours, so that we can say with truth: God belongs to us completely. The Prophet David rejoices at this: "Behold, I know Thou art my God."¹ "Oh, what great knowledge that is!" says St. Augustine, speaking of this passage; "he does not say, I know that Thou art God; but, I know that Thou art my God."² The Lord is ours to such an extent that, so to speak, He will not be a lord, unless for us. He has given us all that He has created outside of Himself; He has given us all that He is in Himself. If I contemplate the vast globe of the earth, and look round me, I find myself in the midst of countless creatures of manifold differences of shape, beauty, strength, and utility, so that I know not what I must begin to admire first, and am in the same condition as the queen of Saba when she saw the magnificence of Solomon: "And when the queen of Saba saw all the wisdom of Solomon, and the house which he had built, and the meat of his table, and the apartments of his servants, and the order of his ministers, . . . she had no longer any spirit in her,"³ and she sank down fainting with wonder. But suppose that some one had said to the queen, after she had come to herself, Behold, all this palace is built for no one else but you, and it is destined for your dwelling; these gardens are for your pleasure; these countless servants are for you alone; what would she have

Who also belongs completely to us, with all that is outside Himself.

¹ Ecce cognovi quoniam Deus meus es.—Ps. lv. 10.

² Magna scientia! non ait, scivi quia Deus es, sed quia Deus meus es.—S. Aug. in eundem Psalm.

³ Videns autem regina Saba omnem sapientiam Salomonis, et domum quam ædificaverat, et cibos mensæ ejus, et habitacula servorum, et ordines ministrantium non habebat ultra spiritum.—III. Kings x. 4, 5.

thought? what would have been her feelings towards Solomon? But that is exactly what is said to us mortals. When God had created the heavens and the earth and all the creatures in them, He led man into this magnificent palace, and said to him: all that is for you; “fill the earth and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and all living creatures that move upon the earth. Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed upon the earth, and all trees. . . . to be your meat.”¹ All that belongs to you; I am not in want of the earth, nor of a house, in order to live therein; I do not require food or drink to support My life, nor sun and stars to give Me light, nor forests and gardens for My pleasure; all these things are only for you, My servants; they are for your use, your support, your enjoyment, your delight. I have built a heavenly palace which you cannot see now; but not even that do I require for Myself; without it I am happy from all eternity. That, too, is for you, My servants; if you serve Me for a certain time and remain faithful to Me, you will possess the kingdom prepared for you, with all its joys and delights. O my Lord and God, what are we to think or say, how are we to express our astonishment? Nothing, then, of all that Thou hast made outside Thyself is for any one else but us.

And with
all that
is in Him-
self.

Nay, Thou dost not look on it as even enough for Thy faithful servants that Thou hast created heaven and earth for them. For it is Thy will that all Thou art and hast should also be ours; Thou hast made us like Thyself, in creating us to Thy own image; Thou hast made Thyself like to us, when Thou didst take our nature on Thyself, and become a poor man for our sake; Thou didst give Thyself completely to us, when Thou didst sacrifice Thy life on the gibbet of the cross for us; Thou hast made Thyself our food, since Thou didst leave Thyself to us in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar; every day Thou dost offer Thyself as a continual sacrifice for our sins to Thy Eternal Father; and Thou Thyself, with Thy whole divine essence, wilt be our reward in the heaven where we are to possess Thee for eternity, and where we shall live with Thy life, be happy with Thy glory and splendor, and rejoice with Thy own joy; Thou wilt be our portion, our inheritance, our very own and eternal good! O my Lord and my God, filled with wonder, I now cry

¹ Replete terram et subjicite eam; dominamini piscibus maris, et volatilibus cœli, et universis animantibus quæ moventur super terram. Ecce dedi vobis omnem herbam afferentem semen super terram, et universa ligna, ut sint vobis in escam.—Gen. 1. 28, 29.

out with David: "Behold I know Thou art my God;" I know that Thou art truly mine; that not only do we belong to Thee, but Thou also to us, and therefore in the most perfect manner, and by all imaginable titles, that Thou art our Lord and God.

Christians, do we believe this truth? Do we thus acknowledge God as our Lord? But if so, where is the respect we owe Him? Where the obedience, reverence, esteem, affection and love which nature has given even the most wild and savage people for their lawful rulers, although the title of the latter is only an imperfect one? Should not this alone impel us to love God always with our whole hearts, to keep His law, sweet and consoling as it is, inviolably, to serve Him alone most zealously, and to fulfil His holy will in all things most exactly? And yet (oh, what ungrateful, or rather boorish, senseless, dishonorable servants of such a Master we are!) we make the greatest difficulty of loving and serving our Lord! Is that not the case, my dear brethren? We must love Him according to the law He has laid down for us in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind."¹ With our whole heart, inasmuch as we must truly love Him above all things; we must esteem nothing, desire nothing, love nothing, but the Lord our God alone, and if we wish for anything else besides Him, or esteem or love it, it must be on account of our Lord. With our whole soul, inasmuch as we do not allow ourselves to be moved by anything but God alone; when we rejoice, it should be on account of His endless glory and happiness; when we are sorrowful, it should be because we have despised and offended Him, because so few really know and honor Him in the world, because so many dishonor His holy name. Our only fear should be to fall into disfavor with Him by again falling into sin; if we hope for or desire anything, it should be perseverance in His grace and friendship, that we may love and praise Him in eternity. With our whole mind, inasmuch as we should always think of our God as far as possible, and be concerned about nothing except pleasing Him more and more, and offering Him acceptable service. Finally, we should love Him with all our strength, inasmuch as we should be ready to put forward every effort of soul and body when the honor of God requires it, and be prepared to sacrifice all we have,

Therefore
we should
serve and
love Him
above all
things.

¹ Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo, et in tota anima tua, et in tota mente tua.—Matt. xxii. 37.

and all that the world esteems, and according to His good will and pleasure to accept all imaginable trials and difficulties, and bear them patiently till death for His sake. This is the measure of the love and esteem which Thou, O great God and Lord of infinite perfection, so justly requirest from us mortals! But how many servants dost Thou find in the world who pay Thee the tribute of love that is due to Thee?

We often do
the con-
trary, and
offend and
insult Him.

Alas, how far different is our conduct! There is hardly anything in the world that is not preferred to Thee in our hearts, wishes, and desires, in our love and esteem. Bitterly but truly does Salvianus complain that "God alone is vile in our eyes in comparison with other things."¹ And so it is in truth, my dear brethren. Consider what God is in Himself, how He is the supreme, all-perfect Good, and worthy of all love; how He is our sovereign benefactor, from whom we receive benefits at every moment; how He is our eternal recompense in heaven, and that joy and happiness that we desire as our greatest good; consider Him, I say, in that way, making abstraction of creatures which could excite our senses; then, indeed, we esteem, honor, love, and praise our Lord; we adore Him humbly, we thank Him, we resolve to serve Him and keep His commandments, we wish and desire to possess Him forever; but in comparison with other things that excite our cravings and desires, if the most trifling object is proposed to our choice instead of Him—nor do I now speak of the world with its treasures and riches, which, as we read in to-day's gospel, the devil offered Our Lord: "All these will I give Thee, if falling down Thou wilt adore me;"—if we have to choose between God and something of trifling value, as, for instance, between God and the point of honor, God and a temporal gain, God and a beautiful creature, God and some worldly vanity, God and a momentary pleasure, God and human respect, God and the laws of the world: what then becomes of God in our judgment? What place does He hold? Which of the two gets the preference? Ah, then we know the Lord no longer! Then, if not in words, at all events in deed we say, "I will not serve;" I am not ready to serve and obey my Lord to such an extent as to give up for His sake a temporal gain, or honor, or pleasure, or the love of a creature, or an unlawful custom of the world. Thus, in comparison with all other things, the Lord is looked on as the most worthless and the vil-

¹ Solus nobis in comparatione omnium Deus vilis est.—Salvian. de gubern. Dei, l. vi.

est. And this, says Salvianus, is the case with God alone. We should not dare to act in that way towards earthly sovereigns. If they utter a command, or publish a law, or make known their will even by a word, or mere sign, oh, how obedient their servants are! No difficulty frightens, no obstacle turns them away from their obedience; their duty may be displeasing to them, but no matter what sacrifices it exacts, they are ready to make them. The king has commanded, or forbidden; we must not go against his will. It is Thou alone, O Lord and God, who art thought of least of all by us; whose commands and prohibitions are ruthlessly trodden under foot when it does not suit our convenience to observe them.

Moses and Aaron came to king Pharaoh and made known to him the command of God: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: Let My people go that they may sacrifice to Me in the desert."¹ What? said the proud king by way of answer. "Who is the Lord that I should hear His voice, and let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go."² So Pharaoh would not hear anything about the God of Israel. But, my dear brethren, do you not think that he would have shown far greater pride and obstinacy, if he had said: I know the Lord, but I will not hear His voice, nor obey His command? Where the shameless pride of Pharaoh failed to reach, thereto have we come, when we consent to grievous sin. We know well that God is our supreme and sovereign Lord and Master, and that He has commanded or forbidden us peremptorily this or that, and yet what answer do we often make Him by our actions? "I will not hear Him, nor do as He orders me, nor obey Him." And this is the bitter complaint that God utters by the mouth of His Prophet Jeremias: "Of old time thou hast broken My yoke, thou hast burst My bonds, and thou saidst: I will not serve."³ I have commanded you to keep My law, and truly it is a sweet yoke and a light burden; but you, like an untamed horse, a stubborn ox, have cast the yoke from you, broken it to pieces, and trampled it in the dust: "Thou hast broken My yoke." The commandments I have given you are so many golden chains with which I wished to draw you to My love and service, nay,

And that,
too, know-
ing Him to
be our Lord

¹ Hæc dicit Dominus Deus Israel: dimitte populum meum, ut sacrificet mihi in deserto.—Exod. v. 1.

² Quis est Dominus, ut audiam vocem ejus, et dimittam Israel? Nescio Dominum, et Israel non dimittam.—Ibid. 2.

³ A sæculo confregisti jugum meum, rupisti vincula mea, et dixisti, non serviam.—Jerem. ii. 20.

even to the true freedom of My children; but “thou hast burst My bonds, and thou saidst: I will not serve,” and without any shame hast answered: I will not do it; I will not obey. If one of your friends asked a favor of you, you would at once say with the greatest courtesy: certainly, I will do as you ask, and I even look on it as an honor to be able to serve you. To your neighbor you would say: I am at your service; to an unknown person who asks something of you, you would give the same reply; nor would you refuse even the meanest of men. But Me, your only true Lord, you put off with those harsh and discourteous words, I will not serve. See, my dear brethren, that is the way in which I and many more with me have treated our Lord and God.

Conduct unworthy a human being; shown by examples.

But now I ask, is that a prudent mode of acting, to say nothing of honor or gratitude? But what am I saying? Can anything more terrible or presumptuous be imagined than for a Christian, who knows by the light of the true faith what a great Lord God is, to act in that manner? Richard, king of England, lost his way once when out hunting in the forest, and his servants being unable to find any trace of him, he was forced to beg hospitality for the night from a charcoal-burner, who received him indeed into his hut, but with so little courtesy, that at the very door he gave the king a box on the ear. Richard kept quiet and showed no indignation at the insult; but when he got safely home again, he put on his most costly apparel, seated himself, adorned with crown and sceptre, on his throne, and thus, surrounded by his ministers and vassals, caused his discourteous host to be brought before him, and said to him: “Do you know me now?” So terrible was the effect of these words on the poor man, that he sank dead on the ground with fear. Christians, that man acted in a most unbecoming manner towards his sovereign; but he did not know his dignity, and in so far he was excusable. But we know our great God and Lord, and yet we act far more rudely towards Him than the charcoal-burner acted towards the king; nor are we frightened at the thought of the number of times we have insulted Him by our sins. In former times, when the missionaries were preaching the Gospel in Further India, and explaining the mysteries of the faith, dilating on the Incarnation and shameful death of the Son of God, the heathens were so taken with the wonderful love of God, which was diametrically opposed to the infernal cruelty

and pride of their idols, that they cried out aloud: Oh, what a Lord that is! what a good Lord is He whom the Christians adore! How mild and kind and benevolent He is! But what would these blind heathens have said, if they had been told that Christians do not honor the loving Lord whom they adore! Would they not be astonished if they were to hear it said: Yes, truly the Christians have the greatest, mightiest, most just, wisest, most generous and good God of all the gods and lords on earth; and yet they do not love Him, nor obey Him; they deliberately trample His law and commandments under foot. It is their God who has drawn them forth out of nothing; who has given them everything they have; who has presented them with all that He has made outside Himself, and all that He is in Himself, and who is always looking after their welfare and that of all belonging to them. Not for a moment does He lose sight of them; all He produces is for their use; daily He renders them countless services with the greatest tenderness and love; and yet these ungrateful men do not love their Lord. When they were overcome by their arch-enemy, and were about to be dragged off to everlasting slavery, He took up their cause out of sheer mercy, and offered Himself completely and without reserve for their ransom; He still bears with their unfaithfulness and disobedience with wonderful patience and long-suffering; when they run away from Him, He is the first to seek them; He runs after them, calls out to them, and offers them His friendship and grace; not that He will be any the worse if they do not heed Him, for He has neither harm nor profit to fear or hope for from them, nor does He stand in need of their services; yet He is, so to speak, inconsolable when they go to ruin, while He can hardly restrain His joy when He succeeds in bringing them back to the right path, so that He can give Himself to them as their eternal reward in His kingdom. In a word, He loves His servants almost above all; yet He cannot induce them to return His love; He is compelled to command them expressly under the pain of eternal damnation to love Him; but not even that is of any avail, and He is still forced to look on while they daily insult and dishonor Him. What a barbarous and savage people they must be, would the heathens exclaim; they surely are the most hard-hearted people on earth! O senseless, stupid Christians! in what part of the world, under what sky of iron, in what accursed country do such monsters live! Dear

Exhortation
to love the
Lord God
above all
things, and
serve Him
alone.

Lord and God, only too well do we deserve such reproaches! Ah, Christians, shall we still so act as to deserve the shameful name of ingrates? No; rather let us, after doing sincere penance for our past misdeeds, write deep in our hearts the words which the Prophet Moses addresses to the Israelites in the Book of Deuteronomy: "Therefore love the Lord thy God, and observe His precepts and ceremonies, His judgments and commandments at all times."¹ If we will not love Him because He is a God so worthy of our love and service; if we will not love nor serve Him because He is such a great Lord, let us at least love and serve Him constantly because He is our God and our Lord, to whom we completely belong, who belongs completely to us. Let us love our Lord not merely with the lips during the time of prayer; but let us show this love in every deed and in all our works, by faithfully doing His holy will. Let us love our Lord with our whole hearts above all created things without making any exception. As our Lord He wishes to be loved and served by us in this fashion; as our Lord He deserves that we should thus love and serve Him. "Woe to the man," says St. Augustine, "who loves anything with Thee, which he does not love on account of Thee."²

Like faith-
ful servants
of God.

Edward, a noble English youth, once proposed the following question to his school-fellows: if each of you were allowed to choose any state of life he pleased, what would his choice be? I, said one, would wish to be a great, rich king, not through ambition, nor to gain the esteem of the world, nor for the sake of the pleasures I could enjoy in that position, but solely that I might do good to a great number. Another said: I should like to be a great, powerful, and experienced warrior and general, and to have many soldiers under me; not through pride, but that I might conquer the enemies of the Catholic faith, and bring all heretics back to the bosom of the Church. When the others had in their turn given expression to similar wishes, Edward spoke last of all, and said: "I should esteem myself the happiest of men if I could only be a true servant of God, my supreme Lord, and love Him sincerely; and therefore I will choose that state of life in which I can fulfil this wish of mine most easily, and render to my God a perfect love and a pleasing

¹ Ama itaque Dominum Deum tuum et observa præcepta ejus, et ceremonias, judicia, atque mandata omni tempore.—Deut. xi. 1.

² Vae homini qui tecum aliquid amat, quod propter te non amat.—S. Aug. confess., l. vi., c. 16.

service." Faithful to his word, he loved God so zealously that he became a model and mirror of all Christian virtues.

Ah, my Lord and my God, my choice in that way has hitherto been far different! I have esteemed myself happy when I served the vain world, or indulged inordinate love of creatures, or gratified the flesh and its unruly desires. Thee alone, O Lord, I have put off with a cold love, which I merely had on my lips during vocal prayer; while my heart, that already belongs to Thee by countless titles, oh, in how many parts it was divided! I acknowledge it with sorrow, miserably have I served Thee. What I might justly reproach a worthless, idle servant with as deserving punishment, that I can with reason accuse myself of. I acknowledge openly that if my servant had done his duty to me as badly as I have done mine to Thee, my sovereign Lord, I should long since have turned him out of my house. And Thou, O my God, still hast patience with me! It is most unjust and deserving of chastisement for a servant not to perform his duty to his master; but what would it be if the servant were openly to refuse all obedience to his master, to offend him, to despise him, to insult him, and, as it were, to trample him under foot? Ah, my soul, cast thy eyes on thy sins! Such is the way in which thou hast acted towards thy sovereign Lord! There are servants enough who murmur in secret against their masters and mistresses, but who would be so daring as to do that before their very faces? But I have been an ill-conditioned, shameless servant of that kind, O my God, when I committed sin in Thy presence, and thus insulted and despised Thee to Thy very face. O most gracious Lord, whom I have hitherto served so ill, nay, what is still worse, whom I have rejected after openly refusing to obey Thee, there is nothing else left for me to do now, but to bewail my transgressions with contrite heart, and implore Thy mercy and pardon. And when I have once learned to know Thee better by the light of Thy grace, O Lord, my heart shall be devoted solely to Thee and Thy service! Vain world! unruly flesh! infernal spirits! whom I have served—shame to me that I should have to say it—better than I have my God, I now leave your service. I now hate and detest all the sins to which you led me against the law of my Lord. No other lord do I now acknowledge but Thee, my God, whom I will serve with all my strength, and love with all my heart, and soul, and mind until the hour of my death, that thus, as I hope, I may change this mortal love for eternal love in heaven. Amen.

Repentance,
and resolution
to love
God con-
stantly.

THIRD SERMON.

ON FEARING AND LOVING GOD, BECAUSE HE IS ALMIGHTY.

Subject.

Our Lord and God is an almighty Lord; therefore the just should love Him all the more with an assured confidence, while sinners should fear and tremble before Him.—*Preached on the third Sunday in Lent.*

Text.

Cum ejecisset dæmonium, locutus est mutus, et admiratæ sunt turbæ.—Luke xi. 14.

“When He had cast out the devil, the dumb spoke; and the multitude were in admiration at it.”

Introduction.

At the mere command of Jesus Christ the devil had to leave the possessed man; a single word of Our Lord's, a sign, was sufficient to make the dumb speak, the blind see, the lame walk, and to restore the sick to health. It was that which excited the admiration of the bystanders: “The multitude were in admiration at it.” But they looked on Christ as a mere man like themselves; if they had known Him to be true God, they would not have been so astonished at His miracles, for with God a word or command is enough to effect whatever He wishes. Why? Because He is an almighty Lord, to whom nothing is impossible. There, my dear brethren, we have another reason for giving to God,—who, as I have already shown, is our Lord by countless titles, and is most worthy of our love,—for giving to Him the homage, what shall I say? of our fear, or of our love? Of both, as I believe; we must love Him and fear Him at the same time, according as we are disposed towards Him, as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

Our Lord and God is an almighty Lord; therefore the just should love Him all the more with an assured confidence, while sinners should fear and tremble before Him. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

O Almighty God, whom we adore as our only Lord! imprint Thy salutary fear deeply in our hearts, while we meditate on Thy almighty power, so that we may never offend Thee by sin; inflame our hearts at the same time with an ardent love for Thee, that in all dangers of soul and body we may place our confidence in Thee. This grace we beg of Thee through the powerful intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

He alone can be called almighty who can cause something to exist where there was nothing before, and can do so at once, so that, without trouble on his part or help from others, he can create what he pleases; his power and will must be such that no other power can resist them, and that without him no other power can do the least thing. Such a one is alone truly omnipotent or almighty. There, my dear brethren, you have a short description of the unlimited and perfect power of God our Lord: "The Lord is as a man of war; Almighty is His name,"¹ as the Prophet Moses describes Him.

God has everything in Himself that is required for omnipotence.

In the first place, then, He can make a thing without any pre-existing material, a power that seems impossible and is incomprehensible to any created intelligence. One of the first maxims of philosophy is, out of nothing nothing can be made.² If the shoemaker has to make a pair of shoes, the tailor a coat, the builder a house, they must necessarily have materials for their work, as well as instruments and tools wherewith to work, and time and place in which to work, otherwise they can do nothing. Let all the mighty ones of the world gather together, with all the angels in heaven; let them put forward all their strength, all their cunning and wisdom, all their sharpness of intellect, and then, if they can, bring into being a single grain of sand, a single blade of grass; but with all their strength, wisdom, and cleverness they will never be able to do that. If the sun were as a grain of sand, and God had afterwards made it many thousand times larger than the earth, would not that be a great miracle? And yet it is a still greater wonder to make something out of nothing, to create the smallest grain of sand, than to make the sun out of that grain. Why so? Because there is some resemblance, although a very small one, between the sun and the grain of sand; for the sun is something, and the grain of sand is something; but between nothing and the grain of sand there is absolutely no resemblance whatever.

For He can make everything out of nothing.

¹ Dominus quasi vir pugnator; omnipotens nomen ejus.—Exod. xv. 3.

² Ex nihilo nihil fit.

“From nothing nothing can be made.” God alone has the power to make out of nothing in a moment all He pleases.

This He has shown in the creation of the world.

If there had been in the beginning, before anything was created, an angel to serve God as a counsellor, and God had showed him the heavens and the earth and all that He intended to create in order, saying to him: “See, this is the universe I wish to create; what do you think of it? That vast globe of earth and water in the midst of the firmament is to serve as a dwelling-place for countless creatures, some lifeless, others living, and others living and reasoning; the transparent atmosphere that surrounds it is to be the habitation of numberless birds; the blue vault above will be studded with millions of twinkling stars, the smallest of which will be far greater than the earth; the blue skies shall be a sort of courtyard to My residence, while the highest place of all is to be My palace, in which I shall dwell with My courtiers and attendants. What do you think of My plan?” “How, O Lord,” the angel would have exclaimed, if he had not as yet full knowledge of the divine omnipotence, “how can such a wonderful and vast universe be completed? And what has it to rest upon? Where are the foundations to be laid? Where is it to be placed? for there is no place as yet in which to lay even the smallest grain of dust. And what is that mighty edifice to be made of? Where are the materials? Thou hast nothing except me outside of Thyself. Where are the workmen to put the edifice together? for we two are quite alone. And how much time will be required before such a vast undertaking is completed?” To all these questions the divine Architect might have answered: “Do you wish to know who is to erect the edifice? Then you must know that I alone will do it. You ask how, in what time and of what materials I will build it; then listen: nothing will be all that I shall require to help Me in the work; nothing shall be the foundation, the material, and the time of the whole undertaking. Wait a moment; ‘let it be made!’ there, now you see the universe complete according to the plan.” And so it is in reality, my dear brethren; the heavens and the earth are created out of nothing, a work that is possible only to the almighty God: “He stretcheth out the north over the empty space, and hangeth the earth upon nothing,” as the Prophet Job says of Him; “He bindeth up the waters in His clouds, so that they break not out and fall down together.”¹ And here I

¹ Qui extendit aquilonem super vacuum, et appendit terram super nihilum; qui ligat aquas in nubibus suis, ut non erumpant pariter deorsum.—Job xxvi. 7, 8.

again invite all the clever inventors who by their skill have introduced all sorts of new things into the world, and with them all the experienced masters and artists that can be found, and I ask them, can they discover any means by which one small apple can be made to rest unsupported in the air. The wisdom of all philosophers, the power of all monarchs, could not go so far as that. God has made this earth, which is twenty-five thousand miles in circumference, out of nothing, and He has placed it in the air unsupported by ropes or pillars, with all its weight of oceans, mountains, towns, and towers; nor can it fall; and it has its fixed place, which it will not leave forever: "Who hast founded the earth upon its own base; it shall not be moved forever and ever."¹ The mighty vault of the heavens is according to the reckoning of astronomers more than a hundred and sixty millions of miles distant from the earth, so that its whole circumference is more than nine hundred and sixty millions of miles. Yet this stupendous work has no pillars to rest on, no ropes to hang by, no hinges on which to turn; but it does not fall down, and always goes along on the road pointed out for it by its Creator. And this great weight moves so rapidly, that each point of it passes over more than forty millions of miles in an hour, yet it never gets out of repair, nor requires to be mended or changed. O my God, although I see these things with my eyes, yet I cannot comprehend them in my thoughts; how couldst Thou do such things if Thy power were not infinite? Truly, it is Thou and Thou alone who canst bring forth out of nothing all that is pleasing to Thee, and keep it firmly fixed on nothing.

And that Thou canst do at once, in a single moment. This is the second proof of the divine omnipotence, my dear brethren. Men, even the most skilful artists, must remove many difficulties out of their way before undertaking any work; so that, according to the nature of their task, they require a greater or lesser interval of time in which to perform it. What a time it takes to perfect a statue out of marble, and to bring it to its final stage of excellence! How much time it requires to build a magnificent palace according to the rules of art! If God had made the sun without light or brilliancy, and had left to men the labor of gilding it, do you think that the work would be completed in all the years that the sun has already existed, remembering that the

And it takes
Him but a
moment to
make what
He pleases.

¹ Qui fundasti terram super stabilitatem suam; non inclinabitur in sæculum sæculi.—
Ps. ciii. 5.

sun exceeds the earth in size a thousand times? How many laborers would be required to bring the necessary gold out of the mines? How many to melt it, to purify it, to beat it out into thin plates? How many hundred years would pass away before a single city, Rome, for instance, or Naples, Venice, Amsterdam, Vienna, Paris, or Treves, that was formerly just as great, or a high mountain, or a province, or the mighty ocean could be covered with gold? Pliny writes of the temple of the goddess Diana at Ephesus that it was a wonder of magnificence.¹ But how much time did it take to build it of wood and stone? For two hundred and twenty years was the whole of Asia employed on it.² Poor mortals! how small your power! The whole universe, the heavens and the earth, were made out of nothing by the Lord whose name is Almighty, nor did He require more time than a single moment in which to do it.

And He
does it with
one act of
His will.

Nor did it cost Him more labor or trouble than a single word, a breath of His mouth, an act of His will; which is the third proof of the divine omnipotence. With us mortals it is one thing to say, and another to do what one says; one thing to command, and another to fulfil the command; one thing to will, and another to carry out one's wishes. Where are you now, great ones of the earth, you who are called "most powerful?" Let your might be as great as it may; give us a proof of your power! Tell your villa to come from the country into the town; command that hill to remove a few paces out of your way; tell the rushing torrent to still its course for a moment, and see what you can do with your commands. Canute, king of England, was once seated on a throne by the sea-side, and he said to the sea: thou art a part of my kingdom, and consequently a subject of mine, so that thou must obey me; I command thee therefore not to pass beyond this line. Hardly had the king uttered these words, when a great wave rushed in on him and overthrew the throne on which he was sitting, putting his life in such danger that he was indeed glad to have escaped. He then understood the truth and exclaimed: "Vain is the power of monarchs; God alone is omnipotent."³ And so it is. With the almighty God alone willing and being able, saying and doing, commanding and fulfilling, are all one and the same. In the beautiful words of Theodoret: "What other artificers do by materials, tools, time, labor, and diligence,

¹ Magnificentiae admiratio.—Plin. l. xxxvi., c. 14.

² Ducentis viginti annis factum est.—Ibid.

³ Vana omnium regum potestas, et solus Deus omnipotens.

God does by His will alone.”¹ “And God said: be light made, and light was made, . . . let there be a firmament made amidst the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And it was so. Let the waters that are under the heaven be gathered together into one place; and let the dry land appear. And it was so done. Let the earth bring forth the green herb; . . . let there be lights made in the firmament; . . . let the waters bring forth the creeping creature; . . . let the earth bring forth the living creature; and so it was done.”² “He spoke, and they were made.”³ A word was enough for Him to produce any effect He pleased. And just as He has created the world by a word, He could also, if it were His will, with one word create new worlds every moment. But what do I say of a new world? Picture to yourselves a million of worlds, all greater than and of different form to this. God can make infinitely more of them. Add other millions to them; God can make them without time or trouble, if He only wills. And as He has made all things by a word, and can still make other things in the same way, so also He can destroy what He has made, and reduce all to nothing. “The almighty Lord,” says Judas Machabeus, “who at a beck can utterly destroy the whole world,”⁴ “because no word shall be impossible with God.”⁵

The fourth proof of a great power is to produce great effects with small and weak means, and to have no need of other help. For instance, if I were to tell you that Samson went about with a long spear in his hand, and put a whole army of the Philistines to flight, you would wonder, and say that he must be a strong and mighty hero. If I told you he did that with a short sword, you would have a still greater idea of his strength. But how if he did it with nothing but a stick in his hand? Would that not be a much greater achievement? Without doubt. Now, in reality, Samson put his enemies to flight without any arms at all, using for the purpose the jaw-bone of an ass that he happened to find on his way: “And finding a jaw-bone, even the jaw-bone of an ass which

Nor does He
require any
help or in-
strument.

¹ Quod cæteris artificibus est materia et instrumenta, necnon tempus et labor et diligentia, hoc universorum Deo voluntas est.

² Dixitque Deus: fiat lux; et facta est lux. Fiat firmamentum in medio aquarum, et dividat aquas ab aquis; et factum est ita. Congregentur aquæ quæ sub cœlo sunt in locum unum, et appareat arida; et factum est ita. Germinet terra herbam virentem; . . . fiant luminaria in firmamento cœlli; . . . producant aquæ reptile; . . . producat terra animam viventem; . . . factumque est ita.—Gen. 1. 3, 6, 7, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24.

³ Ipse dixit, et facta sunt.—Ps. xxxii. 9.

⁴ Potest universum mundum uno nutu delere.—II. Mach. viii. 18.

⁵ Non erit impossibile apud Deum omne verbum.—Luke i. 37.

lay there, catching it up, he slew therewith a thousand men.”¹ That is a wonderful thing indeed! That gives proof of a strength the like of which is not to be found amongst men! And so it is; for the weaker the means made use of for a great end, the greater must be the power of the person who produces the effect. Mark again, my dear brethren, the wonderful power of the almighty God, our Lord. He does and produces all that He pleases, and can do so without any help or instrument whatsoever. We read and see represented in pictures how in the time of Pope Sixtus V. the immense obelisk that was formerly erected by the Pagan emperors, and had often fallen down, was placed in the position it now occupies before the Church of St. Peter. What an amount of labor and trouble that work cost! Sixty-five horses were yoked to forty thick ropes and iron chains; four large wooden towers, or rather strong castles, were built round the place, and there were besides great trees, props, cross beams, ladders, stairs, overseers without number, tradesmen, laborers, journeymen, and any number of assistants, who at a signal given with drums and trumpets all pulled together with all their strength to lift that one heavy stone from the ground and put it in its place. Still greater was the labor of building the celebrated pyramids of Egypt, which are even now looked on as a wonder of the world. All the power of the Egyptian kings would not have sufficed to erect them, if they had not had three hundred and sixty thousand workmen employed for twenty consecutive years. But what is that building or that monolith compared to the whole universe, heaven and earth? And God created them in a moment. Ask the Prophet Isaias what trouble it cost Him, or how many angels He employed in that work, and you will hear that He accomplished it without help of any kind, by the mere breath of His mouth: “I am the Lord that make all things, that alone stretch out the heavens, that establish the earth, and there is none with Me.”²

Generally
He uses the
weakest
means to
produce the
greatest ef-
fects; shown

For the power of God is in Himself, and if He ever makes use of His creatures for any purpose, it is not through want of power on His part, but through sheer goodness, and to accommodate Himself to the ways of men. Therefore, when we read in Holy Writ that God did something wonderful or extraordinary, we

¹ Inventamque maxillam, id est mandibulam asini, quæ jacebat, arripiens, interfecit in ea mille viros.—Judges xv. 15.

² Ego sum Dominus faciens omnia, extendens cœlos solus, stabiliens terram, et nullus mecum.—Is. xliv. 24.

generally find that He chose very weak creatures to work with Him. Gedeon, that celebrated leader of the Israelites, was commanded by God to take the field against the Madianites, and to attack them in battle array. The whole army of Gedeon consisted of thirty-two thousand men, while the Madianite forces numbered a hundred and thirty-five thousand armed men: "Madian and Amalec and all the eastern people lay scattered in the valley as a multitude of locusts; their camels also were innumerable as the sand that lieth on the sea-shore."¹ What hope could Gedeon have of victory in such an enormous disparity of forces, since the Madianites outnumbered him by a hundred and three thousand men? With reason, therefore, was he afraid. "I beseech thee, my lord," said he to the angel who was sent to him from heaven, "wherewith shall I deliver Israel?"² What can a handful of people do against such a multitude? Mark, my dear brethren, the wonderful answer he received from heaven: "And the Lord said to Gedeon: the people that are with thee are many, and Madian shall not be delivered into their hands."³ But what is the meaning of that? If He had said, the enemy are too strong, and therefore you will not be able to conquer them, we could easily understand it. But, you will not conquer because your people are too numerous; who could make any sense of that? To men indeed it is incomprehensible; but not so to the almighty God. Human power, it is true, consists in the number of soldiers; kings and emperors are called most puissant, most powerful, most mighty, when they have large standing armies. Thus in former times Xerxes was looked on as a wonder of the world, because he had an army of more than a million of men, so that, wherever he came, the soldiers and their horses and camels ate everything up, and drank the rivers dry. But this very outward show on the part of earthly potentates is a proof of their natural weakness and impotence; a proof that they have no power in themselves, since they must depend on others. Their whole might consists in the hands and weapons of their subjects. Wise, then, was the answer of king Pyrrhus, when he was greeted with the title of eagle, on his return from a victorious campaign. No, said he, you cannot call me an eagle, for it is my soldiers and their val-

¹ Madian autem et Amalec, et omnes orientales populi fusi jacebant in valle, ut locustarum multitudo: camelique quoque innumerales erant, sicut arena, quæ jacet in littore maris.—Judges vii. 12.

² Obsecro mi domine, in quo liberabo Israel?—Ibid. vi. 15.

³ Dixitque Dominus ad Gedeon: multus tecum est populus, nec tradetur Madian in manus ejus.—Ibid. vii. 2.

or I have to thank for being able to fly so high. God alone is the Lord to whom the name belongs: "I AM WHO AM."¹ I do and create what I will, nor do I require the arm or the help of any one; My whole power I have in and of Myself. Thus Gedeon, by the command of God, had to select and choose from his small army until only three hundred men were left. Then at last the Lord commanded him to march against the enemy: "And he with the three hundred gave himself to the battle."² And behold, that small number of men, without sword or spear, armed only with trumpets and torches and earthen pitchers, made the attack and filled the enemy with such dread, that they imagined heaven and earth were coming down on their heads, and in their confusion and bewilderment began to kill one another, and they fled in greatest dismay, leaving a hundred and twenty thousand dead on the field: "For fifteen thousand men were left of all the troops of the eastern people, and one hundred and twenty thousand warriors that drew the sword were slain."³ And did Gedeon with his three hundred unarmed men gain such a signal victory? Certainly he did; but it was because God fought on his side: "And the Lord said to him, I will be with thee; and thou shalt cut off Madian as one man."⁴ For where the almighty God works, no other help is required.

No other
power can
withstand
His will;
shown by
examples.

The fifth proof of omnipotence is that there is no power or might that can withstand the will of God. "O Lord, Lord, almighty king," exclaims Mardocheus, "for all things are in Thy power, and there is none that can resist Thy will. Thou art Lord of all, and there is none that can resist Thy majesty."⁵ If God wishes to humble the obstinate and bring them to obedience, all creatures, even those without life or reason, are at His disposal, ready to execute His commands. King Pharaoh dared to dispute His authority: "Who is the Lord that I should hear His voice? I know not the Lord."⁶ But God brought him to reason by the vilest things, frogs, flies, and gnats, and showed him that he must let the people of Israel go into the desert.

¹ Ego sum qui sum.—Exod. iii. 14.

² Et ipse cum trecentis viris se certamini dedit.—Judges vii. 8.

³ Quindecim enim millia viri remanserunt ex omnibus turmis orientalium populorum, cæcis centum viginti milibus bellatorum educantium gladium.—Ibid. viii. 10.

⁴ Dixitque ei Dominus: ego ero tecum, et percuties Madiam, quasi unum virum.—Ibid. vi. 16.

⁵ Domine! Domine! Rex omnipotens! in ditone enim tua cuncta sunt posita, et non est qui possit tuæ resistere voluntati. Dominus enim omnium es, nec est qui resistat majestati tuæ.—Esth. xiii. 9, 11.

⁶ Quis est Dominus, ut audiam vocem ejus? Nescio Dominum.—Exod. v. 2.

Nabuchodonosor did not acknowledge the authority of God, but had a golden statue erected to himself, which he commanded all his subjects to adore as their god. When he heard of the three youths who dared to transgress this command and adore the God of Israel, he cried out in a rage: "Who is the God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"¹ O poor, foolish mortal! You ask who is God! Hearest Thou that, O Lord? Wilt Thou not send down fire from heaven, Thy lightnings and thunderbolts, to destroy the wicked, proud king, or cause the earth to open and swallow him up, since he has dared to oppose Thee? No, the Lord has no need of such powerful instruments; a single thought with which the king's imagination was disturbed was enough to humble him and bring him to the knowledge of God. For Nabuchodonosor imagined that he was no longer a man, but a beast, so that he rushed out of his palace, out of his city, away from the society of men, into the forest, among the wild animals, where he ate grass like an ox, until he recognized that God ruled over him, as Daniel had foretold him: "They shall cast thee out from among men, and thy dwelling shall be with cattle, and thou shalt eat grass as an ox . . . till thou know that the Most High ruleth over the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will."² And the event verified the prediction, for, as Nabuchodonosor himself says: "Now at the end of the days, I, Nabuchodonosor, lifted up my eyes to heaven, and my sense was restored to me; and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and glorified Him that liveth forever; for His power is an everlasting power; for He doth according to His will, as well with the powers of heaven, as among the inhabitants of the earth; and there is none that can resist His hand. . . and them that walk in pride He is able to abase."³ O infinite power of God, who with a single thought canst hurl down the mighty from his throne and make him subject to Thy will! "Take the rod," said God on another occasion to Moses, "and assemble the people together, thou and Aaron thy brother, and speak to the rock before them,

¹ Quis est Deus qui eripiet vos de manu mea?—Dan. iii. 15.

² Ejicient te ab hominibus, et cum bestiis ferisque erit habitatio tua, et fœnum ut bos comedes, donec scias quod dominetur Excelsus super regnum hominum, et cuiusque voluerit, det illud. —Ibid. iv. 22.

³ Igitur post finem dierum ego Nabuchodonosor oculos meos ad cœlum levavi, et sensus meus redditus est mihi; et Altissimo benedixi, et viventem in sempiternum laudavi et glorificavi, quia potestas ejus potestas sempiterna; juxta voluntatem enim suam facit, tam in virtutibus cœli, quam in habitatoribus terræ; et non est qui resistat manui ejus: et gradientes in superbia potest humiliare. —Ibid. 31, 32, 34.

and it shall yield waters.”¹ “If you have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, you shall say to this mountain, remove from hence thither, and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible to you.”² But, O Lord, dost Thou not say by the wise Ecclesiasticus: “Where there is no hearing, pour not out words,”³ for speaking is useless where there is none to hear? Such is indeed the case when men speak, but not when God speaks, or even a man in God’s name; for in that case the hardest rocks and most rugged mountains have ears, and must obey. Nothing can resist the will of God.

Without His
will no
other power
can do the
least thing.

And, which is the last proof of the divine omnipotence, there is nothing in the world so strong and mighty that it can do the least thing without His help. “Without Him was made nothing that was made.”⁴ Without His coöperation nothing is, nor can act; for, as all creatures receive their nature and essence from Him, so also from Him do they receive their strength and power to work. I cannot move foot, or hand, or finger, nor form a single thought in my mind, unless God gives me the movement, and helps my mind to think. Not a drop of water falls from the clouds, not a leaf from the trees, not a hair from my head, unless God, the first Mover, so disposes things. If calamities and misfortunes happen, it is to no purpose that we throw the blame on creatures, as we are in the habit of doing, or attribute to chance or design on the part of others the adverse circumstances that distress us. No, the almighty God is the author of all these things, for without His will no creature could do the least thing to harm us. If affairs succeed with us, to no purpose and unjustly do we ascribe our success to our own industry, or to the help we have received from others, or to blind chance; the almighty God is the cause of it all; to Him alone do we owe the tribute of our homage and gratitude. For without His will no creature can do the least thing for our advantage; health and prosperity, fortune and happiness, the fruitfulness of the earth, victory in war, riches, all come from the hand of the almighty Lord. So that in such circumstances we should act like St. Peter, when he cured the man who had been lame from his birth. The miracle attracted the attention of the people,

¹ Tolle virgam, et congrega populum. tu et Aaron frater tuus, et loquimini ad petram coram eis, et illa dabit aquas. — Num. x. 8.

² Si habueritis fidem sicut granum sinapis, dicetis monti huic: transi hinc illuc; et transibit, et nihil impossibile erit vobis. — Matt. xvii. 19.

³ Ubi auditus non est, non effundas sermonem. — Ecclus. xxxii. 6.

⁴ Sine ipso factum est nihil quod factum est. — John i. 3.

who ran up in crowds to see the wonderful man who was able to do such things. What? said St. Peter, "Ye men of Israel, why wonder you at this? or why look you upon us as if by our virtue or power we had made this man to walk?"¹ You must know that it is not we, but Jesus of Nazareth, whom you have unjustly crucified and put to death, and who arose again from the dead. He is the almighty God who has restored the use of his feet to this man, who was hitherto lame; we are only the weak instruments of His omnipotence. His name is Almighty. Therefore, my dear brethren, God our Lord is alone the Lord who can create all things out of nothing, in a moment, without trouble or labor, without any one's help or coöperation; whose power and will no one can withstand; without whose help no other power can do anything; and therefore our Lord and God is alone almighty; Almighty is His name.

What salutary thoughts should this truth inspire us with, my dear brethren, to our instruction and the profit of our souls? The two following, for two sorts of men, the just and the wicked: If we are in the state of sanctifying grace, if we love our God as we should, and keep His commandments, oh, then, what good things may we not hope for from Him! If we do not love Him as we ought, if we are in the state of sin, alas, have we not just reason to fear? Marius, the favorite of the emperor Tiberius, once showed his power by inviting a man of lowly condition to his table; but during the feast he caused the man's house to be razed to the ground. The poor man, when he came home, could hardly realize what had become of his house. The next day Marius again invited him, and during the repast caused a new and better house to be built for him on the same ground. It is easy to imagine his astonishment on returning in the evening; he could hardly believe his eyes, and looked on the new house as the effect of a dream. Marius then sent for him: see, said he, I am able to throw down your house and to rebuild it; should you not, then, be careful to keep me as your friend, since I can do you so much harm and so much good in one day? Woe to you if you do anything against me; but well will it be for you if you always keep my friendship. O Christians, how much more should we not fear to have the Lord our God as our enemy! How much greater care and diligence should we not employ to keep as our friend Him who at every

From this it follows that the just have everything to hope from God.

¹ Viri Israelitæ, quid miramini in hoc, aut nos quid intuemini, quasi nostra virtute, aut potestate fecerimus hunc ambulare.—Acts iii. 12.

moment of our lives can inflict an infinite harm on us, or give us an infinite good! In the first place, God is an almighty Lord; what good, then, may I not expect from Him, if I am in His grace, if I am His friend, His dear child, if I endeavor to do His will in all things, and with child-like confidence fly to Him for refuge? If without any fault of mine I am in the danger or the occasion of losing my soul; if the evil one with his suggestions, or men with their flatteries, or my own flesh with its unruly desires, attack and try to lead me into sin, what have I to fear? The almighty God is present with me, and to Him my weakness, no matter how great it is, is well known; He can protect me in temptations and dangers: He has promised me His help, and if I only make up my mind to work with it, He will preserve me from sin. If I am in temporal or bodily affliction, what comfort have I not in my trouble? I have an almighty Lord present with me, from whom, as I know for certain, the cross, the poverty, or the persecution comes; He can take it from me in a moment, if He wishes, and if He does not do so, I am certain that He has ordained the tribulation for my greater good, and that He will reward me for it eternally in heaven. If I desire to fulfil the duties of my state well and satisfactorily, and to attain true perfection and holiness, according to the position in which He has placed me, I have an almighty Lord ready to help me. No stone so hard, no block so unshapely, that He cannot make out of it children of Abraham. He converted the publican into an apostle, the murderer into a confessor of the faith, the greatest sinners into the greatest saints; why should He not also make of me a useful instrument to His glory, by enabling me to perform well and perfectly what He has laid on me? If I desire to persevere in good, and after a holy life to die a happy death, He is the almighty God who will not abandon me at the last moment, who will strengthen me at the hour of death, and will lead me into the kingdom of His elect. In a word, if I am in favor with the almighty God, I am one of the happiest men on earth, no matter how things go with me otherwise.

But sinners
everything
to fear.

On the other hand, am I, alas, in the state of sin? Have I this God as my enemy? Then I have not to do with a stock, or a stone, or a lifeless statue, nor with flies, or beetles, or onions, or garlic, such as the blind heathens adored as their gods, according to the testimony of Theodoret, that they might indulge

their passions without restraint, since they would have nothing to fear from such miserable gods. Oh, no! I adore an almighty God; and what have I not to fear if I fall into disgrace with Him? Rain and sickness, shame and disgrace, poverty and hunger, fire and water, thunder and lightning, all the trials and tribulations of the world are in His hand, and at any moment He can visit me with them and utterly destroy me. But that is the least I have to fear. For my enemy is the almighty God, who, as Our Saviour says in the Gospel of St. Matthew, "can destroy both soul and body into hell;"¹ in whose power it is, not merely to torture my body, but to hurl me body and soul into hell; who can at any moment carry me off by a sudden death, and condemn me to eternal fire, and that with a single breath of His mouth, as Eliphaz says of Him: "I have seen them that work iniquity, and that sow sorrows and reap them, perishing by the blast of God, and consumed by the spirit of His wrath,"² in order to show us how easy it is for God to ruin both temporally and eternally those who dare to violate His law.

O presumptuous mortal that I am, what have I done? I, a wretched worm of the earth, have not hesitated to rise up against Thee, O Almighty God, and to offend Thee by my many mortal sins! I have read of a heathen in India who was falsely accused before the celebrated Vasco Nunez of having rebelled against his authority. He was tried and condemned to death; but he cast himself at the feet of Nunez, and among other arguments which he urged in his defence, he caught hold of the scabbard of Nunez's sword and exclaimed: how is it possible to believe or even suspect that I would dare to rebel against a lord who wears such a terrible weapon at his side, a weapon that can cut a man in two at a single stroke? It was nature that suggested this defence to the poor savage, and its force consisted in the absurdity of believing that a poor, weak, unarmed man could think of attacking one who was armed with such a terrible sword. But I, O my God, have been so daring as to rebel against Thee, to despise Thee to Thy very face, to renounce Thy friendship, and declare myself Thy enemy, although I knew by the light of faith that Thou art the almighty Lord, who canst not merely cut me in pieces with a sword, but hast the power to destroy me in an instant, nay, to deliver me body and soul into eternal torments.

Therefore he
who offends
God is
guilty of
great pre-
sumption.

¹ Qui potest et animam et corpus perdere in gehennam.—Matt. x. 28.

² Vidi eos qui operantur iniquitatem, et seminant dolores et metunt eos, flante Deo perire, et spiritu iræ ejus esse consumptos.—Job iv. 8, 9.

Repentant
acknowledgment
and detestation
of past
sins.

O madness and folly! I, who in comparison with my God am less than the leaf that is blown about by the wind, than a dry straw, I have presumptuously rebelled against the almighty God! against that God who by His omnipotence keeps me every moment from falling back into my original nothingness! against that God without whose help I cannot move a muscle, nor speak a word, nor stir a limb! It is an abomination before men, when one who is wretchedly poor is at the same time proud. O my God, how hast Thou, then, had patience with me when I dared to set myself up against Thy omnipotence? Why hast Thou not permitted the earth to swallow me, the air to stifle me, the wicked one to strangle me, in order to remove that abomination from before Thy face? Why, I ask again, hast Thou borne with such unbearable, loathsome pride? No other reason can I find for it, unless that Thou art not merely almighty in Thy power and strength, but also in Thy goodness, almighty in Thy meekness, almighty in Thy patience and mercy, so that the Church cries out to Thee: "O Almighty God, who showest Thy omnipotence especially by having mercy and sparing." And should not that thought soften my heart? Should not an almighty goodness provoke me to return Its love? O Almighty Love, I surrender myself to Thee fully! I acknowledge with sorrow and regret, through love of Thee, that I have sinned against Thee, my Almighty God and Lord! Ah, never again, O God, shall that be the case for all eternity! I acknowledge, too, my great weakness and misery, and that in spite of my resolution the least temptation or occasion may cause me to fall into sin; but I place my whole confidence in Thy help, for Thou art almighty. Amen.

FOURTH SERMON.

ON THE LOVE OF GOD, BECAUSE IN HIMSELF HE IS WORTHY OF LOVE.

Subject.

We must love the Lord our God, because He is in Himself infinitely beautiful and worthy of all love.—*Preached on the Second Sunday in Lent.*

Text.

Transfiguratus est ante eos, et resplenduit facies ejus, sicut sol; vestimenta autem ejus facta sunt alba sicut nix.—Matt. xvii. 2.

“He was transfigured before them. And His face did shine as the sun, and His garments became white as snow.”

Introduction.

These three disciples had already been a considerable time with Jesus, their Lord and Master; they had seen His most holy and perfect life; they had beheld the great miracles He had wrought in their presence by His almighty power; they had received many benefits from Him, and yet they never had such pleasure in His presence, such a fervent desire to be with Him, as they felt on Mount Thabor, when He was transfigured before them. They lost their senses almost with joy, and became unconscious. Oh, cried out Peter, “Lord, it is good for us to be here;” let us never leave this place; “if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.” They imagined they were already amidst the joys of heaven. But why? What did they see there? “He was transfigured before them; and His face did shine as the sun, and His garments became white as snow.” This was a mere figure of the future beauty and glory of the humanity of Christ in heaven; would not the disciples, then, have expired through love and joy, if they had seen the beauty of His Godhead even for a single instant? My dear brethren, we are created for no other end than to know the great God, to love Him with our whole hearts, and to rejoice in Him. We should be animated to this love and joy by the thought of the countless benefits He bestows on us every moment of our lives; nay, the mere fact of His being our Lord, as we have seen already, should be a sufficient motive for every reasoning being to love Him. But if all this has no effect on us, then let us try to represent the Lord God to the eyes of our minds, and see how in Himself He is infinitely beautiful and most worthy of all love; then, surely, no heart can be so devoid of feeling as not to love such an infinite Good. Such is the subject of this sermon. I repeat it:

Plan of Discourse.

The Lord our God is in Himself infinitely beautiful and worthy of all love; therefore we must love Him above all things.

O Lord and God, most worthy of love! give us by the light of faith some knowledge of Thy beauty, that we may all begin to love Thee with all our hearts! This we beg of Thee through the merits of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

What is
beautiful? &
lovable.

What most excites us mortals to love is beauty and a comely appearance; for, as experiences teaches, this captivates our eyes, minds, and hearts at once, although we may not have any advantage to expect, nor evil to fear from it. A natural impulse urges us by a gentle violence to love that which is beautiful. We find frequent mention in the holy Scriptures of persons who were celebrated for their beauty, and as they could not conceal it, they conquered the bravest and holiest people, and made captives of them. Rachel was beautiful: "Rachel was well-favored, and of a beautiful countenance;"¹ and she attracted Jacob so powerfully, that the fourteen years he had to labor in order to win her hand seemed to him but a few days: "And they seemed but a few days because of the greatness of his love."² Bethsabee was beautiful: "The woman was very beautiful;"³ and she so bewitched the holy king David, who had happened to cast his eyes on her, that he forgot his God, and became a shameless adulterer and murderer. Judith was beautiful: "She was exceedingly beautiful;"⁴ and when she adorned herself through divine inspiration, she made the otherwise cruel Holofernes as meek as a lamb, while all the soldiers who saw her were ravished at the sight: "They beheld her face, and their eyes were amazed, for they wondered exceedingly at her beauty."⁵ Esther was beautiful: "She was exceeding fair and beautiful;"⁶ and when she came forward and showed herself, the angry king Assuerus, to please her, caused his favorite Aman to be hung on a gibbet. In a word, there is no human heart so rude and stony as not to be attracted by the sight of beauty. Aristotle, when asked why beauty has such power over the heart, answered that such a question could come only from one who is stone-blind, or who has not the eyes of a human being but of a beast.

God is in-

But why do I speak of such beauty? In all these cases beauty

¹ Decora facie et venusto aspectu.—Gen. xxix. 17.

² Videbantur illi pauci dies præ amoris magnitudine.—Ibid. 20.

³ Erat autem mulier pulchra valde.—II. Kings xi. 2.

⁴ Erat autem elegantæ aspectu nimis.—Judith viii. 7.

⁵ Considerabant faciem ejus, et erat in oculis eorum stupor, quoniam pulchritudinem ejus mirabantur nimis.—Ibid. x. 14.

⁶ Pulchra nimis et decora facie.—Esther ii. 7.

consisted merely in outward appearance, and was sure to decay with old age, and to become the food of worms after death. Moreover, outward comeliness often gives occasion to brutal lusts, and hides the inward filth of the soul with a fair mantle. It is a far different beauty to which I wish to direct the eyes of your minds to-day. That, namely, which is found in the Author and Source of all beauty, in the sovereign God Himself, who is the essential Beauty of all beauties. If that Lord had not created us men to the end that we might love Him above all things; if He had not redeemed us by His death, fed us with His own Flesh and Blood, and bound us by countless benefits to love Him with all our hearts; if He had not prepared the joys of heaven as a reward for us, provided we love Him above all things; in a word, if the Lord our God had nothing whatever to do with us, yet should we be impelled by a natural instinct to love Him above all things, solely because He is in Himself the sovereign beauty worthy of all love.

And what sort of beauty is His? Oh, a far different idea must we now form in our minds from that which we had when speaking of mere outward comeliness on the part of creatures. If a man is distinguished in his personal appearance, it does not follow that he is prudent, wise, or of good understanding; nor that he is kind-hearted, generous, or merciful; nor that he is strong and powerful of body. No, that is not by any means a necessary consequence, for created beauty, which consists merely in the due proportion of the body, and in an agreeable diversity of color, can be without prudence, or wisdom, or goodness, or skill, or power, or wealth; nor is there any one in the world, no matter who and what he is, who is without some fault or other which is apt to make him displeasing. But when I speak of the beauty of God, I include in that one word every possible attribute which can attract our love; I include in it infinite perfections, which are in God in an infinite manner, and which cannot be understood by any created intelligence; an infinite loveliness and charm; an infinite amiability and goodness; an infinite generosity and mercy; an infinite greatness and omnipotence, by which He created the universe, heaven and earth, in a moment; an infinite might and sovereignty, by which, if He wills, He can reduce all things to nothing; an infinite wisdom, by which He rules without requiring any adviser or helper; an infinite providence, by which He feeds every day not alone so many poor

infinitely
beautiful

And His
beauty has
in itself
endless per
fection.

mortals who have nothing in the world, but even the wild beasts in the forest, the birds in the air, the reptiles that crawl on the ground; an infinite essence, by which He is present everywhere, and cannot be circumscribed by the limit of the universe; an infinite justice and holiness, which cannot approve of the least sin, or leave it unpunished; an infinite wealth, which is inexhaustible; an infinite majesty and glory, before which the princes of heaven tremble; an infinite happiness and eternity, which requires no other happiness outside itself. In a word, I include therein the highest, best, most beautiful, unchangeable Good, that is alone worthy of all love.

We can form some kind of an idea of it from inanimate things.

Yet, since we have no means of representing to our imaginations the real divine essence in its beauty, all these perfections generally fail to touch our hearts, and whatever efforts we make to speak of them, we hardly understand even what we say ourselves. "What is it to me," say St. Augustine, "if, when I speak of such things, no one understands me?"¹ My God, I rejoice that we cannot understand what Thou art. I acknowledge that Thou art infinitely greater and more beautiful than my intellect and that of all angels and men can comprehend. If I tried to comprehend Thy essence, I should find myself mistaken; nor wouldst Thou be the great Lord Thou art, if I could understand Thee. My ignorance does not displease me, for it proves Thy greatness. I will be satisfied, O Lord, with being able to admire, praise, and love Thy infinite beauty, without trying to investigate impenetrable mysteries. Thou "inhabitest light inaccessible, whom no man hath seen, nor can see,"² says St. Paul. Just as our eyes can see the light that comes from the sun, but cannot look at the sun itself for a moment without being blinded, so our understanding can see and enjoy the light that the divine Sun pours out upon His creatures; but if we presumptuously try to go farther, and investigate the majesty of that beauty, we shall be oppressed and overwhelmed by it, for "he that is a searcher of majesty shall be overwhelmed by glory."³ Therefore we have to borrow our ideas of the divine beauty from creatures, whom we see and can understand by our outward senses, and thus be enabled gradually to ascend higher in thought, till we come to some little conception of the beauty of God. In the

¹ Quid ad me, si quis non intelligat?—S. Aug., l. i., conf. c. 6.

² Lucem inhabitat inaccessibilem, quem nullus hominum vidit, sed nec videre potest.—I. Tim. vi. 16.

³ Qui scrutator est majestatis, opprimetur a gloria.—Prov. xxv. 27.

first place, then, my dear brethren, represent to yourselves all the created perfections that are to be found in lifeless things; all that shine in the sun, that twinkle in the stars; all that is pleasing in the most beautiful gardens and flowers; all that is precious in pearls and diamonds; all that is magnificent in palaces and mansions; in a word, consider everything in the world that can be an agreeable object to the eyes; all these earthly beauties are so many voices that cry out to us: See, O mortals, how beautiful our Creator is. The pleasure that we give your eyes, the fine odor or taste that attracts your other senses, is only a crumb, a spark, a drop of the divine beauty from which it comes. "The whole world," says St. Augustine, "with its well-ordered changes and motions, and the beauty of all outward things, cries out, as it were, silently, that all these are made and could be made only by God, who is ineffably and invisibly great, and ineffably and invisibly beautiful."¹ They call out to us at the same time: He who made all that is good and beautiful is better and more beautiful than all that He has made;² for no one can give what he has not. How beautiful Thou must then be, O my God! Thee should we love; to Thee should we give our whole hearts.

Eleonora, a royal princess, who afterwards became a Franciscan nun, was once brought, when a child, into a garden that was filled with different flowers. With child-like curiosity, she asked her mother who made the beautiful flowers. God made them, was the answer; they are all painted by the hand of God, and there is no artist in the world who can produce anything so beautiful. Oh, then, said the child, I will devote myself altogether to the service of God; for, since He can make such flowers, He must be very beautiful. That was a conclusion that one could hardly expect from a mere child; a conclusion that puts to shame all the wisdom of the world, and teaches all of us how from contemplating the perfections of creatures we are to rise to the beauty of the Creator. Yet the beauty of lifeless things is the least perfect kind; it excites indeed admiration, because it delights the senses, but it is incapable of exciting love in a reasoning being.

Greater is the influence that the beauty of reasoning creatures possesses over our hearts. Imagine to yourselves, then, all that

Shown by
an example.

From reason-
ing
creatures.

¹ *Mundus ipse ordinatissima sua mutabilitate et mobilitate, et visibilibus omnium pulcherrima specie quodammodo tacitus et factum se esse, et non nisi a Deo ineffabiliter atque invisibiliter magno, et ineffabiliter atque invisibiliter pulchro fieri se potuisse proclamatur.*—S. Aug., de Civit., l. ii., c. 4.

² *Qui fecit omnia, melior est omnibus.*

ever was of loveliness, amiability, and comeliness in all men since the beginning of the world; bring all these perfections together in one man; that man will surely be the most beautiful of men. It is infallibly certain that the almighty God can with a single word create such a man, and it is equally true that His omnipotence would not be exhausted by the act, but that He could create such men, one more beautiful than the other, and go on creating them forever. Suppose, now, that, reckoning from the present time to the end of the world, God were to create a new man every hour, of whom the first would be as we have imagined, the second would surpass him twofold in beauty, the third would surpass the second, the fourth, the third, and so on till the end of the world. According to our supposition, twenty-four such men would be called into being during the course of a single day, and their beauty would go on constantly increasing in twofold proportion; tell me now, what sort of beauty would the last of them have, namely he who is to be created during the last hour preceding the end of the world? No human imagination can form a picture of it, and yet it would be a mere created beauty, that is, a mere spark of the divine beauty. For even then it would still be true that, "He who has made all that is good and beautiful is better and more beautiful than all that He has made." Oh, how incomprehensible must then be the beauty of the great God!

From the
human soul.

Ascend still higher in your thoughts, my dear brethren. All the outward comeliness that we can see with our bodily eyes, no matter how dazzling it is, is as nothing compared to the natural beauty of the human soul; for, whatever amiability, or comeliness, or loveliness there is in the body, it comes originally from the in-dwelling soul. If you do not believe this, says St. John Chrysostom, then wait a little till the soul has departed from the body; "go and look at the graves of the dead;"¹ there you will see the body of a man or a woman lying: of one who was during life well-mannered, clever, learned, and a good orator; where are now his knowledge, his wisdom, his courtesy, his cleverness? They have all disappeared completely and at once. How is that? Because the spirit is wanting; the soul is no longer there, which was the origin of all those perfections. That woman was during her life-time a wonder of beauty, who captivated the hearts of all who beheld her; where is her comeliness gone now? Where the roses and lilies of her color? the winning manners?

¹ *Considera sepulchra hominum.*

the laughing eyes? the ruddy lips? All is gone and completely vanished. And why? Because the soul, the one only soul, has gone, and the body, when deserted by the in-dwelling spirit, becomes a putrid mass of filth and corruption. Now think again how beautiful must the soul be from which the body receives all its comeliness. But think at the same time how incomprehensibly beautiful must the Creator be, for all the beauty of souls is but a shadow of His. Truly, He who made all things is infinitely more beautiful than all of them.

Up to this, my dear brethren, we have confined ourselves to the earth, that valley of tears. Away up to heaven now with your thoughts, to the residence of the almighty God, the palace of the supreme Monarch, the joyful dwelling-place of the elect. Oh, what do we see there? The earthly paradise with all its wonderful loveliness is but as a dung-hill compared to it. Ah, yes, "how vile the earth becomes in my eyes," we may justly exclaim with St. Ignatius Loyola, "when I look up to heaven!"¹ Yet in vain do we try to ascend there in thought: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man;"² we can form no idea of the endless glory that God has prepared for those who love Him. Now, if heaven is so beautiful in itself, how much more beautiful must not its inhabitants be? The most beautiful thing on earth is the human soul; but incomparably more beautiful are the angels, even when we consider merely their natural gifts. Still more beautiful are they in their supernatural state, which comes from sanctifying grace; and incomparably greater still the beauty they receive from the light of glory in the beatific vision. And what sort of an idea shall we now form of the beauty of the Mother of God, which far surpasses that of all the angels? "She is holier than the Seraphim," says St. Ephraim, "holier than the Cherubim, and beyond all comparison more glorious than all the celestial spirits."³ Even during her life on earth she was possessed of such bodily beauty and comeliness, that St. Denis, who lived during the life of Our Lord, when he saw her for the first time, nearly fell into a grievous mistake, for he assures us that, if he had not the faith to enlighten him, he would have fallen down on his knees and adored her as God. If Denis had seen her soul, what

From
heaven and
its inhabi-
tants.

¹ *Quam sordet mihi terra, dum cœlum aspicio!*

² *Oculus non vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis ascendit.*—I. Cor. ii. 9.

³ *Sanctior Seraphim, sanctior Cherubim, et nulla comparatione cæteris est omnibus superioris exercitibus gloriosior.*

would he have thought? The soul of Mary is that masterpiece of beauty in which, according to the teaching of the holy Fathers, the mighty arm of God has chiefly shown its skill; for He put into it all the imaginable loveliness of all creatures. The angels themselves were astonished at the first sight of it: "Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun?"¹ For they know that they are mere stars, nay, insignificant lights, in comparison with that shining sun of beauty and glory. St. Bernard gives a pretty description of her: "So great is the Virgin's perfection, that a full knowledge of it is reserved for God alone."² But even that beauty, although we cannot comprehend it, is still incomparably less than that of the humanity of Our Lord in its glorified state, for that makes a joyful heaven of itself. The angels themselves desire to see His face, and St. Peter writes of Him in his first Epistle: "Whom having not seen, you love: in whom also now, though you see Him not, you believe; and believing shall rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified."³ When St. Teresa had received but one ray from the glorious body of Jesus Christ, all earthly beauties, as she herself acknowledges, became so many abominations to her; "since I have seen the exceeding great beauty of the Lord, I have not laid eyes on anything else which in comparison with it could be called beautiful, or be esteemed worthy of a single thought."⁴ "For when I represent to myself His image, which is graven in my mind, whatever else I look on seems to excite disgust, in comparison with the excellent beauty of my divine Lord."⁵ Ah, where shall we go to in thought now, my dear brethren? All the beauties we have considered up to this are still outside of their Creator; how great, then, must not be the origin, the spring, the source of them all? Is it not true that He who has made all must be more beautiful than all? Ah, certainly! But not even now have we reached the height of His beauty; vain are our thoughts; for every idea we can form of

¹ Quæ est ista quæ progreditur quasi aurora consurgens, pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol?—Cant. vi. 9.

² Tanta est perfectio Virginis, ut soli Deo cognoscenda reservetur.—S. Bern. Serm. de Concept.

³ Quem cum non videritis, diligitis: in quem nunc quoque non videntes, creditis; credentes autem exaltabitis lætitia inenarrabili et glorificata.—I. Pet. i. 8.

⁴ Ex quo immensam Domini pulchritudinem vidi, nihil alibi aspexi, quod ipsi collatum, pulchrum mihi ac decorum videatur, suaque specie cogitationes meas occupet.

⁵ Quoties enim mentis aciem desigo in illius imaginem, meo animo insculptam, quicquid aliud intuear, videtur mihi nauseam clere præ tanto excellentiori divini hujus Domini forma.—In Vita, c. 22.

it is far too mean. "The beauty of that blessed and immortal nature," such are the words of St. John Chrysostom, "is an infinite thing, which exceeds all our powers of mind; and therefore, whatever we say of it, we shall not be able to give an idea even of a shadow of it."¹ An immense, infinite beauty cannot be understood by any one but the immense, infinite God Himself.

Let it suffice to say that the indescribable joy and happiness of the angels and elect in heaven consists in this alone, that they can see and gaze on the beauty of God for all eternity; from this vision proceeds in them a perfect love of God, and an ineffable joy; a joy in which the Prophet David delights beforehand, when he says: "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of Thy pleasure."² A joy which St. Thomas and St. Anselm call "the perfect fulness and superabundance of joy."³ "They will rejoice with their whole hearts, their whole minds, their whole souls; so that their whole hearts and minds and souls will not suffice for the plenitude of their joy. For when their hearts and minds and souls and their whole being are full of joy, there will still remain an immense joy."⁴ Therefore, "all that joy will not enter into the blessed;"⁵ but, according to the words of Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Matthew to the faithful servant, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord,"⁶ "all the blessed shall enter into the joy,"⁷ and be surrounded by it as by an immense ocean. Nay, so great will that joy be, that if the elect were not supported and strengthened, they would be unable either to see God or to bear the excess of joy, but would be overwhelmed and annihilated by it in an instant. Such was the force of the answer that the Lord gave to Moses, when the latter said to Him: "If I have found favor in Thy sight, show me Thy face, that I may know Thee."⁸ Ah, Moses, that is a vain wish. "I will show thee all good,"⁹ but not yet; in heaven you will see Me,

From the
joy of the
elect in the
beatific
vision.

¹ Pulchritudo illius beatæ et immortalis naturæ res est quædam infinita, quæ omnem excedit rationem; atque ideo, quæcunque dixerimus, ne tenuè quidem illius decoris vestigium explicare poterimus.—S. Chrysost. in Psalm. lx.

² Inebriabuntur ab ubertate domus tuæ, et torrente voluptatis tuæ potabis eos.—Ps. xxxv. 9.

³ Gaudium perfecte plenum, superplenum.—S. Thom. 2. 2æ, q. 28, a. 3.

⁴ Sic gaudebunt toto corde, tota mente, tota anima, ut totum cor, tota mens, tota anima non sufficiat plenitudini gaudii: pleno quippe corde, plena mente, plena anima, pleno toto homine, adhuc supra modum supererit gaudium.

⁵ Totum illud gaudium non intrabit in gaudentes.

⁶ Intra in gaudium Domini tui.—Matt. xxv. 21.

⁷ Toti gaudentes intrabunt in gaudium.

⁸ Si inveni gratiam in conspectu tuo, ostende mihi faciem tuam, ut sciam te.—Exod. xxxiii. 13.

⁹ Ego ostendam omne bonum tibi.—Ibid. 19.

but here it is impossible: "Thou canst not see My face; for man shall not see Me and live."¹ By which the Lord meant, not merely that man must die before being admitted into the glory of heaven, but also that he would die of joy if he saw the face of God. What are you to do, then, O human soul? How will it be with you in heaven? If the first moment you get there you die at the sight of the face of God, what better will you be? But be comforted; you will live; the God who will be your eternal joy will also find a means of making you able to bear the splendor of His beauty and the immense weight of eternal happiness. And that He does, my dear brethren, as theologians teach, by a supernatural light, which is called "the light of glory," and it is a participation of the uncreated light in which God sees Himself, of which the Prophet David says: "In Thy light we shall see light."² By this supernatural light of glory the souls of the elect will be raised above their natural capacity, so that they will be able to fix the eyes of the understanding on the very centre of the divine beauty, like on a brilliant sun, without being dazzled; and, moreover, it will strengthen them to enjoy their immense happiness without being wearied. This, I repeat, should suffice for us to form some idea of the incomprehensible beauty of God, since the mere sight of it causes such an overwhelming joy that a supernatural strength is required to enable the mind to bear it. And finally, let it suffice for us to know that the infinite happiness of God Himself consists in nothing else than the knowledge of His own beauty, His love for it, and the infinite satisfaction with which He rejoices in it.

Therefore
we are
blind and
foolish if we
do not love
God.

Christians, do we acknowledge this truth? Ah, how is it possible, then, that such beauty does not win our hearts and affections? How is it possible that we can love anything else but our all-perfect God? Shame, that we should have to say it! A mortal, perishable, miserable beauty, on which we chance to cast our eyes, can sometimes so bewitch and befool us, that we think of it day and night, and constantly sigh after it, while the infinite beauty of God makes such little impression on us! Whence comes this want of feeling, this hardness of heart? Ah, a lively faith is wanting; for if we had that, we should often represent to our minds that supreme Good. As it is, we attend to what comes under our eyes, and let our hearts go after it without thought or con-

¹ Non poteris videre faciem meam; non enim videbit me homo, et vivet.—Exod. xxxiii. 20

² In lumine tuo videbimus lumen.—Ps. xxxv. 10.

sideration. I read of a blind man who recovered his sight in the middle of the night; when he opened his eyes, he saw the moon. Oh, what is that? he cried, filled with wonder and admiration. Oh, what a beautiful thing! And he could hardly gaze enough at the light of the moon, thinking that there was nothing more brilliant in the whole universe, because he had never seen anything like it before. But next morning, when the sun rose, he changed his opinion. What a mistake I made, said he; I was sure that the light I saw first was the most beautiful of all; but now I see there is another, in comparison with which the former is not worthy of consideration. So it is with us, too, my dear brethren; we are like blind and senseless people; we cast our eyes on earthly beauties and on comely objects, and giving ourselves up to them, imagine that we should enjoy some wonderful degree of happiness if we could only get possession of them. O blindness! cries out St. Augustine; "we love the creature, and do not love the Creator."¹ We delight in a flower that blooms in the morning and withers in the evening; we are pleased at the sight of a piece of metal that is dug out of the earth; we take pleasure in the beauty of a mortal like ourselves, which fades away on the approach of old age and must decay in the tomb; but the only beauty that is imperishable, infinite, and real is so little prized, so little loved!

Oh, if we had but a ray of the light of faith and knowledge that so many servants of God possessed, with what sorrow of heart we should bewail our fault! How ashamed we should be of ourselves for having made so much of a worthless thing! Like St. Augustine we should exclaim: "too late have I loved Thee, O ancient Beauty, ever new!"² We should be like St. Teresa, who, as we have seen, after she had beheld Our Lord for only a moment, could not look on even the greatest earthly beauty as otherwise than as an abomination; the sun itself seemed only a dark shadow to her; nay, so great was the dislike she felt to behold created beings, that in their presence she was obliged to bite her lips, lest her feelings should betray themselves outwardly. St. Thomas of Canterbury writes of a young girl, a penitent of his, who was so captivated by the love of a certain beautiful person, that she had no rest day or night; no means that she tried were of any avail, and she had almost resolved in desperation to give herself up to her impure passion. While in this

And show
that we
have not a
lively faith,
shown by
examples.

¹ Amat condita, et non amat Conditorum.

² Sero te amavi, O Pulchritudo, tam antiqua, tam nova! sero te amavi.

state, our divine Lord appeared to her; ah, My daughter, said He, love Me, for I am infinite beauty, infinite sweetness, infinite goodness and loveliness! whereupon He disappeared, and the girl was so changed in a moment, that she had only feelings of disgust for all earthly beauty, and devoted herself altogether to the love of Jesus Christ. What would she have done, if she had seen but a spark of the infinite beauty of God? Cecilia von Creutz, a noble lady in the service of the queen of Spain, suffered for a long time from sore eyes, and at last lost her sight altogether. Being asked once by the bishop how she bore such a privation, oh, said she, with the greatest contentment and satisfaction; for, in God's name, of what use would my eyes be to me? I can find nothing on earth that gives me the least pleasure to look at, when I consider by the light of faith the infinite beauty of God, that I hope one day to behold in heaven.

Therefore, by the help of faith, we must often consider the beauty of God.

O faith, where art thou? Why hast thou not had the same effect on me long ago? Why hast thou not at least made me love the God of infinite beauty more than all created things, which, alas, I have not done? For when I consider the course of my life, I find that quite the contrary has been the case, and I must acknowledge that I have loved almost all creatures, but not Thee, O God of sovereign beauty; and that I have loved them against Thee and Thy holy law, and therefore have loved them more than Thee. O my heart, what answer wilt thou make to God; how wilt thou account for having loved a perishable beauty, a fine garment, a good horse or dog even, while thou didst not find in the perfections of thy God enough to attract thy love and esteem? I know well the reason that is generally alleged, namely, that we see creatures and their beauty, but have never seen God, and therefore His beauty has not such a powerful attraction for us. But what a vain excuse that is for a Christian to bring forward! Have there not been many saints of both sexes, who have not seen God any more than we? And yet they loved Him, and that with an indescribable fervor, so that some of them, like the holy youth Stanislaus, had to place damp cloths on their breasts to cool their hearts that were on fire with the love of God; while they reckoned it as the greatest happiness to suffer for God's sake the most grievous trials and the bitterest torments. Remember the fearful austerities and penances of the holy hermits Paul, Antony, Hilarion, Macarius, Simeon Stylites, and many other confessors, and how they used to chastise their

bodies, that were already emaciated enough by fasting. Consider the rods and scourges, the plates of hot iron, the gridirons, the terrible racks, the crosses and wheels, the stake, and all the cruelties of the tyrants against the Christian martyrs. What do you think, my dear brethren, of such torments? Could you point to even one individual who, for the love of a created beauty and for the sake of seeing and gazing on it, has borne even the twentieth part of those torments? And yet thousands of martyrs and confessors have borne them with the greatest joy, in order to be able to see God in heaven; nay, they looked on them as of no account compared to the endless happiness of the beatific vision, according to the words of St. Paul: "For I reckon, that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us."¹ Where did that ardent love of God come from, if not from the light of faith? Can we love nothing but what we see with our bodily eyes? If so, how is it that we often feel an inward inclination to love and esteem some one whom we have never seen, simply because we have read or heard of his wonderful beauty or skill? When princes and potentates think of getting married, they generally bestow their affections on some one at a distance, whom they have never seen, and of whose charms they have no knowledge except what they can get from a lifeless picture. We know from history, that Johanna, the daughter of Alfonso V., king of Portugal, on account of her great beauty, was sought for in marriage by Maximilian, the archduke of Austria, by Richard, king of England, and by several other sovereigns. One of these, when he saw Johanna's portrait, could not restrain his admiration, but fell on his knees and thanked God for having made such a beautiful creature. If the comeliness of one who is absent can excite such admiration, by the mere tidings that one hears of her, why should not the God of all beauty draw our hearts to Himself, since we are assured by faith that He infinitely surpasses all creatures in perfection? Yes, you say, but the beauty of an absent person can be represented to us by a portrait, so that we can form some idea of what he is like; but no one can draw a picture of God. But do not those very beauties that befool and bewitch us represent their Creator? And that, too, with this difference, that generally in portraits the person is flattered, while the pict-

¹ Existimo enim quod non sunt condignæ passionēs hujus temporis ad futuram gloriā, quæ revelabitur in nobis.—Rom. viii. 18.

ures of the divine beauty that we find in creatures are only mere shadows of the infinitely perfect Original. But why do we spend so long speaking of pictures? Even a mere imaginary love tale, or romance, as it is called, of some hero, or king, or king's daughter, when we read it (and it would be far better that such books were thrown into the fire than that Christians should read them), can make such a deep impression on the heart, and carry us away to such an extent, that we often shed tears and keep the memory of the characters fresh in our minds for days after, although we know well that the whole story is but an invention. Is it true, then, that we cannot love God, because we do not see Him? Does not the light of faith teach us, and that, too, with far greater certainty than we can have of anything we see with our bodily eyes, that in God there is an infinite beauty worthy of all love? Of that we have not the least doubt. Why, then, do our hearts remain so cold, so hard, so unfeeling, although they are so easily moved by a fanciful love tale?

Conclusion
and resolution
to love
God above
all things.

Truly, O my God, I must be ashamed when I think of it! Well may I cry out with St. Augustine: Late have I loved Thee, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new! Little have I loved Thee, because I have little known Thee! Little have I known Thee, because hitherto I have seldom thought of Thy wonderful perfections; because I have not raised my heart from creatures to the knowledge of Thy beauty; because I have not restrained my inclinations and desires from the inordinate love of creatures. Ah, Lord of infinite beauty! there is no excuse for my wickedness, for often have I not merely refused my love to Thee, but by indulging in forbidden love for creatures, hated Thee as a vile thing! O my God, how could I have been so wicked? O Lord, as great and amiable as is Thy beauty, so great and abominable is the insult I have offered Thee! How, then, can I appear before Thee, O divine Beauty, stained as I am, like as I am to the hellish spirits themselves with the filth of sin? Do I not deserve to be rejected by Thee forever? But I know that, besides being infinitely beautiful, Thou art also infinitely good; Thou dost never reject the repentant sinner; Thou embracest him with Thy grace when he returns to Thee with sorrow of heart. And if I have a human heart, should not that very fact soften it, and induce me to love Thee henceforth with all my strength? Therefore, O God of all beauty, I love Thee now, and will love Thee for all eternity; and those very things that formerly I

loved more than Thee shall henceforth give me a fresh impulse to love Thee all the more. If I see any beautiful object that is apt to attract my admiration, it will serve to recall to my mind Thy infinite beauty. Away, I shall say in thought, away with all perishable comeliness that must rot in the grave! Thou art not worthy of my love! He who has created thee and me must be far more beautiful. Thee alone, O God, do I love, because Thou alone hast all that is worthy of love in Thyself. True, I have not seen Thy loveliness, nor shall I see it as long as I am in this vale of tears, but I am infallibly assured by faith that Thou art infinite Beauty itself, and the source of all that is beautiful; this faith shall be to me during this life a sufficient incentive to love Thee with my whole heart above all created things, to renounce for Thy sake all love that cannot harmonize with Thine, to give up and avoid forever all that displeases Thee, to do and fulfil all that is pleasing to Thee, to suffer what Thou wilt, and to direct all my thoughts, words, actions, and movements of body and soul, every day, till the end of my life, to no other end but to Thy honor, glory, and love. And when the moment at last comes (and I hope in Thy goodness that it will come) for me to appear before Thee in heaven and to behold Thy infinite beauty by the light of glory, then will I make amends for my want of love here by an all-perfect and eternal love. Amen.

*FIFTH SERMON.***ON THE SMALL NUMBER OF THOSE WHO REALLY LOVE THE SON OF GOD,****Subject.**

There are few who love Jesus the Son of God with a sincere love; therefore there are few who are loved by Jesus.—*Preached on the Feast of St. John the Evangelist.*

Text.

Vidit illum discipulum, quem diligebat Jesus, sequentem.—John xxi. 20.

“Peter . . . saw that disciple whom Jesus loved following.”

Introduction.

Is there only one, then, amongst so many, whom Jesus loves? Did He not love Peter? Did He not love Andrew and the

other disciples? Did He not love all men? For the same Evangelist says expressly of Him: "Having loved His own, who were in the world, He loved them unto the end."¹ Why, then, is mention made of John alone as of the one whom Jesus loved? Truly, the Son of God loved the other apostles, nay, all men; but He had a special tenderness and affection for St. John, just as many a parent who has several sons might say of one of them, this is my dear child; not that he thinks nothing of his other children, but because he has a special tenderness for that particular one. There are different reasons given for the predilection of Our Lord for St. John, but the most certain of them is this, that John loved Him more than did the others; for, since the Eternal Wisdom says: "I love them that love Me,"² He must have a greater love for the one who loves Him most. Such was the case with St. John. He was the only one of the apostles who, along with the Mother of God, followed his divine Master, through love, amidst the furious Jews, to Mount Calvary, to the cross, to death, to the sepulchre, without the least fear of ridicule, contempt, or death, while not a single one of the other disciples showed himself in public during those days. No wonder that John should be the disciple whom Jesus loved before all the others. What an honor, my dear brethren, what happiness, to be loved by Jesus Christ, the Son of God! "What greater dignity can a creature have," says St. Thomas of Villanova, "than to please his Creator, and to be loved by Him who made him?"³ Who can understand what it is to be loved by the God of infinite power, goodness, and beauty? Ah, would that I could say of you and of myself with truth, I am amongst those who are loved by Jesus Christ, the Son of God! Rejoice, all of you who are here present, for the Son of God loves you! But "man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred;"⁴ I at all events am afraid that of all the men in the world hardly one in a hundred, not to speak of one in twelve, will be found worthy of the special love of the Son of God. Why so? When I consider the way of the world at the present time, I find very few who sincerely love the Son of God. This I shall show in the present sermon. I repeat that—

¹ Cum dilexisset suos, qui erant in mundo, in finem dilexit eos.—John xiii. 1.

² Ego diligentes me diligo.—Prov. viii. 17.

³ Quæ major est, aut esse potest, dignitas creaturæ, quam ut factori suo placeat, et diligatur ab eo qui fecit eam?

⁴ Nescit homo, utrum amore an odio dignus sit.—Eccles. ix. 1.

Plan of Discourse.

There are few men who love Jesus Christ, the Son of God, with a sincere love; therefore there are few who are loved by Jesus Christ with a special love.

O holy St. John, whom Jesus loved, and the Mother of Jesus, as the child recommended to her, speak for us to this Mother, that she may obtain for us by her intercession, and give us by the hands of the holy angels, the knowledge and grace of true love, so that we may in future obey the warning thou hast so often given us, and love Jesus our God in truth and in deed, and thus be reckoned amongst the children whom He loves.

To love a person is nothing else than to wish well to him, to be sincerely glad of his good fortune, to be troubled at his misfortunes, to be pleased when he is present, and in every way possible to seek to serve him. When a love like this is returned, that is, when he whom I love loves me also, then there is friendship. Now, as there are many kinds of friendship in the world, so there are many kinds of love. Some love in outward appearance, through mere hypocrisy, and with the lips alone, while their hearts have nothing to do with it; this is not love, but flattery and falsehood, and such friends are more to be dreaded than open and declared enemies, because one cannot be on his guard against them. Some love and really mean it in their hearts, and have a true affection for the person, but only so long as they receive benefits from him; this is not an honest love; for even the most savage barbarians and heathens can be softened by presents and benefits; in this way, not the person, but his benefits are the object of the love. Others love although they have not received nor expect to receive any benefits from their friend; but they do not show this love in act when there is an opportunity of doing him a service; when they could run to his assistance, they shrug their shoulders, hang back, and leave him in the lurch. This is not true friendship; for he who loves sincerely, willingly shares with his friend, and would even take the bit out of his own mouth to give it to him. Others love and show their love in act; but they do not do so constantly and with their whole hearts; they are shifting and changeable; to-day they love one person, to-morrow another. That is a love that has no foundation; for where there is true love the heart does not allow itself to be divided and turned away from the object of its affections. Others love the one person with their

In what true
love consists.

whole hearts, but only so long as he is prosperous; in the time of need they fall away, and leave him, and are ashamed to be looked on as his friend; they have no desire to share in his misfortunes. That is a weak friendship, and the one to which the old proverb refers: "a friend in need is a friend indeed." A sincere love does not allow itself to be interfered with by suffering, misfortune, or sorrow; it sweetens all that is bitter, nor is there any hardship that it will not readily endure for the sake of the loved one. Finally, there are others who love constantly, with their whole hearts, even when their friend is in the greatest need; they are ready to share with him all they have, and to bear anything for him, even when they have no hopes of gaining any reward thereby; and that they do out of sheer affection and tenderness. This alone is true, honest love and friendship. I say honest love; for I do not at all allude to that impure love, which should rather be called a brutish, raving madness, than love or friendship.

Such love
for Jesus
Christ is a
rare thing
in the
world.

Since such is the case, my dear brethren, since true love consists in what I have explained, I require no further proof of my subject, for it is already clear enough that there are few men in the world nowadays who sincerely love Jesus Christ, the Son of God. For where can I find hearts that are always true to Him in their desires and inclinations, in joy and sorrow, in consolation and troubles? There are lovers enough in the world; but how do they love? And they love with great fervor and earnestness; but what? Would to God that their affections, which should be directed to God alone, who is alone worthy of all our love, and who is our last end, were not perverted to quite a contrary object, and to forbidden things; a perversion that makes them not friends of the Son of God, but His bitterest enemies; so that they live, not in true love, but in bitter hatred! I need not go far, nor search through Asia, Africa, and America for Turks, heathens, Jews, and infidels who do not know Jesus Christ, but blaspheme and persecute Him, for, unfortunately, the greater part of the world is full of such people. Nor need I bring forward the heretics who deny and dispute the true doctrine of Jesus Christ; and, God help us! there are only too many of them. I will confine myself simply to Catholics, and examine those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Saviour, believe in His doctrine, and call themselves His friends, disciples, and followers; who, moreover, are often fed with His Flesh and Blood

as the companions of His table and His confidential servants; amongst these, I say, how few there are who truly love Jesus Christ!

Proud Christians! to what do your love and affections, your hearts and desires tend? To Jesus the Son of God? No indeed; He is too vile in your eyes; He acts in too humble a manner for your taste! There He lies in the manger, between the ox and the ass, unknown and despised by the world, while His companions are poor shepherds and peasants. Your thoughts and ideas tend much higher than that! High sounding titles of honor, the esteem of men making a great parade before the world, being looked up to by all; these and similar things are the objects of your wishes. So that you do not love Jesus, and you renounce His friendship and company; for He cannot bear the proud, while He shows favor to the humble: "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."¹ You misers, where does your love tend to? To Jesus? Far from it! Money and property, which you try to scrape together by all possible means, you will not find with Him. A handful of straw on a hard block of wood is His couch; swaddling-clothes are His wardrobe, the breath of the animals His fire and hearth, a poor virgin His mother, a poor carpenter His foster-father. I know well, and you must acknowledge it too, that you cannot hold long with Him, nor share in His poverty. You unchaste libertines, whither do your desires tend? But let us not speak of such things. You yourselves would be ashamed to speak of them in decent company, so vile are the affections you cherish. They who give way to impure passions know well that they are going altogether away from Jesus, but that troubles them little; it gives them small concern whether they are friends of Jesus, or not, as long as they can indulge their brutal passions without let or hindrance; that is all the happiness they ask for. You drunkards, what do you love? Jesus, the Son of God? Ah! how often His sacred name is mentioned with derision in your convivial meetings, and coupled with oaths and curses, and other sins! Revengeful, quarrelsome, envious Christians, do you love Jesus? But He is the God of peace, unity, and mercy; He continually cries out to you: "Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart."² He commands you: "Love your en-

Many hate
Him.

¹ Deus superbis resistit, humilibus autem dat gratiam.—James iv. 6.

² Discite a me, quia mitis sum et humilis corde.—Matt. xi. 29.

emies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you; that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven.”¹ This command does not please you, and therefore you go away from Jesus. In a word, all sinners and children of the world who break the commandments of God are on the side of the sworn enemies of Christ; the world, the flesh, and the devil have taken possession of their hearts and inclinations, so that the love of Jesus Christ has no room in them. “You that love the Lord,” says the Prophet David, “hate evil.”² And do we not find a great, not to say the greater, number of Christians amongst those who by their vicious lives hate and abandon Jesus Christ, that they may possess and enjoy goods and pleasures which should rather draw bitter tears from them? See, O good Lord and Saviour! in that way not only do men refuse to love Thee, but most people in the world cannot even bear the thought of Thee; they drive Thee out of their hearts and persecute Thee in order to make room for some other love. And what hast Thou done to them? Ah, Thou hast done nothing but shower down benefits on them, for which they should love Thee with their whole hearts!

Others love
Him only
with the
lips.

Yet I am making a mistake; there are many, very many, at least amongst Christians, who love Jesus; for what else are we to conclude when we see zealous, pious Christians thronging before the altars in the churches, before the crucifixes in the public streets, and spending much time on their knees at home, uttering those loving words: Dearest Saviour, I love Thee; I love Thee with all my strength, with my whole heart and soul, more than myself, more than everything in heaven and on earth? If there were neither heaven nor hell, I should still love Thee, because Thou art my God and my Saviour, etc.? Such are their sighs and their prayers; so do they sing together for hours at a time in the churches. All that would indeed be very fine, if true love consisted in such things, and in that case I should retract what I have said, and assert that the greater number of Catholics love Thee, O Lord and Saviour! But attend, O Lord, to their actions and mode of life, and Thou wilt see that generally speaking their love is but a lip service, a simulated affection, a friendship consisting in mere words, but not a love in reality. Their lives do not harmonize with their words; and the same

¹ Diligite inimicos vestros, benefacite his qui oderunt vos, et orate pro persequentibus et calumniantibus vos; ut sitis filii Patris vestri, qui in cœlis est. —Matt. v. 44, 45.

² Qui diligitis Dominum, odite malum. —Ps. xevi. 10.

persons who praise and bless Thee with their lips will soon afterwards again insult and revile Thee by their repeated sins; they who in the church sing and pray like angels before Thy altars, when they go home, curse and swear like demons if the least thing crosses them; they who so often say out of their prayer-books, Dearest Jesus, I love Thee above all things, when they go home, do everything to displease Thee. They who during a sermon sometimes shed hot tears, and imagine that those tears are the fruit of love for Thee, remain without sorrow or detestation for their sins, and have no wish to amend their lives. Is that the way to love? No, certainly, says St. Gregory, "deeds are the proof of love."¹ "For," says St. Augustine, "God does not wish to be loved in words alone, because He sees and hears not words, but the heart."² "You say, I love God; would that you would prove in deed what you say in words."³ And what sort of a love is that which consists in praising one with the lips and saying, I love thee, while you actually beat him with your fists, trample him under your feet, and raise your stick at him? That is to give him a friendly kiss and at the same time hand him over to his enemies, as the traitor Judas did with Our Lord. That is to greet and embrace him with one hand, while with the other you pierce his heart, as Joab did to Amasa, as we read in the twentieth chapter of the Second Book of Kings. That softening of heart and shedding of tears that occurs sometimes during sermons is not a whit different from the feeling that Saul often experienced while persecuting the innocent David, his son-in-law. The meekness and noble behavior of David towards him made such an impression on him, that he openly declared his emotion, and cried out in a voice broken with weeping, "Is this thy voice, my son David? and Saul lifted up his voice and wept."⁴ But this emotion did not harmonize with his will, for he still kept the hatred in his heart, and did not cease persecuting David. See, my dear brethren, that is the way in which many of us love Jesus in word only, but not in deed; and then we flatter ourselves that we are pious and devout. If we sit for a while in the church, and prattle through half our prayer-book, we look on our-

¹ Probatio dilectionis exhibitio est operis.

² Deus enim non se vult verbis tantum diligi, quia non verborum sed cordis auditor est et inspector.—S. Aug. de Sal. docum., c. 24.

³ Dicis: diligo Deum, utinam sit in re, quod dixisti sermone.—Idem de Visit. infirm., serm. I., c. 4.

⁴ Numquid vox hæc tua est, fili mi, David? et levavit Saul vocem suam et flevit.—I. Kings xxiv. 17.

selves as saints, and think we have done wonders for the glory of God. But love does not consist in that: "My little children," says St. John, the beloved disciple, "let us not love in word, nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth."¹ How is that to be done? Hear what Christ Himself says, "If any one love Me, he will keep My word."² The love of God is in the will, and it is a real conformity of our human with the divine will; so that we will what God has commanded, and avoid what He has forbidden. In a word, as St. Augustine says, "let no one deceive himself by imagining that he loves God, if he does not keep the commandments; for we love in so far as we do what He told us."³

Others love
Him for the
sake of tem-
poral goods.

There are certainly some who love Thee, O God, not merely with the lips, for they prove their sincerity by their actions; but how and why do they love Thee? Not for Thy sake, but for their own advantage. If Thou refusest what they ask from Thee, or if they have obtained from Thee the object of their desires, their love and friendship ceases at once. They are like the two birds that Noe sent out from the ark to see if the waters had disappeared from the earth. The dove came back to the ark, because the earth was still covered with water, and she could not find any food: "But she, not finding where her foot might rest, returned to him into the ark."⁴ But the raven, says the Scripture, "went forth and did not return;"⁵ for when it found carrion to eat it did not require food from Noe any longer. Why did it not come back like the dove? The dove could not find food; but the raven had plenty of it, and so forgot its benefactor, by whom it had been fed so long; it did not want the ark any longer, and so left it altogether. Many of us, my dear brethren, cultivate a friendship of that kind for the almighty God; we are of the number of those of whom the Psalmist says: "In his lifetime his soul will be blessed; and he will praise thee when Thou shalt do well to him."⁶ We love our God, we serve Him, and keep His commandments, as long as we think we are in need of His help. For instance, we have a weighty undertaking on hand, on which a great deal depends; we are about to set forth on a long journey, or we are engaged in a lawsuit in

¹ Filii mei, non diligamus verbo neque lingua, sed opere et veritate.—I. John iii. 18.

² Si quis diligit me, sermonem meum servabit.—John xiv. 23.

³ Nemo se fallat dicendo quod Deum diligit, si ejus præcepta non servat; nam in tantum eum diligimus, in quantum ejus præcepta servamus.

⁴ Quæ cum non invenisset ubi requiesceret pes ejus, reversa est ad eum in arcam.—Gen. viii. 9.

⁵ Egrediebatur, et non revertebatur.—Ibid. 7.

⁶ Anima ejus in vita ipsius; benedicetur confitebitur tibi, cum benefeceris ei.—Ps. xlviii. 19.

which we can win or lose some thousands of ducats; we require a good word in some affair or other; one has a hope of making a rich marriage; another is looking out for a good situation; another is very anxious for something he has set his heart on; one of our best friends is sick and in danger of death; the business is falling off; epidemics, scarcity, wars, and famine are at the door, and we wish to avert them. In those circumstances, oh, how pious and devout we become! Then we love Thee, O God, with all our strength; we run to the churches; we spend whole hours on our knees; we pray, and fast, and give alms, things that we otherwise would hardly think of doing; we do penance, we repent of and confess our sins, we give up our accustomed vices, avoid bad company and dangerous occasions, for that is the only means of appeasing the divine anger and of warding off the threatened calamity from us, or of gaining the object of our desires. In a word, in such cases God is our best friend. But if He does not give us what we ask, if things still go wrong with us, then we grow peevish, discontented, and ill-humored; all our love and friendship for God is at an end, and we say sometimes in desperation: what is the use of bothering myself any longer serving God, and speaking fairly to Him, since He will not help me, and allows me to remain in my difficulties? Or else (and this is the basest and worst of all) if the good God has heard our prayers, and granted our desires, we thank Him for a few days afterwards, knowing that we have received the benefit from His hands; but in time we forget our Benefactor; we become like the raven with the carrion, which we, too, have found, for our hearts and affections remain fixed on the earthly things and goods that God has so generously lent to us; our zeal in His service grows cold; we go farther and farther from Him every day; our old life recommences, our former sins are repeated, and we have taken leave of God altogether because we are no longer in need of His help. What a disgraceful kind of friendship that is! To show yourself a friend only because you hope for some advantage, and to love solely because you find your profit in loving! Even a dog, if he had reason, would be ashamed of that; for, although you allow him to suffer hunger, yet he remains true to you, and fawns on you when he sees you. Such people have not a sincere love for Jesus, the Son of God.

There are others who love Thee, O Lord! but not for a long time, nor with constancy; if they happen to see anything that

Others are
inconstant

in their
love.

pleases their eyes and outward senses Thou art driven out of their hearts. Let the vain world offer to that man who now loves Thee some trifling honor or authority, and he will accept it at once and abandon Thee; let the flesh offer him some momentary, brutish pleasure, the enjoyment of some created beauty; and he will rush to it immediately, and send Thee away from him without scruple. Nay, let the foul fiend himself come and promise some temporal good that he is desirous of, some property or money, or whatever it may be, and he will at once draw away the man's heart from Thee, while Thou with Thy promises of eternal riches art treated with disdain. Thus do we become attached now to one creature, now to another; we sell our love to the one that offers the highest price; he who gives us what we most desire carries off our affections with him. O miserable, inconstant mortals that we are! how quickly we change our love for God into hatred, and leave Him, whom all the powers of hell should not separate us from! "He that is a friend," says the Wise Man, "loveth at all times; and a brother is proved in distress."¹ He who wishes to act the true friend must continue to love in all circumstances. Even the world, and how much more the God of all holiness, hates the heart that makes itself too common and offers its affections to the first comer that attracts it. "Their heart is divided;" such is the threat pronounced against such inconstant souls by the Lord, in the words of the Prophet Osee, "now they shall perish,"² and be rejected by Me forever.

Others do
not love
Him truly,
because
they seldom
think of
Him.

So far, my dear brethren, we have found none who love the Lord God sincerely. And if I were now to examine those, and they are, alas! very few in number, who mean well with God, who keep His commandments, avoid grievous sin, and do all they can to gain heaven, so as to be able to love Him forever, even amongst these I find but a very small number who love Him as truly as they ought. For when one loves with his whole heart, his thoughts, desires, affections, and wishes are almost always fixed on the object of his love, nor can even sleep interrupt this current of thought. "If you wish to know what you love," says St. Laurence Justinian, "then see what you think of."³ "He loves God," says St. Augustine, "whose thoughts are constantly occupied with heavenly and divine things."⁴ Just, pious, de-

¹ *Omni tempore diligit, qui amicus est, et frater in angustis comprobatur.*—Prov. xvii. 17.

² *Divisum est cor eorum; nunc interibunt.*—Osee x. 2.

³ *Vis nosse quid amas, attende quid cogites.*

⁴ *Ille Deum diligit, qui nihil aliud quam cœlestia cogitat et divina.*

vout souls, are your thoughts, desires, and sighs always directed to God during the whole day, and to the things of God? Nothing like it! Hardly once or twice in the day is an earnest thought turned to God; we are too busy with earthly things; our minds are distracted with our occupations, our domestic duties, our work; we have neither time nor leisure to think seriously of God, and yet we might with the greatest ease, without the least loss of time, without the slightest difficulty, and to the greatest consolation of our souls, frequently raise our hearts to God during our daily work, and say to ourselves in a few short words: For Thy sake, O Lord, and for Thy love I do this; I labor now because Thou requirest of me that I should do so in the state to which Thou hast called me. Give me patience, O Lord, in this adversity, in this trial; may Thy holy will be done, and so on. What is easier than that, my dear brethren? What more comforting, more useful, more just, than for us to cultivate this holy familiarity with God? Does not Jesus deserve it from us, since He constantly thinks of us, and has offered up to His heavenly Father for us all the thoughts, words, and actions of His life on earth? Nay, what more necessary for us, if we have a sincere love for God? Is it really a difficult matter to remember one whom we love? Is it possible to forget when we really love? Is it not rather an infallible sign that love is growing cold and beginning to be extinguished when we begin to forget the object of it? Therefore a certain philosopher has said that love is a skilful, natural painter, whose first efforts tend to drawing a living picture of the loved one in the mind and imagination of the lover. And experience teaches us this only too well with regard to vain and worldly love. Now, can we believe that the love of God is less skilful or industrious in filling our minds and memories with the beautiful picture of our most loving Saviour? For just as that love, when it is sincere and zealous, takes still more forcible possession of the human heart, so does it also make a far deeper impression on our memories. The Prophet David had experience of this in his own person, when he said that he would rather forget his right hand than the city of Jerusalem and the Ark of the Covenant, because in the Ark was the dwelling-place of God, and there David had left his heart when he was compelled to go away from it: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand be forgotten."¹ But alas! even in the place where we deal

¹ Si oblitus fuero tui, Jerusalem, oblivioni detur dextera mea.—Ps. cxxxvi. 5.

immediately with God, where He has fixed His dwelling, I mean, in the church, when we praise God and send forth our prayers to Him, we sometimes cannot keep our thoughts from wandering and going abroad to the things in which we have placed our treasure, and which we love more tenderly and sincerely than we love God: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."¹ Oh, says St. Augustine, "if you truly love God, then let your mouth, your hand, your eye, your foot, and all your senses love Him."² That is, when you speak with your mouth, or see with your eye, or work with your hand, or walk with your foot, your loving heart should be occupied with God; for that is the way to fulfil perfectly that chief commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind."³

Have little
pleasure in
His com-
pany.

When we love a person, we like to speak of him, and to hear others speak of him; our greatest pleasure is to hold a conversation with him, while the time we spend in his presence never seems too long, never wearisome. So does Our Saviour love us, as we should by rights love Him. "My delight," He says, "is to be with the children of men."⁴ But, O God worthy of all love, what pleasure and joy men find in Thee, and in Thy company and conversation, is shown clearly enough by the weariness they feel when Thou art spoken of, and when Thou Thyself explainest to them Thy eternal truths! I allude to the little desire they have to hear sermons and Christian instructions. One finds the hour too early; another waits till the last sound of the bell; one is not yet dressed; another finds the hour too long, although he may not come till the sermon is half over, while no one is much troubled by the thought that he thus loses the good of the sermon. Oh, what a cold love of God that shows! But what swift wings we have to fly where our real treasure is, the creature we love! And when we have found it, a whole day spent in talking does not seem tiresome to us, nor do we think five or six o'clock too early an hour for rising in the morning, although eight o'clock is too early when there is question of hearing the word of God. Enter into conversation even with those Christians whose lives are looked on as edifying and who

¹ Ubi enim thesaurus vester est, ibi et cor vestrum erit.—Luke xii. 34.

² Diligat Deum os tuum, oculus tuus, manus tua, pes tuus, et omnis sensus tuus.—S. Aug. de Visit. infirm., serm. i. c. 4.

³ Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo, et in tota anima tua, et in tota mente tua.—Matt. xxii. 37.

⁴ Deliciæ meæ esse cum filiis hominum.—Prov. viii. 31.

have the name of being pious and devout, what is the subject that engages their attention? The latest news, business, some fresh amusements, dress, and a thousand similar worthless things. But will there be not a word said of God, of Jesus Christ? No, indeed; you might wait a long time before hearing anything about Him. There might chance to be some one who has zeal enough to speak of heavenly things; but how coldly and with what displeasure he is listened to, and how soon the subject is changed! So that it requires a great deal of courage, or a great deal of simplicity to venture to say a word about God in company. Yet they who truly love God should not allow themselves to be deterred by this, just as the vain lovers of the world do not allow their freedom of speech to be tampered with, and have a hundred ways of bringing forward the subject that lies nearest their hearts, although they may thereby weary their listeners. May I not, then, considering the fact that God our Saviour is seldom alluded to in company and conversation, justly conclude that there are few Christians who love Him sincerely?

When we love a person, we are rejoiced at his prosperity, and deeply afflicted when things go wrong with him. O Christians! we see, and hear, and know that the God and Saviour, whom we say we love, is grossly insulted and offended and mocked every day, and every hour of every day, by great and small, young and old, who sin against Him; where is our sympathy, our sorrow and affliction? Who of us sheds a tear, when he sees others sinning? But what do I say about tears? What have tears to do with the matter? God is offended, and that is all. Why should we concern ourselves about it? Let those look to it who are answerable for it. And so men laugh and enjoy themselves, and eat and drink, and sleep just as quietly as if offending God were of no greater consequence than untying one's shoe-latchet. Oh, if we truly loved God, what opportunities we should find of preventing sin, especially the sins that are committed by children, servants, and others who are under our authority! To look after them, punish their faults, keep them out of the occasions of evil, encourage them in the practice of devotion and the fear of God, and give them good example, is not merely a sign and an effect of the love of God in masters and mistresses, but it is moreover their bounden duty. But, alas! how grievously some are wanting in this respect! If a

Are little af-
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Him.

servant happens by mere chance to break a glass, or a child knocks its head against a window-pane, they get into a violent rage at once, and are in an ill humor the whole day about it; but if the servant or child commits a grievous sin, or goes into dangerous company, they look on with the greatest indifference; they say not a word, and even laugh at the matter as if it were not of the least consequence. O love of God, how very cold and weak thou art! How different the zeal with which thou didst inspire so many apostolic men, who crossed the ocean to spread the glory of Jesus Christ, and went through the most distant lands, amongst the wildest savages; undertaking unheard-of labors, despising all dangers and persecutions, suffering trials and adversities of all kinds, and in the midst of it all full of consolation and spiritual joy, and thinking their labors richly repaid if they succeeded in bringing one sinner to repentance, or even in hindering a single mortal sin. Such were the effects of love in many servants of God. St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi was deeply afflicted at the thought that Our Saviour was so little known and still less loved by men. The violence of her love was such, that she often ran about, almost beside herself, with the crucifix in her hand, crying out: "Ah, Love is not loved by men! Love is not loved! O senseless, blind, and hardened hearts! will you never begin to love infinite Love with more zeal?" St. Teresa was as keenly sensible of anything that touched the honor of God as she was indifferent to everything else, so that, seeing the many sins and vices which daily dishonor the holy name of God and offend His divine majesty, her heart was often so afflicted that she burst out into bitter tears and lamentations. Hearing once of the great mischief that heresy was working in France, she wept inconsolably, testifying her sorrow to her beloved Saviour by offering to give up a thousand lives, which she wished she had for the purpose, in order to obtain the conversion of even one sinner; she earnestly begged of God to be accepted as a victim for the erring, for whom she was ready to endure all conceivable torments, because no pain seemed worth considering in comparison to what she suffered at seeing Christ so grievously offended. Of such a nature is the true, zealous love of Jesus Christ. Therefore the little concern that we feel at the terrible offences offered to God, the coldness and indifference with which we look on while countless sins are committed every day, without moving a step to prevent them,

are certainly an evident proof that we have in our hearts but a very small spark of the true love of God.

When we love a person, we look on it as a joy and consolation to be able to suffer something for him; for, as St. Bernard says, “nothing is difficult to one who loves;”¹ nothing is too bitter, nothing too hard, provided he can thereby please his beloved one. Thus we read that Jacob thought nothing of the seven years during which he had to work for his beloved Rachel; they seemed but a few days because of the greatness of his love.² What is our love like in this respect, my dear brethren? As long as we have nothing to suffer, as long as things go according to our wishes, and we are in good health and spirits, receiving consolations from God; when Jesus comes to us in the appearance of a bridegroom, and invites us into the garden, into the wine-cellar, as we read in the Canticle, oh, then we are zealous and active in the service of God; then we cry out: “My heart is ready, O God; my heart is ready;”³ may Thy holy will be done! Then we often exclaim: God be praised! I am still prospering! Blessed be God! I am still in good health; glory be to God! this undertaking has succeeded with me. But if Our Lord comes like a poor child; if He shows Himself to us torn by the scourges, or nailed to the cross; if He asks us: “Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink?”⁴ if we hear Him calling out to us from afar, saying: “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me,”⁵ oh, how unpleasant those words are in our ears! how we shrug our shoulders and act like little children! Sometimes the mother gives her child a thick piece of bread spread over with honey; the little one is not hungry at the moment and goes off and licks up the honey, but the bread it throws away or hides in a corner, for it does not want it. In the same way Jesus offers His servants bread and honey; that is, He mingles their joys and consolations with crosses and trials; what do we do? The honey, the sweet repose of conscience, spiritual consolations in our devotions, we willingly accept; but the bread does not please us; the cross we try to throw aside, and even the least discomfort seems intolerable to us. But that is not the way to love. A true lover must bear

Do not wish to suffer anything for His sake.

¹ Amanti nihil difficile.

² Videbantur illi pauci dies præ amoris magnitudine.—Gen. xxix. 20.

³ Paratum cor meum, Deus; paratum cor meum.—Ps. cvii. 2.

⁴ Potestis bibere calicem quem ego bibiturus sum?—Matt. xxii. 22.

⁵ Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam, et sequatur me.

—Ibid. xvi. 24.

everything, sweet and sour, with and for the object of his affections; he must be ready to laugh and weep, to rejoice and to suffer. "Love without the cross," says St. Bernardine of Siena, "is not worthy of praise;"¹ it is not worth anything, and therefore God said as it were boastingly to Satan: "Hast thou considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a simple and upright man, one that feareth God, and avoideth evil?"² Yes, answered Satan; but I am not surprised at it: "Doth Job fear God in vain? Hast Thou not made a fence for him and his house, and all his substance round about, and blessed the works of his hands, and his possession hath increased on the earth? But stretch forth Thy hand a little and touch all that he hath, and see if he blesseth Thee not to Thy face."³ Let me have my will of him, let me burn his house, take away his cattle, slay his children, and throw himself out on the dung-hill; and then, if he continues to love Thee, I will acknowledge him as a truly good man. Job faithfully withstood all persecutions, and remained true to God in the midst of his grievous trials. O my God, if I were to ask Thy lovers nowadays for similar proofs of their love, how differently they would act! Behold that man, that woman, loves Thee earnestly; at least they say so a hundred times, and they give proofs of their sincerity by many acts of charity; but Thou must not come too near to them! Stretch forth Thy hand, seize the rod and strike them with it, but not, dear Lord, as hard as Thou didst strike Thy servant Job; send them a slight trial, some trifling misfortune or disaster in their temporal affairs, some passing poverty or want, some bodily illness or discomfort, some trouble on account of the death of a friend; then Thou wilt see how great is their love for Thee! Alas, what lamentations Thou wilt hear! They will cry like little children whose father seizes the rod to beat them; they will become almost desperate and will murmur and complain. Such is the way, my dear brethren, in which we love our Lord and God.

I will say nothing now of our niggardliness with God, although true love is generous, and has nothing too precious to

Are cold
and tepid

¹ Amor absque cruce nullo modo meretur aliquam laudem

² Numquid considerasti servum meum Job, quod non sit ei similis in terra, homo simplex et rectus, ac timens Deum, et recedens a malo?—Job i. 8.

³ Numquid Job frustra timet Deum? Nonne tu vallasti eum, ac domum ejus, universamque substantiam per circuitum, operibus manuum ejus benedixisti, et possessio ejus crevit in terra? Sed extende paululum manum tuam, et tange cuncta quæ possidet, nisi in faciem benedixerit tibi.—Ibid. 9-11.

give the loved one. But how miserly we are towards God! If we do and avoid that to which we are bound under pain of eternal damnation, we seem to have done wonders. Is this or that a mortal sin? we ask sometimes. Oh, if not, then we can do it. But it is a venial sin,—oh, that is nothing! Who can avoid small sins? If I did this or that, if I put a stop to that abuse or that vanity, I know I should please God; but He is not so dear to me as all that. I love Jesus my Saviour; but my friendship for Him does not go to such lengths; I cannot overcome myself in that particular. I will say nothing of the love of our neighbor, of generosity to the poor, of benefiting those who hate and persecute us,—all duties that we would certainly perform if we loved God sincerely, for even the servants of one whom we love are of interest to us, nay, we feed our friend's dog and do not suffer it to go away hungry. And I must also pass over the carelessness we show in furthering the divine honor, although many occasions present themselves of furthering it. Nay, would to God that we were not sometimes ashamed of being pious and devout, or of accompanying the Blessed Sacrament through the streets, as if we had reason to shrink from passing as His friends!

You see now, my dear brethren, that, if we go through all classes of men, we shall find very few who love Jesus sincerely. And why is that? Is the Son of God so worthless that He is not deserving of love? And yet, what is there in Him that does not deserve the greatest love? If we love what is beautiful, why not love Jesus Christ, our God, who is infinite beauty? If we love what is good, why not God, the supreme Good? if we love him who is our benefactor, why not God, from whom we have everything? If we love a king or an emperor whom we have never seen, simply because we have heard that he is a powerful, brave, just, and good ruler, why do we not love Him who possesses all these perfections in an infinite degree? Ah, dear Saviour, worthy of all love, how is it that our hearts are so hard towards Thee? Thou art almighty God, yet love for us poor worms of the earth has brought Thee down from heaven, and laid Thee on a handful of straw, while love for Thee, O God of infinite beauty, cannot bring us from earth to heaven! The world, the flesh, the devil have done nothing like that for the love of us; they can only offer us miserable things, which will hurl us into the depths of hell; and yet they find lovers enough all the world over, though there is no command to love them. But Thou, O Lord, who hast

in His service.

Thus there are very few who truly love Jesus Christ.

left nothing undone to win our love, who hast promised the kingdom of heaven to those who love Thee, and threatened the fire of hell to those who do not love Thee, Thou canst find but few lovers!

Conclusion
and reso-
lution to
love Him
constantly.

“Ah, how unjust and ungrateful I am,”¹ as I must acknowledge in the words of St. Thomas of Villanova, in being so hard-hearted! After having created me out of nothing, saved me from hell by Thy death, made me Thy child and an heir to the kingdom of heaven; after having showered countless benefits on me, it was still necessary for Thee to command me to love Thee, for it would have been intolerable if I had not freedom to do so. Ah, why have I not loved Thee sooner? And, alas, how have I ever dared to hate and provoke Thee to anger? Shall I not, then, at once begin to love Thee sincerely? Yes, O my God, take my whole heart; Thou Thyself art now reason enough for me to love Thee, not merely with the lips, but in deed and truth; not only in the time of consolation and prosperity, but also in all crosses and trials whatsoever; not merely for a year or two, but my whole life long, so that in all circumstances, small and great, I shall endeavor to do Thy holy will. And if Thou wert to reject me forever and condemn me to hell (which, however, they who love Thee need not be afraid of), even then would I, like St. Francis de Sales, love Thee during my life with my whole heart; so that, if I should not have that happiness in the next life, I might at least in this be amongst the number of those who are loved by Jesus. Amen.

¹ *Tam iniquus ego sum, tam ingratus!*

ON AVOIDING THE LEAST THING THAT IS DISPLEASING TO GOD.

SIXTH SERMON.

ON KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD.

Subject.

1st. All that God has commanded or forbidden is necessary for even the temporal welfare of each one and of the whole community. 2d. But since most of His prohibitions run counter to our natural inclinations, they are necessary also for our spiritual welfare in time as well as in eternity. Therefore he is unreasonable and senseless who complains of difficulty in keeping the commandments, or who does not keep them all, and tries to excuse his sins.—*Preached on the fifth Sunday in Lent.*

Text.

Si quis sermonem meum servaverit, mortem non videbit in æternum.—John viii. 51.

“If any man keep My word, he shall not see death forever.”

Introduction.

It sounds disagreeably in the ears of many to speak to them of keeping the commandments of God. No one wishes to go to hell; all desire heaven; but as it seems to many, there is a very difficult condition attached to the fulfilment of that desire: “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.”¹ Baptism is not enough, nor to be a member of the one true Church; nor is it enough to have faith and hope, nor is it enough to love God with the lips alone. “If any man keep My word,” that is, My law, he and no other will escape death and possess eternal life. No Christian doubts, my dear brethren, that it is absolute

¹ *Si vis ad vitam ingredi, serva mandata.*—Matt. xix. 17.

ly necessary to keep the commandments in order to gain heaven; but there are many who ask the question: why is it that the God of infinite goodness and mercy, who truly wills all men to be saved, has placed so many and such difficult commands upon us, which most people in the world violate, and thus are shut out from eternal happiness and condemned to hell? And again, why has the same God forbidden us the very things to which we are naturally inclined, so that we cannot avoid them without great trouble and self-denial? Would it not have been better either to have given us no law at all, or else to have taken those inclinations away from us? I shall answer these doubts in this sermon.

Plan of Discourse.

All that God has really commanded or forbidden is necessary for even the temporal welfare of each one and of the whole community. This I shall prove in the first part. But since most of His prohibitions run counter to our natural inclinations, they are necessary also for our spiritual welfare in time as well as in eternity. This I shall show in the second part. Therefore he is unreasonable and senseless who complains of difficulty in keeping the commandments, or who does not keep them all, and tries to excuse his sins. Such will be the conclusion.

That we may keep Thy word faithfully and observe all Thou hast commanded, give us Thy necessary help and grace, O God, which we humbly beg of Thee through the merits of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

Reason tells us that the commandments are necessary for the temporal prosperity of the world.

Come here, then, you who complain of too great a difficulty in keeping the commandments, and think that it would have been better for us if no law had been given to man! (With heretics I do not intend to have anything to do, for they say that the commandments cannot be kept, in order that they may violate them without disturbing their consciences, as if the God of all holiness, justice, and goodness would or could condemn to eternal fire a man for whose sake He died on the cross, simply because he could not do an impossibility; no sound reason could admit an error like that.) I am speaking now to believing Catholics, and I ask them, what do they complain of? You say that it is too hard to keep all the commandments, and to keep them exactly and constantly. But which commandment are you speaking of? Show me a single one of them all which is, I will not say too

hard and difficult, but which is not acknowledged by all who use their reason properly to be necessary for the general welfare of the world. I will give you the same answer that a certain theologian once gave a libertine and half-Christian who, to excuse his vicious life, said that the Christian law is too difficult and almost impossible, and that God should either not have published it, or have laid easier commandments on men. What, answered the theologian, suppose that the Lord, before giving the ten commandments to Moses written on two tables of stone, and which are already written of themselves in each one of us by nature, suppose that He had asked you for your advice, and said to you: the root and foundation of good government are the laws which keep every one in his place and oblige every one to do his duty; now I, the King of kings and Lord of hosts, must give some laws to the world that is subject to Me; do you give Me some advice on the matter. What is your opinion? What sort of laws are required to keep all the people in the world in proper tranquillity and good order?

Do you think it well that each one should be allowed to seek out a god according to his own fancy, an ox, for instance, a calf, or a brazen image? That each one should be allowed to adore the devil, to bend the knee to him, and ask his advice and help? No, certainly not; that must not be. Thou art our true, almighty God, and there is no other beside Thee. Very well, then, says the Lord; I will take your own word for it, then, and let the first commandment be: "I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt not have strange gods before Me; thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing," to adore it. But now that I am to be recognized as the true God everywhere, do you think it would be right for My name to be blasphemed by the wicked, and to be uttered without reverence at the least provocation? No, would be the answer, suggested by reason itself; Thy holy name, O God, deserves the greatest respect from all men at all times, in all places. Very well, then, let the second commandment be: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord Thy God in vain." Of all the days that pass under the sun, and in the vast circumference of the earth, do you not think it would be right to have a day and a place set apart for My service? Certainly, there can be no doubt of it; it would be a glaring injustice if the Author of time, the Creator of the universe, were to have no time nor place for Himself. Good! then we shall put this, too, amongst

Proved by
explaining
each of the
command-
ments.

the other laws: "Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day," (that is, according to the law of the Church, thou must sanctify Sundays and holy-days by duly appearing in the church consecrated to God). Let us see now how men are to live in society. What do you think is owing to those from whom, after Me, one receives his life, his daily bread, his clothing, and all the necessities of life for years and years, and all bestowed with the greatest love and kindness? The answer to that is easy, for every sense of honor and decency, as well as reason itself, requires that we should love them sincerely, and show them all honor and respect. Then let the fourth commandment be: "Honor thy father and thy mother." But now, supposing that men were allowed to act as they pleased towards their fellows, to hate them, persecute them, curse them, revile and calumniate them, and beat, wound, and murder them; if men were allowed to take away each other's property; if the sexes could live without any more restraint than dumb animals, do you think that it would be conducive to the general good? Certainly not; reason itself suggests this answer. Therefore we shall put amongst our written laws the following: "Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor?" But since wilful thoughts and desires are the sure road to excesses that must not be permitted, would it be right to allow every one to indulge his thoughts and desires without restraint? No, you would say after due reflection, that would be too dangerous. Good! then we shall put a stop to such desires by the commandments, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods." See, there we have all the laws that are prescribed for us by God, and they contain all His commands and prohibitions, and you and every reasonable man must approve of them and acknowledge that they are necessary for the general welfare.

They are
also neces-
sary for the
welfare of
each indi-
vidual.

But why do I go to the trouble of supposing you to be called in to consult with God in matters of general welfare? Remain at home in your own family, and see how you would like it to be managed. Tell me, do you wish to be master in your own house, and to receive the respect due to your position? Would you allow a servant to treat you with indifference, to take away your good name, to curse you and run down your character everywhere? Would you be satisfied to see your children disobedient, obstinate, and the cause of great trouble to you. Would

it be a matter of indifference to you if others were to make free with your goods, either publicly or secretly? Would you like to have people backbiting you, talking about your faults, and making you an object of dislike to others? Would you permit others to strike, wound, and even kill you? If a quarrel broke out amongst your domestics, would you, as head of the family, give up your right to settle the dispute? Would you be satisfied that another should dishonor your wife or daughter? To all this you must answer, no; for otherwise your house would be in bad order indeed. Now, there you have a law which you know to be necessary for your family, and which you wish all your domestics to observe exactly, as otherwise you could not have a moment's rest or peace; can you call that law too difficult, or complain of it, published as it is by the great Father, God Himself, for the benefit of the whole world, and so necessary to it that, as your own reason tells you, the world could not exist without it? Such was the answer, though not in the same words, that the theologian gave the libertine.

And so it is in reality, my dear brethren. Let us for a moment suppose the contrary were the case; let us take away the commandments, either altogether or at least in part, and especially those which we find most difficult; what sort of a life should we then have in the world? I will say nothing of idolatry, witchcraft, superstition, dealings with the devil and similar practices, if they were allowed; for every one of right mind turns away from them in disgust and feels not the least inclination for them. Nor will I now allude to the profanation of the churches, and of the days consecrated to God. For even in that there is no sensual pleasure, nor is there any natural inclination for it. We shall imagine that the other laws, which place a restraint on our wicked passions, are abolished. Suppose that children are permitted to show disrespect and give trouble to their parents as they please; that servants are allowed to disobey their masters; that subjects can revolt against their spiritual and temporal superiors, all of which cases are included in the fourth commandment; what disorder and confusion would be caused by the abolition of this one law! And if the others were abolished as well, what would be the result? If no one were forbidden, but every one allowed to take revenge as he pleases; if there were no restraint placed on murder, adultery, unnatural crimes, theft, robbery, and injustice, what a state the world

If there were no commandments, the world would be badly off.

would come to! Who could trust his neighbor, when one cannot be sure of him? The world would resemble a wilderness inhabited by wild beasts, or the hell of the damned, rather than the habitation of reasoning creatures. Thus we must all confess that reason itself teaches us the necessity of the divine law to keep the world in temporal prosperity. And if God had given us no such law, all sovereigns and superiors would publish in their towns and communities those very same precepts which the Monarch of heaven and earth has given us, and would compel their subjects to observe them under severe penalties. In fact, even the civil authority punishes transgressions of this law, when they are public and judicially proved. Nay, almost all civil laws and ordinances tend to urge the strict observance of the divine law, simply because all who are of right mind must confess that the world cannot be kept in order without it.

Therefore
no one has
cause to
complain of
their being
different.

You may now see for yourselves, my dear brethren, whether any one has a right to complain of the divine law, or to seek an excuse for his sins in the alleged difficulty of observing it. God is the supreme Lord, who has the fullest power to rule and govern us, and to place what bounds He pleases to our freedom. As it is, He has given us but ten commandments; He could just as easily have given us a hundred, and has still the right to impose much more difficult laws on us if it seems good to Him. He might forbid us all pleasures in eating and drinking, in food, lodging, and clothing; He could command all parents, under pain of eternal damnation, as He formerly commanded Abraham, to sacrifice their own children with their own hands; He could command all men to give up what they look on as absolutely necessary to their comfort, so that they think they cannot live without it; He could require of us to live like the penitent Magdalene in her cave, or like Paul, Antony, Macarius, and other solitaries in the desert, so that we should have to spend the years of our lives in fasting, watching, prayer, and bodily austerities. And if He were to lay all these commands on us, we should be obliged to obey Him, as our supreme Lord, without a word of complaint. But as it is, He has given us a very easy law, and if He forbids us a certain pleasure, here and there, He allows us a hundred others in its stead. He forbids the eyes to indulge in unchaste looks; but how many harmless pleasures does He not allow them. Decent plays and theatrical amusements, the architectural beauty of palaces and churches, the

magnificence of public buildings, a countless number of plants of different species, the trees and flowers in our gardens and fields; all these He has allowed us. He forbids the ears to listen to impure songs and conversation; but how many delightful sounds He has permitted them to hear! They can listen to the harmony of musical sounds, and to the feathered songsters of the woods and groves. He forbids us to indulge in unlawful pleasures of the flesh; but He permits us to clothe and feed the body comfortably, and to enjoy many other pleasures. He forbids us to take vengeance; but He does not prevent us from putting the civil law in force to secure our rights. He forbids robbery and theft; but allows us to make what use we like of what our land produces, and of what we have got together by our work and industry. In a word, when we take everything into consideration, we must acknowledge that our most generous God has forbidden us very few things, and allowed us very many. Therefore we have good reason to rejoice, and to thank Him, not only for having given us so many comforts, but also for having forbidden those things that are now unlawful, and placed on us the restraint of His commandments, which, as we have seen, are so necessary that, if there were no superiors in the world, we ourselves should all unanimously agree to observe them inviolably. And see the wonderful loving kindness of our God. Although we ought to keep His law for the sake of our own happiness, yet He has promised us, moreover, if we are faithful during the short time of this life, an eternal reward, an everlasting, indescribable joy in heaven. And to encourage us to keep His commandments, He proposes for our consideration the example of His own Son who became Man, and of numberless saints of both sexes, whose lives show that His commandments are not so difficult. To enable us to keep them with still less trouble, He offers us His helping, coöperating grace in abundance, and each one, by devoutly receiving the sacraments and by daily prayer, can obtain it. Do we still think that we have a right to complain of His law as being too hard? Truly, then, he who refuses to accept and submit to such a loving, useful, and necessary law deserves to be cast forth from the society of men, and to be condemned to the eternal pains of hell.

But some will think: all that is true enough; we acknowledge and openly confess that the divine law is conformable to reason, useful to the whole world, and that it must necessarily be ob-

*In spite of
our evil in-
clinations.*

served; but, alas, what poor, weak, miserable creatures we are! The greater number of the commandments are contrary to our natural inclinations and desires, and we are so strongly urged to transgress them, that we cannot be sufficiently on our guard. But this very objection refutes itself, for, since we are inclined by our corrupt nature to unlawful things, the necessity for their being forbidden is all the greater; otherwise all men would do those things without fear or shame, and, as we have seen, would thereby interfere with the general well-being. But let us go a little farther with our thoughts. For the very reason, I say, that our inclinations are borne to do what is wrong, that wrongdoing must be forbidden, not merely for our temporal welfare, but also, which is much more important, for our spiritual welfare, in this life and during eternity. That I shall prove in the

Second Part.

The commandments are also necessary for our happiness here; for our greatest happiness consists in possessing God.

The greatest happiness that a reasoning being can have in this life consists in the possession of the greatest good, that is, in the continual remembrance and love of God, and in the joy in God that springs therefrom. For, just as the centre of the earth is the point of attraction of all heavy bodies, so God alone is the end and aim of reasoning souls; therefore, as the stone, for instance, finds no rest until it lies on the earth, so the human soul can have no true repose or true enjoyment until it is united with God. “Thou hast made us, O Lord, for Thyself,” are the well-known words of St. Augustine, “and our heart is restless until it reposes in Thee.”¹ This we know by experience, and each one of us whose conscience is not hardened in guilt must confess that it is true. When a man has left God by committing a grievous sin, and made Him an enemy, can he say with truth that he was easy in his mind even during the enjoyment of the forbidden pleasure? Must he not acknowledge that, at least after the sinful act, he was filled with uneasiness, melancholy, doubt, and anxiety? that his perturbed conscience often reproached him most bitterly, and that he often said to himself in the agony of remorse: “Ah, what have I done! I have lost the Supreme Good, I have become the enemy of God, and now He can cast me into hell when He pleases”? On the other hand he must acknowledge that he felt great interior satisfaction and joy of heart after having laid down the heavy burden of his sins in the sacrament of

¹ *Fecisti nos, Domine, pro te, et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te.*

penance, and that simply because his conscience said to him: Thanks be to God, I am now a dear friend and child of God. Nor can it be otherwise; our true rest is in God alone, and therefore the poor servant-maid who loves God with her whole heart, and is content with the arrangements of His providence in her state of life, is far more cheerful and happy than the king or emperor who has separated himself from God by sin.

Now, my dear brethren, we could not even think of enjoying this true repose and happiness, if those things which are now forbidden were allowed, if we could indulge without restraint in pleasures to which we have a violent natural inclination. For our hearts would be so taken up by them, that we would rarely, if ever, think of God. And now, though the faith infallibly assures us that such things are forbidden under pain of hell-fire, though we are tortured by remorse when we have indulged in them, yet we often cannot make up our minds to abstain from them, and for their sake we wilfully renounce God forever; how would it be if we were permitted to enjoy those pleasures, and so had no remorse of conscience to dread? Even those temporal pleasures and enjoyments that are allowed by God, such as the possession of riches and other worldly things, which by a good intention can be made a means of meriting glory in heaven, do they not sometimes so turn the heart away from God that He is hardly thought of during the day? How, then, could the Supreme Good find room in our hearts, if we could have those earthly goods, and with them the other pleasures that are now forbidden? Oh, no, God would be quite forgotten then, and therefore we should be deprived of true happiness. Therefore the good God, who has an infinite desire to unite Himself with us, and to make us happy thereby even in this life, and give us a foretaste of the joys of heaven, the good God has forbidden those things under pain of hell-fire, lest they should take complete possession of our hearts and steal us away from Him altogether. See, my dear brethren, how well the almighty God means with us, even when He forbids us that to which we have a violent natural inclination. If he had not issued such a prohibition, we should have had to pray fervently to Him to do so, that we might work all the better and easier for the attainment of our true happiness.

But you will say: if God is so desirous of our love, why did He give us such a weak, miserable nature, that is so violently in-

This we would not seek, if we were allowed to do what is now forbidden.

That our inclinations

are contrary
to the law
of God,

clined to forbidden pleasures? Day and night almost we have to fight against ourselves in order to avoid sin. Nay, those evil inclinations make themselves felt even against our rational will, and we have great difficulty in repressing them. So miserable are we, so inconstant in our good resolutions with regard to keeping the commandments, that our firmest purposes often come to naught. We promise to preserve an inviolable fidelity to God; I will be on my guard now against all sin, we say; as long as I live I will do nothing against the will of God. "I said," we exclaim with David, full of enthusiasm, "now have I begun; this is the change of the right hand of the Most High."¹ "In my abundance I said: I shall never be moved."² Once for all I am determined; now I will begin to serve God; my heart and my love shall never be changed towards Him. Such are our resolutions; but, God help us! before we have time to look round we fall headlong into our former sins through inborn inclination and weakness. To-day we are full of holy purposes; to-morrow we are just as we were yesterday. Would it not be far better for us, as far as the attainment of our last end is concerned, to be free from such inclinations and passions? Then we might free our hearts from all attachment to earthly things, and fix them on God alone. So do we argue, poor mortals that we are, and try to throw the blame of our transgressions on the Lord God! My answer, then, to this is, first: God has not given us a nature that is weak, corrupt, and inclined to sin; that is an effect of original sin, in which we are born.

Is also to
our profit in
eternity.

Again, the God of infinite wisdom has left those frailties in us, in order to make our happiness greater in heaven; and this is the last advantage of the commandments of God. He has proposed to us the kingdom of heaven as a reward for all our labor and trouble, and we can gain it by keeping His commandments; nay, He has given us those commandments that we may have all the more joy in heaven. A good may be very great in itself, but if it costs nothing, if every one can easily get possession of it, men do not consider it worth having. The laurel crown placed on the temples of the victorious hero is of far greater value in the eyes of the world than one of diamonds or pearls thrown gratuitously into the lap of a good-for-nothing.

¹ Dixi nunc cepi; hæc mutatio dexteræ Excelsi.—Ps. lxxvi. 11.

² Ego autem dixi in abundantia mea: non movebor in æternum.—Ibid. xxix. 7.

On Keeping the Commandments of God.

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The one can say, I won this crown by my valor, while the other has done nothing to gain his; and royal crowns are made of precious materials simply because they are to be placed on the heads of individuals who are worthy of them. Moreover, the happiness and enjoyment that we gain by our own hard work is far sweeter to us than what is given to us without any merit on our part. Now, what labor or trouble would be required to keep the commandments, or what merit should we gain by keeping them, if there were neither any difficulty in the commandments themselves, nor any tendency in us urging us to transgress them? In such a case the joys and glory of heaven would, as it were, fall into our laps, and we should have no need to strive for them; therefore we could not truly rejoice in eternity, nor call our glory our own, since we should have done nothing to secure it; nor could any one earn a higher degree of glory than another, since all should have an equal facility in keeping the commandments. But now, since the laws of God are for the greater part averse to our natural inclinations; since our corrupt nature and its desires often rise in rebellion against those laws, we must daily do violence to ourselves, and labor hard to overcome the passion that is raging in us. Thus we have countless occasions of increasing our merit here and our glory hereafter. Besides, we have not any longer those cruel tyrants who in the early ages of the Church used to torture people and put them to death for the Christian faith; and so we cannot prove our fidelity and readiness to endure any torments for the sake of the faith to the God who suffered so much and gave up His life on the shameful cross for us. God has been pleased, then, to make up for this by the manifold temptations which He allows to assail us, and by those perverse desires of our nature, which torture us, as it were, in our efforts to overcome them, and give us an opportunity of using the violence that, according to the testimony of Our Lord Himself, can alone gain heaven.

But why should I take such trouble to defend or palliate the difficulty there is in keeping the divine law, which is so just and so necessary to the welfare of the whole human race? Is not the beautiful heaven that God has promised us worthy of any little trouble that we can make up our minds to endure in this life, that we may be happy with God forever? Ah, I am ashamed that I have to put such a question to reasoning beings; and still more ashamed when I consider the pains people take,

The thought of a heavenly reward should alone suffice to make us think little of difficulties and to keep the.

command-
ments.

the difficulties they face, for some wretched, worthless thing, and that, too, with the greatest willingness. I will say nothing of the daily and nightly attendance of the courtier who desires to gain his master's favor, although the latter cannot do anything for him in the long eternity that awaits him. What does not the merchant undergo on dangerous and toilsome journeys by land and sea, for the sake of making a little money, which he must leave behind him at the hour of death, not a penny of which he can take with him into eternity? And yet he does not complain, nor find the difficulties of his calling too great; nay, he encounters them with joy. What does not the soldier undergo in the service of his king? Toilsome marches in rain and snow, through bogs and marshes, over almost impassable mountains, through rivers and rushing torrents; standing on guard for hours at a time in the piercing cold night, when he is almost dead with sleep and yet must keep awake; spending whole hours in the broiling sun; having to keep his post and not yield a foot while a storm of stones, bullets, and bombs is crashing about his ears; suffering the pangs of hunger and thirst; having to venture on one attack after the other against sword and cannon, and to expose his body to wounds and death; such is the duty of one who undertakes to serve his king as a soldier. And what reward does he get for it? A trifling salary, that he cannot always be sure of receiving at the proper time. What has he to hope for? He can be quite certain that, if he loses his life in battle, his earthly king is utterly powerless to secure good quarters for him in the next life, and can give him neither honor nor wealth there. Nevertheless you find hundreds of thousands who lead that hard and dangerous life, merely to get the name of being brave, a name that will not be of the least benefit to them in eternity. How the hunter plagues himself in the pursuit of game! He interrupts his sleep early in the morning, and is out before sunrise; he thinks nothing of enduring hunger, thirst, cold, rain, and snow for the length of a day; he runs through hedges and bushes, climbs high mountains, descends into deep valleys (a poor hermit has hardly so much to go through to gain heaven), and all that for the sake of killing a miserable hare; that is all he gains by it, and yet he calls that labor a pleasure and a delight. And must we look on the delights of heaven as deserving of less trouble, as being less able to sweeten a much lighter toil? The workman is satisfied when he finds an employer who will certain-

ly pay him the proper wages at the proper time, not to speak of one who will be so generous as to give him more than his due; and he works contentedly for such a man. The tradesman, too, is always most anxious to have some work to do, and he begs for it, if he cannot have it otherwise, in order to be able to make a little money and support himself and his family.

But Thou, O great, almighty God, Thou hast difficulty enough to find any one who will serve Thee, if there is the least obstacle in the way. Thou, O God, who wilt infallibly pay the wages, who hast promised an eternal reward for a temporal service, Thou hast made but one condition in promising Thy rewards, and that is, that we keep Thy law, a law which every sound mind must regard as necessary; but most of us complain of that condition, and find it too hard. We prefer to remain in the slavery of our corrupt flesh and its brutish desires, or to do the will of the perverse world, or to groan under the yoke of the infernal serpent, and thus, as all must acknowledge, to carry a far heavier burden, and lead a far harder life, which after a few years will end in the flames of hell; we prefer to do all that, rather than to take up Thy sweet yoke by keeping Thy law and so secure for ourselves the entry into eternal happiness, and that through a sheer imaginary fear of a little mortification which the observance of Thy law occasionally renders necessary. Such, my dear brethren, are the blindness and folly of men; they can hardly be sufficiently understood, never sufficiently bewailed.

With regard to myself (such should be the resolution of each one of you), it concerns me little in whose service others wish to enter, except that I have a heartfelt compassion for the loss of so many precious souls redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ; for myself, I know whom I will serve, and whom I must serve; and it is Thou, O God, worthy of all honor and love! "I will search Thy law," such is my resolution with Thy faithful servant David; "and I will keep it with my whole heart."¹ Ah, would that I had done so all my life, so that, like the young man in the Gospel, I might say with truth: "All these things I have observed from my youth."² But, O Lord, Thou knowest how it has been with me, and how often I have been amongst the number of those blind and senseless people who throw off Thy sweet yoke and submit to the law of the devil to avoid some slight in-

How foolish for man to break the commandments in spite of all this.

Conclusion and resolution to keep the commandments.

¹ *Scrutabor legem tuam, et custodiam illam in toto corde mea.—Ps. cxviii. 34.*

² *Hæc omnia observavi a juventute mea.—Mark x. 20.*

convenience, to gratify some inordinate inclination or love of creatures, or to please a mere mortal. I am sorry, O God of love, that it has ever happened. Now I know, alas, from unhappy experience the great difference there is between Thy sweet yoke and the bitter slavery of sin. Ah, many was the bitter morsel I had to swallow when I wandered from the way of Thy law. I acknowledge now that no one is happier, even in this life, than he who keeps Thy commandments exactly. "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord."¹ Henceforth I am firmly determined not to depart a hair's breath from that law for the sake of any advantage or pleasure, or for the love of any creature: "So shall I always keep Thy law, forever and ever."² I will keep Thy law and do all Thou hast commanded without exception during the remainder of my life, and for all eternity. And since we are so weak and frail, give us all Thy grace to this end. Amen.

SEVENTH SERMON.

ON AVOIDING VENIAL SIN, BECAUSE IT IS DISPLEASING TO GOD.

Subject.

Venial sin is a sin against God; therefore we should fear it as the greatest of all natural evils.—*Preached on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.*

Text.

Tota pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te.—Cant. iv. 7.

"Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee."

Introduction.

Most Blessed Virgin! thou and thou alone amongst all mere creatures art the one to whom the Blessed Trinity can say with supreme satisfaction: "Thou art all fair, O My love, and there is not a spot in thee," not even the least stain of sin. In the first moment of thy conception thou wert the beautiful and stainless object of My love, and so thou hast been ever since. So it is, my dear brethren. That the Mother of God was conceived im-

¹ Beati immaculati in via, qui ambulant in lege Domini.—Ps. cxviii. 1.

² Custodiam legem tuam semper, in sæculum et in sæculum sæculi.—Ibid. 44.

maculate and never had the stain of original sin on her soul is the firm belief of all true servants of Mary, not indeed as a dogma of the Church,¹ but as a truth which cannot now be openly contradicted. With regard to the life she led, the holy Fathers testify that her soul was so enlightened and so inflamed with the love of God, that it was a moral impossibility for her to commit, not only a mortal sin, but even the least venial sin, nay, even to offend her Creator by a wilful imperfection. We congratulate thee, O glorious Virgin, and rejoice with all our hearts that thou art all fair, and that the smallest stain of sin was never found in thee. Christians, how is it with ourselves? Ah, we dare not claim such happiness! It is too late! In sin have our mothers conceived us, and sin was the unhappy inheritance we brought with us into the world! Yet, to speak the truth, we were not worthy of the privilege enjoyed by the Blessed Virgin. She, as the future Mother of the Saviour, was made an exception; that we should bring sin with us into the world is a consequence of the state of slavery in which we are conceived and born. God be praised for having cleansed us from that filth in the sacrament of baptism, and received us into the number of His children! But after that cleansing, how is it with us? I must ask again. From that time, can God say to all souls: "There is no spot in thee"? Ah, no! I will say nothing to-day of the grievous mortal sins with which most men befoul their souls daily and hourly. I speak to just and pious Christians, who say and acknowledge that they love God with their whole hearts; and I ask them, can you say that you are free from all stain of sin? I mean of those sins that are called small and venial? No, indeed! For who makes any account of such sins? For the very reason that they are small sins and daily faults, they are committed by most people without scruple. But is that a proper way to act towards the almighty God of infinite beauty, who is worthy of all love, as we have already seen, and whom we should fear to offend even in the smallest thing? Certainly not; for precisely because those so-called venial sins displease Him, we should hate and fear them more than all temporal evils, as I shall now prove.

¹ It is unnecessary to remark that these sermons were written long before the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. The Author's words form a valuable testimony to the general belief of the Church with regard to that dogma, even before its promulgation.
—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

Plan of Discourse.

Venial sin is displeasing to God; therefore, if we fear and love Him as we ought, we must avoid and hate venial sin as the greatest of all natural evils. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

O Immaculate Virgin Mary, obtain for us from thy divine Son, by the intercession of the holy angels, the light to see this truth, that we may in future keep our souls free from the least as well as from the greatest stain of sin.

Venial sin is
not grievous
enough to
deserve hell.

When you hear me say, my dear brethren, that venial sin is the greatest of temporal evils, do not imagine that I wish to inspire you with an excessive fear, or to say that venial sin is as grievous and wicked as mortal sin, and entails eternal ruin on the soul. No; it is not my intention to make the way to heaven narrower for you, or to represent it as more difficult than it really is, nor to burden your consciences with obligations that take away all the sweetness from the yoke of Christ, and make of it an intolerable weight, an odious burden. Like Our Lord Himself, I do not agree with those Pharisees who shut the gate of heaven against others, by making the entrance to it too hard; nor with those heretics who with an unreasoning severity declare that every sin, no matter what it is, and even all evil inclinations and desires, are mortal sins worthy of eternal damnation. That is a grievous error, which has been long since condemned in a general council. It is an error opposed to sound reason, and derogatory to the infinite goodness and justice of God. I say it is against reason; for there are sins that are committed through haste, thoughtlessness, half advertently, with only half of the reason and freedom and will, by accident, and through sheer weakness and frailty. Even the most pious and holy men are sometimes not free from them, and therefore St. Augustine calls them, "daily sins."¹ Alas, poor mortals that we are! what would become of us if we were to lose the friendship of God and our right to heaven every time we commit one of those sins? If such were the case we might all with reason despair of our salvation. There are also sins that are committed knowingly, on purpose, and with full advertence; yet they are small in themselves on account of smallness of matter; such, for instance, as a jocose lie, a wilful distraction in prayer, an impatient word, deliberate anger, a curious look, a slight contempt of one's neighbor, discontent in crosses, sensuality in eating and drink-

¹ Quotidiana peccata.

ing, and so on. Can we believe that such a good and merciful God as ours is will, on account of such faults, condemn to the eternal pains of hell souls that He has made to His own image and likeness, and loved to such an extent as to shed His Blood and die a shameful death for them? No, I repeat, venial sin is not a grievous evil in that sense; there are small faults that do not draw down the hatred of God on us, or make Him our enemy, or deprive us of His favor and love, or take away from us our right to heaven.

But what am I doing now in delaying so long explaining a well-known matter to you, and describing as small the sins that I wish to frighten you from, as from a grievous evil? Is not this the very thing that feeds and nourishes our negligence and carelessness in the divine service? Is it not this that daily encourages us to a thousand new transgressions? What else do we think and say, but: "Oh, that is a small matter; that thought, that word, that action, that omission, that curiosity, etc., is only a venial sin, and since it is no more than a venial sin, it does not signify much in our opinion"? Therefore we are not afraid of those sins, and commit them without hesitation, remain in them without fear or anxiety, multiply them beyond counting, hardly ever repent of them, never amend them.

But, my dear brethren, why do we say, it is only a small sin? Is that a reason for thinking so lightly of it, and for committing it without scruple? Is it not enough for us to know that it is a sin, that is, a wilful act against the holy will of God, and displeasing to Him? Are we to look on that as a small matter? Oh, then we do not know what it is to offend God; we are stone-blind in the midst of the clear light of faith; we are ice-cold in the love of God! A slight insult offered to a great lord is no small matter. Give your lawful sovereign a short answer, or be guilty of some act of discourtesy towards him; he will feel it more than a servant would feel a blow of a stick. Again, a slight insult to a benefactor is a gross ingratitude. If you have raised a man from the gutter and placed him in a position to earn his bread, and he churlishly refuses some small service you ask from him, you will feel more annoyance at his ingratitude than you felt pleasure in the grateful feeling he first showed you. The least annoyance given to a loving friend is a painful thing. Let the bride put on a sour face before the bridegroom, let her act in an unfriendly, peevish manner towards him, and she will cause him

Therefore it is little thought of as a general rule.

Still it is a sin

Against the
Almighty,
our greatest
benefactor
and friend.

more pain than he would feel if his enemy gave him a blow.

I have already explained what a great, infinite, almighty Lord our God is, and I need say no more now on that head; for no human tongue, even if it were ruled by angelic intelligence, could fully express the greatness of His majesty. To compare kings, princes, emperors, and all the great ones of the world with the Lord God would be a far more unapt comparison than to compare a fly with an elephant, a dry straw with the tower of Babel, a grain of sand with the world, a worm with a mighty monarch. We see what a great benefactor we have in God by the fact that He has called us forth out of nothing, and given us existence and all that we have in and outside ourselves, and all that out of sheer generosity, without any preceding merits on our part. What a loving friend we have in God is shown clearly enough by the wonderful care with which He sought us out when we were lost, by the form of a poor servant that He took on Himself for our sake, by the poor life that He led for us, by the cruel, shameful death on the cross that He suffered for us, by the loving and jealous desires with which He is always seeking to get possession of our hearts. But if He is so great and mighty a Lord that everything without exception in heaven and on earth belongs to Him, then surely He must be obeyed in all things with the greatest submission and humility, and at all times, in all our actions, we owe Him the greatest respect, honor, and glory. If He is such a great benefactor, we owe Him in every circumstance the deepest, most heartfelt gratitude. If He is such a loving friend that He values us more than His own life, then it is but right that we should love Him above all things with our whole hearts.

Who is
thereby of-
fended.

But what do we do when we determine to commit even the least venial sin wilfully? Instead of obeying Him, we set ourselves to a certain extent against His sovereign will; instead of showing Him respect, we dishonor, though in small matters, His infinite majesty; instead of being grateful to Him, we refuse Him a small service that we could easily and without difficulty render Him; instead of being loving and friendly to Him, we show Him a sour and peevish face; in a word, we do what we know to be displeasing to God and apt to provoke Him to anger. "All the unlawful and wilful movements of my soul," says St. Bernard, "are so many insults offered Thee, O God."¹ Every

¹ Singuli illiciti motus animi mei sunt quedam in te, Deus, convitia.

wilful movement of anger and impatience is an insult to Thy infinite meekness; every act of envy and uncharity to others is an insult to Thy infinite goodness and mercy; every jocose lie is an insult to Thy infinite knowledge and truth; every act of irreverence in the church and every wilful distraction in prayer is an insult to Thy infinite holiness; every transgression is an insult that dishonors Thy infinite majesty and treats it with contempt. "Thou that makest thy boast of the law," says St. Paul to the Romans, "by transgression of the law dishonorest God."¹ When the transgression is grievous, God is grievously offended; and when it is small, God is still offended, not grievously, indeed, but the offence remains an offence. The Apostle does not say "by grievous transgression of the law," but simply, "by transgression of the law;" whether it is great or small, the divine honor suffers injury.

Pious Christians, who love your God and try to please Him, ponder well on this truth: venial sin is a sin that displeases God and lessens His honor. If you rightly understand that, not a single venial sin but will appear hateful and terrible to you; be it small on the part of man, on account of his frailty and inclination to evil; be it small on the part of the matter, which is not looked on as grievous; be it small on the part of the circumstances, because it causes no harm or mischief; be it small in consideration of the pardon which God easily extends to it; be it small on account of the punishment due to it, since it does not deserve hell-fire; still it is not small when we consider that it is committed against God, who deserves to be served with the greatest willingness and submission in the smallest as well as the greatest things. It is not small when we consider the infinite holiness of God, who weighs everything exactly, who feels keenly the least slight, and whom we should love with all our hearts, and minds, and strength, above all things. Oh, no! cry out the holy Fathers unanimously; venial sins are indeed small compared to mortal sin; but when they are considered in themselves, they cannot be called small, because they all dishonor God. "Who is there," asks St. Basil, "who will dare to call trifling any sin, no matter of what sort it be, since the Apostle asserts that God is dishonored by transgressing the law?"² "Truly," says St. Jerome, "I know not whether we can call any sin small

Therefore it
is a great
evil.

¹ Qui in lege gloriaris, per prævaricationem legis Deum inhonoras.—Rom. ii. 23.

² Quis est qui peccatum ullum, cujusmodi illud sit, leve audeat appellare, cum asseruerit Apostolus, quod per transgressionem legis Deum inhonoras?

which is committed in contempt of God.”¹ Such, too, is the warning given us by St. Bernard. “Let no man say in his heart: these are small things; I do not care to amend them; it is no great matter if I continue in these venial and very small sins.”² For shame! what un-Christian thoughts these are! “This is the impenitence of the most beloved one; this is the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.”³ The same holy Father also tells us that we should look on every sin as intolerable, no matter how small it is; for, in any case, it is always an offence against God: “Let the heart be pure, and not tolerate the least stain of sin.”⁴ Noteworthy are the words in which God tells us to keep His holy law. “Keep My commandments, and thou shalt live; and My law as the apple of thy eye.”⁵ Now, if the least thing, a grain of dust even, gets into the eye, it hurts it and causes it pain; and by this simile God wishes to impress upon us that, no matter how small a sin may be, it offends His divine majesty. Therefore Salvianus says: “Our Saviour has told us to avoid even the least sins, so that the life of a Christian may be as pure as the apple of the eye; and as the grain of dust injures the sight when it enters the eye, so should our lives not admit of the smallest stain.”⁶

Nay, worse
than all nat-
ural evils.

For that reason venial sin, since it offends God, is a far greater evil and more to be avoided than all other calamities that can afflict the world, mortal sin alone excepted. If a fire broke out in a large town, and the flames, driven along by a strong wind, caught the buildings, the palaces, houses, shops, churches, and convents, and consumed them all, with everything in them, and the inhabitants as well—oh, you would all say, what a dreadful calamity! O most unfortunate town! But if we place this great evil in the scale with one venial sin, we shall see at once that the latter is a far greater evil than the former; for it dishonors God, slightly, indeed, but still it is a dishonoring of an infinite Good, which must be esteemed far beyond all the goods

¹ Sane nescio, an possimus leve aliquod peccatum dicere, quod in Dei contemptum admittitur.

² Nemo dicat in corde suo: levia sunt ista; non curo corrigere; non est magnum si in his maneam venialibus minimisque peccatis.—S. Bern. de inter. domo.

³ Hæc est enim dilectissimi impœnitentia; hæc blasphemia in Spiritum Sanctum.

⁴ Sit purum cor, nec modicum quidem offendiculum tolerabile reputet.

⁵ Serva mandata mea, et vives; et legem meam quasi pupillam oculi tui.—Prov. vii. 2.

⁶ Salvator jussit etiam minima cautissime vitari: scilicet, ut quam pura est pupilla oculi, tam pura esset Christiani hominis vita: et sicut salva intuitus incolumitate pulveris labem in se oculus non reciperet, sic vita nostra labem in se penitus non haberet.—Salvian. l. 3 de Provid.

of this world. Hear, O Christian, you who so lightly and wilfully commit venial sin, and say, oh, what matter does it make? it is only a little sin. Would you like to be attacked by a virulent fever and ague, which would cause you to shake in every limb of your body? But what do I say about a fever? Would you like to have all the sicknesses, pains, and aches that can be found in all the hospitals in the world? all the inflammations and purulent wounds, all the delirium and raving of grievous illness, nay, would you like to have the very demons from hell assailing you? But you answer with disgust, what a foolish question to ask! What on earth are you talking about? I will tell you: when you wilfully commit a single venial sin, you make choice of an evil which far exceeds all the other evils I have mentioned. And the reason is clear; by that sin, small as it is, you offend God, and that is more than you would do by bearing all the pains and sickness in the world.

The Lord God, holy and good as He is, can command His creatures to inflict natural evils on others. Thus He commanded an angel to slay the first-born in every family of the Egyptians in one night, during the time of king Pharaoh; a command that was carried out to the letter. He told Saul to destroy utterly the Amalekites and not to spare a single one of them, nay, not even their dumb animals: "Go and smite Amalec, and utterly destroy all that he hath, spare him not nor covet anything that is his; but slay both man and woman, child and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass."¹ But the same God, powerful as He is, cannot command any reasoning creature, for any cause whatever, nor advise him, nor permit him with pleasure to commit a single venial sin; for He is impelled to forbid, to disapprove of, and to punish even a jocose lie. Much as God loves us, He can and does command us to bear with patience and resignation all the evils of this life; nay, He warns us by His Apostle to suffer these trials and crosses with spiritual consolation and joy of heart for His sake: "My brethren, count it all joy, when you shall fall into divers temptation."² But there is not one venial sin which He can command us to commit, not one that He can approve of, not one that He has not told us to fear and to avoid. God Himself can be the author and cause

And God
must hate
it.

¹ Vade et percute Amalec, et demolire universa ejus; non parcas ei, et non concupiscas ex rebus ipsius aliquid; sed interfice a viro usque ad mulierem, et parvulum atque lactentem, bovem et ovem, camelum et asinum.—I. Kings xv. 3.

² Omne gaudium existimate fratres mei, cum tentationes varias incideritis.—Luke i. 2.

of evils and calamities; nay, as the Prophet Amos says, there is no evil in the world which is not the work of His mercy or of His justice: "Shall there be evil in a city, which the Lord hath not done?"¹ And yet He cannot be the cause of the least venial sin. Although holy servants of God have begged of Him in earnest prayer to send them trials and misfortunes, and He heard their prayers, not one of them could ever lawfully ask Him, even for the sake of saving a whole kingdom from destruction, to approve of a jocose lie; a prayer of that kind would be blasphemous. The eternal Son of the Father, when He became man, could and did take on Himself all the miseries of our nature; weakness, sadness, fear, anguish, poverty, contempt, insults, hunger, thirst, blows, stripes, thorns, nails, the cross, and a disgraceful death were not evils that He thought unbecoming His divine majesty; for He willingly took them all to Himself through love for us. But to commit a venial sin, what am I saying! to be able even to commit a venial sin, was, according to theologians, an utter impossibility for Him, on account of the clear knowledge He had as man of the divine majesty with which His human nature was united. And this simply because a sin, no matter of what kind it is, dishonors and offends God.

Hence, no one is allowed to commit it, although thereby he would save the world from ruin.

I take this fundamental truth as the basis of a supposition that I am about to make of circumstances that will indeed never occur, but which will serve to make the malice of venial sin more evident. Suppose now, my dear brethren, that the terrible punishment that an angry God once inflicted on the whole world, the deluge, from which but eight souls were saved, was again about to be sent down upon us. The clouds begin to look threatening (so you must imagine), the stormy sea encroaches on the land, the water rises over the towers and mountains, you along with all the other inhabitants of the globe are swimming about in a most miserable state and can find no place of safety. I alone, through the mercy of God, am sitting securely in a large ship, like the patriarch Noe long ago, and I could save you all by stretching forth my hand; but if I did so, I should commit a small act of disobedience towards God, a venial sin. Now, what do you think? Should I help you under the circumstances? No, my dear brethren, I dare not; I must not do it. But will I be so hard-hearted and unmerciful as to allow you to be drowned before my eyes, and (as I suppose) my own father

¹ Si erit malum in civitate, quod Dominus non fecerit?—Amos iii. 6.

and mother, whom I must love and obey next to God, along with you? Yes, certainly, I should allow you all to be drowned, and look on sorrowfully at the catastrophe. You cry out to me from the waves, and stretch forth your hands, and beg of me to take you into the ship; ah, save us, save us, for God's sake! you exclaim. During our whole lives we will do nothing but serve God, and praise and bless Him! The most of us, since we are in mortal sin, are in danger of eternal ruin; help us, then! Take pity on our poor souls! Ah, my dear son, would my father say to me, or my mother; dear brother, my brothers and sisters would cry out; ah, save us at least! But I should say to you, while trying to prevent you from entering the ship, away with you, you cannot come in here. Much as I pity you, I cannot help you; great as your misfortune is, it is not in itself an offence against God; while, on the other hand, if I helped you, I should commit a sin, a slight one, it is true, but a sin nevertheless, and therefore I must rather allow you all to be drowned than save you by committing that sin.

I go still farther; there are in the world a vast multitude of sinners who are walking on the broad way that leads to hell; a vast multitude of just and pious Christians who strive to enter by the narrow gate and to be happy with God forever; a vast multitude of poor souls in purgatory who are sighing most eagerly for their deliverance; a vast multitude of damned souls who are burning in hell for all eternity; a vast multitude of the elect who are in actual possession of eternal joys with their Creator;—all these are souls, and precious souls, too, for the great God Himself has shed His blood for them; to gain a single one of them, I should be ready to undertake any labor or trouble, even death itself; and yet, if a venial sin, for example, a jocose lie, were sufficient to convert all sinners, to confirm all the just in grace, to free all the poor souls in purgatory, to liberate the damned out of hell and bring them to heaven, and to keep the elect in heaven, from which they would otherwise be hurled down into hell, and I were to think about what I should do, and to consider the matter as to what resolution I must take if I really love God,—rather than commit a venial sin, or tell that jocose lie, I should allow all the damned to remain in hell, and all the just and sinners on earth, all the souls in purgatory, and all the blessed in heaven to be lost forever. Nay, the angels and just in heaven, since they know how beautiful and worthy

And the
souls of all
men from
eternal
damnation

of love God is, would agree with me in this case, and would prefer to suffer in hell for all eternity, provided they could do so without sin, rather than offend the Supreme Good by one venial sin.

Because the destruction of all creatures is of less account than the least offence against God; shewn by a simile.

You are surprised, my dear brethren, at this, and imagine perhaps that I am making too much of the matter. But it is a fundamental truth, the reason of which is clear; for the destruction of all angels and men would only be an evil amongst creatures; while every sin, no matter how small, is an insult which attacks and dishonors God Himself; and therefore it is not to be compared with any mere natural evil. Tell me; in the summer time a midge annoys you by buzzing about your ears, and at last it settles on your hand and stings you; what do you do with it, when you catch it? I will soon put a stop to your buzzing and stinging, you think; and so saying, you crush the midge in your hand. But why are you so severe and hard to the poor thing? It has not wounded you; it has only stung you so slightly that you have hardly felt it. Its fault is indeed a small one. And yet you take from it the highest and greatest good it has in the world, namely, its life; is that right, do you think? What, you say, what is the wretched insect to me? Such a small and worthless creature is nothing compared to a rational being like me; nor is its life to be compared to the annoyance it has caused me. Very well, then, O mortal! and now raise your thoughts to God. It is altogether beyond a doubt that all men and angels, and all creatures in the universe put together, when compared with the infinite perfections of the divine nature, are far viler and more worthless than the midge compared to a man; nay, they are to be reckoned as nothing, according to the express words of the Prophet Isaias: "All nations are before Him as if they had no being at all, and are counted to Him as nothing and vanity."¹ If you, then, on account of the trifling inconvenience the midge has caused you, do not hesitate to destroy it forever, be not surprised if the great Creator thinks just as much of a slight offence offered Him, and if the destruction of all creatures be looked on as a lesser evil than the least insult to His infinite majesty.

We mortals often feel slight insults deeply.

We ourselves are so sensitive, and feel so deeply the least insult offered us by one of our fellow mortals, that it is only with great difficulty we can repress our desires of revenge. If the kitchen-

¹ Omnes gentes quasi non sint, sic sunt coram eo, et quasi nihilum et inane reputatæ sunt ei.—Is. xl. 17.

maid does not exactly obey her mistress, or the servant run off quickly enough at the command of his master; if they give the least short answer, or let fall a word of complaint; nay, if a well-meaning friend happens to say an incautious word, what a dreadful to-do there is at once! Bitter feelings are aroused, that find vent in curses and oaths. The maid, the servant, must be off at once out of the house, and the friend has to put up for a long time with the secret anger his ill-timed word has excited. It is not forgotten the next day nor for a long time after, as if some great insult had been offered. And we think so little of the insults that we poor mortals offer the divine majesty, although the offences are small!

As Charles IX., king of France, was out hunting one day, one of his courtiers forgot himself and ran before him; the king called out to him to stop, but he did not hear, whereupon Charles took a rod and struck him with it on the shoulder. The courtier got into a violent rage at once; what, he said, turning to the king, what have I done to offend your majesty, that I should be beaten with a rod like the meanest of your servants? Is that a fitting reward for the faithful services I have rendered you? I am a nobleman, and should not be treated in that way. The king was struck by these words, and on his return sent for the nobleman to come to court, excused himself by saying that he had no evil intention in what he did, and assured him of his favor and protection. But the other refused all the king's offers, went home, and never made his appearance at court again. Think of this, my dear brethren; men are so sensitive, so easily offended, poor worms of earth as they are, at a slight matter of the kind, although coming from a royal personage and not inflicted with any bad intention; and yet we still dare to think: oh, this is but a venial sin; if I offend God in this way now and then, it does not much matter! I am a nobleman, we say sometimes when the least thing annoys us; I am master in my own house; I am a respectable lady; this or that should not be tolerated by me. Very well; but we should also imagine, when we commit wilful venial sins, that the Lord is saying to us: I am your God; whose honor is to be preferred, yours or Mine? Which offence is of greater account, that which one worm of the earth offers another, or that which I, the great God, have to bear from a miserable creature?

Let no one, then, say: it is only a venial sin, it is not of much Therefore

Shown by
an ex-
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be afraid
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account whether I commit it or not; but rather let each one remember that it is an offence against God, and therefore an evil, and a great evil, which no one should ever be guilty of wilfully and wantonly. Every true Christian who really loves God with all his heart should be of the same sentiments in this matter as that great servant of God, Julius Thomas, duke of Parma. He was once in doubt as to whether a certain undertaking was in accordance with the will of God or not; he therefore caused the affair to be examined by pious theologians, and when one of them said that at the farthest there could be question only of a venial sin, the Duke gave the following answer, that ought to make a deep impression on every Christian heart: "The Reverend Father says that there is danger of a venial sin in the matter; if that is the case, I will have nothing to do with it, for I have made a resolution on no account whatever to commit a wilful venial sin, since I have learned that it would be better for all men and angels to be utterly destroyed, and for heaven and earth to be consumed, than that the great God, who is worthy of all love, should be offended by the least sin."

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion to avoid
deliberate
venial sin.

O my Lord and my God, art Thou perhaps of less account in these days of ours? Dost Thou deserve less respect and reverence? Is an offence against Thy majesty less deserving of hatred than it formerly was? Such is certainly not the case. But how is it, then, that we think so little of those sins which Thy servants formerly were so careful to avoid? Ah, Thou art the same God Thou wert in their times, but we do not reflect how much honor and obedience Thy divine majesty deserves from us. Truly, this is where the fault lies; for if I had believed this truth, if I had taken it more to heart, could I have been so shameless as to commit venial sins with such little fear, so often, and so wantonly? Would I have dared to think and say, as I have done thousands of times: oh, it is but a small matter; it is only a venial sin, that is, it is a greater evil than the destruction of all the creatures in heaven and on earth. And that is the very evil that I have committed hundreds of times a day, which I have made no account of, in which I have enjoyed myself and made merry, which I have brought over and over again to confession, and hardly ever repented of, never amended! O great God, forgive me! Never again shall that happen, at least wilfully, and I shall do my best to keep this resolution. In future I shall look not at the smallness of the act of disobedience, but at the

greatness of Thy majesty, which I am always bound to obey; for, as Thy servant St. Jerome says, that is required by Christian prudence: "He is the most prudent, who considers, not what is commanded, but the person who commands; not the greatness of the law, but the dignity of the law-giver."¹ So shall it be with me. It shall be enough for me to know, in order to avoid all venial sins, that they are offences against Thee, my God, who art worthy of all love, reverence, and fear, and therefore that they are to be shunned more than the worst natural evils. I shall remember this when I kneel down to pray, and shall say to myself: it were better for heaven and earth to be destroyed than for me to offend God wilfully during this prayer. I shall think of it when I go into company to speak with men, and shall say to myself: it would be a lesser evil for all creatures to be reduced to nothing than for me to offend God even by a jocose lie or a word against charity; and so on, according to circumstances. Do Thou, O God, help me to keep this resolution by Thy grace. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

Text.

Unde ergo habet zizania?—Matt. xiii. 27.

"Whence, then, hath it cockle?"

It is not difficult to know why weeds spring up in a garden that is sown with good seed; they come up of themselves, and unless care is taken to pull them up when they are young, they will soon overrun the whole garden. By the good seed, my dear brethren, we can easily understand the inspirations and graces of God; the ears of wheat that grow from that seed are the good works of the just man, who coöperates with those graces; the weeds that are sometimes found with the wheat are the small faults and imperfections, or so-called venial sins, from which the most pious souls are not free, unless they are very careful in all their daily actions to avoid them. But precisely because those sins are small, they are thought little of by most men, are committed without scruple, and so fill the soul with weeds. We have an almighty God, who is worthy of all love and honor, and whom we should fear to offend, not merely by

¹ Est ille prudentissimus, qui non tam considerat quod jussum sit, sed quantum qui juserit; nec quantitatem imperii, sed imperantis cogitat dignitatem.

sins that are evidently mortal, but also by wilful venial sins. Nay, for this very reason, because those sins are against the almighty God, we must avoid them and hate them more than the worst natural evil, as I shall now show.—*Plan of Discourse as above.*

EIGHTH SERMON.

ON AVOIDING VENIAL SIN, BECAUSE IT IS SMALL.

Subject.

1st. Venial Sin is committed in a trifling matter, and from a trifling cause; for that very reason we are less to be excused if we commit it wilfully and make little account of it. 2d. Venial sin is easily taken away and forgiven; therefore the injury to God is all the greater when we commit it and make little of it. *Preached on the second Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Ut peccatis mortui, justitiæ vivamus.—I. Pet. ii. 24.

“That we, being dead to sins, should live to justice.”

Introduction.

The object for which the Son of God became man and died on the cross was not merely to free us from the eternal death to which we were doomed by original sin, but also, according to the testimony of the Prince of the Apostles, that we might die to sin and live to justice: “Who His own self bore our sins in His body upon the tree; that we, being dead to sins, should live to justice.”¹ And in truth, there is reason for wondering that a man can still offend his God, when he remembers that the same God had to die on the cross to atone for sin. Yet what, alas, really happens in the world? How often is not that God who was crucified for us offended by most men in the most grievous manner, and thus nailed again to the cross? But I have nothing to say to such men now. I will confine myself to just Christians, who have the name of being pious and of wishing to serve God faithfully. Oh, how many even of these act against the will of God, not indeed by indulging in mortal sin, but by commit-

¹ Qui peccata nostra ipse pertulit in corpore suo super lignum; ut peccatis mortui, justitiæ vivamus.

ting wilful venial sins! And generally speaking, they make nothing of those sins, and look on them as of no account, because they are small; although at the same time a single venial sin is a far greater evil (mortal sin alone excepted) than all the evils of the world, and it would be better for all creatures in heaven and on earth to be utterly destroyed than for the God who is worthy of all love to be offended by even a jocose lie, as I have already proved in detail. Now, my dear brethren, I will acknowledge that venial sin is a small thing in itself, and that, too, in a twofold sense: first, because it is committed in a trifling matter of little importance and for a trifling reason which is not of much account; secondly, because it can easily be blotted out and is easily forgiven by God. But from those very reasons I shall now prove that he who commits a venial sin with full knowledge and consent is all the less to be excused and offers a greater insult to the divine majesty.

Plan of Discourse.

Venial sin is committed in a trifling matter, and from a trifling cause; for that very reason we are less to be excused if we commit it wilfully and make little account of it. This I shall show in the first part. Venial sin is easily taken away and forgiven; therefore the injury to God is all the greater when we commit it and make little of it. This I shall prove in the second part. No one, then, should look on it as a small thing or commit it wilfully.

Such shall be the conclusion, to which we beg of Thee to help us by Thy grace, O God worthy of all fear and love, through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

The smaller and more trifling the service a well-meaning friend asks of me, the smaller the advantage I gain for myself by refusing him, the more easily the favor is conferred, the less, certainly, am I to be excused; the more reason, too, has my friend to complain of me if I do not do as he asks. For instance, some one comes to you and says: my good friend, you have two fine houses in town; give me one of them, and some other time I will do a service for you. Oho, you think, that is a modest request! No, my dear friend; my friendship for you does not go to such an extent as that; if you ask something reasonable of me, I shall be only too glad to serve you; but you cannot expect me to give you a house that cost me some thousands. Is it not so? And

There is no excuse for him who refuses a friend a small service easily rendered.

when the other hears your answer, can he with reason be offended? For he has asked you for something really great. But if he comes and says to you: my good friend, lend me your wagon for an hour or so; you are not using it now, and I am in need of it; I will return it in a short time,—and you put on a sour face and say: no, I will not lend my wagon; I know I am not using it, but as long as it is in my yard I know where it is. What would you think of that? Oh! the other would say, is that the way for a friend to be treated? I have done many a service to you, and now you refuse me this small thing that I ask you for? I should never have thought it of you. But you reply, it is only a small thing that I have refused my friend. And for that very reason, I say, because it was a small thing, your discourtesy in refusing was all the greater; for you could readily have done what he asked you, and so he has just reason for complaining of your conduct, and for considering that you have not acted in a friendly manner to him. Is not that the case, my dear brethren?

If something great were to be gained or avoided by venial sin, still it should not be committed.

Now to our subject. Venial sin is and remains a small sin, which is committed in a trifling matter from a trifling cause; this we know very well, and so we make no account of it. Again I say it, venial sin is small, and is committed for some trifling reason; but, mark well, it is precisely on that account that we are less to be excused, and that the Lord God has more cause to complain of us when we commit that sin wantonly and wilfully. If there were something weighty in question, a great property to gain, or some piece of good fortune to secure; if there were question of a violent passion or desire that has to be gratified or withstood; if there were the choice of martyrdom for the faith proposed to us; if our lives were hanging in the balance, so that love on one side and fear on the other forced us to commit the small sin, as it is called; even then I could not approve of our action; for I should always look on it as an act of tepidity, an unfaithfulness, an ingratitude towards God, if it were committed with full knowledge and deliberation. Still, I should pity the guilty one very much. Why? Oh, I should say, such a great piece of good fortune is indeed something that can easily lead a man astray, and a great virtue is required not to yield to the temptation; or, that desire and inclination is so strong, that it needs courage to overcome it; or, the natural love of life, the fear of death, the terror of impending torments are

indeed things that can change the bravest temperaments and make them vacillate in their good purposes; therefore it is not so much to be wondered at that a poor mortal should forget himself in such circumstances, and consent to that slight offence against God.

But what shall I say, my dear brethren, what excuse shall I bring forward for your conduct and mine in so easily and wantonly committing certain venial sins? What is there question of? What is the matter in hand? A distracted thought in prayer that we notice and do not put away, so that we choose the sin and thereby offend the great God. A useless word that we do not wish to keep to ourselves, so that we trouble our good Saviour by sinning against charity. A curious look that we do not wish to refrain from, so that we do not hesitate to offend the all-seeing God, who is looking at us. A slight sloth in the divine service that we do not wish to amend; human respect, or vain honor, for which the honor and glory of God must suffer; an annoyance that we do not wish to bear with patience, a word that displeases us, and which we wilfully resent; an amusement that we do not wish to be baulked of, some miserable sensuality that we wish to gratify, some worldly vanity that we do not wish to renounce. See, for trifles of that kind, and a thousand others that are still more insignificant, we do not fear to go against the will of God daily and hourly, and to offend and anger Him who is infinite beauty, worthy of all love, and almighty. Now, is that well done on our part? Is not that the subject of the Lord's complaint by the Prophet Ezechiel: "And they violated Me among My people for a handful of barley, and a piece of bread;"¹ for a trifling, a wretched thing they have insulted and disobeyed Me.

Ah! since it is such a small thing, since, as we maintain, so little depends on it, why do we refuse such trifles to a God who is worthy of infinite honor and love, whose least sign the princes of heaven are ready to obey? Why do we not give these small things to the God who for our sake took human nature on Himself and offered Himself as a victim for our salvation on the cross? Truly, we are deserving of the reproach that the servants of Naaman addressed to him, when he complained of being ordered by the Prophet Eliseus to wash seven times in the Jordan

But it is generally committed for some small thing that could easily be sacrificed.

And should be therefore all the more carefully avoided. Shown by a simile.

¹ Et violabant me ad populum meum propter pugillum hordel, et fragmen panis.—Ezech. xiii. 19.

in order to be cured of his leprosy. "Father," said the servants to him, "if the Prophet had bid thee do some great thing, surely thou shouldst have done it;" if he had told you to undertake something difficult in order to be healed,—for instance, to give away half your property, to set out on a long and dangerous journey, to take bitter medicines,—surely you would have obeyed him, to get rid of your loathsome disease and to be restored to your former good health. "How much rather what he now hath said to thee: Wash and thou shalt be clean"?¹ The remedy he has proposed to you is so easy, and takes such little time, that you certainly ought to profit by it.

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vice to God.

We deserve the same reproach, my dear brethren. Great as God is, He now and then requires something very small from us; for instance, He wishes us to restrain our loquacious tongues, with which we often criticise and find fault with others, and speak of them behind their backs. He wishes us to abstain from jocose lies, which certainly do not profit us anything; to mortify our curious eyes and keep them from beholding dangerous objects; to moderate our anger and displeasure when anything is done to annoy us; to keep from talking and looking about in church, and so on. Now, what is all that in itself? A very small thing indeed. If He commanded us to cut out our tongues, so as to prevent lies and backbiting; to tear the eyes out of our heads, so as not to look on anything that could lead us into even venial sin; to cut off our hands, lest we should give way to a slight act of sensuality; certainly, as He is our supreme Lord, we should be ready to obey Him willingly and humbly, even in those most difficult things, and should be proud and happy at the thought of being thus able to please the mighty Monarch of the universe. "How much rather what He now hath said," since the same God requires from us a service that we can easily and without difficulty render Him?

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But if we do not obey Him in those things, if we refuse Him the trifles He asks for, then we are all the more inexcusable, more despicable in ourselves, more unjust and ungrateful to God, our best friend, from whom we have received everything that we have and are. Can He not complain of us in the words in which the Church complains in His name of the ingratitude of His people: My people, My Christian people, what have I done to you, that you should so contemptuously refuse Me that small

¹ Pater, etsi rem grandem dixisset tibi propheta, certe facere debueras; quanto magis quia nunc dixit tibi: lavare, et mundaberis?—IV. Kings v. 13.

vice? I have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the blind heathenism in which so many thousands have been left, into the true light of the Catholic Church; I have brought you into a good land, into My Church, in which I have prepared for you so many graces, inspirations, illuminations, instructions, and opportunities of doing good; I have fed you with bread from heaven, with My own Flesh and Blood, and I have strengthened you with My sacraments; I have planted you as a chosen vineyard, and have expected to gather good and agreeable fruits from you. But now you are become too bitter to Me. You must know that those small sins that you so carelessly commit daily and hourly are more bitter to Me than the gall and vinegar that the Jews gave Me to drink. I shower down benefits on you constantly, but I cannot induce you to grant Me a trifling favor, to give up for Me a small thing that is of no use to you. I do everything for the welfare of your soul; but you do not hesitate to displease Me daily by your misconduct. It is only a small offence against God, you think; therefore it does not much matter. Is that the way in which you treat Me as a friend?

Alas, so it is in reality! So unbecomingly, O God worthy of all love, do we act towards Thee! Because venial sins are small, we commit them over and over again, until they surpass in number the hairs of our heads; we commit them through habit, and bring them again and again to confession, but never truly amend them or lessen their number. We commit them without fear or anxiety; nay, we make a boast of not being scrupulous like others, of being able to take larger views of things, of living more unconstrainedly; and so, while we commit them, we laugh at and turn into ridicule those who, as we look on the matter, are too anxious and are inclined to make a mountain out of a mole-hill, and try to be too pious by their efforts to avoid the smallest sins. Nay, we commit them and meanwhile contemn Thy divine mercy and goodness; for we make little account of them because they do not entail eternal punishment, and are easily pardoned. See, my dear brethren, there you have another degree of malice in the wanton commission of venial sin. Why, we say to ourselves, should we make such a to-do about venial sins? They are easily forgiven by the good God, who knows our weakness and frailty; they can be taken away by a little holy water, or by striking the breast, or by sending forth a sigh to heaven; "God be merciful to me, a poor sinner," that is enough,

Yet most
men are
guilty in
that way.

so that we have no great punishment to fear. I acknowledge that venial sin is easily forgiven by God, and that we have no great punishment to fear on account of it. But for that very reason I now assert that, when we commit it deliberately, the insult and disrespect we offer to God is all the greater, as I shall show in the

Second Part.

God has
before now
severely
punished
venial sin.

But why was I in such a hurry to say that we have no great punishment to fear on account of venial sin, and that it is easily forgiven by God? Have I, then, forgotten what happened to Moses, that otherwise so faithful servant of God, for having doubted whether the water would come out of the rock on his striking it with his rod, as God had commanded him? Was he not on that account excluded from the Promised Land? Was he not therefore taken away by death while he was yet in sight of that land? Have I forgotten what happened to Nadab and Abiu, when they put strange fire in their censers? Were they not consumed by fire on the spot, in punishment of that act of thoughtlessness? Have I forgotten the severe chastisement inflicted on David, that man after God's own heart, for a single sin of vanity he was guilty of in numbering his people? Did not that act of his cost seventy thousand of his subjects their lives? Have I forgotten what happened to Oza, when he put forth his hand to support the ark, lest it should fall? Was he not punished by the justice of God by being struck dead on the spot? There are many similar examples in Holy Writ, which I pass by in silence. All these faults were small and venial, and they were committed only once and for the first time. What sort of a punishment have we not to dread, then, for sins that we wilfully commit every day and make no account of, for sins that we make a habit of and multiply until they are beyond counting, that we never really repent of and amend, although we often go to confession and holy Communion?

It is still
severely
punished in
purgatory.

Suppose, my dear brethren, that a rich and noble lady is condemned by the civil authorities to a gloomy dungeon, and that, when her trial is over, she is sentenced to have her body torn by red-hot pincers and then to be burnt alive on the public market-place; what would you say to a sentence of that kind? Would you not look on it as very cruel, and think that that lady must certainly have been guilty of a most grievous crime?

None of you would guess that she had committed but a small fault. Now descend in thought into that painful prison called purgatory, and see the immense number of souls there; some of them have been confined for five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years in the very fire in which the damned suffer so hopelessly. And who are those souls? They are all friends of God, and kings, heirs of heaven, who have a right to the vision and possession of the highest Good, and to the immense joy that springs from that vision, one moment of which is worth more than all the joys of earth, and would be cheaply purchased by suffering all the torments that can be imagined. O my God, if we could but understand what a terrible punishment, what unhappiness, what misery that is for a soul that is separated from the body and from all influence of the senses, that sighs for nothing but God, desires nothing but God, loves nothing but God, and yet cannot possess Him, but is compelled to remain in that prison of torments, in those burning flames, sending forth useless sighs to heaven! What keeps those souls so long in that prison? What fearful crime have they committed against God? A venial sin, a single venial sin is enough to bring down on them all that severe punishment; and if we could interrogate those souls, they would answer us to that effect. One would say: a small lie, that did no one any harm, and that I did not do penance for during my life, is the cause of my being here; another would attribute his punishment to his culpable carelessness and wilful distractions in prayer; another to vanity in dress and trying to attract attention, although that vanity was not the cause of scandal; another to the habit of suspecting and finding fault with his neighbor, giving way to impatience in daily crosses, committing small sins against Christian charity, etc.; and this class of sins is what most of them would confess to. This, they would say, is what keeps us here; this is the thief that robs us for such a long time of the possession of our greatest Good that we desire so earnestly; this is the bolt that shuts against us the heaven that belongs to us; this the sole reason why we must burn so long in this fire. I know, my dear brethren, that this thought makes but little impression on our minds; as a general rule purgatory does not frighten us much, and therefore we often hear people say, and indeed it is the sentiment of the greater number, what matter if we have to go to purgatory? We shall not stop there long, and we shall be sure in any case

of going to heaven; I wish I was only sure of going there, even if I were to be put next to hell itself; I am not afraid of purgatory, etc. But they may think and say what they like; I am terrified when I think of it, and all sensible men ought to be frightened when they consider that one venial sin is enough to keep even the holiest soul and one most beloved by God from the enjoyment of happiness, so that, if such a sin could remain forever on the soul, and there was no atonement offered for it, that soul should be forever deprived of the beatific vision. This alone should convince us that the punishment inflicted by God on venial sin is not a small but a very terrible one.

It is easily forgiven in this life, but for that very reason the conduct of him who deliberately commits it is all the more disgraceful.

But be that as it may, I will say nothing to-day of the just punishment of venial sins; but will admit that, since it does not last forever, it seems tolerable enough to us. Nay, I grant moreover that they are easily remitted in this life, in which, too, they are not so severely punished; but for that very reason, I repeat, the injury and offence offered to God is all the greater when we commit such sins deliberately. For, I ask, how comes it that we make such a difference between mortal and venial sin? That, while we avoid the former with all our strength if we have any conscience left, we so wantonly commit the latter daily and hourly? What is the reason of that? Let us confess the truth honestly before God. Is it not because on the one side God is infinitely just and strict, and pursues mortal sin with an infinite hatred, casting us off on account of it and condemning us to the eternal pains of hell, and we are in dread of this justice; while on the other side God is infinitely good and merciful, is not so severe against venial sin, and we deliberately commit that sin on account of His goodness and mercy, as if we said to His very face: O just God, I know that Thou wilt give me over to the demons, and send me to hell on account of this grievous injustice, this impure act, this intemperance and deliberate drunkenness, this revenge and injury inflicted on my neighbor, this calumny and detraction, this cursing and swearing which really comes from the heart, this scandal and leading the souls of others astray; therefore I will be careful not to commit such sins, not to be so foolish as to bring eternal ruin on myself for the sake of a short-lived pleasure. But in other matters I need not be so careful; this or that is but a venial sin; I know Thou art a good Lord, and wilt not be hard on me for it; it will not cause me to lose Thy grace and friendship altogether; the

punishment I have to expect for it is small and will not last long, while Thou hast given me a thousand means of getting rid of it at any moment. Venial sins, then, make no great matter; I will commit them as they come, without scruple, although I know well that they offend Thee. Ah, how unjust that is! "Is thy eye evil, because I am good?" is the answer that Our Lord gives us.¹ Will you offend Me because I forgive those sins so readily? Will you thus shamelessly treat Me with disrespect, because I, your most gracious and merciful Lord, am inclined to have patience with you and not deprive you of My grace? Ah, my God, my malice in offending Thee because Thou lovest me is inexcusable! But how is it possible that I am not in dread of displeasing Thee the whole day long by such a chain of disobediences and transgressions against Thy holy law? Am I so daring because Thou art so good, so merciful, and so loving? But these are reasons why I should love Thee with my whole heart above all things, and rather give up my life than offend Thee by even the least lie. And shall I now make of Thy goodness an excuse for offending Thee hourly without any remorse of conscience? Ah, my God, I acknowledge that my conduct has been most reprehensible in this particular, and that I am a monster of ingratitude. See, Christians, how most people act towards their Lord and God.

But what a shame that is! Away with those dishonorable, boorish, mean-spirited souls, who always think and say, when there is question of doing something that their consciences are not quite easy about, is this or that a mortal sin? while they do not trouble themselves in the least as to whether it is a venial sin or not! Away with you! I say. You do not deserve the name of loving children and true friends of God; you are rather slaves and bondmen; for you do not wish to serve God unless He comes with the rod or the sword in His hand and threatens to force you to obey Him. You respect, reverence, and fear nothing in Him but the fact of His being able to hurl you into the terrible fire of hell. It is a wicked, undutiful child who refuses to obey his father until the latter takes the rod in his hand and threatens punishment, and who would strike his mother dead, were it not for fear of losing his own life in consequence, and who still annoys and troubles her in every conceivable way, because she is so good that she will not punish him.

Such a man
does not
truly love
God; shown
by similes.

¹ *An oculus tuus nequam est, quia ego bonus sum?*—Matt. xx. 15.

A well-reared, dutiful child does not ask whether the punishment of his faults is to be severe or otherwise, nor whether his disobedience inflicts a deep wound or not on the heart of his father or mother; the mere fact of anything being displeasing to his parents is already reason enough for him to avoid it. I should not care much for a friend who refuses to help me until I am in extreme necessity and in danger of death; who will not stretch out his hand to assist me until I am up to the neck in the water, and on the point of drowning. God grant that I may never be in need of such a friend as that! A true friend seeks to serve me in all circumstances, whenever he can; he avoids causing me the least trouble; he thinks to himself: this is a small matter to arouse anger, but it displeases my dear friend, and I must abstain from it. Truly, I do not understand how a man can say that he loves his God with his whole heart, when he makes no scruple of committing deliberate venial sins; for he gives me reason to suspect that his sorrow and detestation for mortal sin comes only from self-love, from a servile fear of hell.

By the testimony of the holy Fathers.

At all events, what Our Lord Himself says in the Gospel of St. Matthew must be true: "He that shall break one of these least commandments. . . shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven."¹ These words are thus explained by St. John Chrysostom: "as if Christ wished to say of the transgressor, he is indeed a Christian, but the least of Christians."² As long, O man, as you do not commit a mortal sin, you will be amongst the servants of the Lord, but amongst the lowest of His servants, whom He sets least value on; you will never approach near to Him, but will have, as it were, to stand at a distance. But the fact of your being so careless about rising higher in His favor is an evident proof of the little love you have for God; for, as the Holy Ghost says in the Book of Wisdom: "Love is the keeping of her laws."³ Thus the love of God is a sentinel that guards the divine law; now, that sentinel is not worth much who, although he prevents great thefts, yet allows small ones to be committed on the property entrusted to him. If your love of God, that is set to guard the commandments of God, avoids great but not small transgressions of them, then it is a very

¹ Qui solverit unum de mandatis istis minimis, minimus vocabitur in regno coelorum.—Matt. v. 19.

² Tanquam si dicat de solvente: Christianus quidem erit, tamen minimus Christianus.—S. Chrysos. in Caten. S. Thom.

³ Dilectio custodia legum illius est.—Wis. vi. 19.

cold-hearted, faithless love. "A faithful soul, that is devoted to God," says St. Jerome, "is not less careful in avoiding small sins than in avoiding great ones."¹ St. Augustine considers two kinds of fear: one that of the spouse who truly loves her bridegroom; the other that of the spouse who does not love her bridegroom, but is disposed to be unfaithful to him. "The one fears as well as the other. Ask one of them, do you fear your bridegroom? and she will say, yes, I fear him; ask the other the same question, and you will get the same answer. They will both answer alike, but their dispositions are very different. Ask them now, why? The one will say, I fear lest my bridegroom should come. The other, I fear lest he should go away from me. The one says, I am afraid lest he might do me harm; the other, I fear lest he should desert me."² One who has evil inclinations is afraid of doing anything very wrong in the presence of her bridegroom, not because she loves him, but because she is afraid of being punished; while the other carefully avoids giving the least offence to him whom she tenderly loves. Let us now apply this to ourselves, and it is easy enough to do that. If you are careful not to offend God even in the least things, then your fear is one that springs from true love; but if you are satisfied with avoiding merely mortal sins, then you fear hell, but you have little fear of God; and if you love God, you love Him more through fear of punishment than for His own sake. To say or think, it is enough for me to keep clear of mortal sin, is in fact saying, it is enough for me to escape hell. Now, do you think that, when we are dealing with a God who is worthy of infinite love; whom we are bound to love with our whole hearts by countless titles; by whom we are what we are; from whom we have received all we have, and hope for eternal reward for our love—do you think, I ask you, that such meanness is to be tolerated? Do you think that you will be able to persuade yourself that you love God because He deserves to be loved with all your heart?

Far different, with regard to venial sin, are the thoughts of the soul that truly loves God. Hear what Cassianus says: They who love God look on venial sin as
 "The fear which springs from the love of God is frightened at

¹ Mens Christo dedita æque in majoribus et in minoribus intenta est.—S. Hieron. ad Hellsd.

² Timet ista, timet et illa; Interroga: quasi unum tibi respondent. Interrogetur illa: times virum? respondet illa: timeo. Interroga et istam, si timeat virum? respondet: timeo. Una vox est, sed diversus animus. Jam ergo interrogentur, quare? Illa dicit: timeo virum, ne veniat. Ista dicit: timeo virum, ne discedat. Illa dicit: timeo, ne damnet; ista dicit: timeo, ne deserat.—S. Aug. in I. Joan. iv.

worse than
any natural
evil; shown
by an exam-
ple.

the least idea of sin, and endeavors, not only in all its actions, but also in every word, to avoid all that could diminish love in the slightest degree.”¹ Therefore the Holy Scriptures represent the just and God-fearing soul under the image of the living creatures in the Apocalypse, that “were full of eyes before and behind;”² for, as the eye cannot bear even the least particle of dust, so the pious soul, that loves God, cannot rest under the least stain of sin. These living creatures were full of eyes, to signify the great care the just take not to offend God by even the smallest sin: “For he that feareth God neglecteth nothing.”³ “Propose to such a soul,” says St. Bernard, “something very slight, by which she may knowingly offend God; your proposal appears to her more terrible than hell itself.”⁴ Anna Isabella, Duchess of Mantua, who died in the year 1704, stated on her death-bed that she never sullied by a mortal sin the innocence she had received in baptism. Happy soul! And have we not reason to wonder that a princess brought up in the midst of a court and worldly pleasures, and exposed to a thousand temptations and occasions of sin, should bring her baptismal innocence with her to the grave? Still more must we wonder that the same princess went from a court to heaven, into eternity, with a soul purer than that of many a hermit and solitary; for she protested solemnly that she would rather die a thousand times than commit with full deliberation even the least sin. O Christians, how she will put us to shame on the last day! Has that been our determination also hitherto? Is it still our resolution? Such was the firm purpose of all the holy servants of God, and they regulated their lives according to it. But if we are not of the same sentiments, if we do not make up our minds to avoid the least venial sin, then we can be certain that we do not yet know what it is to offend the great God, and that we have not yet begun to love Him truly with our whole hearts.

Repentance
and reso-
lution of
amend-
ment.

Ah, of a certainty, that is where I have been wanting! If I had^d loved Thee, O my God, as I ought, would I have wilfully offended Thee as I have done every day, nay, every hour, for

¹ Timor, qui de charitatis magnitudine generatur, vel tenuem amoris formidat offensam, atque in omnibus, non solum actibus, verum etiam verbis, attenta semper pietate distenditur, ne erga se, quantulumcunque fervor dilectionis illius intepescat.

² Plena oculis ante et retro.—Apoc. iv. 6.

³ Quia qui timet Deum, nihil negligit.—Eccles. vii. 19.

⁴ Terribilius et horribilius ipsa gehenna judicat, in re levissima vultum Omnipotentis scienter offendere.

some miserable thing, for the sake of gratifying my senses, of indulging my curious eyes and ears, of vanity in dress, to gain empty praise, to please men, to indulge in talk, and for a thousand similar vanities. No, I know well now that I have not loved Thee as a child should love his father. I am sorry, O God worthy of all love, for my great unfaithfulness and ingratitude, which are all the less to be excused, as I could easily have rendered Thee the slight services Thou didst require of me. O my good God, after having acted so meanly towards Thee, I acknowledge that I am not worthy to ask any favor from Thee! Yet, in spite of my unworthiness, Thy own mercy encourages me to implore of Thee a grace Thou wilt certainly be not unwilling to grant me. I ask Thee, then, for an earnest love of Thee, for a constant love, for a daily increasing love. I beg pardon, too, for having had such a cold love for Thee; pardon for the little account I have made of venial sins. These small transgressions shall be henceforth the object of my hatred and fear. I know well, and Thou, O God, knowest best of all, that my inborn weakness and frailty will not permit me to avoid all faults, and that, no matter how careful I am, I shall fall sometimes through forgetfulness. But with Thy grace there is one thing I will strenuously endeavor to do, and that is, never with full knowledge and deliberation to commit any fault. Every morning I will renew this resolution to lessen the number of venial sins that I have been in the habit of committing and to shun them altogether; and a sufficient reason for me to keep that resolution will be the thought that, because venial sin is such a small matter, and is so easily forgiven by Thee, O God of goodness, the offence offered Thee thereby is all the more inexcusable. Help me, O Lord, in this my resolution. Amen.

*NINTH SERMON.***ON AVOIDING VENIAL SIN, ON ACCOUNT OF ITS EVIL EFFECTS.****Subject.**

- 1st. Venial sin gradually separates God from the human soul.
- 2d. It also gradually separates the soul from God.—*Preached on the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle.*

Text.

Thomas autem, unus ex duodecim, qui dicitur Didymus, non erat eum eis, quando venit Jesus.—John xx. 24.

“Now Thomas, one of the twelve, who is called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.”

Introduction.

On one occasion only had Thomas separated himself from the other apostles, and it was even then that Jesus came and comforted the others with His presence and strengthened them in the faith, a comfort that Thomas had no share in. His absence was of course no evil in itself; but what was the result of it? Incredulity; for he refused to acknowledge that Jesus was risen from the dead, although the disciples all assured him that they had seen the Lord alive. And he added great presumption to his obstinacy: “But he said to them: Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”¹ So that at the time Thomas was separated from the Lord not only in body, but also in soul. So great an evil can spring from such a slight cause. We have seen already, my dear brethren, that venial sin is a small thing in itself; yet, when we consider that it is an offence against the Lord God, it is a worse evil than all natural evils, because it dishonors Him, and it would be better for heaven and earth to be destroyed than that we should even tell a jocose lie. Venial sin, as I have shown on another occasion, is a small thing in itself, because it is committed in a small matter, from a trifling cause; but for that very reason we are less to be excused when we commit it deliberately and wantonly; for we thus refuse God, who is worthy of all love and honor, a slight service that He asks from us. It is small, too, because it can be easily taken away; but precisely on that account, also, the injury it offers to God is all the greater when we commit it with full knowledge and consent. Now, if we consider venial sin in relation to our own soul, it is true that the harm it does the soul is slight; but when venial sins are committed in great number, oh, what great injury and mischief is the result! The worst harm that can befall the soul is the

¹ Ille autem dixit eis: nisi videro in manibus ejus fixuram clavorum, et mittam digitum meum in locum clavorum, et mittam manum meam in latus ejus, non credam.—John xx. 25.

loss of God, the supreme Good; this loss can eventually be caused by venial sin when it is committed wantonly, as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

Venial sin gradually separates God from the human soul. That I shall briefly prove in the first part. It gradually separates the soul from God. That I shall show in the second part. Therefore he who loves his soul and does not wish to lose the Supreme Good must carefully avoid all deliberate venial sin. Such shall be the conclusion.

To which help us, O Lord, by Thy grace. We beg this of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

An ulcer on the face, a swelling on one of the cheeks, or an unsightly lump on the forehead, disfigures even the most beautiful countenance, and creates feelings of disgust in those who behold it. But that deformity is not to be compared to that of venial sin in the sight of God. These are the words of St. Augustine regarding this matter: "We do not believe that such sins kill the soul, but they render it hideous by filling it with horrid pustules, as it were, so that it can hardly be admitted to the embrace of its heavenly Spouse, or at all events cannot approach Him without shame."¹ Now, if a deformity in our personal appearance excites such disgust in us that we would prefer to have a great sum of money stolen from us; if there are many who avoid the pleasant sunshine through fear of having their complexions spoiled, are we not foolish, then, and forgetful of our best interests, when we think so little of wantonly sully the far greater inward beauty of the soul?

Venial sin deforms the soul in the sight of God.

From this it follows necessarily that venial sin lessens the special favor, good-will, and love of God for the soul. St. Augustine asks: If you were quite covered with pustules, would you wish some great lord to approach and embrace you, or even to stretch out his hand to you to kiss? And yet you expect the great Lord God to caress you with His consolations and be on familiar terms with you, while your soul is deformed and disfigured by venial sin? No, you cannot have any reasonable hope of such a thing. Again, God acts towards the soul as one friend does with another; no matter how strong are the ties that unite two men together, if

So that it lessens the love of God for the soul. Another reason given for this also.

¹ Quibus peccatis, licet occidi animam non credamus, ita tamen eam veluti quibusdam pustulis, et quasi horrenda scabie replentes deformem faciunt; ut eam ad amplexus illius sponsi cœlestis aut vix, aut cum grandi confusione venire permittant.—S. Aug. Serm. 41 de Sanct.

they do not frequently see each other and keep up a mutual interchange of good offices, their love will gradually cool down. And if one of them does not hesitate now and then to play some trick secretly on his friend, or to injure him even in small things, the other will soon begin to grow careless of his friendship, confidence will be lessened between them, they will become quite strange to each other, and at last one will endeavor to pay the other back in his own coin. It is true enough that we are in the habit of acting in that way with our neighbor, nor is the habit confined to great lords and potentates, who often forget the service of years on account of some trifling fault; but it is also to be found amongst common people. Which of you, my dear brethren, would like to have a servant who does not indeed commit any great fault, but who is every day guilty of carelessness, disobedience, and negligence in small things; who always gives you short answers and fails to treat you with becoming respect; who thinks nothing of acting against your will, under the pretext that his transgressions are only in small matters, which do not much affect your interests or honor? Truly, if I had a servant of that kind, I should not have him long, no matter how much I might have valued him at first; or, at all events, he might not expect a single penny from me beyond his salary. And yet we wish to persuade ourselves that the great Lord and God, who is not in want of us, will show Himself favorable and friendly to us, although we could not tolerate a servant, a man like ourselves, who would act towards us in the way in which we act towards God! But wait, O slothful man, who are satisfied with merely avoiding evident mortal sins, and deliberately and wantonly commit venial sin through habit and wilful carelessness! Say, if you wish, they are but small things; for the Lord God will deal with you as you do with Him; He will measure you by your own bushel. You are cold and tepid in your love to Him; He will be the same in His love for you. You are sparing and niggardly towards Him, for you refuse Him the slight services He asks of you; He will not show a greater liberality in giving His graces to you. You will give Him nothing unless you are compelled to do so by the threat of eternal damnation; and He will give you no more than He is bound to give you and all men.

God is generous to those who

When God finds a soul that is ready and willing in His service, that has a horror of displeasing Him not only in great,

but also in small things, although through frailty it now and then is guilty of a fault, He looks on Himself then as bound in honor, so to speak, to show that soul the glory, greatness, and superabundance of His generosity by giving it an almost sensible pleasure in His service, before which all difficulties vanish; a lively faith, by which the soul is always in the presence of God; a firm and child-like confidence, by which it lives almost secure of its salvation and future glory, without fear or anxiety, full of spiritual consolation and convinced of possessing the love and favor of God; a perfect contentment and resignation to the divine will in daily trials and crosses; a tender, earnest love and desire with which it ever looks up to heaven; the special protection of Providence, by which God comes to its help in temptations and unavoidable occasions of sin with powerful graces, so that it never falls into mortal sin; and by the same providence He so arranges matters that everything must turn out for its greater good. These and many others like them are the special graces and marks of love that He gives such souls. It is true that God often withdraws spiritual consolations from His faithful servants for a time, and leaves them in dryness; but that is only to give them an opportunity of acquiring greater merit and to try their virtue. But even during this period of trial God still strengthens them with a sort of inward joy, which comes from a humble and constant resignation to His holy will, a joy that is not, indeed, without suffering, although it strengthens and consoles the sufferer. Besides, even in the greatest dryness of spirit the zealous servant of God is consoled by the testimony of a good conscience and of a steadfast confidence that the trial he is under is not laid upon him in punishment of sin or negligence; and even if the trial had to be looked on by him as a punishment, he has still the satisfaction of knowing that he thereby atones for some fault or other that he is not aware of. In a word, he is always comforted by the fact that God is his dear friend. Oh, what a heaven on earth it is thus to possess the highest Good and His friendship in peace and quiet of conscience!

Can you, O slothful Christian, expect such a favor and grace as that? You who avoid mortal sin only through fear of being lost forever, while you do not hesitate to offend God by daily slight transgressions? Oh, no! what belongs to beloved children must not be given to mercenary hirelings. You must have re-

fear to offend Him even in small things.

Favors of this kind are not to be expected by one who does not try

to avoid venial sin.

marked that you can find no trace in yourself of such favors; quite the contrary; good thoughts are rare things with you; your understanding, as far as heavenly things are concerned, is weak and dull like the rays of the sun in winter, which have but little effect on the earth; your imagination, like an unbridled horse, runs hither and thither, filled with all kinds of useless thoughts; your will loses its taste for divine things, and becomes quite callous to what concerns your salvation, so that you are obliged to look to creatures for all your consolation and enjoyment; the practices of piety which used to be so sweet and agreeable to you are now become a heavy burden, so that you either omit them altogether or perform them carelessly and in such a way that they no longer deserve the name of devotions; you have little inclination for prayer, and generally your prayers are so full of voluntary distractions that they hardly merit the name. You have no spiritual consolations; you are more pleased at the end of the divine service than at the beginning; the observance of the commandments, the performance of the duties of your state become irksome to you; you do your actions through vanity and for mere outward show, or with a coldness of heart that takes all the good out of them. From one end of the day to the other, you hardly do a single thing that really pleases God; the least cross, trial, or contradiction seems intolerable to you, and you become discontented, morose, ill-humored, half-despairing, without consolation, without confidence, without any comfort from God or heaven, and therefore without merit. With regard to the divine protection, God does not any longer take special care of you; He does not keep your hellish foe in such strict bounds, but allows him more freedom to attack you; He does not keep you out of the dangers and occasions of sin as He formerly did; He withholds from you the special help of His powerful grace, so that you either fall, or else at all events have a great deal of trouble to avoid falling into mortal sin. In a word, all your powers for good become weakened and lamed.

Thus God gradually separates Himself from the soul; a terrible punishment!

Such is the miserable state of the soul from which God separates Himself and His grace and favor. Be not surprised if you are aware of similar experiences in yourself. We sometimes hear people complain that they have no relish for heavenly things. But what are you complaining of? The root of all your troubles is in yourself. "My tears have been my bread day and night," sighs the Prophet David in your person, "whilst

it is said to me daily: Where is thy God?"¹ Where is your God gone to? Why is He so cold towards you? Because you are so cold towards Him; because He can see nothing in you but what annoys and displeases Him; because you do not hesitate to offend Him daily, although only in small things, and make a habit of committing venial sin. Ah, my dear brethren, what a fearfully dangerous thing is coldness and tepidity in the service of God! As He Himself says in the Apocalypse, it causes Him the most profound disgust: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; but because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of My mouth."² Oh, what a terrible misfortune, what a fearful punishment is this in difference on the part of God to a soul! This is what I dread above every other evil, says St. Augustine, speaking of those words of the Psalmist: "Whoshall stand before His cold?"³ This thought freezes me up. If God leaves me, if He is no longer my special friend and helper, what will become of me during life, after death, and in eternity? The venial sin that we commit wantonly and deliberately is the thief that steals away from the soul that special favor and good will of God, and separates God from it, and, what must follow as a necessary consequence, that makes the soul gradually separate itself from God, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

By this I mean that venial sin leads on to mortal sin, and so eventually to eternal damnation. However, I do not say that venial sin, even when committed with full deliberation, deprives the soul of its spiritual life, that is, of sanctifying grace and the friendship of God. No! "The soul that sinneth, the same shall die,"⁴ these words hold good for mortal sin alone. Nor do I mean that venial sins change their nature and become mortal, or that a great number of them put together could make up an amount of guilt deserving of hell, just as twenty shillings put together make a pound sterling. No; if they were heaped up till their number surpassed the sands on the sea-shore, they would not attain the malice of a mortal sin. But I mean to assert,

Venial sin gradually separates the soul from God, because it prepares the way for mortal sin.

¹ Fuerunt mihi lacrymæ meæ panes die ac nocte, dum dicitur mihi quotidie: ubi est Deus tuus?—Ps. xli. 4.

² Scio opera tua, quia neque frigidus es, neque calidus; sed quia tepidus es, et nec frigidus, nec calidus, incipiam te evomere ex ore meo.—Apoc. iii. 15, 16.

³ Ante faciem frigoris ejus, quis sustinebit?—Ps. cxlvii. 17.

⁴ Anima quæ peccaverit, ipsa morietur.—Ezech. xviii. 4.

with St. Thomas of Aquin and other holy Fathers, that venial sin, particularly when it is committed frequently, deliberately, and through habit (for it is of that kind alone I am speaking), leads on to mortal sin, and opens the door to it, so that the soul dies and is often condemned to hell and thus separated from God forever, not on account of its venial sins, but on account of the mortal sins that have sprung from them. "He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little,"¹ and be lost altogether in the end. Mark well the word *contemneth*; for there are many who fall into many sins, but they enter into themselves at once, repent, and purpose amendment. But they who think nothing of such falls are the unhappy ones who are going almost without knowing it to eternal ruin. "Shall fall by little and little;" wherefrom shall they fall, and how? They will fall from piety and holiness, from the state of grace to the state of sin and enmity with God: "Such as turn aside into bonds, the Lord shall lead out with the workers of iniquity."² They who neglect their duties and obligations will be counted by God amongst the number of those who commit grievous sin, for He will allow them to fall grievously. Such is the explanation the holy Fathers give of this passage, which they refer to those who wantonly commit venial sin. But in what way shall they fall? By little and little; they will not commit mortal sin at once, but after a while. How so?

Shown by
similes.

The Holy Ghost again answers this question by a simile: "By slothfulness a building shall be brought down, and through the weakness of hands the house shall drop through."³ Very often all that is required to cause a house to fall in ruins is a slight crack in the roof, by which the rain can enter drop by drop and rot away the supporting timbers, until the latter are no longer able to bear the weight that rests on them, and the whole building tumbles down. What was the cause of the misfortune? Not the first drop of water, nor the second, nor the third, nor all the drops put together, but the fall of the heavy beams, which was brought about by the drops. Attach a long fuse to a mine under a tower; set it on fire with a single spark; the fuse burns away until it reaches the powder in the mine and blows up the tower. That was not the work of the first spark, nor of the

¹ Qui spernit modica, paulatim decidet.—Eccles. xix. 1.

² Declinantes autem in obligationes adducet Dominus cum operantibus iniquitatem.—Ps. cxxiv. 5.

³ In pigritiis humiliabitur contignatio, et in infirmitate manuum perstillabit domus.—Eccles. x. 18.

whole fuse, but of the powder that was ignited. Yet, if you had not applied the first spark, or if you had extinguished it at once, the tower would still be in its old place. A slight wound, when neglected in the heat of the summer, can easily become inflamed and bring the whole body to the grave. In that case, what is the cause of death? Not the wound, but the inflammation which has eaten away the heart; if the wound had been looked to in time, the man might be still alive. So it is with the human soul. "He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little." What you did to-day, yesterday, and the day before, is but a small sin, a slight wound, a spark of fire, a drop of water; but if you do not stop the leak in time, if you blow the spark to make it burn quicker, if you do not heal that wound, the building of your soul will fall to the ground; your soul will die through mortal sin, and eternal flames can be the result of that.

This comes partly from our own nature, and partly from being abandoned by God. From our own nature, which is always inclined to evil, and in its inborn weakness is accustomed to go on gradually from small faults to great ones. "They begin," says St. Bernard, "with small sins, and rush on to great ones." For one venial sin follows another, until it becomes a matter of habit; the shame and sensitiveness of conscience and its fear of sin gradually lessen day by day; one gets to be on familiar terms with sin; the passions are more inflamed; the danger is less regarded; one rushes headlong into it, and then all that is necessary is a slight allurements, a temptation somewhat stronger than ordinary, a more seducing occasion, and sin is consented to and a course of vice entered on that will never perhaps be abandoned. We are often plagued with impure thoughts, if we do not put them away at once; they are at first only a faint image in the imagination, a slight act of curiosity with which we think of them for a little time, a small sin; after that comes the sensual pleasure, and finally consent, which is a grievous sin. At first we only tell jocose lies, as they are called, and from that we go on to injurious lies, false oaths, and treachery. At first we are only curious to see what happens in other families; from that we go on to evil suspicions and rash judgments. At first we merely indulge in useless talk, and speak of some small faults of our neighbor; from that we go on to backbiting, faultfinding, contumely, calumny, and detraction. At first the servant steals only a penny,

That comes from our nature being inclined to evil.

¹ A minimis incipiunt, qui in maxima prouunt.

but soon cupidity urges further thefts, and at last he becomes a habitual thief. At first there is nothing but a rather free look at a person of the other sex; that is soon followed by a laugh, a confidential talk, a meeting, and shameful sins. At first there is only a bitter word, which, as it borrows another, brings on quarrelling and disunion, and thus ends in hatred and enmity. Thus it is with all vices as a general rule; we begin by committing venial sins without scruple, and end by mortal sin.

And also
from being
abandoned
by God.

And this is all the more likely to happen, because, as I said in the beginning, God, offended by the many venial sins that are thus committed with malice aforethought, grows cold in His love for the soul, and withdraws from it the special help of His grace and favor, so that the weakened and helpless soul is easily overcome and led into mortal sin. "Behold," says the Lord by the Prophet Amos, "I will scream under you, as a wain squeaketh that is laden with hay. And flight shall perish from the swift, and the valiant shall not possess his strength, neither shall the strong save his life."¹ What sort of a thing is hay, my dear brethren? It is fine, dry grass, and has hardly any weight; yet, if a lot of those little dry blades of grass are heaped together they can make a weight heavy enough to force the wagon that carries it to groan and creak. So, says God, in the passage of the Prophet I have quoted, so am I heavily burdened by your small sins and slight transgressions. But what does He do then? "I will scream under you;" He groans, so to speak, with displeasure and just chagrin; and by withdrawing His powerful graces He deprives the ungrateful soul of the ability to withstand the shock of temptation, so that it cannot save itself from a grievous fall and consequent ruin. Go on, then, O slothful Christian, and sing the old tune: What I am doing, thinking, or saying, is but a small sin. I will serve my God, but I do not want to be like those devotees who are afraid of the least sin. I wish to go to heaven, but am not anxious to secure the highest place there; I shall be satisfied with a very low one. Ah, I fear that you will find out to your cost that in your efforts to avoid being a devotee you will hardly remain a servant of God; and in your indifference to a high place in heaven you will hardly find room behind the door! The time will come, that most dangerous time of violent temptation and alluring occasion; ah, my

¹ Ecce ego stridebo subter vos, sicut stridet plaustrum onustum feno. Et peribit fuga a veloce, et fortis non obtinebit virtutem suam, et robustus non salvabit animam suam.—Amos ii. 13, 14.

God, if Thou dost not then help that soul with Thy special powerful graces, it will probably be lost forever! But (O terrible, yet most just judgment of God!), embittered by so many repeated acts of ingratitude, God, instead of helping it, leaves it to its own weakness, that is, He withdraws from it the special help of His powerful grace, which He is not bound to give to any one, and gives it only the ordinary helps, so that it is overcome, sins mortally, remains in sin without repentance, and is lost eternally: "Neither shall the strong save his life."

Does not the history of the world supply us with examples enough as sad proofs of this truth? King Nabuchodonosor saw in a vision that wonderful statue whose head was of the finest gold, while its breast was of brass, overthrown in an instant and crumbled into dust, and that, too, by a single stone that was cut from the mountain without hands, and fell on the statue. Truly a surprising vision! But men have been seen to fall most lamentably whose fall was terribly shocking. Angels, so to speak, have been turned into demons. Thou hast permitted, O Lord, that amongst Thy twelve apostles, the pillars of Thy Church, there should be one who was a traitor, a deicide, and, as Thou Thyself saidst, a devil! I am all the less surprised, then, when I consider the apostasy even of men who have lived in the strictest orders, who left their convents and their faith, and of many others who were at first good and holy Christians, but afterwards became like the heathens in their vices. I could wish to ask them all the question that the Holy Ghost asks Lucifer, the rebel angel: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, who didst rise in the morning? And thou saidst in thy heart: I will ascend into heaven, but yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, into the depth of the pit."¹ O ye souls that were formerly like stars in the heavens, how have you fallen! How is it that you have sunk so low? Where are the virtues that formerly adorned you? the zeal with which you began to serve your God? You seemed then to be fixed immovably in good, and now you are so perverted! You were looked on as invulnerable, and now you are covered with wounds, and mortal wounds, too. You said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven; I will serve my God truly, and be happy with Him forever; and now you are lying amongst the demons in hell. How have you fall-

Experience shows this in the number who began with small sins, and went to ruin.

¹ Quomodo cecidisti de celo Lucifer, qui mane oriebaris? qui dicebas in corde tuo: in celum conscendam. Veruntamen ad infernum detraheris in profundum laci.—Is. xiv. 12, 13, 15.

en! Ah, my dear brethren, if I could compel them to answer me, they would acknowledge that at first it was but a small stone that made the beautiful statue crumble to pieces; that they did not become so wicked all of a sudden, but gradually fell into the gulf of ruin on account of the small sins that they committed wantonly and carelessly, the unhappy result of which they did not foresee. If, while Judas was still following Our Lord, and was secretly purloining small sums here and there from the money that was given him to take care of (for according to the words of Our Lord Himself he was a thief),—if, I say, some one had foretold him that his love of money would one day bring him so far that he would betray his Master, the Son of God, for thirty pieces of silver, and that he would then hang himself to a tree and go down to hell,—God forbid, he would have thought and said; far be it from me to act in such a fashion! No, I cannot believe that I will ever do such a thing as that. What I now keep for myself is but a trifle, and will not be made much of by One who despises the whole earth and all its goods. But to betray the Son of God and sell Him, to put an end to my own life and so give myself up to the devil for all eternity, that would be too bad indeed! God forbid that I should be guilty of such wickedness! And yet, unhappy Apostle! such will be your fate of a certainty. The cause of it all, as St. John Chrysostom remarks, were the small sins of avarice that Judas gave way to at first. Many other souls now in hell would have to make the same confession: that, namely, the first cause of the wicked lives they led, and of the damnation they are now suffering, were the venial sins they committed with full deliberation and consent. St. Teresa says of herself in her *Life*, that for a certain period she lived without taking any great care to avoid small sins, although she was always on her guard against mortal sins; for her chief desire was to get to heaven. But after she had by the advice of her confessor conquered that tepidity, and had made a fixed resolution to serve God faithfully, she saw once in ecstasy the place already prepared for her in hell amongst the damned, and which she certainly would have occupied, had she continued to commit venial sin deliberately and to lead a tepid life.

Therefore
the saints
did severe
penance.

Now, my dear brethren, I see clearly that the saints had very good reason for fearing even the smallest offence against God, and for punishing severely in themselves such offences if they

ever happened to fall into them. Hear what St. Gregory says of this: "The just chastise themselves for even the smallest faults by the most severe penances." Notice that he uses the word *just*, so that he is not speaking merely of great sinners, who, after having done penance, practise great austerities. He speaks of those even who never lost their baptismal innocence by mortal sin. And they atoned by severe penances for even the small faults into which they fell through human weakness and infirmity. And how strict they were with themselves in this respect! They inflicted on themselves great bodily pain with long-continued fasting, hair-shirts, and scourging themselves even to blood. But why did they do that? Because they considered on the one hand the infinite majesty of God and His surpassing dignity, and on the other, the great danger of falling into mortal sin by being careless about venial sins; and thus they came to the conclusion that it was a most deplorable thing and not to be sufficiently bewailed, to offend the great God even in the least, and to put their own souls in danger of hell. That holy youth St. Aloysius Gonzaga, when he was still an innocent boy, once stole a little powder out of a soldier's pocket to load a toy cannon with, and on another occasion he made use of an unbecoming word of which he did not know the meaning, and when he was accusing himself afterwards of those faults, he was filled with such contrition for them that he fell into a faint. The hermit Eusebius was so penetrated with sorrow for a slight fault he committed by looking round while the Blessed Ammianus was reading a part of the Gospel to him, that he condemned himself during his life-time never to look at the field that had so attracted his attention on that occasion, and never to look up to heaven, since he had rendered himself unworthy of doing so. He had a heavy iron collar made, which he put round his neck, and to it he attached a chain that, being made fast to his side, prevented him from forgetting his resolution; this severe penance he practised for forty years. What would these men have done if they had incurred as many debts as we have with the justice of God?

And now, my dear brethren, by way of conclusion, I say that, if we have not courage to punish ourselves thus severely for our manifold sins, let us at least be careful not to commit them again. If we do not endeavor to wipe out the debts we have contracted, let us at all events not increase them by fresh sins. If the good God has hitherto kept us from many grievous sins,

Conclusion
and exhortation to all
to avoid venial and
especially
mortal sin.

or brought us out of them by repentance, let us use every effort not to run into the danger of committing them again by being careless about venial faults. Mark how the penitent David, when he is giving us fatherly advice to be cautious, calls our attention to the danger of small faults, and advises us to be careful about them; for he begins the first psalm in these words: "Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the chair of pestilence; but his will is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he shall meditate day and night."¹ In these words we must distinguish three steps which lead to destruction, and they are signified by the words, "walked, stood, sat." He who begins by "walking" generally goes on to "standing," and at last winds up with "sitting." To allow one's self to be moved by a slight occasion even of a small sin, is the first step; that brings on the second, standing in the danger, and that again is followed by the third, namely, sitting down and feeling at ease in the state of sin, so that final impenitence is the result. I cannot expect that you will never commit even a half deliberate fault, for even the most just souls fall sometimes during the day; but I do exhort you to be careful not to commit those sins with full deliberation, through habit, and out of mere wantonness. Every one who examines his conscience daily will soon find out in what business, at what times, in what matter he is apt to commit deliberate sin most frequently; he can then fortify his will by making good resolutions every morning to do what he can during the day to avoid those sins. Christian soul, I tell you once for all, you may be as pious as you wish in other respects, you are in an evil and wretched plight if you are not always in dread of mortal sin; and even if you are always in dread of it, but still do not endeavor to avoid deliberate, wilful venial sin, then I say again: poor miserable soul, you are in an evil plight! But you, O sinners, can draw from what I have hitherto said this conclusion, which will be of use to you: if venial sin is such an evil before God, if it is so very hurtful to our souls, what a terrible evil must not mortal sin be, for even one mortal sin is worse than all the venial sins that all the people in the world could commit. And yet you have thought so

¹ *Beatus vir qui non abiit in consilio impiorum, et in via peccatorum non stetit, et in cathedra pestilentiae non sedit; sed in lege Domini voluntas ejus, et in iugo ejus meditabitur die ac nocte.*—Ps. i. 1, 2.

little of it hitherto! Oh, how careful you should be to avoid it, if you wish to save your souls, and possess your God for all eternity!

And Thou, O God of mercy, do not allow us to be again so blind as to offend Thee by mortal sin! If our manifold sins deserve punishment (and for my part, I freely acknowledge in Thy presence that my whole life has been nothing but a continued chain of sins and acts of base ingratitude against Thee; in all places, at all times, in the midst of the holiest actions, devotions, and prayers, I have seldom done anything to please Thee which was not spoiled by imperfections and faults that deserved Thy displeasure. And there are many who must make the same confession with me.)—if, I say, we have deserved to be punished on this account, we do not refuse whatever chastisement Thy fatherly hand will inflict on us. But, O loving and good God, Thou hast many rods with which Thou canst punish us: “Many are the scourges of the sinner.”¹ Strike us, then, as a mild, well-meaning Father, in our bodies, our temporal goods, our good name, as much and as long as Thou pleasest! But one thing we beg of Thee, that Thou wouldst not strike us in Thy wrath by allowing us to fall into mortal sin, and to lose Thy grace! And meanwhile we now renew our good resolutions to do all we can to lessen the number of our daily faults, and never again to commit them with full deliberation. We will be true to Thee in small things as well as in great, so that at the end of our lives we may hear from Thy lips the words: “Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”² Amen.

Prayer for
pardon and
resolution.

Another Introduction to the same sermon, for the sixth Sunday after Epiphany.

Text.

Cum autem creverit, majus est omnibus oleribus, et fit arbor.—Matt. xiii. 32.

“But when it is grown up, it is greater than all herbs, and becometh a tree.”

¹ Multa flagella peccatoris.—Ps. xxi. 10.

² Enge, serve bone et fidelis; quia super pauca fuisti fidelis, super multa te constituam: intra in gaudium Domini tui.—Matt. xxv. 21.

Introduction.

St. Augustine, explaining the words of Our Lord in to-day's Gospel, "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took and sowed in his field," full of astonishment turns to God and asks Him: pardon me, O God, but pray tell me what sort of a comparison is this? If Thou wilt that we mortals should have a great idea and esteem of the kingdom of heaven, why dost Thou compare it to such a miserable thing, which is so small that it can hardly be felt or seen? But that is after all quite right, is the answer that Augustine gives himself; the mustard-seed signifies the beginning of everything, for every beginning is like it, "very small in size, but very great in power."¹ That is also what Our Lord means when He says: "Which is the least indeed of all seeds, but when it is grown up, it is greater than all herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come, and dwell in the branches thereof." Thus from a small beginning, good or bad, can come a great good or a great evil. Venial sin, my dear brethren, as I have already explained, etc. *Continues as above.*

On the Neglect of Small Things in the Divine Service, see the preceding Second Part.

¹ Minimum quidem mole, sed maximum virtute.

ON THE NATURE OF A PIOUS, HOLY LIFE.

TENTH SERMON.

ON THE HOLINESS OF OUR DAILY ACTIONS.

Subject.

1st. To do and omit what God wishes us to do and omit, therein consists Christian piety and holiness. 2d. But what does God wish us to do and omit?—*Preached on the seventh Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Qui facit voluntatem Patris mei, qui in cœlis est, ipse intrabit in regnum cœlorum.—Matt. vii. 21.

“He that doth the will of My Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Introduction.

There we have from the lips of infallible Truth the surest foundation of our hopes of salvation, nay, the only means by which one who is come to the use of reason can get to heaven: “He that doth the will of My Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.” To think in the heart, or say with the lips, “Lord, Lord!” to pray, make pilgrimages, fast, give alms, practise all kinds of devotions, be enrolled in different sodalities, to honor the Mother of God and the saints—all these are good works; but they are worth nothing unless that one necessary condition is fulfilled, namely, to do the will of God. He who does that, he and no other will enter into the kingdom of heaven. This text, my dear brethren, gives me an opportunity of speaking of that most important virtue, or rather compendium of all virtues, in which all our piety and holiness

consists, and to which therefore all works of devotion must tend, and that is, the conformity and union of our will with the will of God. But to treat the matter in due order we must first know in what this conformity consists. It is shown chiefly in two things: first, in this, that man fulfils the will of God and does what God requires of him; secondly, that man is content with the will of God and readily submits to all that God appoints for him. If I observe these two things, then my will is in full conformity with the divine will. Let us take the first part now, for that comprises many things in itself. To fulfil the will of God is to do and omit what God wills us to do and omit; to do it or omit it when God wills, how God wills, because God wills, and for no other reason but simply for God's sake; and that is to be observed in everything without exception. There you have the heads of the six following instructions, as far as the first part of conformity with the will of God is concerned. The first point is the subject of to-day's instruction.

Plan of Discourse.

To do and omit what God wills us to do and omit, therein consists Christian piety and holiness. This I shall show in the first part. But what does God wish each one of us to do and omit? This I shall answer in the second part.

Christ Jesus, who didst come into the world to do the will of Him who sent Thee, excite our wills by Thy grace, that we may faithfully imitate Thee in this point; this we beg of Thee through the merits of Thy dearest Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

Christian holiness does not consist in doing wonderful things.

If Christian perfection and holiness of life consisted in apparitions, ecstasies, prophecy, healing the sick, raising the dead to life, and other miraculous works, such as holy servants of God have often performed, then we should all have just reason for despairing of attaining perfection and holiness, and God, who wishes us all to be holy, as St. Paul expressly says—"For this is the will of God, your sanctification"¹—would require of us what far exceeds the faculties of our nature, and what He gives only to a very few, in order to show forth His power. Oh, no, there are many who have led perfect lives without working miracles. We do not read that St. John the Baptist worked miracles, although, according to the testimony of Our Lord Himself, there

¹ *Hæc est enim voluntas Dei, sanctificatio vestra.*—I. Thess. iv. 3.

was none greater than he among all the men born of women. Many worked miracles, such as Judas the Traitor, and yet did not attain holiness. And therefore Our Lord assures us that He will not know His elect by that test on the last day: "Many will say to me on that day: Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and cast out devils in Thy name, and done many miracles in Thy name?"¹ But what reward will they receive from Him? "And then will I profess unto them: I never knew you; depart from Me, you that work iniquity."²

If to every one who wishes to attain perfection were said the words that Our Lord spoke to the young man whom He loved, "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me,"³ then, indeed, most people would go away sorrowful like that young man: "And when the young man had heard this word, he went away sad."⁴ Nor would there in that case be any chance of perfection for people living in the world in the different states to which the providence of God has called them, and they would be all obliged to leave their business, their occupations, and whatever other worldly duties they have to attend to, so that the whole world would become a vast convent. No, God wishes that we should try to become perfect and holy in whatever state of life we may be; and therefore this perfection must consist in something that can be found in every state. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were rich; Job, after having been deprived of all he had by divine permission, received twice as much from God again: "And the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than the beginning. And he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she-asses."⁵ Yet these and many others served God in the midst of their wealth, and led lives that were pleasing to Him.

Nor in voluntary poverty.

If Christian perfection consisted in performing very difficult and extraordinary outward actions, in many long prayers, in sublime meditations, in subtle contemplations, in constant

Nor in extraordinary outward works.

¹ Domine, Domine, nonne in nomine tuo prophetavimus, et in nomine tuo dæmonia eiecimus, et in nomine tuo virtutes multas fecimus?—Matt. vii. 22.

² Et tunc confitebor illis: Quia nunquam novi vos; discedite a me qui operamini iniquitatem.—Ibid. 23.

³ Si vis perfectus esse, vade, vende quæ habes, et da pauperibus, et habebis thesaurum in cælo, et veni sequere me.—Ibid. xix. 21.

⁴ Cum audisset autem adolescens verbum, abiit tristis.—Ibid. 22.

⁵ Dominus autem benedixit novissimis Job magis quam principio ejus. Et facta sunt ei quatuordecim millia ovium, et sex millia camelorum, et mille jugs boum, et mille asinæ.—Job xlii. 12.

watchings, fasting, alms-giving, bodily mortifications, and other austerities, such as we wonder at in the lives of hermits and religious, there would not be much chance then, either, for most people to attain perfection. For many a one could urge in excuse that he is not strong enough to bear such a heavy burden, and poor beggars and other poverty-stricken people would be badly off, since they have not the means of giving alms, and must rather receive them from others; nor could sick and bedridden people become holy, for they are forbidden to pray, or fast much, or to practise any bodily austerities; and such, too, would be the case with all those whose duties or occupations give them no time, or whose ignorance prevents them from performing those outward works of devotion. No, Christian perfection does not consist therein, although many, to their own great disadvantage, are of the opinion that it does. To their own great disadvantage, I say, for since they find those exercises difficult, they have neither the will nor the courage to undertake them, and so they think they would be guilty of presumption if they were to aspire to perfection. That is a false idea altogether, for God calls to perfection people of all classes, ages, and conditions, and therefore it must consist, not in difficult and extraordinary things, but in something that is common to all, easy to understand, and which all men have ability enough to attain, without distinction of age, sex, or condition.

But in doing the will of God.

And so it is in reality, my dear brethren. To every Christian I can say what the Lord said in former times by Moses to the Israelites: "This commandment that I command thee this day is not above thee, nor far from thee, nor is it in heaven, that thou shouldst say: Which of us can go up to heaven to bring it to us, and we may hear and fulfil it in work? Nor is it beyond the sea: that thou mayest excuse thyself, and say: Which of us can cross the sea, and bring it to us; that we may hear and do that which is commanded? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayst do it."¹ It is in your power to do it if you wish, nor does it require any great trouble or difficulty on your part. In what does this commandment consist? To live holily nothing more

¹ Mandatum hoc quod ego præcipio tibi hodie, non supra te est, neque procul positum; nec in cœlo situm, ut possis dicere: quis nostrum valet ad cœlum ascendere, ut deferat illud ad nos, et audiamus et opere compleamus? Neque trans mare positum, ut causeris et dicas: quis ex nobis poterit transfretare mare, et illud ad nos usque deferre, ut possimus audire et facere quod præceptum est? Sed juxta te est sermo valde in ore tuo, et in corde tuo ut facias illum.—Deut. xxx. 11, 12, 13, 14.

is required than that every one keeps in the state of grace, and always does what God wills him to do. This is the sole foundation of all holiness and piety. If I do a good work, it is good because it is in conformity with the will of God; if I do evil, it is evil because it is contrary to the will of God. God has neither advantage from our good works nor harm from our evil ones. No matter what we do, we cannot lessen by an iota His infinite happiness, which He has in and of Himself, nor can we add anything to it. If all the men that were ever in the world were in hell, and cursing and blaspheming Him forever, He would not be less happy. If all the men in the world were in heaven praising and blessing Him, He would not be more happy than He is; He would still remain what He is from all eternity. In a word, God is not in need of any of His creatures, and therefore the Prophet David with reason says: "I have said to the Lord, Thou art my God, for Thou hast no need of my goods."¹ In this alone has He placed His external glory, that His creatures do what He requires of them with all humility and submission, whether it be in small things or in great, or even in what outwardly appears useless. Thus, if, like the great Apostle of the Indies, St. Francis Xavier, I were to go forth without scrip or staff, and wander through the world barefoot, converting with incredible labor thousands of souls to the true faith, and that were not the will of God, and my superiors had not sent me, my labor would be all in vain, and I might say with the Apostle: "It profiteth me nothing;"² it has gained no merit for me, no glory for God. But on the other hand, if through obedience and according to the will of God I were to spend the day reclining on a soft cushion, eating and drinking of the best, or to spend my time throwing a straw down on the ground and picking it up again, I would do more good to my soul, and further the honor and glory of God better than if, instead of the good eating and drinking, I emaciated my body with fasting, or scourged myself even to blood; or if, instead of the seemingly useless labor of picking up the straw, I said a hundred rosaries, heard a thousand Masses, or converted all the sinners and infidels in the world. Why so? Because God wishes me to do the one thing, and not the other.

King Saul thought he had done wonders when he saved the Shown from

¹ Dixi Domino, Deus meus es tu, quoniam bonorum meorum non eges.—Ps. xv. 2.

² Nihil mihi prodest.—I. Cor. xiii. 3.

Holy Scripture and by a simile.

best part of what he had taken from the Amalekites, in order to offer it in sacrifice to God, although the Prophet Samuel had told him to destroy everything. "Blessed be thou of the Lord," cried out Saul in exultation to Samuel, "I have fulfilled the word of the Lord."¹ But what did the Prophet say to him? "Why didst thou not hearken to the voice of the Lord, and hast done evil in the eyes of the Lord?"² What evil have I done? asks Saul in astonishment. "Yea, I have hearkened to the voice of the Lord;"³ I have offered to the Lord in sacrifice the best of the flocks and herds, in thanksgiving for the victory I have gained; and whatever is over is for the people to offer in sacrifice. "But the people took of the spoils sheep and oxen, as the first fruits of those things that were slain, to offer sacrifice to the Lord their God."⁴ What sacrifice? cried out Samuel; "doth the Lord desire the holocausts and victims, and not rather that the voice of the Lord should be obeyed?"⁵ Do you think that the Lord will be pleased with offerings that you present Him of your own accord against His command? You should have done as the Lord commanded you, and not what seemed good in your eyes: "For obedience is better than sacrifices; and to hearken rather than to offer the fat of rams. For as much therefore as thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord hath also rejected thee from being king."⁶ Suppose, my dear brethren, that a man has two servants; one of them works day and night and gives himself no rest, but he is an obstinate fellow, who will not hear a word from any one, and who only does what he pleases. The other, although he cannot work half as much as the former, yet pays attention to every command given by his master, and is always ready and punctual in obedience. Which of the two is the better servant? No doubt about it, you will answer; the latter is worth a dozen of the former, because a servant is hired to do what his master tells him, and not to follow his own fancies. Such, too, is the case with us, who are servants of the great God. Not he who performs great and extraordinary out-

¹ Benedictus tu Domino; implevi verbum Domini.—I. Kings xv. 13. 4

² Quare non audisti vocem Domini, et fecisti malum in oculis Domini?—Ibid. 19.

³ Imo audivi vocem Domini.—Ibid. 20.

⁴ Tulit autem de præda populus oves et boves, primitias eorum quæ cæsa sunt, ut immolet Domino Deo suo.—Ibid. 21.

⁵ Numquid vult Dominus holocausta et victimas, et non potius ut obediat voci Domini?—Ibid. 22.

⁶ Melior est enim obedientia quam victimæ, et auscultare magis quam offerre adipem arietum. Pro eo ergo quod abiecasti sermonem Domini, abiecit te Dominus, ne sis rex.—Ibid. 22, 23.

ward works of piety is to be looked on as the best and most perfect servant of God, but he who in all circumstances does what God wishes him to do, no matter how trifling the thing may be in itself.

Go in thought to the house at Nazareth, and there you will see an evident and at the same time a most wonderful example of this in the Holy of holies, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, who is the model and pattern of all virtue and perfection for all men. What was His occupation while dwelling there? "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them."¹ To whom was He subject? To a poor carpenter, His foster-father, and to a young virgin, His mother. In what? In things that were suitable so such a lowly household; He laid the table, swept out the house, collected the shavings, brought wood to the fire, carried the tools to His foster-father, helped him in his work; in a word, He acted as a servant and apprentice to the trade. Nor did His neighbors look on Him in any other light, nor had they any other name for Him than that of the carpenter's son: "Is not this the carpenter's son?"² O my God! what a mystery! who can comprehend it? I am astounded whenever I think of it! What? And were those occupations befitting the Son of God, the wisest and greatest Lord of the earth? To sweep out the house, and collect the fallen shavings? Had He nothing better to do? But did He not come down from heaven to renew the whole world, to redeem men, to show them the way to heaven, and to spread everywhere the glory of His Father? And behold, He spends the greater part of His life hidden away in a poor hut, and leads a lowly, abject, and apparently useless life. Could He not have made a better use of so much precious time? Could He not have turned His immense wealth of gifts and graces to better account? Why did He not go about the world teaching and instructing, giving good example and proving His divinity by miracles? If He had done so, He might have converted all men, brought them to heaven, and so furthered the glory of His Father, which was the only reason why He became man. Filled with astonishment, then, I ask again, why did He shut Himself up in the midst of such lowly occupations for so many years, while the world was quite ignorant that it possessed its God and its Saviour? Ah, my dear brethren, hear what He

Shown
clearly by
the exam-
ple of Our
Lord.

¹ Descendit cum eis et venit Nazareth, et erat subditus illis.—Luke ii. 51.

² Nonne hic est fabri filius?—Matt. xiii. 55.

Himself says in explanation of His conduct: "I came down from heaven not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me;"¹ and again: "For I do always the things that please Him."² These occupations, which we consider mean, were appointed for Him by His heavenly Father at that time; and therefore the Son of God could not find anything that was more pleasing to God, more holy, or more perfect. He honored His Father as much when He was picking up the shavings in the workshop as when He proclaimed the glory of God in the streets of Jerusalem by His preaching and miracles, for in one thing as well as in the other He fulfilled the divine will. So that the perfection and holiness of the Christian does not consist in great and wonderful deeds, as many imagine, but in doing at all times the will of God. Now to our subject: how am I always to know what God wishes me to do at different times and in different places? The answer I shall give in the

Second Part.

God does
not wish all
men to
serve Him
in the same
way.

Yes, again I ask the question, how am I to know what God wishes me to do? Will He reveal His will to me? No, my dear brethren, we must not expect an angel to come from heaven to enlighten us on this point. For we know well enough what the Lord wishes from us. And first, with regard to His commandments and the precepts of the Church, they are public enough and well known, and His wish is that we should keep them inviolably, and not transgress them in the least in thought, word, or deed. "But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."³ Again, it is God's will that we should be satisfied with all He has ordained for us and those who belong to us, and accept all the accidents of life, whether they be pleasing to us or not, with readiness from His fatherly hand; for, sin alone excepted, nothing happens in the world without the permission or command of God. This holds good for all men, nor is any one dispensed from it. Besides these general laws there are still some special works or omissions that God requires from each individual in particular. And how are we to know what those things are? Let each one look to the state in which God has placed him, and see what are its daily duties and obligations, supposing, that is, that the state exacts nothing con-

¹ Descendi de coelo, non ut faciam voluntatem meam, sed voluntatem ejus qui misit me.—John vi. 38.

² Quia ego quae placita sunt ei facio semper.—Ibid. viii. 29.

³ Si autem vis ad vitam ingredi, serva mandata.—Matt. xix. 17.

trary to the general law of God. These, and nothing else, are what God expects him to fulfil. If you do them well, as it is in your power to do them, you do what God wills; for it was for the purpose of fulfilling those duties that He called you to the state you occupy. But as there are many different states and occupations in life, so there are many different duties and occupations, which cannot be fulfilled by all indiscriminately. For God requires one thing from a layman, another from a priest or religious; one thing from a member of this particular Order, another from a member of a different Order; one thing from a superior, another from a subject; one thing from the master or mistress, another from the servant; one thing from the judges and ministers of justice, another from the merchant, the tradesman, and the laborer; one thing from the weak and sickly, another from those who are in robust health; one thing at this time, another at that, and so on. And this difference is so important, that what would make some in a certain state holy and perfect would lead others in a different one to eternal damnation, no matter how praiseworthy the action may be in itself, because in the latter case God expects from them something else.

To explain this I will use a simile that I think I have brought forward elsewhere. You have seen all kinds of personages in a theatre; one struts the stage magnificently dressed as a king, others follow him as his attendants; they who surround him are his soldiers and satellites; on one side there is a peasant, on the other a fool, or a poor beggar. Now, who is the best off among the actors? As long as the play lasts we certainly should say that the king and his lords are best off as regards magnificence of appearance, while it is quite the contrary with the clown and the beggar. But who acts his part best according to the ideas of the manager of the play? Who wins most applause from the public? That is a matter in which people do not consider the dress worn, nor the dignity of the character represented, but simply whether the actor does his part well or ill. If the king were to appear clownish, the peasant polite, the beggar proud, the fool clever, none of them would act his part well; the whole piece would be a failure. The more clownish the peasant is, the more miserable the beggar, the more silly the fool, the better the play. And why? Because the characters require to be so represented; and thus it happens sometimes that the beggar wins the most applause, because the king and his attendants do not perform their parts properly.

Shown by a
simile.

God wishes every one to fulfil the duties of his state.

We mortals, my dear brethren, are in this world as on a stage; we are acting a play, as St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "We are made a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men,"¹ who are the audience; the characters are distributed by the almighty God, and there are as many of them as there are states, occupations, and trades in the world. "We are fools for Christ's sake," continues the same Apostle; "but you are wise in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are honorable, but we are without honor."² Rich, poor; sick, healthy; master, servant; prince, peasant; merchant, soldier, tradesman; cleric, layman; married, single; young, old; men, women; parents, children; teacher, scholar; joyful, sorrowful, etc.—all these are different characters. Some, indeed, appear to be better off and happier in the part assigned to them, while others are miserable and unhappy; but when the last act is played, and the curtain is dropped at the hour of death, then, as far as worldly dignity is concerned, we are all alike, and our whole claim to praise, honor, and reward lies in the manner in which we have played the parts allotted us by God, that is, the manner in which we have fulfilled the duties and obligations of our state. If I am found wanting in that, although I may have transported mountains by my faith, I have done nothing, and have acted against the will of God.

What interferes with this is displeasing to God. Shown in different states. In judges and state officials.

Suppose, for instance, that a judge or advocate did nothing the whole day but go round visiting the sick and the prisoners, consoling the afflicted, and helping the poor and needy; would he be attending to his duty? No, certainly not. But why? Those are all good works, works of Christian charity, which we are often exhorted to perform. Truly, they are good works, when they are performed at the proper time, and do not interfere with their duty. But to make a profession of them, as it were, and neglect everything else, that is not allowed by the character they have to sustain and which God has given to them. To provide as best they can for the common weal; to protect the interests of justice; to defend the causes of the poor and the widow and the orphan as carefully and even more carefully than they do those of the rich and powerful; to do away with public scandals and dangerous abuses; to attend to the duties of their office; and to make themselves more capable of so doing by reading, writing, and study—such are the obligations imposed on them by the part

¹ *Spectaculum facti sumus mundo, et angelis, et hominibus.*—I. Cor. iv. 9.

² *Nos stulti propter Christum, vos autem prudentes in Christo; nos infirmi, vos autem fortes; vos nobiles, nos autem ignobiles.*—Ibid. 10.

they have to act. If they fulfil them well, they can do nothing better, holier, or more pleasing to God, although they may be obliged now and then to omit all practices of devotion for a day or so, for that is what God wills them to do.

That master or mistress takes little trouble about household matters, so that, as they imagine, they may have all the more time to devote to their salvation; they spend the most of their time in church, pray, sing, meditate, and hear one Mass after the other. Oh, what pious people they are! many a one will say. But that is not the case; they are not good; they are not leading pious lives, unless invincible ignorance excuses them; for their piety does not consist in such works of devotion. They have another part to play; they must look after their households and attend to their necessary business; they must teach their children the catechism, chastise them when they merit it, be watchful over them, give them good example, and train them up for God and heaven, and not for the vain world and its pestiferous maxims; they must keep a watchful eye on their servants and other domestics, restrain them from evil, and encourage them to good; they must live in conjugal love and harmony, and bear their daily crosses with patience; they must be upright in business; and then they can hear a Mass in the morning, make their examen of conscience in the evening, and perform other devotions on certain days; their holiness and piety consists in those things; such is the part they have been allotted by God; if they perform it well, they do what God wills and what they ought to do.

Masters and
mistresses.

If servants, apprentices, or soldiers were to spend the day reading spiritual books, or saying rosaries, what would their masters or officers say? The work is good in itself, no one doubts that; but it is not good for them. Why? Because other occupations are their proper business in the parts they have to play. If the soldier does nothing but stand on guard at his captain's command; if the servant obeys his master readily in everything; if the apprentice performs his part of the daily work; and if they do that with a supernatural intention for God's sake, then they do what God wills, and they perform consequently a more virtuous action than if they read all the pious books in the world.

Workmen,
servants,
soldiers.

A weak and delicate person is often recommended by his doctor, who knows what he is talking about, to keep out of the fresh air, not to go to church even on Sundays and holy-days, to eat meat on fast-days, not to fatigue himself with long prayers,

The sick
and deli-
cate.

to give his body a longer time than usual for rest, to pass the time in innocent amusements, etc. But the doctor may say what he pleases; the sick man will not obey. What sort of a life would that be to lead? he says. I must live as becomes a Christian. Very well, then, live as a Christian, and see how you will get on! And so he fasts like others, spends an hour or two in church, hears two, three, or four Masses, one after the other. That is not too much, he thinks. In the morning he gets up early, reads a spiritual book, performs his usual devotions without shortening them in the least, in spite of his illness. Well, now you have had your way; what do you think of it? You must know that you have not acted as a Christian should; your church-going, spiritual reading, and long fasts and prayers are wrong and not at all pleasing to God. How so? They are good works. Excellent works, no doubt. But they are no works for you in your present state. As long as you have to play the part of a sick man you must do your duty as it is laid down for you by your doctor and your confessor, and suffer the pains and inconveniences of illness with patience for God's sake; you have not to trouble about anything else; this is all that God requires from you at present, and what can you do better than what He wishes?

Religious.

With regard to religious, God be praised! we are better off than any one else with regard to knowing the will of God. For if I keep my vows and the rules of my Order, and do during the day what I am ordered by the rules, or the will or approval of my superior and the daily order, as long as I am in good health, and do that well—then I am sure of doing the will of God, and I can comfort myself with the belief that I can do nothing holier, more perfect, or more pleasing to God. If I were to neglect any of these things for the sake of doing something else, although it might be far more important in itself and more conducive to the glory of God, if I have not been told by my superior to do it, then I would not act as a religious should. So it is, my dear brethren, due proportion being observed, with all states, no matter what they are. Devotion, piety, Christian perfection and holiness of life consist in the exact fulfilment of the will of God; that is, in acting well the part assigned to us, in duly performing the duties of our state, no matter how lowly they may be in themselves. Everything that is a hindrance to this, or that cannot be harmonized with it, must be looked upon as

worthless, of no value in the sight of God and contrary to His will, no matter how holy it may be in itself.

From this it follows, first, that the wisdom and goodness of God must be wonderful, since He has made the way to perfection so easy and secure for every one. Secondly, how little we are to be excused before God if we do not use every effort to become holy and perfect; for every man, no matter who or what he is, or in what state, can attain perfection simply by doing what he is bound in any case to do daily, provided he does it as well as he can. Thirdly, how far they are mistaken who have I know not what high ideas of true Christian holiness and perfection, and imagine that it consists in prayers, holy Communion, outward works of piety, hearing many Masses, and chastising the body. If they do these things, they think they are all right, while they utterly neglect the duties of their state, because they have not the name of being works of devotion. I was good yesterday, they say, and I will be good again to-day, and perform my devotions. What do you mean? Good? You must be good every day; but what special thing did you do yesterday, and what do you mean to do to-day? I went to confession and holy Communion, I heard four Masses one after the other, I gave alms to the poor and went to church in the afternoon, when public devotions were being held; I will do the same to-day. That is all very good, but it is not enough. The next thing you have to do, and in fact the chief thing that belongs to Christian piety, is to fulfil the duties of your state exactly, to be always satisfied with the arrangements of God's providence, to be patient under crosses and trials. If you forget this latter, I would not give much for your piety. Do this always, and you will always be pious as you should be.

Therefore they err who think piety consists in extraordinary outward actions.

Fourthly, how unreasonable the complaints of those who say that they cannot do good on account of their many although necessary occupations, or because they are weak and sickly. Why can you not do good? Oh, I have no time, I have a lot of little children in the house, says a mother, and they keep me going all day. I, says another, have to run about on business. I, says a servant, am kept at it so constantly that I have hardly half an hour on Sundays and holy-days to hear Mass, while on the week days I can with difficulty find a quarter of an hour for my prayers. Ah, says the sick man, I am so weak and suffering! I would willingly go to church and do what others do, but my sickness prevents

And who complain that they have not time or health to do good.

me; I can hardly manage to say a rosary. Ah, poor people! you do not know what it means to do good! That very work, or business, or weakness that hinders you from prayer and outward works of piety, is according to the will of God, who has ordained that for you in your state of life. You have only to be resigned, and go on with your occupation, or suffer your illness with a good intention for God's sake, and then you will really do good; for, if you were to undertake anything else that could not be harmonized with that, you would act against the will of God.

And who neglect the duties of their state, to have more time for devotion.

Finally, it follows that they are wrong and inexcusable who neglect or perform carelessly the duties of their state and their daily work, that they may have more time to devote to extraordinary or special works of piety, which they themselves have invented, or which suit their fancies. They are not content with the fulfilment of their ordinary obligations, but wish to fly higher and do something out of the way. That comes from a sort of vanity and independence of spirit that is inborn in us; for generally whatever is commanded or prescribed by law or rule seems hard to us, while we do with ease and pleasure what we voluntarily take on ourselves. Such people are of the number of those whom St. Augustine calls "erring ones, and deceitful saints."¹ They are deceitful saints, because they get the name of being holy, and yet they neglect that in which true holiness consists. They are erring, because they are deceived by self-love, and often even by the devil, who suggests those devotions to them, that, by following their own will, they may be all the less likely to do the will of God.

Conclusion and encouragement to perform well the duties of our state.

I conclude with the words of Our Lord to the young man: "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor." Shall I address those words to you too? No, that would not suit people living in the world. But do you wish to be perfect in your state? Then let your chief care be to perform perfectly the daily duties that God has imposed on you, and do not neglect even the least of them. Oh, what consolation for a soul that loves God to think, I am now doing what God wills. I am getting up in the morning, and I am well aware that I cannot do anything more pleasing to God just now. I am hearing holy Mass, doing my work, waiting in my shop, writing and studying, eating and drinking at table, saying my night prayers, going to bed and sleeping, etc., and I am certain that all this is

¹ *Falsos atque fallentes sanctos.*

the will of God. What a consolation in the evening to have spent a whole day in that manner! What a comfort at the hour of death to think that I have thus spent my whole life praising and blessing God! What joy and happiness in eternity to see that our worthless, mean, daily actions are the fruitful seed of such unspeakable glory which we shall possess forever in heaven! Should not this encourage us, my dear brethren, to perform the duties of our state with the greatest perfection and zeal? Yes, O Lord, this shall be our determination; we are resolved thus to do Thy holy will. Every day I shall make this intention in the morning: O infinite God, I acknowledge my obligation to serve Thee alone; behold, I am ready for Thy service! Since it is Thy fatherly will that in the state to which Thou hast called me I should do this or that work, bear this or that cross with patience, I am ready to do and suffer what Thou wilt, O God, so that I may please Thee, whom alone I will try to please, comforting myself with Thy words: "He that doth the will of My Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." Amen.

ELEVENTH SERMON.

ON THE ORDER AND MANNER IN WHICH TO DO OUR DAILY WORK.

Subject.

We should do our daily work, 1st, when God wills; 2d, as God wills.—*Preached on the eighth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Hic diffamatus est apud illum, quasi dissipasset bona ipsius.
—Luke xvi. 1.

"The same was accused unto him, that he had wasted his goods."

Introduction.

How did he waste his master's goods? Did he sell them, perhaps? or give them away without permission? or wilfully squander them? No, we cannot suppose that to have been the case, for the steward would have known that his master could not fail to hear of it, and that he himself would be dismissed as a

thief. What did he do then? He did not take proper care of the goods entrusted to him, and so was the cause of the property not bringing in as large a yearly revenue as it should have done if it had been better taken care of; for that is also a way of squandering goods. What are we, my dear brethren, in this life? We are all stewards of God the great Master; the goods that He has entrusted to us are our souls and the gifts and graces that He has bestowed on each one of us. What use should we make of them? We should use them to do His holy will, namely, to do what He wishes us to do; that is, as we have seen in the last sermon, each one, besides keeping the commandments of God and the Church, must fulfil the obligations of his state, and perform daily the different duties that are incumbent on him according to the nature of his office or employment. But this alone is not enough; we can be guilty of wasting those goods and good works, like the steward in the Gospel, if we do not attend to them in such a way as to make them bring in as much before God as they ought. How, then, are we to perform our daily duties? I answer—

Plan of Discourse.

They must be performed when God wills. This I shall show in the first part. They must be performed as God wills. This will be the second part of to-day's instruction.

I begin with the customary act of confidence in the protection of the Blessed Virgin and our holy guardian angels.

How to
perform
our daily
duties in
good order.

Therefore the ordinary duties that God expects us to perform according to our different states must be performed when God wills, if we wish to act well and holily; that is, they must be done at the proper time and in due order. To pray when we should eat; to eat and drink when we should sleep; to sleep when we should work; to work when we should go to church; to observe one order to-day and another to-morrow—that would be to lead an ill-ordered life and to act in a foolish and un-Christian manner, contrary to the will of God. “All things have their season,” says the Holy Ghost by the wise Preacher, “and in their times all things pass under heaven. A time to destroy and a time to build. A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to keep silence and a time to speak.”¹ So, too, should a

¹ Omnia tempus habent, et suis spatiis transeunt universa sub cœlo. Tempus destruendi et tempus ædificandi. Tempus flendi, et tempus ridendi. Tempus tacendi, et tempus loquendi.—Eccles. iii. 1, 3, 4, 7.

true Christian divide the day into parts, and according to the nature of his occupations and duties let each work have its appointed hour. And this hour should be fixed, so that he can say at once, without stopping to think: this is the hour for me to rise in the morning; this is the hour for retiring to rest; this is the hour for hearing holy Mass, for my work, for this or that devotion; on this day in each month I must go to the sacraments; and so on for everything else he has to do. This order, once it is established, he must observe, nor allow himself to be turned aside from it by any trouble, or levity, or difficulty, or deceit of the devil, unless necessity, or Christian charity, or decency, or weakness and illness, or some affairs of great importance, such as are wont to happen with people in the world, should interfere with it. This is the way to do one's daily duty when God wills.

Oh, if every one understood how much depends on good order, of what great value and perfection it is in itself, how beautiful it is, how agreeable in the sight of God, and the great merit we acquire by it for our souls, then would those who are in the habit of observing or are compelled to observe it feel great joy and consolation in it; while they who have hitherto attached little importance to it would be encouraged to observe it, and they who on account of the many distractions their business occasions them cannot observe it in all things would at all events try to keep some order in their devotions and spiritual exercises. For, in the first place, a man thus follows the example of our all-wise Creator in His external works, since, as the Wise Man says, He made all things in measure, number, and weight: "Thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight." The sun, the moon, the planets still keep the orderly course He has assigned to them from the beginning. Spring, summer, autumn, winter, day and night succeed each other regularly as God arranged, nor will this order cease till the end of the world, when the Son of God will come to judge the living and the dead.

Again, of natural products, that has the greatest strength and perfection which is brought forth at the proper time. A tree that begins to blossom too soon or too late seldom produces good and wholesome fruit, and although sometimes fruit that is produced out of season is looked on as a rarity, yet it is also

So as to follow the example of God Himself in His works.

Thus our works are more pleasing to God.

¹ Omnia in mensura, et numero, et pondere disposuisti.—Wis. xi. 21.

considered as an outrage on nature. Man, my dear brethren, while he is on this earth, is like a tree planted by God, and he is expected to bring forth good fruit for his Master, as we learn from the parable that Christ spoke to His disciples in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit."¹ And the Prophet David says of the just man: "He shall be like a tree which is planted near the running waters, which shall bring forth its fruit in due season."² The fruits are our works, and God expects them from us; but when does He wish to have them, that He may relish them and approve of them? "In due season;" everything must be done at the proper time, and then man will be a fruitful tree, pleasing to God: "And all whatsoever he shall do, shall prosper."³ Good and precious as is the fruit of the love of God and of our neighbor, yet it receives a great deal of its worth from good order. Therefore the Spouse of the Canticle says of her Bridegroom: "He set in order charity in me."⁴

And more
meritori-
ous.

Thirdly, the less a work comes from our own will and natural inclination, and the more it is in conformity with the will of God, the greater, evidently, must be its merit and perfection. This is the case with the works that I daily perform in due order; for then they are in accordance not so much with my own inclination as with a hard and fast rule which I observe through a kind of obedience promised, as it were, to God. And, indeed, he who serves God truly always looks towards Him, ready to catch the least sign of His divine will, and to go or stand still, to do or to omit whenever and whatever is pleasing to God. Such was the boast of the centurion in the Gospel regarding the soldiers who were under his authority: "I also am a man subject to authority, having under me soldiers; and I say to this: Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh: and to my servant, Do this, and he doth it."⁵

But they
who do
things ir-
regularly

On the other hand, it is the sign of a weak love for God when we serve Him irregularly and inconstantly. Tell me; you have a servant at home, who is very diligent when he begins to work,

¹ Omnis arbor bona fructus bonos facit; mala autem arbor malos fructus facit.—Matt. vii. 17.

² Erit tanquam, lignum quod plantatum est secus decursus aquarum, quod fructum suum dabit, in tempore suo.—Ps. 1. 3.

³ Et omnia, quaecunque faciet, prosperabuntur.

⁴ Ordinavit in me charitatem.—Cant. ii. 4.

⁵ Ego homo sum sub potestate constitutus, habens sub me milites; et dico huic: vade, et vadit; et alii: veni, et venit; et servo meo: fac hoc, et facit.—Matt. viii. 9.

but he is neither regular nor orderly in his ways; you cannot depend on him on account of his peculiar ideas, for he wishes to do all according to his own fancy, and goes from one thing to another as the humor leads him; if he happens to be in a good humor, he will do your bidding; but otherwise there is not the least use in expecting anything from him. What would you think of such a servant? Would he suit you? Suit me? you say; I would rather have no servant at all than such a one. The servant who is not able to do half the work, but who is obedient and constant in his efforts to please me, is worth a dozen of the other; for it is an intolerable thing to have to wait till it pleases my servant to attend on me when I want anything done. It seems to me that this might be well applied to those Christians and servants of God who frequently perform during the week works that are good and holy, but without order or regularity, and in a confused sort of way, not observing any fixed time. To-day they get up at five o'clock, because they have no desire to sleep any longer; to-morrow they rise at eight. One day they say their morning prayers with great devotion on their knees, because it suits their fancy to do so; the next day they either omit their prayers altogether, or shorten them considerably. Sometimes they get a fit of piety and hear several Masses one after the other; but when the fit is over, they remain at home and do not go near the church. To-day they pray for hours at a stretch, because they happen to feel sensible devotion and spiritual consolation; to-morrow the fervor is no longer there, and the consequence is that they hardly say a rosary properly. They read a spiritual book, because they happen to find one lying about; but when they put it down it may be a whole month before they take it up again. This evening, because they happen to think of it, they make their examen of conscience, and kneel down with their children and servants to say evening prayers, a practice that no good father or mother ever omits, but to-morrow and the next day they will be tired of it. Three times they come to the sermon because it suits them; but six times after that they are among the absentees. This month they go to holy Communion four times; the next month perhaps not once. Some days they abstain from excessive drinking through mortification, and soon after they begin their old intemperate habits. In a word, they measure out the service they do for God according to their own fancies

cannot
please God;
shown by a
simile.

and to what may come in their way; they do not serve God for His own sake, but for their own pleasure; nor because He so wills it, but because it pleases them to do so now and then. Thus the Lord God must, so to speak, wait for their convenience, and catch them when they are in a good humor. But what pleasure can He find in a service of the sort? for if He were not all-seeing and knew not the future He could never be sure of such service. How can the edifice of Christian holiness and perfection ever be finished, if we by our inconstancy allow what we have built up in one day to fall down the next? All this is caused by the want of order, by not having a certain fixed time marked down for the day's duties. Therefore I repeat, if you wish to do the will of God in a holy manner and so that it will please Him, you must do it when God wills, that is, at the proper time and in the proper order.

Instruction
for those
whose busi-
ness is of
a distract-
ing nature.

It is all very fine to talk about order, some of you will say; that will do well enough for religious in their convents, who can spend the day sitting alone in their cells, and have not to trouble themselves about the price of provisions; they can easily observe due order in their duties. But it is quite different with us lay-people. We must adapt ourselves to circumstances which change nearly every day; a hundred things claim our attention in household matters; now one thing, now another is to be done. Some one comes in who must be attended to, business cannot be neglected, and it is very irregular; sometimes there is too much, sometimes too little of it. If my husband comes home late, we must have our meal at a later hour; if there are many customers, we must spend a longer time in the shop; if there are none, as is often the case, we have to sit idle the whole day. An unforeseen accident may occur to keep us up longer than usual at night, so that we have to get up later the next morning. What chance is there of bringing order into a household like that? No, it cannot be done; it is impossible. Now, be not so hasty in drawing your conclusion! I answered your objection in the beginning, when I said that every one must order his duties according to the requirements of his state. I know very well that people in business must adapt themselves to circumstances, and that they cannot have things as they wish; but disorder of the kind, since it is a constant thing, is in itself a kind of order for those who live in that state of life, and is according to the will of God. If such people, then, observe at

least a constant custom in their devotions, for instance, their daily morning prayer, hearing Mass, evening prayer, and the examen of conscience; if they hear sermons on Sundays and holy-days, and read spiritual books when they have the opportunity; if they go to the sacraments every fortnight or at least every month, and observe this order constantly, unless they are hindered by illness or by some work of charity that must be attended to, then they do their daily duties when God wills. But they must also do them *as* God wills. This we shall see in the

Second Part.

By this I mean that our daily work and the duties of our state must not be performed through mere routine, or in a sleepy, slothful, careless manner, but with a cheerful, attentive, and zealous spirit, and with all possible energy and diligence, which must be extended not merely to great and easy matters, but also to those which are generally looked down upon and are therefore apt to be performed carelessly or to be omitted. We must not forget the saying of the wise Ecclesiastes: "He that feareth God neglecteth nothing;"¹ he does nothing carelessly, but everything perfectly and with a holy zeal. To be convinced of the necessity of this we have only to consider that we have a work in hand that we must do for God's sake and to please Him. The greater the lord whom we serve, the more worthy he is of honor and homage, the more pleasing the work he desires from us, the greater also must be the diligence employed in the performance of the work if we wish to serve him truly and to earn his favor. A service rendered with unwillingness, that is, as if it were forced from us, and therefore faulty, causes rather disgust and displeasure than feelings of gratitude even with a common man, to say nothing of a rich lord; for it is a sign that the person to whom it is rendered is thought little of, since his will is so sluggishly carried out. And this holds good all the more when the person who has requested the service is looking on while it is being done. Wonderful is the effect of the master's eye and presence with his servants and inferiors. Go into a workshop, and there you will see the apprentices singing and idling away their time; but if the master happens to come in, there is a change at once, the singing is at an end, and the work goes on briskly, as if they were vying with one another to see who could

Even the smallest things should be done with fervor; this is required by God, for whom they are done.

¹ Qui timet Deum nihil negligit.—Eccles. vii. 19.

do the most. Now, if, in addition to that, a good deal of the workman's own success depends on the diligence he employs, certainly he is all the more likely to make a good use of his time; even the hope of a small gain is enough to make a man take his hands out of his pockets and work.

God worthy
of all love.

My dear brethren, who is the lord for whom we have to fulfil our daily duties? He is the great, infinite God worthy of all fear and love and service, before whom all that are in heaven and on earth tremble with awe; whom the angels wait on with veiled countenances; whom all the crowned heads of the world must humbly adore on bended knee as His slaves; whose least sign every creature, animate and inanimate, must obey. Woe to the reasoning being who would dare to perform a service for this great Lord in a careless and imperfect manner! Hear what a terrible curse is pronounced against such servants by the Prophet Jeremias: "Cursed be he that doth the work of the Lord deceitfully,"¹ that is, carelessly. It is a most important thing to do the work of the Lord, and for that very reason accursed is he who does it without proper care and diligence. Our holy Father St. Ignatius once asked a Brother who was rather lazy at his work what he was working for. For the greater glory of God, answered the Brother. What? said Ignatius, are you not ashamed of yourself? If you were working to please me or any other man, your slothfulness would deserve punishment; how, then, can you be so negligent when you know you are working for the great God?

Who is present every-
where, and
sees all our
actions.

If God were like earthly potentates, who can be present in but one place at a time, and who can see only what is going on before their eyes, from whom much can be concealed, and who, generally speaking, are kept in ignorance of what they are most anxious to know, then, indeed, our sloth and carelessness in the divine service, although most unjust, would still be more tolerable. But go where you will in heaven and on earth, you will find no place that is hidden from the eye of God; we are in God; He is on all sides of us; in Him we live, move, and have our being, as St. Paul says: "For in Him we live and move and are."² He is looking at us while we are doing our work; He sees how we are doing it; He marks not only the outward movement of the hand, but also and chiefly the heart, the inward zeal, the

¹ *Maledictus qui facit opus Domini fraudulenter.*—Jer. lxviii. 10.

² *In ipso vivimus, movemur, et sumus.*—Acts xvii. 28.

intention with which we work. It is a source of joy and satisfaction to Him to see a zealous servant, who is filled with a holy desire to please Him, and is working diligently to that end; while the lazy, careless servant, who works against the grain, only fills Him with disgust. This is evident enough from the terrible words of the Apocalypse, "I know thy works; that thou art neither cold nor hot," and because that is the character of them, I can stand them no longer: "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of My mouth."¹

And finally, whom does it most concern that we perform our daily duties with diligence, if not ourselves? God has nothing and wants nothing from them, except the fulfilment of His will and His outward glory; the whole merit of the work He leaves to us, and for us alone is the reward He has in store for eternity. The more perfectly and diligently the work is done, the more pleasing it is in the sight of God; and therefore the greater will be the merit and the reward due to it. God, says St. Gregory, weighs not the greatness of the work itself that is done for Him, but the greatness of the inward energy and zeal with which it is done. He measures out the reward, not according to the size of the victim offered Him in sacrifice, but according to the manner in which it is offered.² A man who is small of stature, though great in mental gifts, is of more account in the world than a giant who is not so gifted. A work that is mean in itself, if performed in the spirit of true devotion, as it should be, is worth incomparably more in the sight of Heaven than a great and wonderful exterior work which is wanting in true spirit and zeal. An "Our Father," a "Deo Gratias," spoken with a good intention and from the heart, is more meritorious than the contents of ten prayer-books repeated without attention and devotion. Indeed, it would be often better for many to abstain from prayer and exterior devotion than to pray without interior devotion; for by their carelessness and voluntary distractions they only increase their punishment in purgatory, instead of gaining merit. Alas, and can we, then, be punished even for good works? Without doubt, if they are not well performed, and are spoiled by wilful faults on our side. Yet we must not grow pusillanimous on this head if we frequently suffer distractions in our prayers and other devotions, or if we experience no spiritual comfort or con-

And measures the reward according to our fervor.

¹ Scio opera tua, quia neque frigidus es, neque calidus: quia tepidus es, et nec frigidus, nec calidus, incipiam te evomere ex ore meo.—Apoc. iii. 15, 16.

² Deus affectum ponderat, non sensum; non respicit quantum, sed ex quanto.

solation in them. For distractions that are against our will, and that we poor mortals cannot always avoid, as well as dryness of spirit, do not hinder the perfection of the work, since we have not spiritual consolations at our free disposal; but rather they increase the merit of the work and its eternal reward when we continue in spite of difficulties to perform it with all possible diligence.

Most people
are wanting
in fervor.

And now, what am I to think of the works of most Christians? What reward do you think we have to expect from God for our many devout actions that are in themselves holy and pleasing to Him? Are those actions always enlivened by true devotion, spirit, and zeal? Let each one enter into himself and examine his daily actions, and see whether the most of them are not performed in a sleepy, careless, distracted manner, through mere routine, without heart, without preparation, without recollection of spirit, without a supernatural intention, without any affection or love for God, nay, as a mere pastime, as it were. This fault is, alas! only too common, even amongst people who have the name of being holy. They say many rosaries, at least one daily; they sing hymns, say the office, and other prayers; they make the most beautiful acts of the Christian virtues, of faith, hope, earnest love of God, patience, contentment and conformity with the divine will, of sorrow for sin, of the most perfect abandonment to God's will in life and death, of accepting all from the hands of God, etc. And when they have spent hours in making those beautiful acts with the lips, they very often have not the least particle of the virtue itself, neither faith, nor confidence, nor love, nor contrition, nor true resignation to the will of God. Why? Because, while the lips were busy uttering the words, the heart was dumb and occupied with far different things; so that sometimes, if we were asked what we are praying for, we could not say, nor do we remember what we asked the Lord God for in our hymns and devotions. We often go into the church, and adore the Blessed Sacrament, and go down on our knees before it; we remain in that humble posture for some time, but likely enough we have not offered God a single act of humiliation, or homage, or thanksgiving, or adoration. Why? Because the virtue of religion does not consist merely in bending the knee or the body, folding the hands, casting down the eyes, or moving the lips, but chiefly in the humbling of the spirit, the submission of the heart, the fervor of the will; and all these

latter are wanting. We often go to public devotions held here and there, we receive the sacraments frequently and make the daily examen every evening; and yet we derive little or no fruit from it all. Why? Because the whole thing is a mere outward work, without true devotion of the heart, performed through routine, because we are in the habit of so doing. In works that are commanded either by the law of the Church or the will of our superiors, for which we have little inclination, we are generally satisfied with the performance of the mere outward action, while we trouble ourselves little about whether it is well or ill done, perfectly or imperfectly. Even those devotions which have a special attraction for us when we voluntarily undertake them lose all their charm and are carelessly performed when they are imposed on us in obedience, and we have to do them. Often, too, when we are alone and no one is looking at us, we grow careless, because there is no one present to encourage us by his example or to reprove our negligence; but we never think of the all-seeing eye of God.

In a word, taking everything into account, there is great cry and little wool; there are many ciphers and few figures; many devotions, but little devotion. In truth, I might say that those duties that are so carelessly performed by most people are like idleness itself, and are nothing more than a waste of time, without merit or profit for the soul. And meanwhile we imagine that we are doing great things for God, heaping up riches and treasures in heaven, and living holy and pious lives, as Christians ought! But we are grievously mistaken. The service of God does not consist in the multiplicity of works; a few things done well are more for His honor and better for our souls than many things done in a perfunctory manner and imperfectly.

I hope better from your zeal, my dear brethren, and it was to encourage you to persevere that I have chosen this subject. With the same object I conclude with the words of St. Paul that he addresses to the Christians of Rome: "In carefulness not slothful, in spirit fervent, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope."¹ It is not enough to do *what* God wills, nor to do it *when* God wills; we must also do it *as* He wills, that is, we must perform all our duties with all possible diligence and true fervor of spirit. To act as you ought in this respect, say to yourselves be-

So that their works hardly profit them anything.

Warning and exhortation to fervor.

¹ Sollicitudine non pigri, spiritu ferventes, Domino servientes, spe gaudentes.—Rom. xii. 11, 12.

fore each work, no matter what it may be: this I am now about to do because my Lord and my God wishes me to do it; I can do nothing more pleasing to Him just now than this work; He is present and is looking at me to see how I do it. Such a great God, who is worthy of all honor and love, is surely deserving that I should employ on this occasion all the zeal and fervor possible. Think also: a great deal depends for me on this work, and I can by means of it secure an immense reward in heaven; is not that reward worth striving for? But I shall lose it forever if I am careless or slothful now. Act as if on that one work depended all that is in heaven and on earth, and, indeed, the least iota of the honor and glory of God is to be preferred to all creatures in heaven and on earth. Act as if you had nothing but this one work to do, and therefore put out of your heads all thoughts of future occupations. Act as if this was the last thing you had to do, as if death were to come immediately after, as might easily be the case, and you had to go into eternity, there to render to your strict Judge an account of all your thoughts, words, and actions. With such thoughts as these in your minds, how is it possible for you to perform your duties without proper zeal and diligence? Oh, if we could only realize what an immense profit we could make for our souls in a single day while we are in the state of sanctifying grace, what great saints would we not become in the sight of God!

Acknowledgment of past faults, and purpose of amendment.

Alas, I see now how far I am from true Christian perfection and holiness! I have been flattering myself hitherto, and imagining that I have been amassing a wonderful treasure of merits before God by my manifold works of devotion as I thought them to be. But when I hold the greater number of those works up to the light, I find that very often I have done nothing, and I must acknowledge in all humility that I am a lazy, useless servant. For I see that I have performed works of devotion that are indeed many in number, but very few as regards perfection; outwardly they seemed good to men, but inwardly they were wanting in fervor in the sight of God; they were nothing but Dead Sea fruit. I have sometimes held myself to be holier than others, for I could see nothing good in them, while I got through many pious actions in the day; but perhaps those very persons, by the few actions they performed, gained more merit and glory in heaven, since they were not wanting in true fervor, than I with all my piety. Perhaps that poor servant, that

housemaid with her broom, renders a far more pleasing service to God than I with all my church-going, praying, and singing, because he or she has a good intention and a fervent spirit in the mean employment, while I am cold and sleepy in the holiest actions. Therefore in future I will never rely on the number of my good works, but will endeavor to perform my actions out of love for God, with fervor and perfection, and as God wills. Give me, O God, Thy grace to this end. Amen.

TWELFTH SERMON.

ON THE GOOD INTENTION IN OUR DAILY ACTIONS.

Subject.

Deplorable is the state of those who forget the good intention in their daily actions, for they thus cause the greatest loss to their souls.—*Preached on the ninth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Videns civitatem, flevit super illam.—Luke xix. 41.

“Seeing the city, He wept over it.”

Introduction.

Jesus weeps! It must indeed have been a weighty matter that could draw tears of pity from the eyes of the Son of God. And truly it was. For He foresaw not only the temporal destruction of the great city of Jerusalem, but the eternal ruin of the Jewish people, and that, too, He foresaw at a time when He was announcing saving truths to them; this was the thought that made Him weep through pity. My dear brethren, just reason have we, too, to weep when we consider the manner of life that most Christians lead nowadays; nor am I now alluding merely to those who are in the state of sin, losing the precious time of grace and every day going nearer and nearer to hell, but also to those who are not given to great vices, and who, being in the state of grace, do what God wills them to do, and yet derive no fruit for their souls, although they have such a splendid opportunity of acquiring immense and lasting riches. How is that? Is it perhaps because they do not perform their duties in proper order, at the proper time, when God wills? True, that has

something to do with it; but it is not the chief thing. Is it perhaps because they do not fulfil God's will with true diligence and fervor of spirit? That, indeed, has a great deal to say to it; but it is not the chief fault, after all. What they principally neglect is to do their duty because God wills, and thus they lose all the merit and good of their works. Therefore we must perform our duty because God wills, otherwise we are to be pitied, as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

Deplorable is the state of those who forget the good intention in their daily actions, for they thus cause the greatest loss to their souls. Such is the whole subject of this instruction, to the end that we may never again forget the good intention in all our works.

Help us to this by Thy grace, O Lord, which we humbly beg of Thee through the merits of Thy Mother Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

If the good
intention is
not com-
manded
under pain
of sin,

A number of theologians (with whom, as many hold, St. Thomas, the prince of theologians, agrees) distinctly teach that man cannot deliberately and of his full free will think, speak, or do anything that is not either good and meritorious or culpable and deserving of punishment; between these two there is no mean. For instance, I am sitting at table eating a piece of bread, which I am not forbidden to do; if I act with full deliberation, then I either do a good work, that, if I am in the state of grace and have a supernatural intention, will merit for me an increase of glory in heaven; or else I commit a venial sin at least, and deserve to be punished. How can that be? The act of eating is good and meritorious, if performed for a good object and for God's sake; it is sinful and culpable, if I have not that good object in view. They ground their teaching first on the supreme sovereignty of God, who as lord, creator, and preserver of all creatures has not only created everything necessary for our lives, but also must coöperate in all our thoughts, words, actions, and movements of body and soul. Now the Wise Man says: "The Lord hath made all things for Himself."¹ He does everything for His own honor and glory; and therefore it is fitting, and God requires, that all His rational creatures should give Him honor and glory in all their actions as far as they can, since He is their

¹ *Universa propter semetipsum operatus est Dominus.*—Prov. xvi. 4.

God and their Coöperator; this they do by the good intention. Secondly, this opinion is founded on the end and aim of our creation, which is no other than to serve God, to praise Him, to love Him, and that, too, with our whole heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. Hence, if I do not direct my actions to God by a good intention, I do not act like a rational being, conformably to the end for which I am created. Thirdly, it is founded on the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians, of which those theologians make a precept obligatory in conscience: "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God." Mark the words, "whatsoever else you do;" they admit of no exception. From this they conclude that God wishes to be honored in everything we do the whole day long; but that we cannot do unless we direct our works to Him by the good intention. However this may be, my dear brethren, I do not wish to make a sin out of it every time the good intention is left out in our works, even when they are performed with full knowledge and advertence. There are, alas! sins enough already committed daily, without our adding any more to the list.

Yet I maintain, and it is an undeniable truth, that no one of sound mind will contradict, that it is only right and proper for us to direct all our actions to the honor and glory of God, and that on the one hand God has every title to expect this from us, while, on the other, it is a practice of the greatest utility to us, and when it is neglected we wilfully inflict great loss on our souls. I will confine myself to this last point. Tell me, O man, you who have different duties to perform every day in your state or occupation; your head is full of many cares and anxieties, and your body wearied with many labors and difficulties; will not that be the case with you whether you make the good intention or not? If you pay that honor to God, if you raise your mind to Him and offer Him all you do, will your care and trouble be greater on that account? No, indeed; they will rather be considerably lessened. Will you derive less advantage from your actions? Will the good intention bring less profit to your household? Will it cause you to suffer loss in your temporal affairs? But will not your wares be just as valuable as before? Will not your master pay you just the same wages? Will not your services be repaid by the same food and salary? Can you

Yet it is
but right to
show that
honor to
God, for at
least it
does one no
harm.

¹ Sive ergo manducatis, sive bibitis, sive aliud quid facitis, omnia in gloriam Dei facite.
—I. Cor. x. 31.

not study or write as well as before? Certainly, and a great deal better. For, in recompense of the honor paid Him, the good God will give you more help and grace. Will the good intention, perhaps, deprive your soul of some spiritual advantage? Will it render you less able to keep the commandments, or to conquer temptations to sin? Will you have less merit and reward in eternity to expect on account of it? Quite the contrary; you will not suffer the least loss; the whole work, its merit and its reward, is and remains yours; nay, the merit and reward come from the good intention alone. God wishes for nothing from our actions except the homage by which we pay Him the honor due to Him, and that even He does not want for His own advantage, but for ours, so that our merit and eternal reward may be all the greater. “For what things a man shall sow,” says St. Paul, “those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption: but he that soweth in the spirit, of the spirit shall reap life everlasting.”¹ In this world things go quite differently, as Christ says in the Gospel of St. John: “For in this is the saying true, that it is one man that soweth, and it is another that reapeth.”² Namely, the servant tills the ground and sows the seed at his master’s bidding; but the master gathers the fruit into his own barns. Not so does God act towards us; what we do in His honor and to please Him will be kept for us in eternal life, nay, will be increased a hundred-fold. Therefore St. Paul warns us, “And in doing good, let us not fail: for in due time we shall reap not failing.”³ In God’s name, then, my dear brethren, what is there to induce us to omit the good intention, since nothing more is required for it than to send a flying thought up to heaven, and surely there is neither trouble nor difficulty in that.

Because the good intention brings great gain to the soul.

Not only do we lose nothing thereby, but on the other hand we rather inflict an irreparable injury on our souls when we neglect it. And in the first place, most of the acts we do in the day are neither good nor bad considered in themselves, neither praiseworthy nor culpable; such, for example, as walking, standing, sitting, seeing, hearing, speaking, eating, drinking, sleeping,

¹ Quæ enim seminaverit homo, hæc et metet. Quoniam qui seminat in carne sua, de carne et metet corruptionem; qui autem seminat in spiritu, de spiritu metet vitam æternam.—Gal. vi. 8.

² In hoc enim est verbum verum, quia alius est qui seminat, et alius est qui metet.—John iv. 37.

³ Bonum autem facientes, non deficiamus; tempore enim suo metemus non deficientes.—Gal. vi. 9.

playing, studying, reading, writing, buying, selling, suffering annoyances or trouble, and so forth. If all these things are done with a bad intention, they are all wicked and sinful; but no matter how trifling they are, if the good intention is not wanting, they become of such value that not all the riches of earth would be able to purchase them. Water, although its natural inclination is to run downwards, can be driven upwards by artificial means, as we see in fountains, in which the water is made to reach almost the height of the mountain from which it originally comes. In the same manner the most lowly duties we perform, the very meanest things we do, which in themselves savor only of the earth, can be so exalted by a supernatural end that they ascend to the highest heavens, and reach God Himself, whom they merit as their eternal reward. "Every human act," says St. Thomas of Aquin, "which proceeds from our free will, if it be referred to God, can be meritorious."¹ "As the building," says St. Gregory, "rests on the pillars, and the pillars on the foundation, so our lives rest on virtues, and the virtues on the interior intention."² St. Augustine agrees with this: "Know, brethren, that our salvation consists chiefly, not in our works, but in the end for which we perform them."³ And St. Chrysostom says: "The motive can adorn the act. A work is wicked not in itself, but in its motive."⁴ For instance, you dress in costly apparel; that in itself is neither good nor bad; but if you dress in that way to attract attention and excite impure curiosity in others, your wicked intention makes the whole sin. The work is not wicked in itself, but in its motive. If you dress in that way simply to please one whom God wishes you to please, your good intention makes the act meritorious. The motive can adorn the act. You enter a church to admire the beautiful decorations, and that through mere curiosity; the whole work is lost to you, not of itself, but through its motive. If you do so in order to conceive a holy joy at the honor which is paid to God by those decorations, and to learn therefrom how you should honor God more and more in the creatures He has

¹ *Omnis actus humanus qui subijcitur libero arbitrio, si sit relatus ad Deum, potest esse meritorius.*—S. Thom. 2. 2. q. 2. a. 9.

² *Sicut fabrica columnis, columnæ autem basibus innituntur, ita vita nostra in virtutibus, virtutes autem in intentione intima subsistunt.*—S. Greg. in moral.

³ *Scitote, fratres mei, salvationis nostræ summam non tam consistere in operibus, quam in fine, ad quem illa facimus.*

⁴ *Causa actum potest decorare. Opus non ex se, sed ex causa fit crimen.*—S. Chrysos. Tract de Sym.

made for our use, then every step you take will conduce to your eternal glory in heaven. The motive can adorn the act. You are sparing in your housekeeping through mere avarice and an inordinate attachment to worldly goods; your economy is of no good to you and will be rejected by God, not of itself, but on account of its motive; but if you are sparing in order to be the better able to provide decently for your children, or to help the poor more generously, then your economy will earn for you an immense reward in heaven. The motive can adorn the act. So it is in all other things that are neither good nor bad in themselves; it is the intention that gives the work its value and merit.

Even in the
most lowly
actions.

Even the most lowly actions can, as I have said, be made valuable by the good intention. What more trivial act can there be than to give a cup of cold water to a thirsty man? And yet, if that is done with a good motive, hear what Christ Himself says of it: "Whosoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple: amen I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."¹ What more common, nay, more carnal and animal-like, than to satisfy the stomach by eating and drinking? Yet if, according to the exhortation of St. Paul that I have already quoted for you, that is done for the honor and glory of God, in order to preserve health for His service, it merits eternal joy in heaven. St. Winocus, who was formerly a renowned courtier, but afterwards became a humble monk, kept a hand-mill in his cell, and when he was tired praying, used to turn this round to pass away the time; but besides providing a recreation for himself, which was indeed tiresome enough, he also wished to be able to do something for the poor, inasmuch as he ground for them too.² When he grew old and lost his bodily strength, he could no longer use the mill as a pastime, but only as a means of tiring himself with hard work. Nevertheless, as he still adhered to his original intention of helping the poor, he still kept grinding away. And God showed by a miracle how the good intention and fervor of His servant pleased Him. For the mill began to turn itself, without Winocus putting a hand to it, and it ground away without any further trouble to him.³ Oh,

¹ Quicumque potum dederit uni ex minimis istis, calicem aquæ frigidæ tantum in nomine discipuli: amen dico vobis, non perdet mercedem suam.—Matt. x. 42.

² Aptavit sibi molam quamdam, quam subinde manibus versando, suis pauperumque utilitatibus servire coegit.—Sur. in Vit. Sæta Nov.

³ Deus parcere volens labori defessi senis sui, fecit molam sua sponte circumagi, consulens famuli sui et defessæ ætati et necessitatibus.

what a comfort it is for us, my dear brethren, to know that during this life we can so easily increase almost infinitely our merit and eternal reward! Let no one, then, complain that he cannot do much good; let no one lose heart because he cannot imitate the great saints. Heaven does not cost so much as I first thought; nor are we so poor and impotent as we imagined! We can be holy if we wish; we can gain a high place in heaven, and all we have to do is to keep clear of mortal sin and perform our daily duties well, and offer them, trifling though they be, to God by the good intention; nothing more do we require to gain every moment an eternity of glory in heaven. "O Father," said a member of our Society to another priest to whom he appeared after his death at Vilna, "O Father, what an amount we might gain, if we only did everything with a good intention."¹ Therefore St. Gregory warns us to be always watchful over our intentions: the mind should consider our works with watchful care; we must weigh our intention, so that it is directed to nothing temporal in its actions, but may devote itself altogether to eternity."²

Think of this now, O man! all this great gain is lost to you. As many moments as there are in the day, so many joyful eternities do you rob yourself of when you forget the good intention in your actions. Need I say any more to you? Is not that loss great enough? Ah, what deplorable stupidity, to deprive one's self of such heavenly goods through mere indolence or carelessness! If you were able to turn tin and lead into gold, would you allow your art to remain unused? No; day and night would seem too short to you in your efforts to become richer and richer; and now, out of every thought, word, and act of your life, and every movement of body and soul, you can make eternal treasures in heaven; and this art would not cost you either trouble or labor; all you need do is to raise your mind to God, and give Him the honor of your works; nor need you add anything to what you do already in the way of duty. And this beautiful art you utterly neglect! You allow it to remain idle! You hardly think of it once in the week! Ah, to make a slight profit in your business, or to gain a small sum every day, what fatigue or trouble seems too much to you? How ready you are to run about here and there, not sparing yourself in the least! And if you allowed an opportunity of making such a profit to escape you, how sincere

A gain that we miss by neglecting the good intention.

¹ O Pater, quam magna et multa reciperemus, si omnia recta intentione faceremus!

² Vigilanti cura mens percurat opera nostra; intentio nobis nostra pensanda est, ut nihil temporale in his quæ agit appetat, sed totam se in æternitatis soliditate figat.

your sorrow and regret would be! But with regard to our immortal souls, which we can so easily enrich every hour of the day; with regard to our eternal happiness, which we can increase every moment in the day, how careless and slothful we are.

And suffer
great loss in
our good
works.

Mark again a still greater damage you suffer, O man, by neglecting the good intention; for you deprive yourself of the eternal goods and merits of your soul, which you had almost in your hand, and which ought to be the reward of the good works you perform, such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving, visiting the sick, burying the dead, and so on. If you do those things sometimes through habit, you imagine that you have done wonders; but if the good intention has been wanting, even holy works of that kind have not the least merit for eternity for your soul, and they all lose their holiness and worth when they are not performed with a supernatural motive. For, as St. Bernard says, “everything you do is vanity, save and except what you do for God and in honor of God.”¹ Even to go to church and pray is no help to salvation, if the good intention is wanting. So says expressly the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas: “If the first intention is wanting, prayer is neither meritorious nor impetratory.”² The Pharisee whom we read of in the Gospel of St. Luke stood in the temple before the altar and prayed fervently: “O God, I give Thee thanks. I fast twice in a week: I give tithes of all that I possess;”³ and yet his prayer, as well as his rich alms, was rejected by the Lord as worthless, because he had not the right intention. “Why have we fasted, and Thou hast not regarded?” such is the complaint the Israelites addressed to God; “why have we humbled our souls, and Thou hast not taken notice?” But the Lord answered them by the Prophet Isaias, saying: “Behold, in the day of your fast your own will is found.”⁴ You fast and humble yourselves because it pleases you to do so, and not out of a pure intention of pleasing Me. See, says St. Augustine, after citing many examples of that kind, see how God looks not to what man does, but to the motive for which he does it.⁵ We can sin and deserve eternal punishment if we do

¹ Totum est vanitas, quidquid facis, præter id solum quod propter Deum, et ad honorem Dei facis.

² Si prima intentio desit oratio nec meritoria est, nec impetratoria.—S. Thom. 2. 2. q. 83. a. 13.

³ Deus, gratias ago tibi. Jejuno bis in sabbato; decimas do omnium quæ possideo.—Luke xviii. 11, 12.

⁴ Quare jejunavimus et non aspexisti, humiliavimus animas nostras, et nescisti? Ecce in die jejunii vestri invenitur voluntas vestra.—Is. lviii. 3.

⁵ Videtis quia non quid faciat homo considerandum est, sed quo animo faciat.

wilfully what we know to be forbidden under grievous sin, although we may not have a bad intention; but do good and merit heaven we cannot, although the work may be good and holy in itself, unless it proceeds from a good intention; for what is good must be so in all its circumstances. ¹

Oh, how many works, my dear brethren, that we now look on as holy, will appear in quite different colors when the infallible Judge will examine them on that great day! Then we shall see to our astonishment that many a one will receive a beautiful crown who, while on earth, used to eat and drink well; and many another will have little or no reward, who used to fast and suffer hunger and thirst, because the former ate and drank with a good motive, while the latter did not direct his fasting to the honor of God. We shall see one who gave merely a farthing or a cup of cold water in charity, because he had nothing more to give, possess eternal riches; while another, who gave away many pounds to the poor, will be sent away empty-handed, because the former gave what he had to the poor of Christ with a good intention, but the latter, with all his almsgiving, had some other motive in view, such as vainglory and a desire to be thought generous by men, or to get some work out of the poor whom he helped, that is, rather paying a fairly earned wage than giving alms. Then we shall see that many a one shall be condemned to hell on account of the alms he gave, because he bestowed them out of unjustly acquired property that he could have restored to its lawful owner, or because he had an unlawful motive in giving alms, such as enticing some person to have a sinful affection for him. Then we shall see what a great difference there will be between the rewards of two men who at the same time were present at the same devotion, heard the same sermon, or said the same prayers; one was animated by the desire to fulfil the will of God; the other was influenced by mere curiosity, and the wish to have his ears tickled, or to be seen by others. Then we shall see what a high place in heaven that poor servant will have who for God's sake, and to honor Him, swept out the stable with her broom, and how far below her will be the preacher and priest who converted many souls by his instructions and brought them to heaven, because the latter, with all his labor, sought not God, nor souls alone, but himself and his own praise.

Imagine, my dear brethren, that there are two persons who de-

As we shall
see on the
Last Day.

Shown by a
smile.

sire an audience at court in order to present their petitions; one of them is a man of the world and the other a simple peasant. Both, having given their names to the attendant, are ushered into the audience chamber, where the prince is sitting on a high throne, and not far from him the court-jester. The clever man of the world bends his knee before his prince and asks for the favor he desires. The simple peasant thinks that the fool is the prince, because he sees him dressed so richly, and bends the knee before him. The former receives the desired favor, while the latter is driven from the court amid the laughter of the bystanders. Then the poor peasant begins to complain; what have I done? he asks himself. I made as deep a reverence as that other man, and put forward my request far more humbly; why was I not received just as graciously? why was I sent away with empty hands, and laughed at in the bargain? Ah, foolish man that you are! You bent your knee, truly, but not before the right person. Try now if the fool to whom you paid your respects will be able to do as you wish. Even so will it be on that great day with two men who have performed the same good work at the same time, with the same diligence, trouble, and difficulty, but with different intentions and motives; one will be received into heaven, while the other will be sent away without reward. Why is this? the latter will ask. I have done that good work; has that man done more than I? Quite true; but you have not honored the right master; you acted out of self-love, human respect, or to gain some temporal thing; you have paid your respects to a fool; let him now reward you if he can. Away with you! you have already received your reward.

Therefore
one should
regret los-
ing even a
single day
in that way.

Learn further from this, O man, what an immense loss you suffer by neglecting the good intention in your daily work. Have you not just reason to be vexed with yourself when you think of having lost what you might gain even in one day, a loss that you can never make good? The son of a rich man, who was much addicted to playing cards (and there are many like him at the present day, many of both sexes; and I know not whether they always have a good intention in their gambling), lost one day ten thousand ducats at play. He came to his father and asked for money to pay his debt, for it was a debt of honor, and he was obliged to pay it. The father, although he had a too great affection for his son, still could not help being angry with him, and counted out the money to him in small

coin on a table. Here, said he, is the amount of your losses; take it and pay the winner. The young man, when he saw the immense heap of money, struck with astonishment, cried out: "What! have I lost so much as that in such a short time? Alas, what have I done? No more cards for me after this!" O my dear Christian, who live without thought and without the good intention, enter into yourself some evening or other before you go to bed, and count up, if you can, the many hundred moments of precious time that you cannot recall which you have lived during the day; count the thousands of thoughts and desires you had, the words you have spoken; count all the movements of your eyes, your feet, your hands, your body; and when you have added them all together, you will exclaim: ah, is it possible that I have lost so many occasions of merit, so many happy eternities, and that, too, not for the sake of any temporal gain or pleasure, but through sheer negligence and most culpable forgetfulness? Alas, is that really true? Yes, indeed, and there is not a doubt about it. If you had raised your heart to God and given Him the honor due to Him for every thought, word, and work, you would have received an eternal joy in heaven; but now you must do without that reward. Truly, you have good reason to be sorry.

And, indeed, I could well weep with pity when I consider how most people pass their lives in idleness and uselessly, not because they do evil, not because they omit doing good, but because they have not a pure intention in their actions. They live and hardly know why; they suffer, labor, run here and there, give themselves no end of trouble, and think of nothing but that they must do these things because their condition requires it, because they are compelled to do them. They seem to me to act like little children when they are sent on a message. You say to a little boy, as I often had experience of, Run off at once! and the boy runs away at full speed. Stop, I cry out to him; do you know where you are going? I am going to that house there, he says. But, I ask, do you know what you have to do when you get there? That's true, he answers; I don't know that. You must wait, then, till I tell you. So, I repeat, do we often act. We run hither and thither like senseless children; we work, and neither know nor think for what purpose. The Prophet David uses another simile when he speaks of sinners, but it comes to the same thing: "The wicked walk round about."¹ He who goes round

Indeed, it is
a deplorable
loss.

¹ In circuitu impii ambulant.—Ps. xi. 9.

in a circle, never gets any farther than the circumference of it. Go down to the Moselle when they are unloading a vessel with a crane; you will see a man walking round and round in the wheel; if you go in the evening, you will see him still going round in the same place where he began in the morning; not a foot farther does he go, because he goes round in a circle.

Yet most
people do
not think of
the good in-
tention.

“The wicked walk round about.” The most of even those who are in the state of grace go round in the same profitless manner, and when they retire to rest in the evening they are not a whit better off than they were getting up in the morning. If I were to stand in the market-place amongst the people in the evening, and examine each one of them in particular, would not their answers confirm me in this belief? Where are you coming from? I ask one who is just entering the gate of the town. I am coming from the field or the garden. What were you doing there? I dug till I was tired. Why did you do so? Is that a question to ask me? I had to work to get something for my family. Corn and vegetables do not fly into our houses of their own accord. And did you think of nothing else? No. Oh, you poor fellow! You are walking in a wheel, in a circle, and the whole day long you have done nothing for your soul. Why are you idling about here? I ask another, whom I find standing at the door of a house. I am an apprentice, is the answer, and I have a holiday to-day, and glad enough I am of it, because I have to work hard at my trade on other days. But why have you to work so hard? Why do you ask? Must I not earn my bread? And is that the only motive you have? If so, I am sorry for you; you are going round in a wheel. How did you spend your day? I ask a servant. In waiting on my master; and I have had a hard time of it, running to and fro to do his bidding. And what did you earn by so much labor? My food. Is that all? Oh, yes, I get so much money yearly as wages. And have you served merely for that? A fine return, indeed, for all your trouble; you are going round in the wheel. How did you get on to-day? I ask the shopkeeper. Badly enough, he answers; I am just closing the shop; I did my best during the day to get customers, but with ill success. Had you no other object in view but to sell your wares and make money? Then I do believe that things went badly with you, and that you have made but little during the day, nothing at all, indeed, for your soul; for you have been going round in a wheel. What were you engaged

at to-day, I ask the lawyer, the advocate, the attorney. At writing, reading up cases, and studying, he answers; that is my duty; my efforts for the common weal require me to do such things. Did you think of God, and of doing those things in His honor? If not, your studies are all of no use. You have been going round in a wheel. The same kind of answer I should get from many others: from fathers of families, who have to look after the interests of the household; from mothers, who have much trouble in bringing up their children; from soldiers, who have to stand at their posts and to bear the burden of the day; from the poor and needy, who have to suffer hunger and cold and many grievous trials; but they think of nothing except that things must be so, they cannot change them. O ye poor people, how I pity you! How uselessly and wretchedly you have spent the day! "You have sowed much and brought in little," I might say to you all in the words of the Prophet Aggeus; "and he that hath earned wages put them into a bag with holes." You are still in the same place in which you began to run this morning; you are bearing about in a wearied body a soul that is bare of merit. Such is the way of the world, my dear brethren. So does one day pass after another without profit, until death is at the door, and, as the Prophet Isaias complains, "The child shall die a hundred years old."² We often grow old in years, but are still babies in merit when we journey into eternity.

Ah, my dear brethren, I conclude in the words of St. Paul, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God." Whatever you undertake, give God a share of it; do not forget the good intention. Nor must you be satisfied, as most people are, with merely saying in the morning, I offer up all my thoughts, words, and actions this day to the honor and glory of God. That is, indeed, a good and praiseworthy habit; but that intention seldom holds good for the day, for if even a venial sin—and many of them are apt to be committed—if a venial sin, I say, that is contrary to that intention, creeps in, the intention is revoked and is of no value for the next action, so that it should be renewed often during the day, and especially at the beginning of each work. One of the hermits had this habit: whenever he began an action, he stood still for a short time, as if he was pondering on some weighty matter. Being

Conclusion
and exhortation to re-
new the
good inten-
tion often
in the day.

¹ Seminastis multum, et intulistis parum; et qui mercedes congregavit, misit eas in sacculum pertusum.—Agg. i. 6.

² Puer centum annorum morietur.—Is. lxx. 20.

asked why he did that, he said: How does the marksman act when he is about to shoot at the target? He shuts the left eye, and takes aim with the right, until he has caught the bull's eye; nor does he shoot until he has made sure of not missing his aim. That is what I do; I close the left eye; that is, I put away all vain and worldly thoughts, and direct my action to God, as the only end and aim I have in view, by the good intention, that I may not miss what I aim at. Oh, most excellent plan indeed! Nearly similar was the custom of the early Christians, according to the testimony of Tertullian; before beginning anything they made the sign of the cross, as if to say: I do this in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, that is, for God's sake. If we did the same on every occasion, my dear brethren, what a rich treasure of merits we should store up for eternity! Nor do we require to stand still like the hermit, or to say long prayers. It is easy for us to approach God; there is not a moment in which He does not give audience; a single thought is all that is necessary. For instance, you are beginning your work; I do this for Thy sake, O God, you think to yourself, because Thou requirest this of me in the state to which Thou hast called me, and that I as a tradesman may earn enough to support myself and my family. If you are studying, you think: I do this for Thy sake, O God, and to obey my parents, to prepare for the duties of the state to which Thou wilt call me, to instruct the ignorant, or to be able to help my fellow-men. Are you going to table, or to some lawful amusement? Because this is pleasing to Thee, O Lord, I do it in order to recreate my mind, and keep it in a healthy state to fulfil the duties Thou expectest of me, or to preserve my health for Thy service. Are you suffering under trials or adversity? O my heavenly Father, I bear this for Thy sake! May Thy holy will be done! And so on in all other circumstances. That is easy enough, and when you have practised it for a time you will make a habit of it; that means, that you will pray always and never cease praying, as Our Lord and St. Paul warn us; that is the best way of keeping always in the presence of God; that is the surest means of avoiding all deliberate, even venial, sin, and of being fervent in the divine service. Oh, what consolation for the soul, on retiring to rest, to have spent the day in that way! But on the other hand, what bitter regrets it occasions to think that we have lost countless heavenly joys that we shall never have now for all eternity, because we were wanting in the good intention!

What good reason I have, O my God, to make that act of sorrow, when I think of my past life! Unhappy me! through sheer neglect I have lost the greater part of my actions! How many hours, days, weeks, months, years, and in them how many millions of thoughts, words, and actions have passed, from which Thou hast no honor and my soul no merit! "Having turned aside from Thee alone," I must say with St. Augustine, "I have lost myself in a multiplicity of things."¹ All kinds of things engaged my attention, but on Thee I have hardly cast a thought! And yet, art Thou not deserving that I should direct everything to Thee as my only end and aim, from whom I have received everything? Would it not have been for my own advantage to have done so, since I could thus have given value to my otherwise worthless actions? Ah, if I could recall that time, how much better I would spend it now! Henceforth, O Lord, I will be more cautious, and spend my time to better advantage; at every hour of the day I will direct by a sigh sent heavenwards all my actions to Thy honor and glory! Do not Thou cease to remind me of this resolution by Thy inward inspirations, so that I may never forget it! Thus will I always do what Thou wilt, when Thou wilt, as Thou wilt, and because Thou wilt. Amen.

Repentance
and purpose
of amend-
ment.

THIRTEENTH SERMON.

ON AVOIDING VAINGLORY IN OUR DAILY ACTIONS.

Subject.

What vainglory is, and how it robs our actions of their merit.—*Preached on the tenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Dico vobis: descendit hic justificatus in domum suam ab illo.
—Luke xviii. 14.

"I say to you, this man went down into his house justified rather than the other."

Introduction.

See how different those two men were entering into the temple, and how different they were leaving it. What a diversity

¹ Ab uno te aversus, evanui in multa.

there is in the acts of the same two, and in the judgment of God upon those acts. The Pharisee had fasted twice in the week, and given tithes to the poor of all he possessed: "I fast twice in a week; I give tithes of all that I possess." The publican had made public profession of sins and vices. The former, standing before the altar, thanked God for the grace of his good works: "O God, I give Thee thanks." The latter in a few words begs pardon for his wicked deeds: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner." And yet I say, exclaims the Eternal Truth, "this man went down into his house justified rather than the other." Why was that, my dear brethren? The Pharisee's works were in themselves good and meritorious, there can be no doubt of that; but his boasting and vainglory so destroyed their value that they were worth nothing in the sight of God. The publican's works were in themselves bad and wicked, there is no doubt of that; but by his humility he wiped out those works before God, and obtained grace from Him. So much depends on the good intention by which we direct our actions to the honor and glory of God, as I explained in the last sermon. Now there are different ways in which this intention may be wanting in our actions: first, when we act with a bad intention, and this is the worst of all; secondly, when we neglect the good intention through sheer carelessness, and sloth, and forgetfulness, and this is unfortunately the case with most people in the world, who thus suffer irreparable loss; finally, when another intention is mixed with our actions, so that they are not performed for God alone; and this is mostly the case when we act through vainglory and the desire of the esteem of men, like the Pharisee in to-day's gospel. So it is, my dear brethren; and therefore there is nothing we should be more on our guard against in our actions than vainglory and love of praise, for that is the thief that steals away the merit of the holiest things we do, as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

What vainglory is, and how it robs our actions of their merit. Such is the whole subject of this instruction, to the end that we may baffle this thief, and perform our actions for God alone.

Give us Thy light and grace thereto, O Lord; we beg it of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

The glory that I am now speaking of consists in the appreciation and praise of men, namely, in this, that others, when they see my actions, feel a secret gratification, and conceive a high opinion of me, wonder at what I do, and speak of me in terms of praise. There you have the whole of it. It is called vainglory because it is a vain, deceitful, and, generally speaking, useless thing, that fades like the smoke before the wind. For, either I do not know that men have such a good opinion of me and speak well of me; and in that case, what better am I? Or else I do know of it, or see it, or hear it; and even then what does it profit me? The good opinion or praise of others cannot either improve or damage what I have done. If the work is in itself undeserving of commendation, then the praise I receive for it is unjust, and I ought to be ashamed of it in my heart and soul. If the work appears to be commendable, even then the praise comes from men, who cannot see the workings of my heart nor the intention I had, and it is from that the whole goodness or wickedness of an action comes; consequently men cannot form a just judgment of the action.

It is foolish to seek the praise of men, who are ignorant.

If a skilful musician were to feel a secret gratification, and to boast and glume himself, because a dog hears his music and pricks up his ears at the sound of it; if a painter were to be proud of his picture because an ox passing by in the street happens to look at it, would not that be a vain, foolish, ridiculous love of praise? What does the dog know of music, or the ox of painting? Just as little do men understand of the virtue of another, because it is all interior, and cannot be recognized with certainty from any outward sign. How often do we not look on that which is really good and virtuous in itself as wicked and vicious, while, on the other hand, we regard that which is wicked and vicious as good and virtuous? How many hypocrites are saints in the eyes of the world? how many saints are held to be hypocrites? How many different opinions there were amongst the Jews regarding the holiness even of Jesus Christ Himself, the Son of God! "And there was much murmuring among the multitude concerning Him," says the holy Evangelist St. John; "for some said: He is a good man. And others said: No, but He seduceth the people. Others said: This is the Christ. But some said: Doth the Christ come out of Galilee? So there arose a dissension among the people because of Him."

Shown by a simile.

See how different the judgments of those men who at the same time heard the same doctrine from the lips of Christ, and saw the wonderful works and miracles He performed. Is it not, then, a vain and foolish thing to pride one's self and take pleasure in praise that comes from ignorant men?

And judge
according to
the dictates
of passion.

And from men, moreover, who nearly always pronounce judgment and speak of others according to their own passions and fancies. He who loves me sincerely and wishes well to me will praise and approve of everything I do. He who hates me will not be able to see any good in me; He will condemn and find fault with all my actions. The proud man esteems nothing worthy of praise but what he does himself. The simple-minded man wonders at everything he has not seen before. Even the greatest and noblest actions of others are like a splinter in the eye of the envious man. The flatterer, who praises me to my face and congratulates me, despises me and treats me with contempt behind my back. Thus each one looks at an action in the light shed upon it by his own passions. A judgment of that kind we cannot, of course, rely on.

That glory
exists
merely in
the imagi-
nation.

Finally, the glory we seek from men exists mostly in our own fancy and imagination. We say to ourselves sometimes: Oh, what I am now doing is sure to be approved of by people; many will certainly wonder at it. But in reality people only laugh at and turn it into ridicule. A vain woman, who dresses beyond her station, and struts down the street in the latest fashions, imagines that the eyes of all are turned towards her with admiration, and that people are saying of her: Oh, see how beautifully she is dressed! She must be of a noble family, etc. Yes, they talk of her by all means, and look at her with wonder, if you wish; but their talk and their wonder consist only in sarcasm and ridicule. Fie upon her! they exclaim; see how she marches down the street, as if we did not know where she comes from, nor what she is worth! Mark this, my dear brethren, and see what a vain, deceitful, unprofitable, nay, often disgraceful thing it is that they seek who strive to gain the praise of men! He who is greedy of praise can well be called a liar, for he lies to himself, since he imagines that he possesses some excellence which he really has not; or else he thinks that men respect and esteem him, when in reality their feelings towards him are of the contrary descrip-

autem dicebant: non, sed seducit turbas. Alii dicebant: hic est Christus. Quidam autem dicebant: numquid a Gallilæa venit Christus? Dissensio itaque facta est in turba propter eum.—John vii. 12, 41, 43.

tion. "We have heard the pride of Moab," said Jeremias once to the Lord; "he is exceeding proud; his haughtiness, and his arrogancy, and his pride, and the loftiness of his heart."¹ I know that well, said the Lord; but I know also that he is not half so great as he imagines. "I know, saith the Lord, his boasting; and that the strength thereof is not according to it."² He imagines, continues Jeremias, that every one is wondering at him, that all respect and honor him; but these proud thoughts of his only make him ridiculous to the people of Israel, and give him the appearance of a thief who is caught in the act: "For Israel hath been a derision unto thee, as though thou hadst found him amongst thieves. And Moab shall be a derision, and an example to all round about him."³ There we have a picture of the proud man, who thinks a great deal of himself, and imagines he enjoys the esteem of men, but he lies to himself when he tries to persuade himself that he is honored and praised by others; for, generally speaking, he is made the object of their scorn and derision: "He shall be a derision."

But is it, then, pride and vanity to do a good action in presence of others? Or is it wicked and sinful? God forbid! Otherwise the Saviour of the world would have made a mistake in warning us to give good and edifying example: "So let your light shine before men," He says expressly in the Gospel of St. Matthew, "that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, who is in heaven."⁴ Therefore we may allow men to see our good works, that they may thereby be encouraged to honor and praise God in heaven, from whom all that is good and praiseworthy comes as from its source. To do good in presence of others, when I foresee that they will think highly of me, and conceive an esteem for me, and speak in my praise, is that pride and vanity, and a sin? And if they really have a good opinion of me, and speak highly of what I do—nay, if they praise me to my face—is that a sin for me? No, not at all. As long as I give the whole honor and praise to Him to whom alone they belong, that is, to the Lord God, it is a meritorious work. But to seek praise or esteem from men, or to rejoice in it, or

How we
seek it in
our actions.

¹ Audivimus superbiam Moab, superbus est valde: sublimitatem ejus, et arrogantiam, et superbiam, et altitudinem cordis ejus.—Jerem. xlviii. 29.

² Ego scio, ait Dominus, jactantiam ejus, et quod non juxta eam virtus ejus.—Ibid. 30.

³ Fuit enim in derisum tibi Israel, quasi inter fures reperissem eum. Eritque Moab in derisum, et in exemplum omnibus in circuitu suo.—Ibid. 27, 39.

⁴ Sic luceat lux vestra coram hominibus, ut videant opera vestra bona, et glorificent Patrem vestrum qui in cœlis est.—Matt. v. 16.

extol myself on account of it, as if it belonged to me by right, that is the vice of vainglory. That sin can be committed in the beginning of a work: if, namely, I undertake anything that I may please men, or earn their esteem or praise; this is clearly contrary to a good supernatural intention and spoils the whole work, because I make the good opinion of men the whole end and object of it. It can be committed during the work, although the work may have been begun with a good intention for God's sake; if, namely, I think or imagine that it will please men, and win their esteem for me, and I continue to act with this motive. In this way the good intention is retracted and the goodness of the action interrupted. It can also be committed after the work, if I remember what I have done with self-complacency, and have a vain pleasure and joy in the praises I receive for it. By this the work is not destroyed in itself, nor is its merit lessened; yet the sin of vainglory is committed.

To seek
praise takes
away the
merit of our
actions, be-
cause it robs
God of His
glory.

However it be committed, vainglory is the thief that steals away the merit from the holiest actions. For, in the first place, while I am actually engaged in doing a service pleasing to God, I am taking from Him what belongs to Him, and what He values most and has specially reserved for Himself. We act like that outpurse in the band of the notorious Cartouche, in France, who, under pretence of brushing the dust off a gentleman's coat, picked his pocket of a gold watch. St. Gregory compares vainglory to a thief who offers his company to a traveller, pretending that he is going the same way, whiling away the time meanwhile by pleasant conversation; but when the traveller feels most secure, the thief robs him of all his money. So do we act towards our Lord and God whenever we seek the vain praise of men in our actions; we accompany God through courtesy, as it were, under the pretext of doing Him an acceptable service; and meanwhile we rob Him of His property. How so? There are two things in every good work: the honor and praise that belong to it, and the usefulness or merit of it, which latter consists in the increase of sanctifying grace during this life, and eternal glory in the next. This merit God leaves to us, but under the condition that we give the praise to Him alone; just as a celebrated painter willingly gives to another the picture he has painted, first taking the precaution of writing his name under it, so that all may know it is his work; thus we see on some pictures the words, *Apelles pinxit, Rubens pinxit*. Or as two merchants make an agreement with each other

in business to enter into partnership, the one contributing the money, the other taking on himself all the trouble of management: at stated times they settle their accounts, and divide the profits according to arrangement; neither of them takes all the money that has been made.

My dear brethren, we carry on a business, so to speak, with the almighty God, and the principal thing we have to look to is our eternal salvation as the greatest gain we can make; neither God alone nor man alone carries on this business; it is the affair of both together. God supplies all the means of carrying it on, for it is by His help and grace that we are able to do good; man gives his labor and diligence. Now, whatever profit is made must be divided between God and man; God is satisfied with the honor alone, and that He will not consent to give to any one, as He assures us by the Prophet Isaias: "I, the Lord, this is My name: I will not give My glory to another."¹ And St. Paul says: "To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever."² But all the other proceeds of the business, namely, the increase of sanctifying grace, and the eternal happiness of heaven that follows thereon, He gives to man. Now he who wishes to take to himself what belongs to God, and to keep the honor of the action, acts unjustly towards God and deserves to have the whole agreement cancelled, to be deprived of all share in the profits, and therefore to lose all merit. Hence St. Augustine in his Soliloquy addresses God in these words: "He who wishes to be praised for that which is Thy gift, and who in the good he does seeks not Thy glory, but his own, is a thief and a robber, and resembles the devil, who tried to rob Thee of Thy glory."³

Which He reserves for Himself alone

So unjustly do I act towards Thee, O God worthy of all honor and love, so foolishly and senselessly do I behave towards myself, when through vainglory I perform my actions with the view of winning the praise of men! I should rejoice with all my heart at being admitted into a partnership that is so advantageous for me, and I should be satisfied with the exceeding great reward of eternal glory in heaven, which Thou wilt faithfully keep for me as my share, in return for my good works.

And is a gross injustice.

¹ Ego Dominus, hoc est nomen meum; gloriam meam alteri non dabo.—Is. xlii. 8.

² Regi sæculorum, immortal, invisibil, soli Deo honor et gloria in sæcula sæculorum.—I. Tim. i. 17.

³ Quicumque laudari cupit per id quod tuum donum est, et in eo quod agit bonum, non tuam sed suam gloriam quærit; hic fur est et latro, et dæmoni similis, qui tuam furari gloriam voluit.—S. Aug. in Soliloq., c. xlii.

But I am not content with that, and make foolish attempts to take from Thee the share that is Thine alone and that belongs to Thee by right. What a gross injustice that is! Nay, what makes my conduct still worse, not only do I arrogate to myself the praise of the good work, but I also endeavor to make other men, who see what I am doing or hear of it, give the praise, not to Thee, the author and chief cause of the work, but to myself, as if the whole action came from me alone; my will and desire is, not that they give honor and glory to Thee as they ought, but that they admire, esteem, and praise me.

Which cannot be excused; shown by an example.

Ah, how it shames me to read in the Second Book of Kings of the fidelity of Joab to his master David. He had attacked the chief city of the Ammonites and was on the point of carrying it by assault, when he thought to himself, no, this honor does not belong to me; it is my king who must have the glory of having taken the city. “And Joab sent messengers to David, saying: I have fought against Rabbath, and the City of Waters is about to be taken. Now therefore gather thou the rest of the people together, and besiege the city, and take it.”¹ Why did he send that message to the king? “Lest when the city shall be wasted by me, the victory be ascribed to my name.”² Ah, such is the fidelity that I and all men should observe in our actions towards the Sovereign God! And we have far more cause to observe it than Joab had towards his king, for he had almost taken the place without any help from David. But can we, my dear brethren, do even the least good work without the presence and assistance of our Lord and our God? No, truly, that would be utterly impossible! Joab had the city in his power, and could have entered it without any help from David; can we perform the smallest meritorious action without the grace of God? No, again; that cannot be, for St. Paul says: “It is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will.”³ And yet Joab thought it would be wrong of him to allow the glory of victory to be given to himself, simply because David was his king and his master. But when we are puffed up with vainglory, we really wish that God, our Lord and Master, should not have anything, although we do not say so,

¹ Misitque Joab nuntios ad David dicens: dimicavi adversum Rabbath, et capienda est urbs aquarum. Nunc igitur congrega reliquam partem populi, et obside civitatem et cape eam.—II. Kings xii. 27.

² Ne cum a me vastata fuerit urbs, nomini meo ascribatur victoria.—Ibid. 28.

³ Deus est enim qui operatur in vobis et velle et perficere, pro bona voluntate. Phil. ii. 13.

while we arrogate to ourselves all the honor and glory of the good action. Is that fair or honest? And on the other hand, what can we expect but that the merit of our good works shall be taken from us, and instead of being rewarded we shall be punished for our injustice?

Still more: in doing a good work, my only aim and object must be to please God and to gain His favor and friendship; but how do I act when I seek the praise of men? I try to please them and win their applause, although I know that thereby I am displeasing God. What would you think, my dear brethren, of the wife who spends the whole morning before the looking-glass, dressing herself up and curling her hair, while her husband is working hard to supply her with the means of dressing in such extravagant style, and who does that with the sole object of pleasing other men and winning their affections? Would you not say, and that, too, without running the risk of pronouncing a rash judgment, that she has very little esteem for her conjugal fidelity? Truly, she is an unfaithful, undutiful wife who permits her heart and her desires to wander away from him to whom she has pledged her troth in the holy sacrament of matrimony. Such, too, is the judgment you must form of those who in their good works, which are the ornaments of the soul, seek the praise of men. They are, as it were, adulterous, unfaithful souls, ready to sell themselves to serve others; for they are more anxious to secure the approbation of men than that of their heavenly Bridegroom, to whom they were espoused in baptism, and to whom they swore perpetual love and fidelity. What says the Lord God of them? Hear the words of the Psalmist: "For God hath scattered the bones of them that please men; they have been confounded, because God hath despised them."¹

And that all the more because the soul thereby becomes unfaithful to God.

Another reason why even the holiest works and occupations are deprived of all their merit before God when they are performed through vainglory is that the supernatural intention is wanting, since it is nullified by seeking the praise of men. It is the intention, as we have seen already, that gives worth and merit to our actions; if it is wanting, all the rest is of no value, as Christ says in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "The light of thy body is thy eye. If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome. But if thy eye be evil, thy whole body shall be

Vainglory also takes away the merit of good works, which must come from the intention.

¹ Quoniam Deus dissipavit ossa eorum qui hominibus placent; confusi sunt, quoniam Deus sprevit eos.—Ps. llii. 6.

darksome.”¹ By the eye here, according to the general interpretation, is understood the intention, by which we consider beforehand, and as it were foresee, what we wish to do; by the body is understood the work, which follows the intention as the body follows the direction of the eye. Our Lord wishes to show that all actions take their light, their appearance, from the intention with which we perform them. If the latter is good, then the work, provided it is not forbidden, must also be good; if it is bad, then the work, too, must be bad; if the end to which the intention directs the act be perfect, then the work is one of perfection. This is what St. Paul means when he writes to the Romans: “For if the first fruit be holy, so is the lump also; and if the root be holy, so are the branches.”² According to the root, so is the tree and its fruit; if the root is rotten and corrupt, the tree can bear only worm-eaten, bad fruit; the fresher and healthier the root, the better the fruit. So also the goodness and holiness of actions consist in the intention as in their root; the better and holier that intention is, the more perfect and pleasing to God will the work be.

Without
which the
whole work
is spoiled.

The same holy apostle, speaking of charity and sanctifying grace, without which all good works are dead and of no help for salvation, says: “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal; and if I should have prophecy, and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge; and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”³ That is, if I am not in the state of grace while doing all these good works, they will not help me to heaven; they are and will remain dead works as long as they are not vivified by grace. The same words of the Apostle may be used almost without change when speaking of the good intention in our actions. If I fasted all the days of

¹ *Lucerna corporis tui est oculus tuus. Si oculus tuus fuerit simplex, totum corpus tuum lucidum erit. Si autem oculus tuus fuerit nequam, totum corpus tuum tenebrosum erit.*—Matt. vi. 22, 23.

² *Quod si delibatio sancta sit, et massa; et si radix sancta, et rami.*—Rom. xi. 16.

³ *Si linguis hominum loquar et angelorum, charitatem autem non habeam, factus sum velut æssonans aut cymbalum tinniens. Et si habuero prophetiam, et novero mysteria omnia, et omnem scientiam; et si habuero omnem fidem, ita ut montes transferam, charitatem autem non habuero, nihil sum. Et si distribuero in cibos pauperum omnes facultates meas, et si tradidero corpus meum ita ut ardeam, charitatem autem non habuero, nihil mihi prodest.*—I. Cor. xiii. 1, 2, 3.

my life on bread and water; if I actually took the bread out of my own mouth to give to the poor out of Christian charity; if I helped all the sick in the hospitals and visited prisoners with the greatest kindness and attention; if I spent day and night in constant prayer and mortifications; if I wearied myself going about the world converting heathens, heretics, and sinners; nay, if I performed all imaginable good works, but have not the good intention by which they should be directed to a supernatural end, it profiteth me nothing: they are of no use to my eternal salvation. And if I have, moreover, a bad intention, so that those works, otherwise good and holy in themselves, are directed to a bad end, they are turned into sinful and wicked actions. O vainglory, it is thou that art the cause of that sad perversion! It is thou that makest us plague ourselves with apparently holy works to gain heaven, while they are not in reality worth a farthing to us, since we do good before the eyes of men, to get the name of being pious, while we really work evil in the sight of God, who will have to punish us, since we displease Him for the sake of winning the applause of men.

Finally, if vainglory left our works as good and holy as they are in themselves, yet they would not have any merit or reward in heaven. Why? Because he who acts with such unworthy motives renounces the eternal reward, and seeks something else as the fruit of his labor, namely, the esteem, praise, and applause of men, which often exist merely in his own imagination; therefore, since he has no right to expect to be paid twice for the same work, he cannot hope for any other recompense from God, for whose honor and glory the work was not performed. This is according to the express words of Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Matthew, "Take heed that you do not your justice before men, to be seen by them; otherwise you shall not have a reward of your Father who is in heaven."¹ And when He speaks of the hypocrites in the synagogues of the Jews, who caused the trumpet to be sounded before them in the public streets, and then gave rich alms to the poor, that they might be honored by men, He adds this terrible sentence: "Amen I say to you, they have received their reward,"² that is, the admiration and esteem of the people which they sought for by their alms-giving. Again, speaking of the hypocrites, "that love to stand and pray in the

Thirdly, because good works thus lose all title to reward.

¹ Attendite, ne justitiam vestram faciatis coram hominibus, ut videamini ab eis: alioquin mercedem non habebitis apud Patrem vestrum qui in cœlis est.—Matt. vi. 1.

² Amen dico vobis, receperunt mercedem suam.—Ibid. 2.

synagogues and corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men,"¹ He pronounces the same sentence: "Amen I say to you, they have received their reward."

But are paid
for very
poorly in
this life.

Poor mortal, whoever you may be, who seek for the praise of men in your actions, all your works of piety, your public prayers, holy Communions, alms-giving, visiting the sick, attending processions, hearing sermons, the good advice you give others, and by which perhaps you have brought many to heaven—all that has already received its reward. Your wish was to make a great name for yourself before the world, to be looked on as pious and holy, to be praised, esteemed, thought much of; very well, says God, who knows the depths of your heart, very well, then, be it done as you wish. Flatter yourself with the idea that you have secured what you so long for; imagine that the world wonders at your extraordinary works, and holds a high opinion of you. Take your reward and go; I can do nothing more for you; you have already received what you sought for. If you ask Me to reward you in eternity for those works, I will answer you in the words that Abraham spoke to the rich man who was tortured in hell, and asked him for a drop of water to cool his tongue: "Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy life-time."² Heavenly glory is the reward I give for those good works that have not been paid for in time, and which still can claim a price; but you have already received payment, and now you must be satisfied. St. John Chrysostom represents Our Lord as speaking to a proud man in the following terms: I have placed you in the world as on a public stage, in order that you might do good and let your works be seen. My angels, all the elect, and even I Myself wished to be the spectators to admire, praise, and applaud your good works for all eternity. But you have not troubled yourself about us; you did not desire the honor you might have had from us; you made choice of one, two, three, ten, or twenty mortals whom you wished to please, and it was their praise that you made the object of your desires. Away with you, you are paid! My wish was to bring forward your good works before heaven and earth, before the angels, the elect and the reprobate, to your undying honor and glory; but this honor did not suit your taste; you preferred to let your works appear in a favorable light to a few

¹ Qui amant in synagogis et in angulis platearum stantes orare, ut videantur ab hominibus.—Matt. vi. 5.

² Filli, recordare quia recipisti bona in vita tua.—Luke xvi. 25.

ignorant, curious men influenced by passion, who lived with you on earth. Away with you, then! you are paid. I had already prepared an eternal crown, an everlasting joy, endless glory with Myself in heaven, for you; but you despised it; a breath of vain honor before the blind world appeared preferable in your eyes. Be it, then, as you wish; you have already received the payment you chose yourself.

Ah, Christians, what a miserable, wretched, unhappy payment that is! Must he not be foolish, nay, stone-blind, who seeks for the empty sound of human praise and acts through vainglory, while by the very same works he loses an eternal treasure in heaven? Poor, blind, and miserable man, you are indeed a very bad merchant and man of business. You are like the wild Indians who in days gone by used to give away their gold and silver ornaments for a few needles, or beads, or tobacco-pipes. But you are even more foolish, for you exchange the good works by which you might purchase heaven for the vain, imaginary, useless praise of men. Like the dog in the fable, you snap at the shadow, and thereby lose the solid piece of meat that you really had possession of; like the spider, you make a web out of your own entrails to catch a miserable fly.

A truly deplorable fact.

The holy Abbot Pachomius, as Surius writes in his *Life*, once visited some of the religious who were subject to him, and was seated amongst them, carrying on a pious conversation. While they were thus engaged, a Brother brought in two mats which he had just woven out of rushes, and laid them down before the door of his cell, that Pachomius might see them and praise him for his diligence in finishing two mats, while the Brothers were generally obliged to make only one in the day. The holy Abbot saw at once that the Brother was acting out of vainglory, so he sighed deeply and said to the Brethren who were sitting round him: "Look at that Brother, who has labored and toiled from early in the morning till late at night, and after all he has consecrated his work to the devil, preferring the esteem of men to the glory of God."¹ He then called the Brother, reproved him, and laid on him the following penance: at the hour when the others were going to prayer he had to hang the two mats round his neck, and to say in a loud voice, "dear Fathers and Brethren, I beseech you to pray to God for me, a poor sinner, that He may have mer-

Shown by an example.

¹ Videte, quæso, fratrem hunc, qui a prima luce in seram noctem cum laborarit et sudarit, universum laborem suum diabolo consecraverit, hominum existimationem præferens Dei gloriæ.

cy on me, for I have preferred these two mats to the kingdom of heaven." During meal-times, too, he had to wear the mats, standing in the middle of the refectory. Nor was Pachomius satisfied with this, but caused him to be shut up in a cell, where no one was allowed to visit him, and he had no food but dry bread and water for five weeks, and during that time he had to make two mats daily where no one could see him and praise him.

Repentance
and resolu-
tion.

O my God! when I think of this, how must I not bewail my folly and blindness! If vainglory were punished nowadays in that manner, ah, what a fearful penance I should have to perform! How much labor and trouble have I not given up to the devil! Accursed vainglory and esteem of men! how many happy eternities that I might have gained in heaven thou hast robbed me of! But I will not be so foolish any longer; I will place out my labor at better interest, and not fling it away for such a miserable thing. I will serve Thee constantly, O my Lord, by diligently and truly fulfilling all the duties of my state, by doing what Thou wilt without fear, or shame, or human respect, whether my duties are to be done in secret, or in public before the eyes of men. Nor do I ask any other reward but Thee and Thy friendship, and the recompense which Thou wilt give me in eternity. But the honor, the glory, the praise that result from what I do, not to me, O Lord! not to me, but to Thee do they belong; it is for Thee and Thy holy name alone. Grant that they who see my good actions may admire, honor, and praise Thee alone, since Thou art able to do good with such a worthless instrument; but for myself I will claim nothing but what belongs to me, that is, my nothingness and my extreme need of Thy help and grace. If a desire for vain praise should try to creep into my actions, either at the beginning or during the progress of them, or when they are already completed, I now protest before Thee, my all-seeing God, and before Thy elect, and this protestation I intend to renew every morning for the remainder of my life, that such vainglory is and shall be against my will, and I desire that all such thoughts of seeking praise, no matter how they may be suggested to me, should be nothing else but so many acts of the most profound humiliation of my utter nothingness before Thy divine majesty, which is worthy

* Patres et fratres mei carissimi! orate, quæso, Deum pro me misero peccatore, ut mei misereatur, quod pluris duas hasce storeas quam regnum cœlorum fecerim.

of all fear and love, and before Thy holy name, that is worthy of all blessing and praise. To that holy name alone be honor and glory for all eternity. Amen.

FOURTEENTH SERMON.

**ON THE SIGNS OF VAINGLORY, AND THE MEANS OF GUARDING
AGAINST IT.**

Subject.

1st. Signs by which to detect when we are acting through vainglory. 2d. Means to be used against this vice.—*Preached on the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Bene omnia fecit.—Mark vii. 37.

“He hath done all things well.”

Introduction.

Oh, what a grand thing it is to be able to say of any one that he has done all things well! Not, indeed, that such praise should be given to any one during this life, for a vain, deceitful, useless thing is the praise that comes from men who are ignorant of what they say and are blinded by passion, so that they cannot form a correct judgment; but the beauty of that praise consists in its being given by God after this life. Who of us, my dear brethren, will dare to assert that those words, “He hath done all things well,” can be said of himself with truth? To do everything well is to do all that God wills us to do, to do it when God wills, as God wills, and because God wills. Ah, how often we are wanting in the first point! how often in the second, in the third, the fourth, and especially in the last, which concerns the good intention and seeking the will of God alone! How many apparently good and holy works have lost their merit through vainglory and the desire of pleasing men and winning their applause, as we have seen in the last sermon! What are we to do now that this may not be the case with us? This I shall tell you now.

Plan of Discourse.

The signs whereby we may detect whether we are given to vainglory and are apt to be influenced by human respect in our actions; this I shall explain in the first part. The means to be used against this vice, so that we may perform all our works with a pure intention for God alone, I shall show in the second part.

Christ Jesus! we beg of Thee humbly, through the merits of Thy Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels, give us in all our actions a pure intention directed to Thee and the fulfilment of Thy holy will, so that we may hear one day from Thy lips the words: "He hath done all things well."

Vainglory
is a com-
mon vice.

Amongst all the vices there is none so common, so subtle, so hidden and secret as vainglory. None more common, I say; for where is the man alive who can say that he was never assailed by it, and that he never yielded to it in the least? Where is the man who does not sometimes wish and seek to be honored and praised by others? Where is the man who has not at least a secret pleasure in such praise? who does not rejoice in his heart when he sees that his actions are admired and applauded by others? "Whoever he is," says St. Augustine, who can say that of himself with truth, "he is indeed a great man."¹ Augustine himself, holy and humble as he was, did not dare to pronounce himself free from this vice; for he candidly acknowledges his shortcomings in this respect. In spite, he says, of the fact that I often take up arms against this foe, yet I get many a wound from him; no matter how brave and constant my efforts to avoid this vice, and to do all my actions every day with a good intention directed alone to God and the fulfilment of His holy will, yet I must acknowledge that I am often wanting; for I cannot help feeling a secret joy and satisfaction at praise, and grief at contempt. St. Cyprian, considering the second temptation of Our Lord in the desert, when Satan brought Him to the pinnacle of the temple, and said, "if Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down,"² cries out full of indignation: "O execrable malice of the demon! The evil spirit thought that vainglory might conquer Him, whom gluttony failed to conquer."³ He wished to persuade Our Lord to fly through the air, that the people might see and admire Him. In

¹ Quisquis ille est, profecto magnus est.

² Si Filius Dei es, mitte te deorsum.—Matt. iv. 6.

³ O execrabilis diaboli malitia! putabat malignus, quem gula non vicerat, vana gloria superari.

this the tempter hoped to succeed with Our Lord as he had with many others; for he knew well by experience that those who cannot be caught in any other way often allow themselves to be deceived by vainglory. "For it is not an easy thing," says the same Saint, "not to be tickled by the praise and applause of men."¹ And as there are few who can bear to be despised, vilified, and injured in their good name, there are still fewer who do not eagerly listen to what is said in their own praise. In a word, all men condemn vainglory as an abominable vice; all are ashamed to be looked on as vain; nevertheless there is hardly one in the world who does not suffer more or less from this malady.

It is a most subtle vice, for it can creep in unawares anywhere; therefore it is called by St. Basil "a smooth-tongued robber of good works, a hidden mist that hides virtue, a gnawing moth of holiness." "Vainglory," says St. Bernard, "is the first to deceive us in sin, the last that we have to conquer in fight."² St. John Climacus says that it interferes in all our actions and undertakings; for example, if I fast as I ought, and observe the rules of temperance, I am assailed by idle self-complacency, inasmuch as I imagine that I will be looked on as holy. If I eat and drink and enjoy myself, so as not to be considered scrupulous, I seek to gain a good name among the children of the world, as one who knows how to live and to get on with people. If I am well dressed, vainglory suggests that I am looked on as rich and noble; if I am dressed poorly or modestly, according to the rules of the Gospel, I am assailed by the thought that I shall be considered as one who despises the world. If I speak eloquently and in fitting terms of a subject, I am in immediate danger of being overcome by vanity, because I shall pass among those who are listening to me as learned and talented; if I keep silent and say nothing of things that I am not ignorant of, my silence will be esteemed prudence. No matter what I do, I am never safe from the attacks of this crafty and cunning foe. Nay, even the contempt of honors, the avoiding of idle praise and reputation, the humiliation and abasement of myself, cannot protect me from the risk I run by acquiring a name for humility, which is the most beautiful of the Christian virtues and the one most necessary for a holy life. It is certain, says Cardinal Pallavicini of

It is a most
subtle vice.

¹ Neque enim facile est, laudibus et applausu hominum non delectari.

² Ipsa est in peccato prima, in conflictu postrema.

our Society, that often a rich and noble gentleman, with all his wealth and magnificence, is not so self-complacent as a poor hermit in his rags, because the latter imagines that he is trampling the pride of the world under foot; that a noble lady has sometimes less pride in her splendid apparel than the poor peasant girl in the coarse, blue apron and new woolen gown with which she comes to church on Sundays and holy-days to let herself be admired. Not without reason does Our Lord warn us in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth, where the rust and moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither the rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."¹ Nevertheless vainglory manages to get at the treasures that we had laid up in heaven by our good works, when on account of those works we give way to pride and look down on others.

A most hidden vice.

Finally, vainglory is a secret and most hidden vice; it attacks us before we are aware of it; we seek the praise of men, and hardly know that we are doing so. Such is the complaint that the great St. Gregory makes with bitter tears; when, he says, I examine a little more carefully the root of my intention in my actions, I must indeed acknowledge that I have always endeavored to please God alone and to do His holy will; but along with this intention of serving God alone some other intention of winning the praise of men creeps in stealthily, and since I was not quick enough in detecting it, I find that I act in a different manner from that in which I began. O my God, if that great, holy, and faithful servant of Thine was obliged to acknowledge that, in spite of his firm determination, vainglory still crept in and deceived him, how can I and many others like me avoid that vice, since we pay so little attention to our actions, and especially to our motives? "Take heed," says Our Lord; be on your guard, "that you do not your justice before men, to be seen by them."² Take heed, be on your guard. But how? If the vice is of such a nature that it can creep unawares into our works, how are we to know that we are given to it, and that we seek the praise of men in our ordinary actions? That is what we have now to learn.

Nolite thesaurizare vobis thesauros in terra, ubi ærugo et tinea demolitur, et ubi fures effodiunt et furantur. Thesaurizate autem vobis thesauros in cœlo, ubi neque ærugo, neque tinea demolitur, et ubi fures non effodiunt nec furantur.—Matt. vi. 19, 20.

² Attendite ne iustitiam vestram faciatis coram hominibus, ut videamini ab eis.—Ibid. 1.

The first and most certain sign of this malady is boasting, when one loves to speak of the good actions he has performed. We have an example of it in the gospel of last Sunday, in the Pharisee who stood before the altar and there boasted of his fasting and almsgiving. The Pharisee, as St. Ambrose remarks, did not lie; nay, he told the truth about himself; "for he really fasted twice a week and gave tithes of all he possessed; "but every one that exalteth himself offends, although he speaks the truth; for, though the Pharisee was in a better state than the publican when he entered the temple, he went out condemned." There are people who, when they get scent of the least thing that is to their praise, cannot keep it silent, but must out with it to every one they meet; I was there at the time, they say; I did this or that; I managed the matter in this way; so-and-so has to thank me for his success; if those people had not taken my advice, they would not have done so well. If I had been there, I should have managed matters differently; if that person had done what I suggested, he would be better off now, and so on. This is an evident sign that one does not seek the glory of God, but his own glory from men. The same boasting can be done in silence; if, namely, he who says nothing of what he does nevertheless is pleased that men should know of it and admire him for it; they are like children who, when they have a new coat or new shoes, cannot bear to be kept in the house; no, they are all anxiety to rush out into the street and let people see the fine things they have on. Such was the case with the monk of whom I have lately told you, who, without saying a word, laid down at the feet of the abbot the two mats he had made, expecting to be praised for his diligence. But we have heard how little he profited by his boasting. A prudent traveller acts quite differently; he conceals his money as well as he can; he sews it into his clothing, or hides it in his boots, although he thus makes walking more difficult for himself, so that no one may know anything of his wealth and steal it from him. In the same way he who is really humble of heart, and who seeks God alone, conceals as far as he can from the eyes of men his good and praiseworthy actions, lest he should lose his reward in heaven for them. If he is sometimes compelled in the course of conversation to speak of his good deeds, he attributes them not to himself, but to God; for

The first sign of vain-glory is to put forward our acts and speak of them.

¹ Non mentiebatur, imo etiam vera dicebat.

² Sed omnis qui se exaltat offendit; denique probabilior Phariseus ingressus est templum, quam publicanus, et condemnatus exiit.

instance, he does not say: With the help of God I have converted that sinner, but, God has given that sinner the grace of conversion. "They are the children which God hath given to me,"¹ was the answer that Jacob gave when asked if the children belonged to him.

The second is to inquire into the opinions of others about them.

The second sign of vainglory and a perverse intention in our actions is to spy out the judgments and opinions of men, and see how we have pleased them; to run down what we do, as is often the case, and then have a secret pleasure in hearing others approve of it, but to be dissatisfied when they condemn it; to excuse in all sorts of ways what they find fault with, throwing the blame on something else off ourselves, or else obstinately defending our mode of action; fearing the hostile opinion of men, or doing out of respect for it some good work with the intention of pleasing them. All this comes from secret pride, vanity, and thirst of praise. He who seeks nothing but God and His glory cares little for the opinion of men; let them think and say what they will, he says, I will do what God wills me to do; whether men approve of it or not matters nothing to me; I did not begin the act on their account, nor will I omit it for them. I require no other witness or approver of my works than the all-seeing God, to whom my heart and conscience are known; if I please Him, I am satisfied, and have attained the end I work for. Such was the answer with which St. Bernard rebuked the devil; the evil spirit once praised the saint most extravagantly, and expressed the greatest admiration for the prudence with which he did all things, and for the success that attended all his efforts, etc. At first Bernard acted as if he did not hear, and continued his usual pious exercise. Then the demon changed the attack and assailed him with the worst kind of abuse; you poor fool, said he, do you think I meant all that in earnest? I was only speaking ironically; I meant that you do your actions in such a foolish manner that with all your trouble you do nothing but build houses for flies and gnats. Hear me, spirit of evil, answered Bernard; I did not begin for the sake of being praised by you, nor will I leave off for that reason.

The third, to be envious when others are praised for

The third sign of vainglory is to feel a secret envy when others are placed on an equality with us in the same works, arts, or sciences, or when they show more cleverness than we; to be dissatisfied if we cannot do as well as others; to wish and desire

¹ Parvuli sunt, quos donavit mihi Deus.—Gen. xxxiii. 5.

that we should excel all in a certain thing. This envy causes us ^{the same acts.} to feel disappointed when others are praised, to speak very sparingly in praise of them, or, when possible, to belittle them and talk contemptuously of them. This is again an evident sign that we do not seek God alone in our actions, but rather fear that by the praise others get we may lose something of the good opinion of men. See, says St. Gregory, if, when another preaches an excellent sermon and attracts large audiences, you are just as well pleased as if you did it yourself. “For, if you do not rejoice, but feel a certain displeasure, sadness, and envy at it, it is clear that you do not seek merely the glory of God.”¹ To confirm this, he brings forward the words of the apostle St. James, “But if you have bitter zeal, and there be contentions in your hearts, glory not, and be not liars against the truth; for this is not wisdom, descending from above, but earthly, sensual, devilish.”² If those are your sentiments, you have no true zeal for the glory of God, but for your own; because you desire to be praised as well as they who have excited your envy. He who truly seeks the honor and glory of God troubles himself little as to whether others are as good as he in certain things or not, or even excel him; he is rather rejoiced to hear that the honor of God is promoted by them as well or better than he could promote it. The prophet Moses has given us a beautiful example of this; a young man came to him and said: “Eldad and Medad prophesy in the camp;” whereupon Josue, anxious for the honor of Moses, said to him: “My Lord Moses, forbid them;” they are usurping your office. “But he said: Why hast thou emulation for me? Oh, that all the people might prophesy, and that the Lord would give them His spirit!”³ Such, too, were the dispositions of Father John Avila, when he heard of the nature and object of the Society founded by St. Ignatius Loyola. In the joy of his heart he exclaimed, that is the very thing I have been longing for for years; but I was never able to bring it to pass. He compared himself on that account to a boy attempting to roll a great stone to the top of the mountain, but he is not strong enough to succeed;

¹ Si enim non gaudeas, sed nescio quam displicentiam, tristitiam, et invidiam inde contractam præferas, evidens argumentum est, te pure Dei gloriam non quærere.—S. Greg., l. 22., moral. c. 24.

² Quod si zelum amarum habetis, et contentiones sint in cordibus vestris, nolite gloriari, et mendaces esse adversus veritatem; non est enim ista sapientia desursum descendens, sed terrena, animalis, diabolica.—James iii. 14, 15.

³ Eldad et Medad prophetant in castris. Domine mi Moyses, prohibe eos. At ille, quid, inquit, æmularis pro me? Quis tribuat ut omnis populus prophetet, et det eis Dominus spiritum suum?—Num. xi. 27, 28, 29.

soon after a giant comes, who takes the stone in his hand and without any trouble carries it to the top. Mark how the pious Avila speaks of himself as a boy, but of St. Ignatius as a strong giant; and how he rejoices at the great good that God worked for the Church by means of Ignatius. From this we may gather that he was really a true servant of God, and sought not his own glory but the glory of God alone by the good intention. So, too, should every one of us who has a pure intention think and say in the sincerity of our hearts when we hear others praised for their diligence, ability, knowledge, or extraordinary gifts: Would to God that all men were like him! I will do my best to fulfil my duty; if another can do more, God be praised for it! I give him the preference cheerfully, and rejoice that God is honored by him; pleased am I to learn that one to whom God has given five talents has earned other five; I shall direct my labor to adding one other to the talent that my Lord has bestowed on me, so that, when He asks for it as my Judge, I shall be able to give it to Him and to claim my reward as a faithful servant.

The fourth,
to be down-
hearted
when we do
not succeed.

The fourth sign of vainglory is to be down-hearted and troubled when our work is a failure in the eyes of the world, and has not the success we hoped for. He who serves God with a pure intention does not trouble himself about that; for he thinks to himself, I have done my part; if I fail to attain the end I work for, it is not my fault; God has not commanded me to succeed; He has merely told me what to do. St. Ignatius used to say that in our actions we should keep in the dispositions which the holy angels have with regard to those who are entrusted to their charge. They exhort and advise them faithfully; they guard, watch over, and encourage them to good, and do their utmost to bring them to heaven; but if their charges unfortunately make a bad use of their free will, all the good advice and exhortations are neglected, and the unhappy ones hurry on to eternal ruin. But the angels feel no chagrin on that account, nor are they a whit less happy; they say, as the angel in the prophecy of Jeremias: "We would have cured Babylon, but she is not healed: let us forsake her, and let us go every man to his own land;" for, in spite of that, "The Lord hath brought forth our justices."¹ In the same way, when I and others have taken all sorts of trouble to help a sinner out of the unhappy state in which he is, but have effected nothing, because he persists in his evil ways,

¹ Curavimus Babylonem, et non est sanata; derelinquamus eam, et eam unusquisque in terram suam; protulit Dominus justitias nostras.—Jerem. li. 9, 10.

and refuses to be healed, we must not grow down-spirited on that account, nor lose heart; for we have done what we could, and our reward will not be a whit less in heaven, provided we have had the good intention. When the disciples of Christ, as St. Luke writes, came back to Him after having driven out devils and worked many miracles, and were joyfully relating what they had done, He said to them: "But yet rejoice not in this, that spirits are subject unto you; but rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven."¹ We should rejoice, then, not like the disciples in the passage quoted, at the success of our work, but in the fact that we have so done it that on account of it our names are written in heaven. The great apostle St. James, when he was in Spain, did not convert more than eight or nine persons to the true faith, in spite of all his labors, while the other apostles converted whole kingdoms; must we think therefore that his reward was less? No, says St. Jerome; "the Lord received with equal joy him who made ten talents of five, and him who made four of two; for He does not consider the greatness of the gain, but the intention of the will."² He does not so much look at the result of the work as at the work itself and the intention with which it is performed.

The fifth sign of vainglory is, when we perform our ordinary actions with more fervor, zeal, and devotion when others are present than when we are alone. In this we act like beggars; when they see any one coming, they weep and cry out at the top of their voices; when they are alone they are quite still. So, too, there are some servants who are very diligent when any one is looking at them; but if they are left alone in the house, they idle their time away. He who tries to please God with a pure intention finds reason enough for employing all his fervor and zeal in the fact that the all-seeing eye of God is looking at every motion of his heart. There are still other signs that I must pass over, lest I should put myself to still greater shame; for I must confess to my confusion, O my Lord and my God, that I have often been surprised and betrayed by that thief, vainglory. I have often imagined that I had collected wonderful treasures for heaven by my good works; now I see that I have put most of them in a torn sack, and that they have fallen through and been

The fifth, to be more zealous in the presence of others.

¹ Veruntamen in hoc nolite gaudere, quia spiritus vobis subjiiciuntur; gaudete autem quod nomina vestra scripta sunt in coelis.—Luke x. 20.

² Illum qui de quinque talentis decem fecerat, et qui de duobus quatuor, Dominus similiter recepit gaudium; neque enim considerat lucri magnitudinem, sed studii voluntatem.

blown away by the wind of human praise. What am I to do now? What defence shall I adopt against this hidden enemy, that he may no longer harm me? This I shall explain, my dear brethren, as far as time permits, for your instruction and my own, in the

Second Part.

The first means to be used against vainglory is to reflect that we are and can do nothing of ourselves.

Twofold is the origin of vainglory; the first concerns our understanding and imagination, inasmuch as we are apt to think highly of what we find out, do, and effect, and to look on it as worthy of praise. The second concerns our will, with which we arrogate to ourselves the imaginary praise due to our works, and hunt for it eagerly. We must change and amend these two faculties of our soul. As far, then, as the understanding and imagination are concerned, the first means of avoiding vainglory is often and deeply to ponder on what we are, where we come from, what we have of ourselves and can do of ourselves. Of myself I am nothing; of myself I have nothing; of myself I know nothing; by myself I can do nothing. All that I am, and have, and know, and can do, comes from God alone. All the evil I have done, still do, and shall do in the future, certainly deserves neither honor nor praise, but rather shame and confusion before God and man. If I consider the good I have done in the past, I have more reason for saying than holy Job had: "I feared all my works, knowing that Thou didst not spare the offender."¹ For I find that the most of them were tainted with carelessness, pride, vainglory, dislike, wilful distractions, and other faults and imperfections which accompanied them; so that I have reason enough to humble myself on account of them and to be ashamed before God and the world. I must acknowledge with St. Gregory, that, "if all human justice (what we have and do of ourselves) were strictly examined, it would be found to be injustice; for if we were to be judged without mercy, the work for which we expect a reward would be seen to deserve punishment."² Alas, I sigh again with Job: "But if so also I am wicked, why have I labored in vain?"³ If I deserve to be punished even for my good acts, what have I to be proud of, or why should I think much of myself? And what I have done, am

¹ Verebar omnia opera mea, sciens quod non parceres delinquenti.—Job ix. 28.

² Omnis humana justitia si districte judicetur, injustitia esse convincitur; si enim remota pietate discutimur, opus nostrum poena dignum est, quod remunerari præmiis præstolamur.—S. Greg., l. 17, Moral., c. 10 and *alibi*.

³ Si autem et sic impius sum, quare frustra laboravi?—Job ix. 29.

doing, or shall do without any faults creeping in is an alms that God generously bestows on me quite gratuitously, and I am bound to implore that alms of Him like a poor beggar in fervent daily prayer, and further, as His debtor, I must return Him heartfelt thanks for His goodness; for it is He alone who can help me to do good. “For without Me you can do nothing,” says Our Lord in the Gospel of St. John.¹

From all this I must conclude that, if I have anything great or praiseworthy in the shape of natural or supernatural gifts, or if I do any great or praiseworthy action before men or privately, not the smallest particle of honor or glory is due to me on that account, but all belongs to God alone, from whom I have received the gifts and by whose help I have performed the actions. Would it not be foolish for a beggar who is admitted into a strange house through pity, fed at a strange table, clothed with the garments of some one else, although the house, the food, and the clothing may be very fine and magnificent—would it not be foolish for the beggar to boast of all those things, and to think a great deal of himself on account of them? Must he not still confess himself to be a poor, needy man, who is dependent on the charity of his benefactor for food, clothing, and shelter, and who, if left to himself, would have to go about the streets naked and hungry? Would it not be foolish for one who is building a house with other people’s money to boast about the fine building? Poor fool, you might say to him, what are you thinking of? You have not given a single stone to that house. It requires no great art to pay with other people’s money, or to build at another man’s expense. Would it not be foolish for one who seems to be rich, but who is really head and ears in debt, in debt for his clothes, for the bread he eats, in debt to his butcher, his shoemaker, and his workmen—debts that he is bound to pay but has not the means of paying—would it not be foolish for him to boast of his riches, which in reality are nothing but debts? So must I and all men, whoever they are, think; if I have any praiseworthy quality, it is an alms that God has gratuitously bestowed on me through sheer mercy; if I do anything praiseworthy, it is a building for which God pays; all my natural and supernatural gifts of soul and body, all my good actions, all temporal and eternal goods that I possess, are debts that I have incurred with God, that I must pay, that I shall never be able to repay in full

Therefore it is foolish to arrogate praise to ourselves; shown by similes.

¹ Quia sine me nihil potestis facere.—John xv. 5.

and for which I can only return Him humble thanks; therefore I would indeed act like a fool if I were to have the least good opinion of myself on account of such things. I must rather acknowledge that not the least praise or honor is due to me.

The second means is always to give the praise to God.

If we stop up this first spring, the other will soon empty itself; that is, after this heartfelt confession on the part of the understanding, the will must necessarily surrender and acknowledge that, unless it wishes to act wickedly, it must never arrogate to itself any praise, but give all the praise and honor to God under all circumstances; and this is the second means of conquering vainglory. First, we must always at the beginning, middle, and end of all our actions hold fast to this intention with the prophet David: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy name give glory."¹ Secondly, when we have performed a praiseworthy action, we must return humble thanks to God, to show that we did it not of ourselves, but by His help. Thirdly, when we are praised by men for our actions, when they talk well of us and honor us, we must imagine that what they say is not for us, but that they are speaking of God; that their words of praise are not directed to us but to God, whom we represent for the time being; and we must say to ourselves: if you mean that for me, you are doing an injustice and are very much mistaken, for it is not I who did the action, but the almighty God who did it by me. Just as, when one says: what a beautiful pen has written that! what a skilful brush has painted that picture! what a practised hammer has made that work of art! the lifeless tools are never alluded to, although it seems that the whole talk is of them; but in reality the praise is intended for the writer, the painter, the artist who made use of those tools. Hence the will, if it does not wish to act wrongfully and to fall into a mistake, must give all the honor and glory to God whenever it is praised or is otherwise attacked by vainglory.

Otherwise we err grievously; shown by a simile.

You know well, my dear brethren, what occurs at a game of ball. One player throws the ball to another. What does the latter do? If he understands the game, he must catch the ball and throw it back to the first player or to another. If he misses the catch, or the ball sticks in his clothes, the bystanders cry out at once: lost game! So it is with regard to vainglory; it is no fault to be honored and praised by men, or to be attacked by temptations to vanity, if you at once return the praise or

¹ Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam.—Ps. cxlil. 1.

self-complacency to God, from whom all that is worthy of praise must come. If, on the contrary, you allow the praise to stick, oh! then the angels in heaven and the demons in hell cry out, the former with displeasure, the latter with hellish joy: lost game! lost game! Poor man, you have lost all the merit of your good works.

King David was once an unfortunate player of this description. Joab, his general, came once to him, and making a profound obeisance before him, as we read in the Second Book of Kings, said: my lord, I have counted all the people under your sway; "in Israel there are eight hundred thousand fighting men, and in Juda five hundred thousand fighting men,"¹ so that you can lead into the field thirteen hundred thousand soldiers. David was filled with self-conceit at this news, and thought to himself: what a great king I must be! what a mighty monarch, since I have such a powerful army at my command! Alas, David, you have lost the game! Such are the words in which St. Gregory apostrophizes him; you have become puffed up with pride and committed a sin! And how dearly you will have to pay for your vainglory! But David was not long without seeing what he had done; he at once saw his fault, humbly acknowledged it, and begged pardon for it from God: "And David said to the Lord: I have sinned very much in what I have done; but I pray Thee, O Lord, to take away the iniquity of Thy servant, because I have done exceeding foolishly."² Nevertheless the prophet Gad announced to him that he should choose one of these three punishments: "Either seven years of famine shall come to thee in thy land; or thou shalt flee three months before thy adversaries, and they shall pursue thee; or for three days there shall be a pestilence in thy land."³ Truly an unfortunate game for him! A better player than he was the holy abbess named Sara of whom Drexelius writes that she was plagued for thirteen years by the impure spirit with the most horrible temptations against holy purity, but all the efforts of the devil to induce her to consent to sin were fruitless. The demon then changed his tactics, and assailed her in a way that would most likely take her off her guard, namely, by vainglory; he pretended to be obliged to take to flight,

Confirmed
by exam-
ples.

¹ *Inventa sunt de Israel octingenta millia virorum fortium, qui educerent gladium, et de Juda quingenta millia pugnatorum.*—II. Kings xxiv. 9.

² *Et dixit David ad Dominum: peccavi valde in hoc facto; sed precor, Domine, ut transferas iniquitatem servi tui, quia stultie egi nimis.*—Ibid. 10.

³ *Aut septem annis veniet tibi fames in terra tua; aut tribus mensibus fugies adversarios tuos, et illi te persequentur; aut certe tribus diebus erit pestilentia in terra tua.*—Ibid. 13.

overwhelmed with shame at his ill success, and cried out: to no purpose have I attacked you! Many brave men and heroes have I deceived and brought under my yoke, but now I can do nothing against a woman. I am shamefully put to flight, and must acknowledge that you have conquered me! Thou hast conquered, Sara! thou hast conquered! See how that dangerous ball of praise was thrown at her! But the holy virgin caught it dexterously enough; not I, said she, not I, but Jesus Christ my Lord and God has conquered you. The devil, then being really put to shame, had to leave her. She played her game well indeed! The human life of Our Lord teaches us the same game by His example. "How doth this man know letters, having never learned?"¹ said the Jews, astonished at His wisdom; but the Teacher of true humility gave them for answer: "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me."²

The third means is often to renounce vainglory and to pray.

The third means that concerns the will against vainglory is, as I have said before, the good intention that we should make every morning and renew frequently during the day, protesting before God and heaven that in all our actions we seek only His honor and glory. If after that I am tempted to a vain thought, I can laugh at it and say to it: ah, poor fool! you come too late; another has been here before you, and to him I have given all my works and the glory that comes from them: "To God alone be honor and glory." The last and most necessary means against vainglory is constant prayer to God for a pure intention and an upright heart in all our actions, saying daily with St. Augustine: "My God, grant me to know Thee and to know myself, that I may love Thee and despise myself!"³ To Thee alone be glory, to me nothing but shame and confusion on account of my sins. Lord, preserve and increase in me this knowledge of Thy infinite majesty and of my own nothingness, which has to depend on Thee for everything. I do not wish for the praise of men; more than enough will it be for me to hear from Thy lips the praise that was given Thyself: "He hath done all things well." Amen.

¹ Quomodo hic litteras scit, cum non didicerit?—John vii. 15.

² Mea doctrina non est mea, sed ejus qui misit me.—Ibid. 16.

³ Domine, noverim te, noverim me; ut amem te, et contempnam me!

FIFTEENTH SERMON.

ON DOING THE WILL OF GOD EXACTLY IN ALL THINGS.

Subject.

It is a most dangerous thing not to fulfil the known will of God, even in the smallest things.—*Preached on the twelfth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo.—Luke x. 27.

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.”

Introduction.

Love does not consist merely in words, in saying, I love you. Nor does it consist in the heart alone, in wishing well to a person. True, sincere love must show itself in work, namely in doing what we know will please the object of our love, and in abstaining from what we know would displease him. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart;” there, O man, you have the first and chief commandment. You must love the Lord your God, therefore you must do what you know to be pleasing to Him. But remember, too, that you must love Him with your whole heart, not with half of it; with your whole soul, not with half of it; with all your strength, not with half of it merely; and with all your mind, not separating the least act of it from the love of God. Therefore you must do all that the Lord God wishes you to do, and you must abstain from all that is displeasing to Him, and that He does not wish you to do. Alas, how faulty the conduct of most men in this particular! Nor am I now speaking merely of sinners who keep some, perhaps many, of the commandments, but who, because they do not keep them all, are living in a damnable state. There are gross faults committed in this way even by many who appear to be good and holy, and who fulfil the will of God in many things, though not in all; here and there is something small that we keep for ourselves in which we do not wish to do the will of God; here and there we keep something small for ourselves that God does not wish us to do, and that we do not wish to give up. It may be a trifling thing, as we pretend, but it is enough to interrupt the union and harmony of our will with the will of God; nor

can the soul that does not fulfil the known will of God, even in the smallest thing, please Him, nor can God please such a soul, as I have already shown in another sermon. To deter still more all here present from this hateful manner of dealing with God, I now say—

Plan of Discourse.

Not to fulfil the known will of God, even in the smallest things, is very dangerous. Such is the whole subject of this sermon. Therefore let us be careful and strive to love our Lord and God constantly with our whole heart and soul, and all our strength, that is, to do without the least exception all that God wills us to do.

Give us Thy powerful grace to this end, O God! We ask it of Thee through the merits of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

We fear
even little
things
when they
can cause a
great evil.

We look on that as very dangerous which, although it may be a small thing in itself, can cause dangerous sickness or even death itself, although we do not know for certain that such a misfortune will follow. For instance, there are on the table several glasses filled with good wine, and one with poison; you do not know which contains the poison. You are very thirsty and are in want of a drink; the wine with its bright color and pleasing odor looks very inviting; your host enters the room and tells you that it is all at your service, and that you can drink as much as you will. What do you think? Would you not seize a glass at once and quench your thirst? No, you say, I should be indeed very sorry to do so, even if I got half the world for it. But why? You could allay your thirst so easily? Yes, but it is too dangerous; it is better to suffer thirst than to be poisoned. But after all, there is only one glass of poison on the table, all the other glasses are filled with good wine. Ah, if I only knew which is the poison, I could then drink the wine safely enough; but as it is, there is a risk of taking up the wrong glass and drinking down my death. Well, then, here is a very small glass, it cannot matter much, even if there is poison in it; drink out of that. No, I am not so simple; as the glass is small I can do without the little drop of wine that it holds, and it would be a foolish and presumptuous thing for me to risk my life for such a slight gratification. And you are perfectly right. How much more careful should we not, then, be in things that may bring on a

dangerous spiritual illness, or even the eternal death of our precious souls!

Now (O inscrutable and still most just judgments of God! who will dare to examine you, or investigate you) the Divine Wisdom and Providence has prepared many great chastisements and calamities, both for soul and body, and has decreed from all eternity that they should be the punishment of all transgressions, even those that seem very small, against His holy law; so that he who acts against the will of God in this or that small matter, as we call it, or who neglects to fulfil the known will of God, brings down on himself those punishments, and sometimes, too, thus makes a beginning of his eternal ruin; not, indeed, that a small offence deserves the pains of hell, but because by a just decree and permission of the Almighty those small things are followed by more serious faults, which entail everlasting death and damnation on the soul. With reason, then, does St. John Chrysostom warn us all, “if you experience a slight perturbation of mind, do not despise it because it is slight, but consider what great harm it does you.”¹ Imagine you are looking at the great conflagration that arose when Samson set fire to the corn fields of the Philistines; the crops were ripe for the harvest, and the flames raged furiously amongst them, until there was not a field to which they did not extend their ravages. The Philistines saw the destruction of their property, and knew that there was no hope of saving it; they howled, and groaned, and tore their hair, but to no purpose, for they could not hinder the damage or make good the loss it caused them. What was the cause of that destructive fire? Three hundred little foxes that the cunning Samson had caught and tied together, with lighted torches at their tails, and turned loose among the corn fields: “And he caught three hundred foxes and coupled them tail to tail, and fastened torches between the tails; and setting them on fire, he let the foxes go, that they might run about hither and thither.”² It is no great wonder that the foxes running about in that way soon succeeded in setting the corn afire; but the marvel is, how did Samson get such a number of animals so suitable to his purpose in so short a time? They were certainly numerous enough in the country at the time; but still it was not easy for one man to

Great evils
may come
from small
transgres-
sions of the
law of God.

¹ Quando parvam animi perturbationem susceperis, ne eam neglexeris, quod parva sit, sed considera quam multa perdat.

² Cepit trecentas vulpes, caudasque earum junxit ad caudas, et faces ligavit in medio, quas igne succedens dimisit, ut huc illucque discurrerent.—Judges xv. 4, 5.

catch so many of them. My opinion is, that the Philistines themselves helped him in the hunt, believing that no great harm could be done them by any number of such small animals. My dear brethren, we often think and say: this or that is a small thing; it does not matter whether I do the will of God in this particular or not, etc. But I say, although they are small, trivial, insignificant things, yet they are at the same time very dangerous and can kindle a conflagration that will inflict irreparable loss on the soul. Do not despise small sins, I repeat with St. Chrysostom, but reflect on the injury they do.

Shown from
Scripture
in King
David.

I am not yet quite sure that you understand what I mean; perhaps some examples from the fountain of eternal truth, the Holy Scriptures, will help you. How often do we not read in them, as we actually experience in daily life, that God allows great, monstrous, terrible crimes to go unpunished in this life; nay, that, when they have been repented of, He forgets them forever, while He punishes the small faults and transgressions even of His holiest servants very severely, in order to warn us that we must not deliberately go against His holy will even in the most trifling things? King David had been guilty of a shameful adultery with Bethsabee, he had murdered the innocent Urias, and he spent whole years in the guilt of those two sins without repentance, aye, even without thinking of God, from whom he had received so many benefits. Who would look on the premature death of David's little son as sufficient atonement for such sins? And yet the Prophet Nathan, after having represented to David in a parable the crime he had committed, and received his humble acknowledgment of guilt in the words, "I have sinned against the Lord,"¹ announced to him as the sole punishment of his crime: "Thou shalt not die;" but, "because thou hast given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, for this thing the child that is born to thee shall surely die."² On the other hand, when the same David had counted his people (by which act he did not the least injury to any one, for he acted, seemingly at least, as a king ought for the good of his subjects—and in any case, according to the opinion of the holy Fathers, he was guilty of nothing worse than a sin of vanity, which he at once repented of as soon as he thought of what he had done: "I have sinned very much in what I

¹ Peccavi Domino.—II. Kings xii. 13.

² Verumtamen quoniam blasphemare fecisti inimicos Domini, propter verbum hoc, filius qui natus est tibi morte morietur.—Ibid. 14.

have done; but I pray Thee, O Lord, to take away the iniquity of Thy servant, because I have done exceeding foolishly”¹), what followed this act of vanity? It was announced to him in the name of God by the prophet Nathan, as we have seen in another sermon, that he had to choose one of three evils, either a seven years’ famine, or three months’ persecution from his enemies, or three days’ pestilence among his people; and as David humbly resigned himself into the hands of God, choosing the latter punishment, “there died of the people from Dan to Bersabee seventy thousand men.”² What a terrible chastisement this was, my dear brethren, for a sin of vanity, that was already repented of!

Aaron, the high-priest, had sinned grievously against God in the absence of Moses by making for the people a golden calf, which they adored as the true God, amid dancing and singing, eating and drinking; yet we do not read that the least punishment was inflicted on him, or that he was threatened in any way on account of that gross breach of duty. But when the same Aaron, with Moses his brother, was guilty of not perfectly fulfilling the will of God (he had merely doubted for a moment whether striking the rock with the rod he held in his hand would cause the water to flow from it, according to the promise God had made him, which as St. Augustine says, was only a venial sin on his part), how terribly he and his brother had to expiate their fault! “Because you have not believed Me, to sanctify Me before the children of Israel, you shall not bring these peoples into the land which I will give them.”³ Therefore he was excluded from the Promised Land and died on Mount Hor. For the Lord said again to Moses: “Let Aaron go to his people: for he shall not go into the land which I have given the children of Israel, because he was incredulous to My words at the waters of contradiction.”⁴ You must bring Aaron and his son to Mount Hor, and there having stripped the father of his vesture, you shall put it on his son Eleazar, in the sight of the multitude. “Aaron shall be gathered to his people, and die there,”⁵ a sentence that was at once carried into execution.

In the high-priest Aaron.

¹ Peccavi valde in hoc facto; sed precor, Domine, ut transferas iniquitatem servi tui, quia stulte egi nimis.—II. Kings xxiv. 10.

² Et mortui sunt ex populo a Dan usque ad Bersabee septuaginta millia virorum.—Ibid. 15.

³ Quia non credidistis mihi ut sanctificaretis me coram filiis Israel, non introducetis hos populos in terram quam dabo eis.—Num. xx. 12.

⁴ Pergat Aaron ad populos suos; non enim intrabit terram, quam dedi filiis Israel, eo quod incredulus fuerit ori meo ad aquas contradictionis.—Ibid. 24.

⁵ Aaron colligetur et morietur ibi.—Ibid. 26.

In Josias,
Oza, and
Lot's wife.

Josias, one of the holiest of kings, perished miserably in battle. Why? What wrong had he done? Because he did not believe a heathen, barbarous king, who had announced to him in the name of God that he should not fight against him, as we read in the Second Book of Paralipomenon: "Josias would not return, but prepared to fight against him, and hearkened not to the words of Nechao from the mouth of God, but went to fight in the field of Mageddo."¹ "And there he was wounded by the archers, and he died."² The unfortunate Oza (who can think of it without a shudder?) merely put out his hand to support the tottering ark, and prevent it from falling. Was that, then, such a great crime that it deserved the punishment of death? Yet it was actually punished in that way; Oza fell dead on the spot: "And the indignation of the Lord was enkindled against Oza, and He struck him for his rashness; and he died there before the ark of God."³ Lot's wife only looked around when she was flying with her family from Sodom. (Is it indeed such a rare thing for a woman to give away to curiosity? Is it not a thing that happens every day, even in church, before the altar, at the Communion rail, when God is about to be received in the Blessed Sacrament, an act that should certainly be performed with the greatest humility and reverence? What more common than to look about to see who is coming in and how they are dressed, even while the lips are still moving in prayer?) And yet (woe to us if God were to be so strict with us!) that little act of curiosity was so displeasing to God, since He had strictly forbidden it, that the woman was at once turned into a pillar of salt: "And his wife looking behind her, was turned into a statue of salt."⁴

In the
Prophet
Semeias.

The Prophet Semeias is called in the Holy Scripture a man of God. He was sent by the Lord to king Jeroboam, and was commanded to return at once and not to stop to eat or drink. When he had delivered his message, the king invited him to table. "Come home with me to dine," said he, "and I will make thee presents." God forbid! said the holy man; that would be contrary to the express orders I have received from the Lord. "If thou wouldst give me half thy house, I will not

¹ Noli Josias reverti, sed præparavit contra eum bellum, nec acquievit sermonibus Nechao ex ore Dei, verum perrexit ut dimicaret in campo Maggedo.—II. Paral. xxxv. 22.

² Ibiq̃ue vulneratus a sagittariis, mortuusq̃ue est.—Ibid. 23, 24.

³ Iratusq̃ue est indignatione Dominus contra Ozam, et percussit eum super temeritate, qui mortuus est ibi juxta arcam Dei.—II. Kings 6, 7.

⁴ Respicieusq̃ue uxor ejus post se, versa est in statuam salis.—Gen. xix. 26.

go with thee, nor eat bread, nor drink water in this place.”¹ As he went his way he met a certain old prophet, who invited him into his house. No, said Semeias, I will not eat or drink against the command of God. But, insisted the other, “I also am a prophet like unto thee; and an angel spoke to me in the word of the Lord, saying: Bring him back with thee into thy house, that he may eat bread and drink water.”² The Prophet believed the old man and allowed himself to be persuaded. But while he was still at table he heard the voice of the Lord saying: “Thus saith the Lord: Because thou hast not been obedient to the Lord, and hast not kept the commandment which the Lord thy God commanded thee, and hast returned, and eaten bread, and drunk water, thy dead body shall not be brought into the sepulchre of thy fathers.”³ This punishment was inflicted on him that very day, for, as he was going home, he was attacked by a lion and killed, and his dead body was left by the wayside: “And when he was gone, a lion found him in the way, and killed him, and his body was cast in the way.”⁴ What do you think of that, my dear brethren? Was it not a severe punishment for such a slight fault, which consisted merely in being too credulous and in allowing himself to be persuaded by the lying old man, whom he took for a true prophet? Which of us would not have acted as he did under the circumstances? But different is the judgment of God, who does not wish His holy will to be contradicted in the least thing.

God has been equally severe with Christians, even with those who were otherwise His faithful and beloved servants, on account of slight transgressions. Cassian writes of the Abbot Moses that in the heat of argument he let fall some bitter words, a thing that may easily happen even to the meekest and holiest, and he was at once possessed by the devil, who tormented him for a long time. Not less astonishing is what happened to the holy Father Christopher Ortizio of our Society, a humble

In Christians.

¹ Veni mecum domum ut prandeas, et dabo tibi munera. Si dederis mihi mediam partem domus tue, non veniam tecum, nec comedam panem, neque bibam aquam in loco isto; sic enim mandatum est mihi sermone Domini.—III. Kings xlii. 7, 8, 9.

² Et ego propheta sum similis tui; et angelus locutus est mihi in sermone Domini, dicens: reduc eum tecum in domum tuam, ut comedat panem et bibat aquam.—Ibid. 18, 19.

³ Hæc dicit Dominus: quia non obediens fuisti orati Domini, et non custodisti mandatum quod præcepit tibi Dominus Deus tuus, et comedisti panem et bibisti aquam, non inferetur cadaver tuum in sepulchrum patrum tuorum.—Ibid. 21, 22.

⁴ Qui cum abisset, invenit eum leo in via et occidit, et erat cadaver ejus projectum in itinere.—Ibid. 24.

and truly apostolic man. Through humility and love of obscurity he refused to accept a certain post of honor that His superior offered him, and he was struck dead by lightning. That he was otherwise pleasing to God was shown after his death by the miracles with which God honored the memory of His servant. O my God, if Thou art so severe to Thy holiest and dearest friends, on account of transgressions that seem so small and trifling, what have I and others like me to expect, since we daily and hourly act deliberately against Thy known will in so many circumstances!

Therefrom
comes a sin-
ful life and
eternal rep-
robation ;
shown by
examples
from the
Old Testa-
ment.

But my dear brethren, all those punishments that I have told you of were only temporal, and affected the body and its life. If we are free from such chastisements, there is great reason to fear much worse may be in store for us, which will affect the immortal soul and its eternal salvation. And here again I ask, who can explain the wonderful and inscrutable judgments of God, and why He sometimes allows the holiest and most devout souls to fall into the most abominable vices, nay, to die impenitent and be lost forever? If we could see the cause of it, we should find it to be that those sins, and the impenitence and damnation that were their consequence, came originally from slight acts of disobedience and neglecting the known will of God. Where did the adultery and murder come from that David, that man after God's own heart, committed? From a slight sin of curiosity that he was guilty of by not mortifying his eyes. What was the cause of the abominable idolatry and hardness of heart of the wise Solomon? Vainglory, says Salvianus. I shudder when I read of the fearful fate of king Saul. At first he was, as the Holy Scripture says of him, "A choice and goodly man, and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he,"¹ although the Prophet Samuel and the pious David were then alive. But what became of him at last, and what was the cause of the temporal and eternal misery into which he fell? A single act of disobedience, seemingly an unimportant one, by which he neglected to fulfil the will of God. After he had been consecrated king, he wished to offer sacrifice to the Lord, and Samuel told him on the part of God to go on before him to Galgal, and there to await his arrival, promising to come on the seventh day and to offer sacrifice. Saul went on; the seventh day passed by, but there was no sign of Samuel, while Saul was

¹ Electus et bonus, et non erat vir de filiis Israel melior illo. —I. Kings ix. 2.

surrounded by his powerful enemies, the Philistines. What was he to do in such circumstances? Both armies were ready for battle; his soldiers began to murmur and threaten to leave him; he dared not confront such a foe without having first offered sacrifice; everything was prepared, and Samuel had not yet come. "And the people slipped away from him," says the Scripture.¹ At last Saul himself undertook the office of priest, which in the Old Law was permitted to anointed kings; and as he afterwards confessed, he did so out of sheer necessity: "Because I saw that the people slipped from me, and thou wast not come according to the days appointed, I said: now will the Philistines come down upon me to Galgal, and I have not appeased the face of the Lord. Forced by necessity, I offered the holocaust."² Considering all the circumstances, several celebrated interpreters maintain that Saul was not guilty of a mortal sin in this act of disobedience; and yet, what was the consequence of it? Samuel came up when he had completed the sacrifice: "And Samuel said to him: What hast thou done?" Unhappy man, how hast thou forgotten thy duty! "Thou hast done foolishly, and hast not kept the commandments of the Lord thy God, which He commanded thee. And if thou hadst not done this, the Lord would have now established thy kingdom over Israel forever, but thy kingdom shall not continue;"³ there is an end of thy rule! But the loss of his throne and kingdom was not the greatest he had to suffer, for he lost his soul as well. To protect his crown he persecuted the innocent David, cruelly put to death all the priests who gave him shelter, and fell from one vice into another, until at last he put an end to himself in despair. Thus, as St. Chrysostom says, because he did not obey Samuel, and was not exact in fulfilling the will of God at first, he sank deeper and deeper into sin, and did not stop until he had hurled himself into the abyss of hell. Ah, unhappy Saul, one might have said to him at Galgal, when he was about to begin the sacrifice, hold! wait a little, or else you will lose your crown, your precious soul, your God, and heaven! But he would have answered: what I am do-

¹ Dilapsusque est populus ab eo.—I. Kings xiii. 8.

² Quia vidi quod populus dilaberetur a me, et tu non veneras juxta placitos dies, dixi nunc descendent Philistiim ad me in Galgala, et faciem Domini non placavi. Necessitate compulsus obtuli holocaustum.—Ibid. 11, 12.

³ Locutusque est ad eum Samuel: quid fecisti? Stulte egisti, nec custodisti mandata Domini Dei tui, quæ præcepit tibi. Quod si non fecisses, jam nunc præparasset Dominus regnum tuum super Israel in sempiternum. Sed nequaquam regnum tuum ultra consurget.—Ibid. 13, 14.

ing is no great harm; such a trifling thing cannot have such serious consequences. But now he knows to his irreparable loss that his ruin came from that trifling act. If he had abstained from it, his kingdom would have been preserved by the Lord; he would not have persecuted the innocent David through fear of losing it; he would have remained a friend of God, and would now be with Him in heaven. Ah, Saul, if thou hadst known what depended on thy faithful observance of the divine will, even in that seemingly small matter, truly thou wouldst willingly have waited another week for the arrival of the Prophet!

And from
the New
Testament.

Do not imagine, my dear brethren, that it was in the Old Law alone that God showed such severity. According to the opinion of the holy Fathers, the cause of the lamentable fall of Peter, and of his thrice denying with an oath that he knew Our Lord, was nothing else but the too great confidence he had in his own virtue, and the boast he made of it before the other disciples: "And Peter, answering, said to Him: Although all shall be scandalized in Thee, I will never be scandalized."¹ Was it not to Teresa, the seraphic virgin full of divine love, and chosen spouse of Christ, that, as we have seen on a former occasion, God showed the place prepared for her in hell, unless she abstained from certain small faults to which she was addicted? Not, indeed, that those faults in themselves deserved hell fire; but because the just God, in punishment of her disobedience in small things, would have refused her the special graces without which she could not avoid great sins, so that she would have died impenitent, and been hurled into hell. If Teresa had continued to commit those small faults, saying to herself, as we unfortunately do: Oh, it does not matter much; a little holy water will soon clear me of those sins—she would not now be a great saint in heaven, but would be among the demons in hell. So important is it for us to be most exact in doing the will of God even in small things. Nay, St. John Chrysostom says, "Wonderful and unheard of is what I am about to say; it seems to me sometimes that we should be more careful in avoiding small sins than great ones. For the very nature of sin makes us shun the latter; while the former, because they are small, we think little of, and give way to sloth in their regard, nor do we make the generous effort required to avoid them.

¹ Respondens autem Petrus ait illi; et si omnes scandalizati fuerint in te, ego nunquam scandalizabor.—Matt. xxvi. 33.

Hence, through our carelessness, small sins quickly lead to great ones.”¹

Since, then, my dear brethren, we are assured by the Holy Scriptures that the greatest evils of body and soul, nay, eternal damnation, can arise from small transgressions, according to the inscrutable decrees of the Almighty for each individual; and since we know not what evil may arise for our souls from this or that small matter, which we think little of, although we know that it is displeasing to God, and refuse to mortify ourselves in it—it must then be very dangerous to do the least thing wilfully that we know to be contrary to the divine will. Who knows what God has determined with regard to us, what great graces He is prepared to give us, to what glory He will raise us in heaven, provided we only obey Him in this or that seemingly small matter? If we do not obey, we deliberately disturb the order fixed by Him, deprive ourselves of those graces, and bring we now know not what harm on our souls. We know nothing about this now, but we shall see it clearly on that great day when we shall have to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. Oh, what a small thing it was, the elect will exclaim, on which my salvation depended! If I had neglected it during my lifetime, how would things go with me now? I, St. Reiner will say, threw away the cithern to follow a holy man. I, will say St. John Gualbert, pardoned that injury for God’s sake. I have given generous alms to the poor, St. Francis of Assisi will say. I have suffered imprisonment with patience, although I knew myself to be innocent, St. Ephraim will say. I listened attentively to that sermon, St. Nicholas of Tolentino will say. I served Mass for a priest and heard those words in the Gospel: “Go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and come follow Me,” will be the exclamation of St. Antony. While I lay on my sick bed, I read the Lives of the Saints; this was the beginning of a holy life for me, St. Ignatius will say; to it I have to attribute the eternal happiness I now enjoy. If we had not obeyed the will of God in those small things, the whole chain of our predestination would have been broken. On the other hand, the reprobate will cry out: Ah, what a small thing it was that

It is, then, very dangerous to go against the will of God even in small things; as we shall see on the Day of Judgment.

¹ Mirabile quiddam et inauditum dicere audeo; solet mihi nonnunquam videri, non tanto studio magna esse peccata vitanda, quanto parva et vilia. Illa enim ut aversemur, ipsa peccati natura efficit; hæc autem hac ipsa re, quia parva sunt, desides reddunt, et dum contemnuntur, non potest ad expulsionem eorum animus generose insurgere. Unde cito ex parvis maxima fiunt negligentia nostra.—Hom. 83 in Matt.

² Vade, vende quod habes et da pauperibus, et veni, sequere me.—Matt. xix. 21.

caused me to lose my soul! That trifle that I neglected; that habit of lying; that talkativeness about the faults of others; that curiosity of the eyes; that vanity in dress, which I have either indulged in myself or else permitted to my children; that human respect, that desire to please men, in which I refused to overcome myself; that sloth that kept me from going to hear sermons; the habit of losing my time in unnecessary conversations, by which I neglected the duties of my state; that known truth which I did not observe for the sake of pleasing God—that was the first cause of my ruin; that trifle, as it appeared to me, closed the spring of grace; that was the beginning of the mortal sins I afterwards committed; that was the first link of the chain that dragged me down to hell. “See,” says St. Gregory, “how much he lost who despised what he thought to be little things.”¹

Therefore we should do the will of God most carefully, even in the smallest things.

And now, my dear brethren, you will doubtless say: if such is the case, if my eternal salvation or damnation depends on the observance or fulfilment of the will of God in small things, then, indeed, we must always walk most carefully, and avoid the least wilful fault. Eyes, ears, tongue, and our other senses we must always keep guard over, lest they should come across something that would be even a remote occasion of sin to them. We must be suspicious of everything that could be in the least displeasing to God, and avoid it at once; nor must we allow the smallest inspiration of God to go by unprofited of. But how many are there who will make that resolution? How many who will keep it? They who do so must live in quite a different manner from that which is common in the world. And what a melancholy affair life will then be! True, my dear brethren, your first assertion I cannot deny: “He that feareth God neglecteth nothing;”² he who fears God and loves Him sincerely will neglect not even the smallest thing that belongs to His service. Such, too, is the exhortation given us by St. Peter: “Wherefore, brethren, labor the more, that by good works you may make sure your calling and election; for doing these things, you shall not sin at any time.”³ Is not the God of infinite beauty worth that we should do all He wills, and carefully avoid acting against His will in anything? Is heaven not worth that trouble? Not worth all the pains we take to gain it during this short and

¹ En quam magna perdidit, qui, ut putabat, nulla contempsit.

² Qui timet Deum nihil negligit.—Eccles. vii. 19.

³ Quapropter, fratres, magis satagite, ut per bona opera certam vestram vocationem et electionem faciatis; hæc enim facientes non peccabitis aliquando.—II. Pet. i. 10.

uncertain life? To this Our Lord Himself expressly exhorts us in the Gospel of St. Luke, when He says: "Strive to enter by the narrow gate; for many, I say to you, shall seek to enter, and shall not be able."¹

Your second assertion, that few men live in that way, is unfortunately only too true, also; and therefore we read in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat. Narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life; and few there are that find it!"² Truly, we must live differently from the manner which now obtains in the world if we wish to please God and place our souls in safety. "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him."³ "Know you not that the friendship of this world is the enemy of God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of this world becometh an enemy of God."⁴ "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive,"⁵ because My Spirit cannot exist with the spirit of the world and its vain usages. Therefore you must live in the world as if the world were nothing to you. These are all words of the Infallible Truth. Hence it is an undoubted fact that to live in that way is hateful to the world, as Christ said to His heavenly Father of His disciples: "The world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, as I also am not of the world."⁶

Your last assertion, that a life of this kind must be a melancholy one, is not at all true; the contrary is the truth. For no one leads a more pleasant and joyful life in the Lord than he who, being always united with God, endeavors to fulfil His will exactly, although he now and then commits a fault through human frailty and with only half advertence (this is human and it is not of such faults that I have been speaking), and who is al-

And not mind the customs of the world.

This conduces also to a happy life.

¹ Contendite intrare per angustam portam, quia multi, dico vobis, quærent intrare, et non poterunt.—Luke xiii. 24.

² Lata porta et spatiosa via est, quæ ducit ad perditionem; et multi sunt qui intrant per eam. Arcta via est quæ ducit ad vitam, et pauci sunt, qui inveniunt eam.—Matt. vii. 13, 14.

³ Nolite diligere mundum, neque ea quæ in mundo sunt. Si quis diligit mundum, non est charitas Patris in eo.—I. John ii. 15.

⁴ Nescitis quia amicitia hujus mundi inimica est Dei? Quicumque ergo vult amicus esse sæculi hujus, inimicus Dei constituitur.—James iv. 4.

⁵ Ego rogabo Patrem, et alium Paracletem dabit vobis, Spiritum veritatis, quem mundus non potest accipere.—John xiv. 16, 17.

⁶ Mundus eos odio habuit, quia non sunt de mundo, sicut et ego non sum de mundo.—Ibid. xvii. 14.

ways resigned to the will of God, a virtue that I shall speak of particularly in future sermons. On the other hand, there can be no true peace, consolation, or rest for the man who, although he is resolved to escape hell, and abstains from grievous sin, as he imagines, and performs great works of virtue, yet knowingly acts contrary to the will of God even in one thing. For his own conscience constantly reproaches him in the midst of his good works, and says to him: you do not do all that God wills; there is still something in you that is displeasing to God; this or that God would be pleased to see you freed from, but you are still attached to it; therefore you do not love God with your whole heart. A life like that, I repeat, cannot give true peace of spirit, nor can God give to one who leads it His special graces, consolations, and joy in the Holy Ghost, which He has promised to those children of His who serve Him truly and have only one will with His. In truth, it is a miserable thing to reflect that there are souls who, after having rendered great and numerous services to God, cannot make up their minds to renounce some wretched thing for His sake, and thus rob themselves of peace of spirit, acting in this like one who gives several thousand pounds as the price of a splendid property which he is anxious to secure possession of, but loses it because he refuses to give a few pence additional to complete the sum required.

Conclusion
not to go
against the
will of God
in any-
thing.

Therefore, if we wish to lead in this world a life that is joyful in the Lord, we must attend to that first and greatest commandment, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and thy whole soul, with all thy strength and with all thy mind; that is, you must do without exception all that God wills you to do; you must abstain without exception from all that is displeasing to Him and contrary to His will, no matter how small it is, and you must regard it with an unconquerable hatred. When God sent the Israelites to take the land of the Chananians, the Amorrites, and Amalekites, he commanded them to put all the inhabitants of those countries to the sword, not sparing even the women and children: "They killed all that were in it, man and woman, young and old."¹ Why so? The women were weak indeed, but they could do great harm by their caresses. The old men were not strong, but they do much mischief by their false and crafty advice. The little chil-

¹ Interfecerunt omnia quæ erant in ea, a viro usque ad mulierem, ab infante usque ad senem.—Jos. vi. 21.

dren were not capable then of doing any harm, but they could do injury enough if they were allowed to grow up. In a word, they were all enemies of God, and as such had to be put out of the way. If we only remember this, my dear brethren, that every transgression is an enemy of God, not one would appear so small to us, if we truly love Him, that we would tolerate it. Let us at least attend to the advice of St. Chrysostom: "The vice a man knows that he is most subject to he should endeavor to get rid of, and free his soul from it by some good thought as by a spiritual sword."¹ Almighty God, grant that I and all men may love Thee in that way in which Thou deservest to be loved, and that we may always exactly fulfil Thy holy will. Amen.

SIXTEENTH SERMON.

ON CONSULTING GOD IN ALL OUR AFFAIRS.

Subject.

If in our undertakings we seek counsel from any except God and His law, the result must be an unfortunate one for our souls.—*Preached on the feast of St. Matthias, Apostle.*

Text.

Tu Domine, qui corda nosti omnium, ostende quem elegeris, ex his duobus unum.—Acts i. 24.

"Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two Thou hast chosen."

Introduction.

There was question of electing some one to replace the traitor Judas in the apostolate. A hundred and twenty were seated in council, as the Scripture says: "Now the number of persons together was about a hundred and twenty."² Peter, as the head, laid the whole matter before them, showing how it was necessary to elect some one in the traitor's place, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. All agreed about the main point, but none would take the responsibility of deciding who was fitted for

¹ Quem plus aliis vexare defectum noverit, hunc ex anima præcidere studeat, et pia quadam cogitatione, quasi spiritali utens gladio, seipsum a vitio liberet.—S. Chrys. Hom. lxxviii. ad Pop.

² Erat autem turba hominum, simul, fere centum viginti.—Ibid. 15.

the office by the holiness of his life. At last their votes fell on two, Joseph and Matthias; but which of the two was to be chosen they could not decide. Finally they had recourse to prayer: "And praying they said: Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two Thou hast chosen." Show us, O Lord, or else our choice will be wrong! With this act of confidence in God, they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.¹ Oh, truly a happy and safe mode of arriving at a decision, in which the matter is finally entrusted to God alone! How does it happen, my dear brethren, that, especially in things that concern their souls, most men are so unfortunate in their choice? Daily, nay, hourly, we are in doubt as to what we should do; as to whether we should choose this state, or that one; enter on this office or not; undertake that journey or not; do or omit this or that in our daily duties. How comes it, I ask again, that our choice is often so unfortunate that most people have to bewail it, partly here, and partly hereafter? From what else does it come, except from their neglecting to take counsel with Jesus Christ, who alone knows the hearts of all? "Woe to you, apostate children, saith the Lord, that you would take counsel, and not of Me; and would begin a web, and not by My spirit."² No one troubles his head about God, or about what He has commanded or forbidden; other deceitful counsellors are followed too readily, and therefore the choice made must be unfortunate, and the result of the work bad, as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

If we seek advice in our own undertakings from any other source but God and His law, the choice we make must be bad for our souls. Such is the whole subject.

Do Thou, O Lord, who knowest the hearts of all, and holdest them in Thy hands, and who canst move and direct them as Thou wilt, give me to-day the words Thou hast chosen to convince myself and all here present that in all our affairs we ought with confidence to fly to Thee, our God, to follow Thy inspirations alone, and to direct our whole lives according to Thy laws and decrees! This we beg of Thee through our usual advocate, Mary, and our holy guardian angels.

¹ Cecidit sors super Matthiam, et annumeratus est cum undecim apostolis.

² Vae filii desertores, dicit Dominus, ut faceretis consilium, et non ex me, et ordiremini telam, et non per Spiritum meum.—Is. xxx. 1.

He who is inexperienced in a matter of great importance, on the result of which depends great happiness or misery, if he wishes to act prudently and avoid a grievous mistake, will try to find some faithful adviser, who understands the affair, and follow his instructions; just as a blind man will not venture on a dangerous road unless he has some one he can depend on to lead him. Now, there are many blind people, who use different means for their guidance. Some venture alone on the road and depend on the stick they carry; others are led by a dog; most are led by a little child, generally their own. But to my mind these guides are all dangerous, and therefore the blind man who follows them everywhere is imprudent, for, although he may feel about him very cautiously with his stick, although he gropes his way carefully with his hand, yet he cannot often save himself from collision with a projecting beam of timber, so that he comes home with a broken head. If the dog is not very well trained, it can jump over a drain, imagining that its master will do the same, and so the poor blind man falls and hurts himself. The child is certainly better than the other two guides, but who can teach it all the roads? If it loses the way, who will set it right? If the blind man falls and hurts his foot, how can the weak child help him up again? These guides therefore cannot be depended on. Hence the proper course for the blind man to adopt is to select some one who is experienced, and to follow him constantly.

An ignorant man engaged in an important business must have a good adviser. Shown by a simile.

My dear brethren, all of us mortals are wandering along a road in the performance of a most important duty. Our way leads to a long eternity; on our business depends our eternal happiness or misery; that is the end to which all our thoughts, words, and actions should be directed. The way is slippery and dangerous, complicated with many detours and false paths, beset with robbers and murderers. The business we have on hand demands a prudent, watchful eye, and diligent labor, for the least mistake in it will cause an irreparable loss. But the worst and most deplorable thing of all is (and who does not know it and has not experienced it?) that man is so weakened in his understanding, which is the eye of the soul, by original as well as by actual sin, that he suffers from exceeding great ignorance in the selection of the means that are required for the great business he has to attend to; nay, in what concerns his salvation he is stone-blind. Well may the words be used of us which

We are inexperienced in the affair of our salvation; in which we should take God alone as our adviser.

the Lord spoke by the Prophet Jeremias: "Perhaps these are poor and foolish, that know not the way of the Lord, the judgment of their God."¹ And again by the Prophet Sophonias: "They shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord."² Therefore, as blind men, we need a guide; as ignorant, we require an adviser, and one, too, who is experienced in the way we have to walk, the business we have to transact; one who knows well how to distinguish between truth and falsehood, deceit and honesty, evil and good; who can tell us and point out to us what is dangerous, and what is useful for our end; who can not only be careful of the present, but also foresee the issue of what we do in the future. Who is this adviser, this guide? Thou, O Lord, who knowest the hearts of all, from whose all-seeing eye nothing can remain hidden even in the darkest night, to whom everything is open and known; it is Thou alone, and there is none besides Thee in the whole world!

Therefore
most people
are wrong in
taking their
own ideas
as advisers.

I am not surprised, then, that most people stumble so lamentably like blind men, and go astray on this road; that they begin unluckily, finish unluckily, and in the end choose eternal death for their souls instead of life, as the Prophet Jeremias says: "Death shall be chosen rather than life."³ "Many are called, but few are chosen,"⁴ for what kind of a guide and an adviser do we choose? Do we always turn in our affairs to that Lord who alone knows the hearts of all? Do we ask God for advice before beginning our undertakings? Do we attend to what He approves or disapproves of? Ah, quite different is the guide, the adviser we select in the deceitful, perverse world! Many, like the blind man, depend on their sticks; I mean those who follow their own ideas in their affairs. They say, such is my will; that is the way in which I wish to act; and thus they do what they please and omit what they please without further question. Do they wish to marry? They seek for no further reason than that it pleases them to do so. They enter religion. Why? Because they think they will have a comfortable life there. They go to church or remain at home; why? There is no use in asking; such is their will. They eat, drink, play when they are in the humor. Why? Reason enough, they say; I wish to do so. They are their own masters, their own guides

¹ *Pauperes sunt et stulti, ignorantes viam Domini, iudicium Dei sui.*—Jerem. v. 4.

² *Ambulabunt ut cæci, quia Domino peccaverunt.*—Sophon. i. 17.

³ *Eligent magis mortem, quam vitam.*—Jer. viii. 3.

⁴ *Multi enim sunt vocati, pauci vero electi.*—Matt. xx. 16.

and counsellors in all things. But I look on them as blind and ignorant. For, as the Wise Man says: "Lean not upon thy own prudence,"¹ much less on your own will, without some very good reason. "He who is his own master," says St. Bernard, "submits to the teaching of a fool."²

There are others who allow a dog to guide them; namely, they who take counsel from their own flesh and blood, from their inordinate inclinations and appetites, from their evil propensities and desires. What is suggested to them by their unmortified flesh they fall upon like dumb cattle; what the eye pictures to them as beautiful, what savors well to their palate, what sounds sweet in their ears, that they make the object of their pursuit, because they are guided by sensuality. Such was the reason why the unhappy Esau chose a wretched mess of pottage instead of his birth-right, because, when he was hungry and thirsty from hunting, he took advice from his appetite: "Esau swore to him, and sold his first birth-right. And so taking bread and the pottage of lentils, he ate, and drank, and went his way; making little account of having sold his first birth-right."³

The third class allow themselves to be led by a child, and they are those who do everything in a childish manner, that is, without consideration, reason, or reflection, without thinking what may be the result of their action; and just as any trifle can make a child laugh (its joy, however, does not last long, for it often takes up a knife and cuts itself, or puts its hand into the fire, and thus hurts itself) so do these inconsiderate people choose one thing now and another again, simply because it pleases them. They allow themselves to be brought into all kinds of company; they do as they see others do; they follow the crowd as the world does, not caring whether the fashion and custom they adopt be good or bad, nor whether the upshot of their action will be fortunate or otherwise; they cannot see beyond their noses, as the saying goes. Jehu, at first a general and then king in Israel, was one of those inconsiderate, thoughtless people who, according to the Holy Scripture, did everything in a hurry. Once, indeed, the sentinels at the gates saw him at a distance, nor would they have recognized him if it were not for his hurried movements. He was hastening on with his adherents

Or their evil inclinations.

Who thoughtlessly do as others do.

¹ Ne innitatis prudentiæ tuæ.—Prov. iii. 5.

² Qui se sibi magistrum constituit, stulto se discipulum subdit.

³ Et juravit ei Esau, et vendidit primogenita. Et sic accepto pane et lentis edulio comedit et bibit, et abiit, parvi pendens quod primogenita vendidisset.—Gen. xxv. 33, 34.

to take possession of the throne of Israel: "The driving," said the sentinels, "is like the driving of Jehu, the son of Namsi, for he drives furiously."¹ Hasty as he was in his movements, he was equally precipitate in his other actions. An unknown stranger came and called him out of an assembly of warriors; he left at once and went into a room with him: "And he arose and went into the chamber."² But, Jehu, what are you doing? There may be treachery in this. No matter; he does not stop to think about it. When he heard that he was chosen king by God, he lost no time, but at once rose in rebellion against his lawful sovereign, and called on all who were present to recognize him as king; and as there was no throne ready, they had to take their mantles from their shoulders and place them under his feet in sign of homage: "Then they made haste, and taking every man his garment, laid it under his feet, after the manner of a judgment-seat, and they sounded the trumpet, and said: Jehu is king."³ Accompanied by a select troop of soldiers, he met his lawful king Joram, who, as soon as he saw Jehu, turned back, for he was aware of the revolt; but without stopping a moment to think, Jehu drew his bow and shot him between the shoulders: "Jehu bent his bow with his hand, and shot Joram between the shoulders; and the arrow went out through his heart, and immediately he fell in his chariot."⁴ On another occasion Ochozias, king of Juda, met him, and lost his life in the same way as he was flying in his chariot. When entering the town of Jezrael he saw Jezabel leaning out of a window, and at once he commanded her to be thrown down headlong, that her body might be trodden under foot by the horses. A terrible thorn in his side were the seventy sons of Achab; he caused them all to be slain on the one day. The brethren of Ochozias he also put to death. With regard to the family of Achab, it was to be destroyed in accordance with a divine decree, but Jehu had no right or title to act as he did to the family of Ochozias. He was too much accustomed to follow every idea that came into his head, without asking any advice. Childish, too, was the

¹ Est autem incessus quasi incessus Jehu, filii Namsi; præceps enim graditur.—IV. Kings ix. 20.

² Et surrexit et ingressus est cubiculum.—Ibid. 6.

³ Festinaverunt itaque, et unusquisque tollens pallium suum, posuerunt sub pedibus ejus in similitudinem tribunalis, et cecinerunt tuba, atque dixerunt: regnavit Jehu.—Ibid. 13.

⁴ Porro Jehu tetendit arcum manu, et percussit Joram inter scapulas, et egressa est sagitta per cor ejus, statimque corruit in curru suo.—Ibid. 24

conduct of that man in the Gospel who, being invited to the supper, answered: "I have bought a farm, and I must needs go out and see it."¹ Mark, my dear brethren, the folly of his conduct. First he bought the farm, and then he went to see what it was like. Where were his wits? And if the farm had not answered his expectations, if the seller had deceived him, what was he to do? He should first have seen it, and then, if it pleased him, bought it. It is not the part of a sensible man to buy a pig in a poke.

These are the guides and counsellors we take with us on the dangerous way to eternity, in that most important business of our soul and eternal salvation. When beginning an undertaking, or entering on a state of life, in a word, in all our actions, we often go first for advice to our own corrupt nature, to our perverse desires and inclinations, with childish eagerness and thoughtlessness; but we never think of inquiring what God and His holy law have to say on the matter. What wonder, I repeat, that most people choose so badly, and that the result of their choice is so unfortunate? For what good can we expect from such counsellors for our soul and salvation? Can one blind man lead the other? Will they not both fall into the ditch? As Christ says, "If the blind lead the blind, both fall into the pit."² All those people are blind on the road to eternity. "The sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God; for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand,"³ such are the words of St. Paul. Therefore, to follow one's own inclination, one's own opinion, and what the passions suggest, is just as imprudent as to ask a shoemaker about a house you wish to build, or a lawyer about a grievous illness you are suffering from. What does the shoemaker know about building, or the lawyer about treating sickness? If you are allowed to choose one of two houses, and you intrust the business to an ignorant man, he will indeed make a choice for you; but what kind of a choice? He will select the house that is best painted on the outside, and that is higher and wider. This, he says, is the house for me. But he rejects the other, that is better situated and built, because its outward appearance does not please him so well. Such is the way in which you go for advice in the busi-

All these advisers are ignorant.

¹ Villam emi, et necesse habeo exire et videre illam.—Luke xiv. 18.

² Cæcus si cæco ducatum præstet, ambo in foveam cadunt.—Matt. xv. 14.

³ Animalis homo non percipit ea quæ sunt Spiritus Dei; stultitia enim est illi, et non potest intelligere.—I. Cor. ii. 14.

ness of your soul to your inclinations, desires, and sensuality; they will recommend to you what appears fine on the outside and pleases them best; but they know nothing of what is concealed within, nor what will be the result in the future with regard to your last end; and if you follow them, oh, how foully they will deceive you!

And side
with our
enemies.
Shown by
similes.

Besides, what else can you expect but misfortune when you consult one whom you know to be a partial judge, in addition to being ignorant, who takes sides with your enemy, and seeks nothing but your ruin and destruction, so that you know beforehand what sort of a choice he will suggest to you? Pilate once asked advice of the Jews and the Scribes. The question was, which of two prisoners should be set free: "They therefore being gathered together, Pilate said: Whom will you that I release to you; Barabbas, or Jesus that is called Christ?"¹ But Pilate, what are you doing? Whom do you put forward as the object of their choice? Jesus. And to whom do you propose Him? To the Jews? To those who, as you are well aware, delivered Him to you through hatred and envy? Who were watching Him like hungry lions to glut their fury in His blood? Ask a hungry dog whether he prefers a stick or a piece of meat; that question is just as reasonable as the one you asked the Jews. They soon pronounced sentence; the cross was prepared, and they cried out: we wish Barabbas, not this man, to be set free. Away with Jesus, let Him be crucified! A choice that might easily have been foreseen.

They who
follow
them must
make an
unhappy
choice.

My dear brethren, what are those advisers we consult? Are they not what Our Lord speaks of in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "A man's enemies shall be they of his own household"?² That is, his own desires and inclinations are the enemies of his soul, and have conspired together to bring about his eternal ruin: "For the imagination and thought of man's heart are prone to evil from their youth."³ What do you wish? asks one whose heart is moved inwardly by divine inspiration to leave the world. What do you wish me to do? Shall I embrace the religious state? But whom are you asking? Where do you go for advice? To your carnal desires? Oh, then I can easily tell you what the

¹ Congregatis ergo illis, dixit Pilatus: quem vultis dimittam vobis; Barabbam, an Jesum qui dicitur Christus?—Matt. xxvii. 17.

² Inimici hominis domestici ejus.—Ibid. x. 36.

³ Sensus enim et cogitatio humani cordis in malum prona sunt ab adolescentia sua.—Gen. viii. 21.

answer will be. Not at all, they will say; the religious life is a miserable one; you will have to do what others tell you; freedom is preferable to everything; you must enjoy yourself during your youth. What do you wish? asks another, who is called to the married state. What am I to do? Whom shall I choose as my wife? But where do you go for advice? To your eyes? Then the matter is already decided; this or that person is beautiful and of a comely appearance; choose her. Do you ask your avarice? No, it says, not that person; that other is preferable; she is more wealthy and has great expectations on the death of her parents. Do you ask your pride? No, it says, not that person; there is another of a noble family better suited for you. None of these advisers will pay any attention to virtue, piety, modesty, and good morals, nor take into consideration whether the person they recommend is likely to help you to save your soul. What do you wish? asks a third. What am I to do? I can have that office, that employment; shall I take it? Who is your adviser? Your own corrupt nature? Then the answer will be: why should you hesitate? Of course, take it at once, or some one else will be beforehand with you, and you will lose a lucrative employment. Not a word will be said of the ability you should have for the duties of the office, nor of the difficulties and dangers it may place in the way of your soul. What shall I do? asks a fourth. Shall I sleep longer, or get up and go to Mass, to devotions, to the sermon? If you ask your sensuality, the answer is ready. Oh, let me sleep a while longer, and I shall be better able to do my work during the day. What do you wish me to do? asks a fifth. Fish and flesh are placed before me; shall I keep the fast according to Christian custom, or shall I ask for a dispensation, and eat meat? Where are you going for advice? To your appetite? Then you need not stop long to consider; eat meat, of course, as so many others do; it tastes much better; fish is not wholesome and will injure the stomach, so that you might get sick. What am I to do? That man has spoken ill of me, or has reviled me in public; how shall I meet him? If you ask the custom of the world nowadays, fie! it will say; are you not ashamed? Can you allow such an insult to go unavenged? It is a matter in which you must even risk your life to save your honor. What am I to do? I have been offered a good deal of money, with which I could buy a fine property, only that the ends of justice will not be quite served. Do you ask your inclina-

tion? You fool! it says, why do you hesitate? The money will be useful, and you may never have such another opportunity. What am I to do? This evening there will be some pleasant company in that house, and they are to have dancing and other amusements. Shall I go there or stay at home? Do you ask your inordinate love, or your bad companions? Then the thing is settled; of course, you go; you are not a hermit, and must have some amusement now and then. Nay, on one side place the immortal soul, heaven with all its joys, God Himself, the Supreme Good, and on the other some unjust gain, or a vile, momentary pleasure, the impure love of a creature; if we take counsel from our passions, the decision will be: "not this man, but Barabbas;" away with the soul, with heaven, with God Himself! This money, this honor, this pleasure, this person is dearer to me, and is the object of my choice.

And be led
to eternal
ruin.

Such is the unhappy choice we are apt to make, my dear brethren, when we go for advice, not to God and His law, but to the flesh and the world. That is indeed going to one's enemies for advice, to those who seek nothing but our temporal and eternal ruin. That is to ask a murderer and robber to show us the way into the forest. O poor fool! what will become of you? Follow your guide, and he will indeed show you the way, but it will lead to your death. That is, to follow a guide like the Syrian soldiers. Benadad, the king of Syria, was embittered against the prophet Eliseus, because the latter had disclosed all the secret plans and stratagems that were concocted against Joram in Samaria. Hence he sent the flower of his army to take the town of Dothan, where Eliseus was, and to bring the Prophet away a prisoner. Eliseus went out before the walls to meet the soldiers, who were prevented from recognizing him: "The Lord struck them with blindness."¹ "This is not the way," said Eliseus to them; "neither is this the city; follow me, and I will show you the man whom you seek."² The soldiers, trusting in his guidance, followed him without a word. But they found themselves in the hands of the king of Israel in Samaria. When they had come to the principal part of the city, the Prophet prayed to God: "Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see."³ "And the Lord opened their eyes, and

¹ Percussitque eos Dominus ne viderent.—IV. Kings vi. 18.

² Non est hæc via, neque ista est civitas; sequimini me, et ostendam vobis virum quem quæritis.—Ibid. 19.

³ Domine, aperi oculos istorum, ut videant.—Ibid. 20.

they saw themselves to be in the midst of Samaria.”¹ Ah, how many there are who will open their eyes when it will be too late, and see themselves in the midst of Samaria, that is, in hell, whither they allowed their false counsellors and guides to lead them! Would to God that we had not all to deplore an evil guidance of the kind to this day! Eve is in paradise at the forbidden tree; oh, when I think of it! Eve looks up at the tree and admires the fruit. Ah, our best interests are already in a most dangerous state! “And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold.” We are lost already! Her hand is stretched forth: “And she took of the fruit thereof.”² Eve, be careful of the choice you are about to make; a great deal depends on it! The fruit is beautiful and will doubtless taste well; but how if it causes you bitterness and sorrow afterwards? But you are already putting it into your mouth! Have you, then, forgotten the threat that God spoke to Adam: “Of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat. For what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death”?³ But there is no use in my warning; the eyes are delighted at the sight of the fruit; the appetite says that it is pleasing to the taste; the cunning serpent comes and says: “No, you shall not die the death.”⁴ The choice is made; Eve eats the apple, and gives it to her husband: “and gave to her husband, who did eat;”⁵ for he took counsel from the same advisers, and being deceived by them, swallowed the unlucky morsel. Oh, woe to you, Adam and Eve! Woe to me and to all your descendants! “And the eyes of them both were opened.”⁶ See what followed their disobedience. But, alas, it was too late! If you had turned away your eyes from the forbidden fruit, and had not consulted your sensuality, but hearkened to the express command of God, then we, your unhappy children, would not have to weep and lament in this valley of tears, and to earn our bread by the sweat of our brow! Thus repentance comes too late when the sinful act is accomplished.

There are still, my dear brethren, far too many such thought- These peo-

¹ *Aperuitque Dominus oculos eorum, et viderunt se esse in medio Samariæ.*—IV. Kings vi. 20.

² *Vidit igitur mulier quod bonum esset lignum ad vescendum, et pulchrum oculis, aspectuque delectabile; et tulit de fructu illius.*—Gen. iii. 6.

³ *De ligno autem scientiæ boni et mali ne comedas. In quocumque enim die comederis ex eo, morte morieris.*—Ibid. ii. 17.

⁴ *Nequaquam morte moriemini.*—Ibid. iii. 4.

⁵ *Deditque viro suo, qui comedit.*—Ibid. 6.

⁶ *Et aperti sunt oculi amborum.*—Ibid. 7.

ple complain
too late af-
terwards,
when they
see how un-
fortunate
their choice
was.

less people in the world, whose eyes are opened when it is too late, and who deplore the unhappy choice they have made. Many a one there is who bewails his lot to a trusty friend, or in the depths of his own heart. Alas, what have I done, he says, to enter on this state! Would that I had never seen that person! Who could have thought that I should be so disappointed! Ah, how quietly I might have lived alone! And now I must work hard to try to get enough to live on, and have plenty of trouble and trials along with that! If I only had bread enough now, instead of the meat I had before in plenty! O poor soul! whom did you ask for advice when you entered on that state, when you made choice of that person? Did you ask your eyes, your blind passions, and not the almighty God? What else, then, could you expect but to make an unhappy choice? You are to blame for your own misfortunes! See, O parents, how foolishly you act when you destine your children, while they are still in the cradle, one for the religious life, another for the world. Who has empowered you to usurp the office of the almighty God? And what thanks will your children give you afterwards? You will complain when you find them a source of sorrow and disgrace to you; but whom did you ask for advice about them? Your own opinion; you disposed of them to suit your own inclinations. Now you see the result of that. You complain now that this office, this employment, this business has brought trouble into your family, uneasiness to your conscience, despair almost to your soul; but where did you go for advice when you were about to engage in that occupation or business? Your avarice and cupidity? Then, what other result could you expect? You complain now that you have lost the precious pearl of your chastity; you sigh: oh, would that I had never put foot in that house! would that I had kept out of that company! But who advised you to go into it? Your inordinate passion, or your curiosity and desire to see and be seen? If so, what else could you expect but misfortune? And now your sorrow and lamentations are too late. Hell is full of souls that have made an unhappy choice, and they are now crying out, and will cry out for all eternity: "Therefore we have erred."¹ When the calf is choked, there is no use in thinking how much money it would have brought in if it had been sold; when the steed is stolen, it is too late to lock the stable door. A child goes down the street carrying a pitch-

¹ Ergo erravimus.—Wisdom. vi. 6.

er carelessly in its hand, until at last the pitcher drops down and is broken. Then the little one begins to cry, and stands there looking at the remains of the broken pitcher. At last it collects them all together, and fits them to each other as they were before; there, it says, that is what it looked like before it was broken; I wish I had been more careful, and this accident would not have happened. Ah, my poor child, there is no use in your crying now; you should not have been so careless; I would not like to be in your place when you go home! The same I say to those people who complain of their lot. You should have thought more about what you were going to do. Marry in haste and repent at leisure, says the old proverb. Come now and pour forth your complaints to God, and see what answer He will give you. Go, He will say, to those whom you first consulted; they brought you into misery, let them now free you from it. Such is the manner in which the Lord laughs at the wicked in the Book of Deuteronomy: "Where are their gods in whom they trusted? Let them arise and help you, and protect you in your distress."¹ You did not consult Me in your choice, nor think of Me at all; therefore there is no use in your complaining to Me now of the misery you suffer. "See ye that I alone am, and there is no other God besides Me."²

O you silly people! what have you done? If you had taken counsel from God and His law, you would have no reason for a late repentance, nor for uselessly regretting the choice you made. God alone, who knows the heart and searches the reins, is that most wise and at the same time trusty Counsellor, whose advice cannot possibly lead you astray. He alone it is who can say what is good or bad for our salvation and true happiness, at all times, in all circumstances. He does not look to the mere outside, as we blind mortals do, but He considers the interior and the result of everything. Besides that, He is our best friend, to whom we can safely entrust all our affairs, without the least danger of being deceived. If, therefore, you had fled to Him when you were about to commence that undertaking, and had asked His advice like the young man in the Gospel: "Good Master, what shall I do that I may receive life everlasting?"³ Is this undertaking serviceable for eternal life? Will it help me to save my soul? He

If they had asked God, He would have advised them better.

¹ Ubi sunt dii eorum in quibus habebant fiduciam? Surgant et opitulentur vobis, et in necessitate vos protegant.—Deut. xxxii. 37, 38.

² Videte quod ego sim solus, et non sit alius Deus præter me.—Ibid. 39.

³ Magister bone, quid faciam ut vitam æternam percipiam?—Mark x. 17.

would have known what answer to give you. When you were deliberating about the choice of a state, He would have said to you: if you remain in the world, you will lose your soul; therefore, “sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”¹ He would have said to you: the religious state is not suitable for you; you must enter the married state. He would have said to you: do not look for outward beauty, nor great wealth, nor a high position in the world, but for virtue and piety in the person of your choice. He would have said to you: that office or employment is not good for your soul; there are too many temptations in it. He would have said to you: keep away from that house, that company, that meeting; it is too dangerous for you. In place of telling you to seek revenge, He would have said: “Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you.”² He would have said to you, when you were about to imitate the customs of others: “Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world.”³ He would have said to you, when a bribe was offered you: “What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?”⁴ What will this honor, this pleasure, this wealth profit you, if you lose your soul? In a word, God could have told you the best thing to do in all circumstances.

Instruction
for those
who have
erred in this
way. En-
courage-
ment for
those who
have fol-
lowed the
advice given
by God.

But what advice have I for you now, that you cannot change the unfortunate choice you have made? There is nothing else for you but to humble yourselves before God, acknowledge your error with contrite hearts, bear with patience and constancy the trials and crosses that you have brought upon yourselves, and be more careful in avoiding sin and the occasions of sin, and in serving God more zealously in future; so that you may not have to choose eternal as well as temporal misery. But you, prudent souls, who have always begun by asking advice of God in your state of life and in the duties that belong to it, rejoice in the Lord, for things are going well with you, and you have reason to rejoice! If you have perhaps something to suffer in your temporal affairs, oh, even then you have consolation enough; even then you can

¹ Quæcunque habes vende, et da pauperibus, et habebis thesaurum in coelo, et veni sequere me.—Mark x. 21.

² Diligite inimicos vestros; benefacite his qui oderunt vos: et orate pro persequentibus et calumniantibus vos.—Matt. v. 44.

³ Nolite diligere mundum, neque ea quæ in mundo sunt.—I. John ii. 15.

⁴ Quid prodest homini, si mundum universum lucretur, animæ vero suæ detrimentum patiat?—Matt. xvi. 26.

turn to God with child like confidence, and lay your wants before Him. See, O Lord, who knowest the hearts of all, Thou knowest that in this choice of mine I had no other object but to do Thy holy will; I asked Thee first for advice; it was on Thy inspiration that I entered on this state; I began this business with Thee; I consulted him by whom Thou art pleased to make known Thy will to me, namely, my confessor. Thou seest now how troubled I am; help me, O Lord, in my necessity, as Thou easily canst do! Yet, if it is Thy divine will to leave me as I am, then I shall console myself with the thought that, as far as I know, I have done nothing against Thee or without Thee, and that I still continue to live according to Thy will, so that in all circumstances I will say: Thy will be done! A consolation of that kind is not for one who has not commenced and finished his choice with God, so that he has a twofold cross to bear, without any comfort from above; and even if things go here according to his wish, he has still misfortune to fear hereafter, for he cannot be sure that his present prosperity is for the good of his soul.

I conclude with the words of St. Gregory: "Take counsel from God, and you will not be wanting in your duty;"¹ and in your work as father or mother of a family, as judge, as superior, as official, as subject, you will not easily commit a serious fault; and, according to the advice of the wise Ecclesiasticus, "Above all these things pray to the Most High, that He may direct thy way in truth."² Ah, my God, would that I had been always thus prudent in all my affairs; how many sins and faults I should have avoided! But in future I shall be more careful, and before beginning anything, I shall fly to Thee, like the prophet David: "I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me."³ I will not regard what my inclinations, or sensuality, or my corrupt flesh, or wicked companions, or the flattery of false friends, or the helish serpent shall say to me; I will hear only what God wishes from me; I will ask first of all what the commandments of God, what decency and the salvation of my soul require of me; these and no others shall be my advisers in all my thoughts, words, and actions. Let who will make a different suggestion to me; let who will say, this or that is beautiful; no matter how beautiful it is, I will first hear what the Lord has to say of it, and if it

Conclusion
always to
seek advice
from God,
and to keep
His law.

¹ Cum Deo consilium cape, et ab officio non aberrabis.

² Et in his omnibus deprecare Altissimum, ut dirigat in veritate viam tuam.—Eccles. xxxviii. 19.

³ Audiam quid loquatur in me Dominus Deus.—Ps. lxxxiv. 9.

is beautiful and pleasing in His sight. But that is a pleasant thing? I will hear first if it is pleasing to God. That is a comfortable thing? I will hear first if it is good for my soul. That is a useful thing? I will hear first if it is useful for my soul or lawful before God. That is the custom amongst men? I will hear first whether it is approved of by God. That is necessary in the world? I will hear first whether it can bring me to heaven. If God wills it, then I shall choose it. But if it goes against my conscience, or the law of God, or His will, then I shall never make choice of it, but rather of its opposite. The world and all that is in the world can deceive me; God and His law will surely bring me to my last end, that is, to heaven, where I hope to see God, to love and praise Him for all eternity. Amen.

On Taking Counsel with God in the Choice of a State of Life, see several sermons in the preceding First Part.

ON THE CONSTANT RECOLLECTION OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

SEVENTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE REASONS WE HAVE FOR CONSTANTLY RECOLLECTING THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

Subject.

We should often think of God, and keep His presence always before us: 1st. Because we are human beings. 2d. Because we are Christians.—*Preached on the first Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Venit Jesus et stetit in medio.—John xx. 19.

“Jesus came and stood in the midst.”

Introduction.

We, too, my dear brethren, enjoy the happiness of having our Lord and God present in our midst, wherever we may be, although we cannot see Him with our bodily eyes. We must seek God, as St. Paul says, “although he be not far from every one of us. For in Him we live and move and are.”¹ This is an undoubted article of faith, which requires no further proof. Therefore God is present with us at all times, in all places; but are we at all times, in all places present with God? I do not ask if we are with Him, as all creatures and even lifeless and senseless things are. Truly, dogs and cats, and horses and asses, and sticks and stones are always with and before the all-seeing eye of God. I ask, if we are at all times, in all places present with God by constantly recollecting Him and His divine presence? What? At all times, in all places? Not by any means! The church is gen-

¹ *Quamvis non longe sit ab unoquoque nostrum; in ipso enim vivimus, et movemur, et sumus.*—Acts xvii. 27, 28.

erally the place, our hour for prayer generally the time in which we think of God; the remainder of the day is devoted to other thoughts and ideas. To try to think of God often, and to walk constantly in His presence, is, to our mind, fit only for holy and perfect people, and for religious in their convents, who have nothing else to care for the whole day. This erroneous opinion is the reason why I have taken up this subject, in order to show the contrary. All of us, no matter what we are, should practise this holy recollection of God's presence, and keep Him constantly before our eyes; there is nothing more reasonable if we consider it as far as God is concerned; nothing more useful if we consider our own salvation; nothing more consoling, even in the calamities of this life, than the constant recollection of God's presence; nay, as St. John Chrysostom maintains, the whole Christian life depends on this practice. To-day I shall consider only the first point, and shall show what reason we have for practising this recollection of the presence of God.

Plan of Discourse.

We should often think of God, and keep His presence always before us, because we are human beings. This I shall show in the first part. We should do so because we are Christians, as I shall show in the second part.

O omnipresent God, enlighten our minds, and by the intercession of that Virgin who never turned her heart from Thee, grant that we may always be with Thee in our thoughts and in the gratitude of our hearts, who art always with and in us! Do you, O holy angels, remind us of the presence of God, since you are constantly at our side as our guardians.

Man has understanding, that he may know God.

The Lord our God, who is infinite wisdom, who does nothing without a reason, and has made nothing in vain, cannot provide us with a means, unless He wishes at the same time that we should make use of it for the end to which He has created it. Now, when He created me a human being, He gave me reason, mind, and memory to what end? That I might above all remember God Himself, know Him, and with this knowledge love Him above all things with all my heart. That duty is so proper to man, that when he neglects it he does not lead a human life, nay, as the wise Ecclesiastes says, he has lost the nature and the being of a reasoning creature: "Fear God and keep His commandments: for this is all man,"¹ as if he

¹ Deum time, et mandata ejus observa; hoc est enim omnis homo. — Eccles. xii. 13.

wished to say: to know, honor, and love God, therein does man chiefly consist, and he who neglects that cannot properly be called a man.

Therefore as a human being I am bound to use my understanding to this end, and to keep before my memory the omnipresent God. When and how often shall I do that? Perhaps once or twice a day, when I am engaged in prayer? But even lifeless creatures are always tending to the end for which they are created, and it would require an act of violence to make them cease doing so even once. Not once or twice a day, but incessantly does the stone tend downwards, because its end is the centre of the earth. Not once or twice a day does fire tend upwards, but continually, for that is its end. Does God, then, give man the use of reason and the faculty of knowing and remembering Him but once or twice a day? If that were the case, the Lord could not expect me to do more than remember Him during those times; if He granted me the use of my eyes only for a quarter of an hour during the day, I could see only for that time. But just as during the whole day my eyes borrow the light in order to see visible, created things whenever I will, so my understanding and memory, as long as they are in a sound state, receive the inward light necessary to recognize Him as my Creator. Therefore it is just and suitable to the end of man that I should always, as far as I can, have the omnipresent God before my memory. "Seek ye the Lord and be strengthened," says the Prophet David; "seek His face evermore;"¹ and if you should find this difficult, "be strengthened," put forth every effort, use violence, and shut out all idle, useless, curious thoughts and cares, that might draw off your memory elsewhere away from God.

But what do I say about using violence? What is easier for a man than to think of God? Nay, I might ask, is it possible ever to forget Him, unless we deliberately shut Him out of our memory? Is it possible, naturally speaking, for me to keep my eyes open while they are in a healthy state, and not to see during the daytime?—for wherever I turn, I find some visible object. Now, everything I see with my eyes, hear with my ears, touch with my hands, and perceive with my senses—everything I even think of outside of God, is capable of reminding me of Him, and unless I prevent it, of bringing Him before my mem-

Hence, in consequence of his last end, he is bound often to think of God.

All creatures constantly remind him of God.

¹ Quærite Dominum et confirmamini; quærite faciem ejus semper.—Ps. civ. 4.

ory. I have read of a king in India who was so enamored of his idol that he kept a servant whose duty it was to attend him constantly and say to him: your majesty must not forget Aran-ganassa, for that was the idol's name; such was the means he adopted to keep the idol's memory always before him. A sensible and holy action would that king have performed, if it had referred to the true, living God. Yet, my dear brethren, we are not in need of a servant to call out to us constantly and remind us of God; for all creatures in the midst of which we live are so many mirrors in which He shows us Himself and His perfections; so many pictures of His divinity; so many creatures, that call out to us in a loud voice the words of the wise Ecclesiastes, "Remember thy Creator."¹ They are voices that may be heard in every part of the world; voices that are never silent; voices that may be easily understood by all peoples of the earth, no matter what their language may be, as the Prophet David says: "There are no speeches nor languages where their voices are not heard. Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world."² If I look up to heaven, it reminds me of its Creator, and speaks with its lights and stars of the glory of God; so says the same Prophet in the same place: "The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of His hands."³ If I cast my eyes down to the earth, it reminds me of its Creator, and tells me of the wonderful power of God by the countless variety of creatures that are in it, by the trees and fruits in the fields, the herbs and flowers in the gardens, the beasts and other living things in the forests. If I turn round to behold anything that is beautiful and admirable, it reminds me of the infinite beauty of God, who has been able to make His creatures so fair. If I see anything noble and magnificent, it reminds me of the infinite majesty of God, from whom all splendor comes. If something disagreeable happens to me, it reminds me of the Providence of God, who has so arranged for me. If I associate with a pious man, he reminds me of the holiness of God, who has fixed His dwelling in that man's soul. If I consort with a notorious sinner, he reminds me of the wonderful patience, long-suffering, and mercy of God, in sparing for such a long time

¹ Memento Creatoris tui.—Eccles. xii. 1.

² Non sunt loquelæ neque sermones, quorum non audiantur voces eorum; in omnem terram exivit sonus eorum, et in fines orbis terræ verba eorum.—Ps. xviii. 4, 5.

³ Cœli enarrant gloriam Dei, et opera manuum ejus annuntiat firmamentum.—Ibid. 2.

even His worst enemies, and keeping them in life by His benefits. If I consider myself, my soul and body call out to me: all that you are and have, you have received from God. In a word, everything in the world is a voice that cries out to us: "Remember thy Creator."

How, then, is it possible that we do not often, nay, always, think of Him, whom the whole world, with all that is in it, constantly represents to our memory? Where are we, then, when we allow a long time to go by without thinking of God? Are there perhaps certain times when we cease to be rational creatures, so that we need use our reason for only a few moments during the day, and when that short time is at an end, again relapse into the condition of little children? Sometimes, to quiet a child, a book is given to it; it takes the book and turns over the leaves and plays with it for a whole hour without being a whit wiser than before. What is the cause of that? In one place it finds a long word, in another a pretty red letter, in a third a picture. The latter is what takes the child's fancy; it studies and ponders over it; but it cannot understand the letters. Try to explain them and say: see here my child; that is German, that is French, that is Latin, etc.—the child will hear what you say and will attend to it, but not a word will it understand. Are we not like that, my dear brethren, when we sometimes allow half a day to pass without thinking of God? A large book is always placed before our eyes, that is, heaven and earth; all the creatures therein are so many letters and words that explain to us the wisdom, omnipotence, providence, and other perfections of God; so many voices that cry out to us: "Remember thy Creator." We hear the voices and attend to them, for they make an impression on our outward senses; but we do not understand the language in which they speak to us of God. Our thoughts, cares, and speculations are concerned with what we see in the creatures themselves with which we have to do; we are satisfied with begging from them some sensual gratification or temporal benefit; but we rarely if ever think, at least seriously, of the great God who is always present and working in those creatures, although we ought to raise our thoughts higher than what we see around us. Is not that to act contrary to human reason?

Let us at least, my dear brethren, take decency into account, to which every honorable well-trained mind is inclined of itself,

No excuse for him, then, if he allows a long time to go by without thinking of God.

Decency and gratitude require

us often to
think of
God; shown
by similes
and ex-
amples.

and show to the great Lord that gratitude which one man shows another even amongst the most barbarous and savage people. A poor beggar thinks of his benefactor, especially at the time when he is receiving from him some great benefit or a rich alms. The hungry man does not forget the hand that feeds him through charity. St. John Chrysostom relates that the citizens of Antioch had such reverence for the memory of their former Bishop Meletius, who had done a great deal of good to them, that they gave his name to all their children, and caused it to be stamped on their plates, vessels, and other articles of the kind, while his portrait was hung up in every room in order to keep the memory of their great benefactor fresh. The child does not turn its heart or eyes from its mother who is carrying it, or leading it by the hand. Boleslaus III., king of Poland, always wore the portrait of his deceased father round his neck, so that he might never forget him and be constantly as it were in his presence. And we, too, if we have any sense of honor and decency, although we may not know anything of the Holy Scriptures, generally practise through a natural impulse the advice of the wise Ecclesiasticus: "Forget not thy friend in thy mind, and be not unmindful of him in thy riches."¹ We should consider it a most disgraceful thing seldom or never to think of a good friend, who has assured us that he loves us truly, and wishes well to us with all his heart; although the thoughts we have of him can do him no good, since he cannot see our hearts or memories. But if it were possible for him to see into our minds and there to find no trace of his being remembered by us, he would feel deeply hurt, and would complain bitterly of the coldness and indifference of one whom he looked on as a friend. How loving friends beg a place in each other's memory both in their conversations and letters! What wonderment and complaint it gives rise to when the usual post day passes without bringing the expected letter! It seems, the one says, that I am quite forgotten; now I know what the old proverb means, "out of sight, out of mind." Nay, if you could be assured that some personage of royal blood constantly thought of you, although he does not give you any other token of friendship, you would feel obliged to think of him in return, and would look on yourself as guilty of the grossest ingratitude if you acted otherwise. So great is the effect of a

¹ Non obliviscaris amici tui in animo tuo, et non immemor sis illius in opibus tuis.—Eccius. xxxvii. 6.

mere sense of decency and gratitude amongst men in their dealings with one another.

Now, my dear brethren, has man a greater benefactor than God? a better or more loving father? a more faithful and affectionate friend? Can he find any one who thinks so constantly of him as God? Whatever we have in and outside ourselves is His free gift. To Him we must attribute it that we are alive and in good health; and that benefit we receive from His hands every moment of our lives up to the present, for His omnipotence, by its coöperation, preserves our whole being, and, as it were, creates it afresh each moment. God bears us in His arms like a loving mother, to protect us from all dangers of soul and body. God is and works in all things that tend to our preservation, or are useful to us. He is in the earth to support us; in the water to cleanse us; in the air to refresh us; in the fire to warm us; in the sun to enlighten us; in our food and drink to nourish us; in our clothing to cover us. Thus the great God is always occupied with us, although He is not in the least want of us, and would be just as happy as He now is if we never existed. Nay, through all eternity the glorious Monarch of heaven and earth never turned His thoughts away from us for a moment, and attended to us as if He had nothing else to do, while He is so lovingly careful of our interests that David was forced to cry out in admiration: "Thou hast multiplied Thy wonderful works, O Lord my God, and in Thy thoughts there is no one like to Thee;"¹ as if to say, how many thoughts have not parents about their dear children, husbands about their loving wives, and friends for the objects of their affections? And yet all these are as nothing compared to the multitude of the thoughts which Thou hast for us! If, then, it would be a grievous injustice and ingratitude in the sight of the world to withdraw our thoughts or to lend them but seldom to one to whom we owe an obligation, or who loves us and often thinks of us, what black ingratitude must it not be for a man to forget his God, or to think only now and then during the day of that bounteous Creator who thought of him for all eternity, and showed the utmost generosity in conferring benefits on him? Just as not a single moment passes in which we do not enjoy the fruits of the divine liberality, says St. Bernard, so also we should not allow a single

For God is a most loving friend and benefactor.

¹ Multa fecisti tu Domine Deus meus mirabilia tua; et cogitationibus tuis non est qui similis sit tibi.—Ps. xxxix. 6.

moment to pass in which we do not keep the thought of God fresh before our minds.

Therefore
we should
never forget
Him.

As far as possible, then, my dear brethren, let us resolve with St. Augustine, "I will not take my eyes off Thee, O Lord, because Thou keepest Thine always fixed on me."¹ Thou art always thinking of me, therefore will I never forget Thee. At all times, in all places Thou art present with me; therefore shall my heart in all places, at all times, in all occupations be ever present with Thee. Thou, O great Lord, art willing to enter into this contract with me, that I shall not be obliged to think of Thee, when thou ceasest to remember me; but since this latter will never be the case with Thee, I will never take my eyes off Thee, for I must not be the first to break the conditions of the contract. Am I still to continue receiving so many benefits from Thy hands, without remembering Him from whom they come, to whom alone I owe them? That would be an act of the blackest and most hideous ingratitude, of which any reasoning being should be ashamed, and still more a Christian. And there, my dear brethren, you have the second reason that should incite us to walk constantly in the presence of God, namely, that we are Christians, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

A Christian
should live
more per-
fectly than
people for-
merly un-
der the nat-
ural and
written
law.

It is an undoubted truth and stands in no need of special proof, that a Christian is more in the sight of God than a mere human being endowed only with natural gifts; for the Christian is raised above his nature by the grace he receives in baptism, a grace that is called in theology a participation of the divine nature;² and therefore is bound to perform all his actions, not only in a rational manner according to the natural light of reason, but also in a supernatural manner according to grace, with a supernatural spirit, for a supernatural end, that is, for God. It is an undoubted fact, too, that since the Passion and Death of Our Lord, after having received the grace of God, after having solemnly sworn fealty to Christ in baptism, the Christian is bound to follow Christ as his model and exemplar in all things as far as may be, and to strive for far higher perfection than a man in former times under the law of nature, or even under the written law of the Jews, was bound to do. The Jew under the law of

¹ Non a te auferam oculos meos, quia et tu non auferis a me oculos tuos.

² Participatio naturæ divinæ.

Moses was, so to speak, nothing better than the slave and bondsman of the Almighty; the Christian is the dear friend and child of God. The Jewish law was kept in the spirit of fear and trembling; the Christian law is a sweet yoke and a light burden that is to be borne in the spirit of love and child-like confidence. The Jewish law was announced by mere men; the Christian law is published by God Himself, and written by the Holy Ghost in the heart. The sacrifices of the Jews were a mere imperfect shadow and figure of that most holy sacrifice in which we offer our God Himself on the altar. The sacraments of the Jews were a mere imperfect shadow and figure of our holy sacraments, by which we share in the infinite merits of Jesus Christ. Thus Judaism was but a figure of Christianity; a Jew was only the shadow and figure of a Christian. Hence the thoughts of the Christian must ascend far higher, and all his actions as well, than those of the Jew under the law of Moses, and should surpass them, so to speak, as much as the living man surpasses his lifeless image. Is not that so?

Now, if even the Jews under the Old Law were most diligent in keeping God before their eyes and in walking constantly in His presence; if their prophets by the command of God often exhorted them thereto; if God Himself laid His commands on them to that end; nay, if even under the law of nature, which was far more imperfect than the Jewish law, that practice was common; how can we believe that the holy Gospel of Jesus Christ can dispense us from observing it? Read the Sacred Scriptures and see what was the practice of holy men in this respect. Henoah and Noe knew nothing of a written law, and yet the Scripture says of them that they always walked with God: "And Henoah walked with God."¹ "Noe was a just and perfect man in his generations, he walked with God."² St. Paul, writing to the Hebrews, says of Moses that he walked with God as if he could see Him with his bodily eyes: "For he endured as seeing Him that is invisible."³ When the prophets, such as Elias and Eliseus, wished to confirm anything they said, their usual expression was: "As the Lord liveth, the God of Israel, in whose sight I stand."⁴ Does not king David repeatedly say of himself that he never turned the eyes of his mind away from

Yet in those times men lived in the constant recollection of God.

¹ Ambulavit Henoah cum Deo.—Gen. v. 22.

² Noe vir justus in generationibus suis, cum Deo ambulavit.—Ibid. vi. 9.

³ Invisibilem enim tanquam videns sustinuit.—Heb. xi. 27.

⁴ Vivit Dominus Deus Israel in cujus conspectu sto.—III. Kings xvii. 1.

God? "My eyes are ever towards the Lord."¹ Does he not complain bitterly of the wicked of his day who neglected this holy practice? Ah, he says, "they have not set God before their eyes."² Did not the warning of the Prophet Samuel to the Israelites, before David ascended the throne, tend to this? "Now therefore stand before the Lord."³ God Himself seems to have given Abraham, as the father of His people, a special command in this respect: "The Lord appeared to him and said unto him: I am the almighty God: walk before Me and be perfect;"⁴ as if He wished to say: I am the almighty God, who can lay on you whatever command I please; My wish, then, is that you always walk in My presence.

Hence a
Christian is
bound to it
all the
more.

What have we to think of this, or to say about it, O Christians? Has Jesus Christ perhaps left this holy and useful practice out of His most perfect law of love, just as He has abolished so many ceremonies and customs of the Old Law? Hear what He Himself says in the Gospel, and then you will see that He has prescribed this practice in a still more perfect manner: "Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times."⁵ When? In the morning, when you get up? In the evening, when you are retiring to rest? In the church, when you are hearing Mass? Before and after meals? No; "at all times;" without ceasing, as long as you are awake. "We ought always to pray and not to faint."⁶ He adds in another place, to confirm this. And that we may see how in earnest He is, He inspires His apostle St. Paul to write the same thing: "By all prayer and supplication, praying at all times in the spirit."⁷ But how can we do that? Must we spend the whole day in the church on our knees? If so, things will fare badly in our households. Must we always have the prayer-book or the rosary beads in our hands when we are at home? If so, what is to become of the work? What are we to do with our servants? How are tradesmen to earn their daily bread? Must we always keep our lips moving in prayer to God? But how could we eat and drink then, or carry on a conversation, which latter is often very necessary? No, my dear

¹ Oculi mei semper ad Dominum.—Ps. xxiv. 15.

² Non proposuerunt Deum ante conspectum suum.—Ibid. liii. 5.

³ Nunc ergo state coram Domino.—I. Kings x. 19.

⁴ Apparuit ei Dominus, dixitque ad eum: ego Deus omnipotens; ambula coram me et esto perfectus.—Gen. xvii. 1.

⁵ Vigilate itaque omni tempore orantes.—Luke xxi. 36.

⁶ Oportet semper orare et non deficere.—Ibid. xviii. 1.

⁷ Per omnem orationem et obsecrationem, orantes omni tempore in spiritu.—Ephes. vi. 18.

brethren, such is not the case. What is prayer? Nothing else but an elevation of the mind and thoughts to God. But must we, then, always actually think of God, and never let the thought of Him out of our memories? Neither is that required; for it could hardly be done without a miracle, and such an extraordinary grace has been given to only a few saints. The meaning is that we should think of God as often at least as our business permits; that we must frequently, in the midst of our business, raise our minds to Him and offer up our actions to His honor. If we neglect this, we do not live as honorable men, much less as true Christians. Hear the impressive words of St. John Chrysostom: "Let no one say that a man of the world, who is occupied in business, cannot pray constantly during the day; for he can do so very easily. Wherever you are, you can set up your altar; and although you do not bend the knee, or stretch out your hands to heaven, if your mind is recollected, you have prayed perfectly. Are you in the bath? Pray. Wherever you are, pray. You yourself are the temple; you need not seek a better place; God is always with you." ¹

Judge from this now yourself, whoever you be, who at most are satisfied with raising your thoughts to God for a moment in the morning, and making in a careless manner the good intention, if you have even that much good sense, thus paying the Lord for the whole day, while you bury yourself so deep in your cares, business, and troubles that God has hardly a thought from you, until, wearied with worldly affairs, you are about to retire to rest; judge, I say, what sort of a life you are leading, whether your actions are according to the instructions of Jesus Christ and are directed to imitating Him and to the attainment of your last end; nay, whether they are consistent with human reason. Judge whether you know and are grateful to that sovereign Benefactor, who is busy with you the whole day, and who has to preserve you in life every moment by His help and coöperation. Judge whether you love God as you ought with your whole heart, since you exclude Him from your thoughts for such a long time.

If he neglects this, he does not act like a Christian, nor love God.

But you say I am not commanded under pain of sin to think

Although he is not

¹ Ne quisquam mihi dicat, quod nequit homo sæcularis, affixus foro, continue per diem orare; potest enim, et quam facillime. Ubique sis, potes altare tuum constituere; licet genua non flectas, nec in cælum manus extendas; si mentem tamen ferventem exhibeas, orationis perfectionem consumaveris. Licet in balneo sis, ora. Ubique sis, ora. Templum es, ne locum quæras; Deus semper prope est.—S. Chrysos. Hom. 79 ad pop.

bound to it
under sin.

always of God and to walk in His presence. Fie! what a thing to say! What a shameless objection to make! Christians, must we not be ashamed in our hearts, to think that we dare to put forward as an excuse, this is not commanded under pain of sin? Are you, then, resolved to give nothing to God but what you must give Him in order to avoid sin? Will you not perform any friendly service for Him unless He forces it from you by violence, as it were, and by threats of punishment? Is that a right way to act? Ill-reared and undutiful is the child who, when its mother calls it to come to her, that she may hold a loving talk with it, refuses to come until it has seen whether she holds the rod in her hand or not, thus absolutely refusing to obey her unless when threatened with punishment. What courtier who is invited by his sovereign to an audience, because the latter has a special delight in his company, would refuse to go unless the prince compels him by threatening to deprive him of his favor if he does not accept the invitation?

He should
consider it
an honor to
be allowed
to treat
with God so
familiarily.

“Oh, quite different is it in courts! To win a smile from the sovereign, to be saluted in a friendly manner by him, to have the privilege of standing near him when one knows that he is pleased with that proof of respect, to enjoy any of those favors, it would be well worth while to remain in waiting the whole day, and the whole night to boot! What a price many a one would pay for that privilege, if it were to be purchased with gold! No time would appear too precious, or too necessary, to be spent in that way, and to be looked on as well spent. And behold the great King of heaven and earth, the almighty God of infinite beauty, invites a poor mortal to remain always in His presence and to deal familiarly with Him as with a friend. “My delight is to be with the children of men,”¹ He says to us; but the poor mortal, who is always in need of his God, first asks: am I bound to come under pain of sin and punishment? O my God, Thy servant David asks in astonishment: “What is man that Thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that Thou visitest him?”² What honor and happiness for a man, that Thou shouldst deign to think of him! What honor and happiness for a man, that Thou shouldst desire to have him always before Thy face, and to converse in a friendly manner with him! But, O gross stupidity of men! Thou, O God, art willing to be with us, but we

¹ *Deliciæ meæ esse cum filiis hominum.*—Prov. viii. 31.

² *Quid est homo, quod memor es ejus, aut filius hominis, quoniam visitas eum?*—Ps. viii. 5.

do not wish to be with Thee! Thou dost follow us everywhere, so to speak, but we hide ourselves from Thee, lest Thou shouldst find out where we are! Thou dost unceasingly beckon to us, like a loving Father, to come to Thy lap, that Thou mayest speak with us, Thy dear children; but we run away from Thee, because we find no pleasure in Thy presence; that is, we allow our thoughts to be so taken up with worldly things, that we hardly turn our minds to Thee once during the day, while we excuse ourselves by saying that Thou hast not commanded us to think of Thee under pain of sin! I will not, my dear brethren, and dare not say that we commit a sin whenever we cease to think of God and to walk in His presence; for that would be a source of endless trouble and scruples to consciences. But granted that it is but a counsel, is not that enough for a Christian who loves God, and should any one hesitate to offer to that God, whom he is bound to love, his body, and soul, and heart, and mind, if he had a thousand of them, to do Him that pleasure He asks for?

Yes, truly, this should suffice for us. The blessed Hyppolite was once asked by his confessor how he kept in the presence of God. What? was the answer he got; would it not be the greatest rudeness and discourtesy to turn your thoughts from a prince who has admitted you with the greatest kindness into his palace? Now this world is built by the hand of God for our dwelling-place; from Him we have received and still receive all we are; and, moreover, we hope to have an eternal reward from Him in heaven; can we, then, forget our God? “Woe to me if I forget Him even for a moment!”¹ Such, too, should be our dispositions, my dear brethren. The life that is given to us on earth is not so long that we can afford to withhold a single minute of it from God, whom we hope to possess in eternity. Let us, then, endeavor as far as we can to walk in the presence of God constantly. You, officials, need not therefore neglect the duties of your state; nor you, shop-keepers, your business; nor you, parents, your children or your housekeeping; nor you, tradesmen, your work; nor you, servants, the obedience you owe your masters. No, the frequent recollection of God can easily be made to harmonize with all these occupations. Let no one, then, excuse himself by saying that his head is too full of business during the day for him to think of God. Oh, if you were enamored of a

Exhortation
and instruction
how to
keep in the
presence of
God.

¹ *Vae mihi si etiam unico momento sine Dei præsentia essem.*

creature, you would find it easy enough to turn your thoughts to the object of your affections, no matter how much business you had to attend to; for your heart is more with the person you love than with yourself; nor does this hinder you from your work. Give, then, your thoughts and recollection to that God who loves you so much and who is present with you at all times, in all places. What great difficulty is there in thinking before beginning a work: "for Thy sake, O Lord"? Or even when engaged in the most absorbing pursuits, in raising the mind to God, and saying: "for Thy sake, O God"? "What is there," asks St. Augustine, "to prevent the servant of God from meditating on the law of the Lord, even when he is engaged in manual labor?"¹ And St. Bernard says: "Just as, while the hands are working, the eyes do not cease to see, nor the ears to hear, so too, and much more easily, the mind can be working while the body is engaged in labor."² What great difficulty is there, then, in saying, when assailed by cares, troubles, and contradictions, "for Thy sake, O God, I bear these things"? Or in thinking, when attacked by temptations and occasions of sin, "Lord, Thou art with me! save me from falling"? Or in thinking sometimes, when engaged in conversation with others, "O God, Thou art present with me: I love Thee above all things"? St. Basil gives us different means of keeping in the presence of God. "Are you drinking wine?" he says. "Then do not forget Him who gave it to you to enjoy, and to be a comfort to you in weakness."³ "Are you putting on your clothes? Return thanks to the bounteous Giver."⁴ "Are you looking up to heaven, and considering the beauty of the stars? Prostrate yourself before God and adore Him who made them all with infinite wisdom. In all things thank God for having created the universe for your convenience, that you might know, love, and praise Him."⁵ All this is easy enough, and when you have practised it for a time, you will make a holy habit of it,

¹ Quid impedit servum Dei, manibus operantem, in lege Domini meditari?—S. Aug. de op. mon. c. 17.

² Sicut laborantibus manibus nec oculus propterea clauditur, nec auris cessat ab auditu; sic, imo multo melius, laborante corpore, mens quoque ipsa suo intenta sit operi.—S. Bern. Sermon. 4. de altit. cor.

³ Bibis vinum? memento illius, qui illud dedit tibi ad lætitiā, et infirmitatum solamen.—S. Basil. Hom. in Julittam. mart.

⁴ Tunicam indueris? Gratias agito benigno Datori.

⁵ Suspiciens in cælum et siderum pulchritudinem? Proclde ante Deum, et cole eum qui cuncta hæc in sapientia condidit. Deo gratias age, qui hæc omnia ad tuum commodum creavit, et ordinavit ut Creatorem agnoscas, ames, et laudes.

which will be a great comfort in your daily cares and occupations, and it will be, moreover, a source of consolation and enlightenment to you which will greatly alleviate the troubles of life. That is the meaning of walking in the presence of God, and cultivating a holy familiarity with the King of heaven and earth. In a word, if you really love your God, you will not find this difficult, but easy and agreeable.

Ah, yes, my God, now I know the reason why I have been so forgetful of Thee! With Augustine I must say: "Being turned away from Thee alone, I lost myself in a multiplicity of thoughts."¹ My mind was distracted with many cares and vanities, so that I have thought least of all of Thee, who shouldst always occupy my thoughts. I have been able to think, and that, too, frequently, on temporal gain, on my daily work, as if it were my last end. I have been able to think of vain honor, which I have often sought in my actions from men. I have been able to think of sensual pleasure and enjoyment, which attracted all my desires and the movements of my mind. I have been able to think of the person whose beauty captivated me. I have been able to think of those who have done me good, nay, even of those who have injured and provoked me to anger. I have thought of the calamity that threatened me even in the distant future, and that inspired me with fear and anguish. I have thought of the friend whom I have lost by death, and the recollection of him has brought tears to my eyes. All this I have thought of, and that without interrupting my daily avocations, "being turned away from Thee alone." Thou, my God, who not only dost not hinder me from performing my daily duty, but even helpst me therein by Thy special assistance and protection, Thou whose memory and presence would be the greatest comfort to me in all my actions, Thou, I say, O my God, art almost the only one who canst not find a single corner in my heart! Alas, I have not loved Thee with my whole heart as I should; and therefore my heart and mind are so far away from Thee! I am ashamed of the ingratitude, of the meanness with which I have treated Thee hitherto!

Repentant
confession
of faults
hitherto
committed
in this re-
spect.

Henceforth Thou shalt be the sole object of my thoughts. "I shall not take my eyes off Thee," I say with Augustine. When I awake in the morning, my first thought shall be for Thee, my God; and I shall say: Behold me, O my Creator, ready to do Thy

Purpose of
amend-
ment.

¹ *Ab uno te aversus evanui in multa.*

holy will to-day. When dressing, I will bless Thee, and humbly beg of Thee to clothe my soul with the nuptial robe of charity, and to keep me in Thy grace to the end. Never will I begin anything without first bending the knee and directing all my actions to Thee by a supernatural intention. No work, nor business, nor labor shall I perform of which Thou art not the beginning, the middle, and the end in my thoughts. While seated at table I will now and then raise my heart to Thee, who so generously nourishest me. If things go well with me, I will not forget my Benefactor, and I will say; "thanks be to God!" If trouble comes upon me, I will turn to Thee, and resigning my will into Thy hands, I will say with Our Lord: "Yea, Father, for so hath it seemed good in Thy sight." In the evening Thou shalt be the last in my thoughts before I go to sleep, after having thanked Thee for all Thy benefits and made the examen of conscience. Thus I will spend the whole day, nay, my whole life, in Thy presence and in Thy friendship, and make even now a beginning of that happy eternity in which I desire and hope to see and love Thee and rejoice in Thee my Supreme Good, forever and ever. Amen.

EIGHTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE ADVANTAGE OF RECOLLECTING THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

Subject.

There is no better means of becoming zealous in the service of God than constantly to remember His presence.—*Preached on the sixth Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Et vos testimonium perhibebitis, quia ab initio mecum estis.
—John xv. 27.

"And you shall give testimony, because you are with Me from the beginning."

Introduction.

Happy disciples, who had the good fortune to be always with Jesus Christ, and to be on familiar terms with Him, from the

¹ Ita Pater, quoniam sic fuit placitum ante te.—Matt. xi. 26.

beginning of His public mission till His ascension into heaven! This companionship with Our Lord filled them with such zeal for the honor and glory of God that they afterwards preached His name everywhere, as the Lord Himself had foretold them, "And you shall give testimony," in spite of the persecutions and difficulties that the world put in their way. Such, too, my dear brethren, is our good fortune; whether we walk or stand, or sit or lie down, our God is present with, before, and in us; and all we need do to converse with Him is to raise our thoughts and memory to His presence. Oh, would that we had the habit of doing that! What zeal we should then have for God's honor, what encouragement in His service! Nothing is more reasonable for a human being, and especially for a Christian, than the constant recollection of the presence of God, as we have seen already. To-day I say—

Plan of Discourse.

There is no better means of becoming good and zealous servants of God than the constant recollection of His presence. Such is the whole subject of this instruction.

Christ Jesus! whose presence inflamed Thy disciples with zeal, urge us all by Thy grace to seek constantly and keep before our eyes Thy Divinity, which is present everywhere, and to be thereby encouraged to serve Thee zealously. This we beg of Thee by the intercession of Mary, Thy Mother, and of the holy guardian angels.

Zeal in the service of God is nothing else than a certain promptitude and earnestness on the part of the will by which one is impelled to do all that he knows to be pleasing to God, to do it with the greatest fervor and energy, to do it constantly in all circumstances, never to allow any difficulty to prevent one from doing it, and to do it with the purest intention because such is God's will. This I have elsewhere explained in detail. A zeal of this kind must give our works the greatest value, beauty, and merit, and make them most pleasing to God? What does it profit me to perform a good and holy work if I do not perform it well and holily as I should? A mantle of silk adorned with gold and silver is as unbecoming to me as an old sack, if it does not fit me. What pleasure has the great Monarch of heaven in my service if I perform it carelessly and in a slovenly manner? God looks not at the hand, but the heart; not at the greatness

In what zeal in the service of God consists.

of the gift, but the readiness and zeal of the giver. If one of us had been present when the two sisters were entertaining Our Lord, would he not have given the prize to the diligence and industry of Martha? She took a great deal of trouble to prepare things properly for Our Lord: "But Martha was busy about much serving,"¹ while Mary, her sister, did nothing to help her, but kept quite still at the feet of Christ, listening to His instructions: "Who sitting also at the Lord's feet, heard His word."² And yet the latter was praised by Our Lord: "Mary hath chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her."³ Why was that so? Martha was more diligent and zealous in the service of Christ; but Mary's love for Him was more fervent. Amongst the crowd of people who, as the Evangelist St. Mark writes, put so much money in the treasury of the temple, there came a certain poor widow with two mites as her offering: "And there came a poor widow, and she cast in two mites, which make a farthing."⁴ But her gift was worth more in the sight of God than all the gold and silver contributed by the others, as Christ Himself said: "And calling His disciples together, He saith to them: Amen I say to you, this poor widow hath cast in more than all they who have cast into the treasury,"⁵ because she contributed her small gift with a better, more upright, and more generous will. "For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want cast in all she had, even her whole living."⁶ So that the whole matter depends not on the number and greatness of the works of devotion that one performs, but much more on the manner in which they are performed. An "Our Father" said with true fervor and an upright heart brings in more profit to the soul and eternal reward in heaven than three thousand rosaries said with tepidity and wilful distractions. The chimney-sweep, who is content with the will of God in his state, and sweeps out a chimney even once only with a pure supernatural intention, because such is the will of God, merits more in heaven with his work, dirty as it is, than many a learned priest does by cele-

¹ Martha autem satagebat circa frequens ministerium.—Luke x. 40.

² Quæ et jam sedens secus pedes Domini, audiebat verbum illius.—Ibid. 39.

³ Maria optimam partem elegit, quæ non auferetur ab ea.—Ibid. 42.

⁴ Cum venisset autem vidua una pauper, misit duo minuta, quod est quadrans.—Mark xii. 42.

⁵ Et convocans discipulos suos, ait illis: amen dico vobis, quoniam vidua hæc pauper posuit omnibus misit, qui miserunt in gazophylacium.—Ibid. 43.

⁶ Omnes enim ex eo quod abundabat illis miserunt; hæc vero de penuria sua omnia quæ habuit misit, totum victum suum.—Ibid. 44.

brating the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, if he does it without proper fervor and devotion. Be "in spirit fervent, serving the Lord,"¹ is the warning given us by St. Paul; that is, whatever you do for God, see that you do it with fervor and zeal.

To urge us to this fervor in the divine service, my dear brethren, we can find no better means than the constant recollection of the presence of God. The Prophet David, speaking in the person of true servants of the Lord, in order to show with what diligence, zeal, and perfection they do the will of God in all things, says: "Behold, as the eyes of servants are on the hands of their masters, as the eyes of the hand-maid are on the hands of her mistress," to be ready to obey the least sign, "so are our eyes unto the Lord our God;"² so do we turn our eyes towards the Lord, so as not to neglect His will in the least thing. A servant is never prompter and more diligent than when he is aware that his master is looking at him, to see how he does what he has been commanded to do; and therefore those lazy servants who perspire at table, but freeze with cold at work,—who eat much, but do little,—find nothing more annoying than to see their master always looking after them, so that they cannot escape him; and thus what the fidelity they promised him fails to effect is brought about by the presence of the master, although it is against their will. On the other hand, a faithful, diligent servant, who tries to do his duty, is very well pleased to know that his master is looking at him; it is already reward enough for him that his labor and industry are thus seen and approved of. Never does the soldier show more courage in battle, more readiness to expose his life amongst drawn swords and flying bullets, than when he sees his king standing beside him fighting at his side, although otherwise his heart would sink through fear. If a school-teacher wishes to have diligent, studious children, all he has to do is to keep his eyes on them; if he leaves them to themselves there is an end of their diligence. The heathen Seneca, who knew nothing of the all-seeing eye of God, wrote to his friend Lucilius that if he wished to lead a blameless, perfect life, he should select some noble and virtuous man in his thoughts, and imagine that man to be always present with him, looking on at all his actions. No better means wilt thou find, O Lucilius, he says, not only to save thyself from all transgression, but also to

The remembrance of God's presence incites us to zeal; for even the fact of a mere mortal looking at us makes us diligent in our work.

¹ Spiritu ferventes, Domino servientes.—Rom. xii. 11.

² Ecce sicut oculi servorum in manibus dominorum suorum, sicut oculi ancillæ in manibus dominæ suæ: ita oculi nostri ad Dominum Deum nostrum.—Ps. cxlii. 2.

do thy most secret actions well and in strict accordance with thy duty.

How much more, then, the eye of the all-seeing God?

Now, if the eye of a mere mortal, nay, the bare remembrance of one, has such an effect on our hearts and minds that through reverence for him we strain every effort to perform our duties well and in a praiseworthy manner, shall we be less influenced by the real, undoubted presence of the great God, who is everywhere and at all times with us, and whose piercing eye is never for a moment withdrawn from us? Truly, the thought: I serve a Lord before whom all the earth must bow; a Lord whom the powers of heaven serve with veiled countenances through reverence; a Lord whom thousands of thousands wait on, and to whom ten thousand times a hundred thousand minister, waiting but a sign from Him to do His will, and esteeming themselves happy in being allowed to serve Him—this thought should make me, a wretched worm of the earth, esteem myself as only too fortunate in being able to serve Him in my poor way, even if to do so I had to renounce all I possess, to wear away all my faculties of body and soul, to suffer all the torments in the world, and to sacrifice a thousand lives if I had them. And if I really did all that, would it be too much? Nay, would it be enough? Enough, indeed, it would be for my poverty, which has nothing more; but for Thee, O great God, and Thy infinite majesty, it would be nothing! I serve a Lord to whom I am bound to say, like the Prophet David, with the deepest sentiments of admiration and gratitude: “What shall I render to the Lord, for all the things that He hath rendered to me?”¹ All that I have, O Lord, comes from Thee, and is still Thy property; to what end, then, should I use those things if not for Thee and according to Thy holy will? If Thou hadst conferred no other favor on me but admitting me, miserable as I am, to Thy service, allowing me to love Thee, and even thinking of me; must it not be the greatest honor and favor for me to wait on Thee, and to use every effort to do what pleases Thee? I serve a Lord who rewards a momentary service far better and more generously than all the masters in the world; who pays for it far more than all the servants in the world can ever expect in the way of reward; a Lord who owns the beautiful heaven with all its joys and happiness; who for every step, every movement of my body, every word I utter, every thought of my heart that is directed to His honor, will give me this bliss-

¹ Quid retribuam Domino pro omnibus quæ retribuit mihi?—Ps. cxv. 12.

ful heaven for all eternity. Is that recompense not worthy of zealous service? Could there be a greater loss than to forfeit an eternal joy for a moment's negligence? This great, loving, generous God sees me; He has ordained for me the state in which I live, and its duties; the prayer, the devotion, the work of charity, of justice, of meekness and humility that I now perform should be performed for His sake; He Himself with all His divine nature is here present, seeing how I perform it; and He writes it down with pleasure and delight when I perform it well; otherwise, if I am negligent, He is displeased and disgusted. A thought of that nature must necessarily be a spur to one who has even a little love of God, to urge him to do his ordinary duties well and zealously in order to please the Lord.

What deep reverence, modesty, and humility in outward deportment will be the result of this! What attention and recollection of spirit during prayer, and in all works of devotion! St. Basil, being asked how one could keep away all vain thoughts, especially during prayer, answered: "By imitating David, who said: 'I set the Lord always in my sight.'"¹ When the prince is actually in his palace, not every one is then allowed to enter it; all the doors and entrances are doubly guarded to keep out the common people, and to drive out any one who might have crept in. But if the palace is empty for a time, because the prince has gone away, then there is no need of such care, and admittance is granted to almost any one who applies for it. So it is with our minds, my dear brethren. We sometimes spend hours in the church singing, praying, sending forth sighs to heaven, but so dryly and distractedly, and with such wandering thoughts, that, if we were asked what we prayed for, we should not be able to tell. How does that happen? Ah, the prince is not in his palace, and the sentinels do not perform their duty; God is not in the memory, and therefore it is no wonder that the doors of our senses, our eyes and ears, are opened to strange objects, while the mind becomes filled with thoughts of business, or curious speculations regarding those who are sitting near us or passing by. If we kept the great Lord constantly before our memories, so that we remembered whom we are praising and adoring, seldom or never would a distracting thought come to interfere with our devotions.

From this come reverence and attention in works of devotion; shown by a simile.

¹ Si Davidem imitemur, qui ait: providebam Dominum in conspectu meo semper.—Ps. xv.

A pure intention in all our works.

Finally, with regard to the influence the divine presence has on us, inspiring us with a good intention in all our actions, that intention on which so much depends, St. Basil explains it by the following simile. You have a work of art to execute in the presence of a great king, or of a lowly servant, or of some stranger who is nothing at all to you, or of some good friend whom you love. Which of them do you pay the greatest attention to? Whither do your thoughts and desires go? Do you particularly wish to please the servant or the stranger? No, you say; they may think what they wish about my work; they may praise or find fault with it; it is all the same to me; for it makes no difference to me whether they are looking at me or not. It is enough for me if the king and my friend see what I do and give it their approbation; that is sufficient reason for me to strain every nerve to do the work well. Such will be your dispositions in your daily actions, if you always remember that you are in the presence of God, whose all-seeing eye beholds everything you do.

For it removes all the impediments to the good intention.

That we so frequently forget the good intention, or, after having made it, interrupt it and so lose our merit, comes from many different causes. For we either give way to self-complacency if the work is secret; or else, if it is public, we seek the praise of men; or else we forget the good intention, or do not think of it, or are too lazy to make it in our daily work, so that we do our duty for no other reason than that we must do it to earn our daily bread and to support our families, but we have not the least supernatural motive or object in our work. A very deplorable thing for those who have a number of cares to worry them during the day, or have to work hard and bear many crosses and trials; for when they are wearied with work in the evening, they go to bed just as poor and miserable in soul as they are in body; although, if they had directed those trials to God by a single rapid thought, they would have gained an immense reward of glory in heaven. (Poor peasants and citizens, needy workmen and servants, ah, do not forget the good intention!) All these losses would be prevented if we had a lively recollection of the presence of God. For, in the first place, how could we have no desire to please such a great, generous Lord, who is always present with us, when we can do so with such ease, and by merely directing our actions to Him? In the second place, if vainglory shows itself, it will soon be put to flight before the all-seeing Lord by the mere thought:

I have to thank God for all the good that I can do, so that I should do Him a gross injustice, and that, too, before His very face, if I were to arrogate to myself any honor due to my works, for that honor belongs to Him alone. Finally, how could I allow myself to be led astray by vainglory, or depart one hair's breadth from the good intention, even if all the kings and potentates of the world were looking at me, when I remember that the great Monarch of heaven sees me and notices how I do my duty? It is enough for me to earn His praise; for what does the applause of the whole world avail me, if God despises me? And what matters it if the whole world condemns my work, if God alone praises it? for it is according to His will that I desire to regulate all my thoughts, words, and actions during the day. What says the royal Prophet? "I spoke of Thy testimonies before kings; and I was not ashamed."¹ That is, I was not ashamed, O Lord, to proclaim before the kings of the world the justice and holiness of Thy law; I was neither confounded by the splendor of their majesty, nor frightened by the greatness of their power, "because all my ways are in Thy sight."²

In a word, just as the most perfect love in the angels and blessed in heaven springs from the constant contemplation of God, so all perfection and holiness of life amongst men on earth comes from the constant recollection of the presence of God; nay, we might say that the perfect observance of this practice and the attainment of perfection are one and the same thing. When the Lord God chose Abraham as a model for the whole world, He told him in a few words what he had to do: "Walk before Me and be perfect."³ That is, according to the Septuagint, always remember My presence, and you will surely attain perfection. In the lives of the Fathers we read that a certain monk went to St. Antony, and spoke to him thus: Father, what shall I do that will give most pleasure to God, so that I may attain that perfection which Our Lord requires of us in the Gospel? The monk thought that the Saint would give him a number of rules and instructions; but Antony, skilful teacher of holiness as he was, who had passed many years in the practice of all virtues, gave him simply this admonition: "Wherever you go, keep God always before your eyes."⁴ For he knew well

The greatest human perfection comes from the constant recollection of God's presence.

¹ Loquebar de testimoniis tuis in conspectu regum, et non confundabar.—Ps. cxviii. 46.

² Quia omnes viæ meæ in conspectu tuo.—Ibid. 168.

³ Ambula coram me et esto perfectus.—Gen. xvii. 1.

⁴ Quocunque vadis, Deum semper habe præ oculis tuis.

that this was the shortest road to Christian perfection. St. Teresa says of herself, as we read in the fourth book of her *Life*, that she always strove with all her might to walk in the presence of God, and she thus made such progress that she is still looked on as a miracle of holiness. Amongst other lessons she has left us is this: that we should always act as if we saw the Almighty God standing beside us; and if we observe that, we may be sure of deriving the greatest advantage for our souls. Nor was it merely during her life-time on earth that the holy virgin recommended that practice, for she appeared after her death to some religious of her Order, and assured them that, if they wished to attain perfection, they should always observe it.

Shown by a
simile.

What is the reason, my dear brethren, that the moon presents such different appearances to us, so that it sometimes shines with its full light, and at other times seems covered with a dark veil? We now see it but partially, it will continue growing less day by day, and in a week's time we shall not see it at all; again, in a short interval, it will make its appearance, growing daily larger, until it shines again with its full light. What is the cause of that change? It comes from the moon itself, and depends on the way in which it turns its face. It receives all its light from the sun; as long as it looks straight at the sun, it shines with full power; but when it begins to turn away from the sun, it loses its light gradually. The human soul, my dear brethren, must borrow all its beauty, holiness, and perfection from the Sun of Justice, that is, from God, its Creator, the Holy of holies. The more, then, I turn the eyes of the mind away from God, the longer I fix my thoughts on creatures and earthly things, the less influence will the rays of divine grace have on my soul, and my heart and affections must necessarily be drawn where my thoughts and my desires most frequently go. On the other hand, as the wise Ecclesiasticus says: "They that fear the Lord will prepare their hearts, and in His sight will sanctify their souls."¹

Nay, man
thus ac-
quires a
certain re-
semblance
to God Him-
self.

Although the moon receives its light from the sun, yet it does not get any part of its fire or heat, but remains in the state in which God created it; but the soul, says St. John Chrysostom, by the constant remembrance of God's presence, becomes so united with Him, that it receives a sort of resemblance to the divine nature, holiness, and perfection; for we are apt to copy the

¹ Qui timent Dominum præparabunt corda sua, et in conspectu illius sanctificabunt animas suas.—Eccclus. ii. 20.

manners and morals of those with whom we associate. One man is polite in all his movements, in standing, sitting, conversation, etc.; the other is a regular boor. What is the reason of the difference? It is easy enough to guess; the latter spent the most of his time with uncultivated peasants; the other was brought up from his youth amongst refined people. What a difference there is sometimes between children of the same condition! Some are like angels, quiet, devout, modest, zealous in the service of God; others are quite the opposite, being given to stubbornness, swearing, cursing, and all kinds of wickedness, while in spite of their youth they are acquainted with things that it would be well for them to be ignorant of even when they grow up. Be not astonished, O parents, if you see traits of this kind in your children; see whom they are in the habit of associating with. "With the holy thou wilt be holy," says the Psalmist, "and with the innocent man thou wilt be innocent; and with the elect thou wilt be elect; and with the perverse thou wilt be perverted."¹ See what conversations you yourself sometimes carry on in the presence of your children, and what sort of example you give them; for what children see in their parents' manners and morals they will imitate as closely as if it were an inheritance handed down to them. Therefore remember the strict account you will have one day to give your Judge if you are careless as to the company your children keep, or allow them to see anything disedifying in your own behavior. Now, since that is the case, it follows that he who frequents the company of God, the Holy of holies (and that is done by frequently recollecting the divine presence, thus keeping God always before our eyes), must necessarily have something divine and holy in himself, holy thoughts and desires, holy words and discourses, holy and perfect works, which he learns from God Himself.

Many and great were the miracles that Moses, the leader of the Israelites, wrought both in Egypt and in the journey through the desert, such as bringing water from the hard rock and causing by his prayers bread to come down from heaven; and yet he never was held in such respect and reverence by the people, nor had he such a great reputation for sanctity, as when he came down from Mount Sinai after having spoken with God. His face on that occasion, says the Holy Scripture, shone with a

Shown by
examples
from Holy
Writ.

¹ Cum sancto sanctus eris, et cum viro innocente innocens eris; et cum electo electus eris, et cum perverso perverteris.—Ps. xvii. 26, 27.

divine radiance on account of his having conversed with God, although Moses himself did not know that there was anything extraordinary in his appearance: "He knew not that his face was horned from the conversation of the Lord. And Aaron and the children of Israel, seeing the face of Moses horned, were afraid to come near;" so that, as often as he spoke with them, he was obliged to wear a veil: "But he covered his face again if at any time he spoke to them."¹ What a sudden change in themselves was experienced by the two disciples who met Jesus on the way to Emmaus, although they did not know at first that it was the Lord who was talking to them. Before meeting Him, their faith, hope, and charity were almost gone; fear, anxiety, apprehension, and despair had almost driven them out of Jerusalem, and they went out into the country to see if they could not get rid of the gloomy thoughts that oppressed them; but hardly had Jesus begun to speak to them, when they felt themselves as it were on fire with fervor, as they themselves acknowledged after the Lord had disappeared from their sight: "And they said one to the other: Was not our heart burning within us, whilst He spoke in the way?"²

On this account the early Christians were looked on as holy.

Athenagoras, wishing to prove to the emperor Marcus Aurelius how far the Christians were from the vices that the pagans had falsely accused them of through hatred, and what an innocent life they led, said: their faith requires them to believe with the utmost firmness that their God sees day and night all their thoughts, words, and actions, and that they cannot hide themselves from Him; therefore you can imagine how reverential, modest, holy, and perfect those people must be at all times, and that it is not credible, nay, even possible I might say, for them to be addicted to the vices of which they are accused. What do you philosophers think of this argument? Does the conclusion follow? Yes, certainly with regard to the Christians of those days; for, according to their faith, they always had a lively recollection of the presence of God, and offered all their actions to Him. But how ill suited to the Christians of our days would that conclusion be! How many, I will not say pagans, but even of yourselves, my dear brethren, would laugh at me if I ventured to use the same argument and say: that man, or woman, or priest,

¹ Et ignorabat quod cornuta esset facies sua ex consortio sermonis Domini. Videntes autem Aaron et filii Israël cornutam Moysi faciem, timuerunt prope accedere. Operiebatur ille rursus faciem suam, quando loquebatur ad eos.—Exod. xxxiv. 29, 30, 35.

² Nonne cor nostrum ardens erat in nobis, dum loqueretur in viâ?—Luke xxiv. 32.

or layman, or youth, or maiden is a holy person, who leads a perfect life; it is not probable, at all events, that he or she has ever committed a mortal sin. Why? Oh, the reason is easy enough to guess; because of the Christian faith, which commands all to believe that God is present everywhere. How often would I not be shown the door, if I ventured to recommend a servant, saying simply: you may depend on this man; he will certainly do his duty, for he is a Christian, who believes firmly that God is everywhere present. Eh? would be the answer I should get; how does that follow? I have had Christians enough of the kind, and they have not hesitated to abuse my confidence and even to rob me. Are we not all Christians, having the same belief in the omnipresence of God? But are there no bad Christians? None who are tepid, careless in the service of God, vicious, half-hearted Christians? Alas, there are only too many! That conclusion would indeed be applicable to all if the faith were always active and lively in us, and we tried to walk in the presence of God at all times; but since we are careless in this, we cannot apply the argument to ourselves, and must acknowledge that, although we know by our faith that God is everywhere present, we do not on that account always lead a truly Christian, zealous, and holy life.

“Understand these things, you that forget God,”¹ says the Prophet David, and hardly think of Him once in the day. Understand and see what a great advantage you deprive your souls of, and how uselessly you squander the precious time that God has given you. “A man may look on that time as lost,” says St. Bernard, “in which he does not think of God.”² Understand and consider what merit you lose in your actions, which, as you rarely think of God, are performed without a good intention, without being directed to a supernatural end, without true devotion and zeal, through mere routine, from temporal motives, or human respect. Fear the evil consequences that generally ensue when people have not God always before their eyes: the heart becomes earthly, charity cold (for it is an undoubted truth that one thinks often of one whom he loves), while God in turn grows cold in His love for such people, whose hearts are so far from Him; mutual confidence is lessened; bad inclinations become stronger day by day; the tendency to sin in-

Neglect of
this brings
on a sinful
life.

¹ Intelligite hæc qui obliviscimini Deum.—Ps. xlix. 22.

² Omne tempus quo de Deo non cogitat, perdidisse se autemet.

creases, and finally mortal sin is the unhappy result. Irrefutable is the argument of the royal Prophet: "God is not before his eyes; his ways are filthy at all times; Thy judgments are removed from his sight."¹

Exhortation
to remem-
ber the
presence of
God.

Therefore he who truly loves God and his own soul, and is minded to keep in the state of sanctifying grace to the end, and to do his duty faithfully, must not forget what the Lord said to Abraham: "Walk before Me and be perfect;" remember My presence as often as you can, and you will attain perfection. Such, too, was the name that Abraham gave the mountain where he was about to sacrifice his son Isaac, when the angel stayed his hand, which had already drawn the sword that was to inflict the mortal wound on his only beloved son: "And he called the name of that place, The Lord seeth."² In the same way Agar called the well by which she was seated when the angel consoled her, "The well of Him that liveth and seeth me,"³ a name that would indeed suit any place. Therefore my house shall be the house of God, who sees me; the room in which I spend my time during the day the room of God, who sees me; the gardens, fields, and forests in which I walk shall be called the gardens, fields, and forests of the God who sees me; the market-place, the streets and squares of the town, the place and the streets of God, who sees me. He sees me when I offend Him; therefore I must never consent to sin. He sees me when I adore Him; therefore I shall frequently place myself in His presence and adore Him. He sees me when I am tempted; therefore I shall then beg of Him to help me. He sees me when I am in sorrow; therefore I shall then expect consolation from Him. He sees me when I am poor and needy; therefore I shall then expect Him to help me. At all times, in all places, these words shall be in my mind, the Lord sees me. Would to God that all parents frequently impressed on the minds of their children the beautiful exhortation that the elder Tobias gave his son: "Hear, my son, the words of my mouth, and lay them as a foundation in thy heart. When God shall take my soul, thou shalt bury my body; and thou shalt honor thy mother all the days of her life. Give alms out of thy substance, and turn not away thy face from any poor person. Take heed to keep thy-

¹ Non est Deus in conspectu ejus; iniquitatae sunt viæ illius in omni tempore; auferuntur judicia tua a facie ejus.—Ps. ix. 5.

² Appellavitque nomen loci illius: Dominus videt.—Gen. xxii. 14.

³ Propterea appellavit puteum illum, Puteum Viventis et Videntis me.—Ibid. xvi. 14.

self, my son, from all fornication. Never suffer pride to reign in thy mind or in thy words. See that thou never do to another what thou wouldst hate to have done to thee by another.”¹ But above all, my dear son, there is one thing that I beg of you most of all, that it may remain deeply impressed on your memory: “All the days of thy life have God in thy mind,”² and then thou wilt never consent to sin, and wilt become a faithful servant of God. Would to God, I say, that all parents were thus to exhort their children and encourage them to keep always in the presence of God! What holiness and piety in families would be the result!

Let no one say, my dear brethren, that such a practice is fit only for religious in their convents. I do, indeed, grant that it is easier for them to walk constantly in the presence of God, and therefore they are less to be excused if they neglect doing so; yet I am of the opinion that the practice is all the more necessary for people living in the world, because they are more exposed to the dangers and occasions of sin, and should therefore be more careful to keep in the presence of God. Besides, we are all human beings, created to the end that we may know and love our Creator; and we are, moreover, Christians, whose duty it is to model our lives and actions on the spirit, the intention, the teaching, the example of Jesus Christ, as I have elsewhere shown. Nor let any one pretend that it is too difficult for him to think frequently of God on account of the many different and distracting occupations that he has to attend to during the day; for, as I have already proved, no difficulty nor occupation can prevent us from thinking of one whom we truly love, and therefore there can be nothing to hinder us from frequently raising our minds to God, no matter what duties may claim our attention; nay, there is nothing more consoling for the just man than thus to cultivate a holy familiarity with his God, who is present with him. A pious religious, who was celebrated for the great learning and unremitting industry which he devoted to the cause of the Catholic faith, used to say of himself, that if he happened to have some well-cooked food at table, he indeed enjoyed it, but

After the
example of
pious Chris-
tians.

¹ Audi, fili mi, verba oris mei, et ea in corde tuo quasi fundamentum construe. Cum acceperit Deus animam meam, corpus meum sepeli; et honorem habebis matri tuæ omnibus diebus vitæ ejus. Ex substantia tua fac eleemosynam, et noli avertere faciem tuam ab ullo paupero. Attende tibi, fili mi, ab omni fornicatione. Superbiam nunquam in tuo sensu, aut in tuo verbo, dominare permittas. Quod ab alio oderis fieri tibi, vide ne tu aliquando alteri facias.—Tobias iv. 2, 3, 7, 13, 14, 16.

² Omnibus autem diebus vitæ tuæ in mente habeto Deum.—Ibid. 6.

would say to himself at the same time: Lord, another time Thou must treat me somewhat more severely, and I will willingly mortify myself for Thy sake; to-day Thou art treating me very well indeed; I see Thy great goodness therein, and thank Thee for it, and accept with pleasure Thy generous gift. Another, if he happened to be amusing himself in listening to sweet music, or to be refreshing himself with food or drink, or to be looking at a play, would recollect himself now and then, and think: O my God, I deserve to be suffering in purgatory now for the sins by which I have offended Thee, and Thou givest me this pleasure! How have I ever dared to offend such a good God? O Lord, I am sorry, and I thank Thee and love Thee with my whole heart. Another, if he happened to be in pleasant company, would remember how far more pleasant is the society of God and His angels, and say to himself: O my Lord, I love these companions of mine; how much more, then, must I not love Thee? But if he had to deal with coarse, unmannerly and disagreeable people, he would think: O my God, if I find these people so troublesome, how would it be with me if I were in hell amongst the demons on account of my sins? Ah, my God, forgive me my sins! Now, my dear brethren, why should we not raise our minds to God in that way frequently during the day, and place ourselves in His presence? If that great Lord condescends to occupy His mind with the thought of us, surely He deserves that we should give Him our memories, and deliver them up to Him completely. Yes, O Lord, we are resolved to keep Thee always before our minds, that we may serve Thee as Thou desirest with due zeal and perfection, until we shall see Thee in the glory of heaven and rejoice with Thee forever. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Feast of the Dedication of a Church.

Text.

Quærebat videre Jesum.—Luke xix. 3.

“He sought to see Jesus.”

Introduction.

Zacheus, who a short time before had been an unjust usurer, who had wronged others by dishonest practices, now restores four times what he had unjustly acquired; he who was

before a pitiless miser now becomes a generous father of the poor, for he gives them half of what he possesses; he who was before the chief and public leader of sinners, now becomes a zealous follower and imitator of Jesus Christ! What was the cause of the sudden change? "He sought to see Jesus." This was the sole and all-sufficient cause of the happiness and salvation of Zacheus. He climbed up a tree, that he might see the Lord go by; he saw Him, and was seen in turn by the Lord, who called to him before all the people. With the greatest eagerness Zacheus came to Our Saviour, received Him into his house, and became converted with his whole heart, so that he deserved to hear the words: "This day is salvation come to this house." So much did Zacheus profit by the mere glance Our Lord cast on him, nay, by the bare desire he had to see Our Lord. My dear brethren, for us to see God, as far as He may be seen in this life, we need not, like Zacheus, climb a tree; for we are all tall enough; wherever we go, whatever we do, we have God with us, beside us, within and without us. All we have to do is to raise the eyes of our minds to Him, to bring His presence before our memory. Oh, if we were diligent in that practice, what great advantages we should reap for our souls! Nothing is more reasonable for a human being, etc.—*Continues as above.*

NINETEENTH SERMON.

ON THE CONSOLATION TO BE DERIVED FROM REMEMBERING THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

Subject.

There is nothing more consoling for the just man, 1st. in spiritual trials, and also, 2d. in bodily trials, than to think that God is present.—*Preached on the feast of the Ascension of Our Lord.*

Text.

Videntibus illis elevatus est, et nubes suscepit eum ab oculis eorum.—Acts i. 9.

"While they looked on He was raised up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight."

Introduction.

Ah, poor, forlorn disciples! All your consolation and joy are

gone, since Jesus Christ, your only comfort, has vanished from your sight. They were standing on the mountain and looking towards heaven, just as one who wishes to accompany his departing friend a part of the way, nor did they take their eyes off Him, as long as He remained in sight. This was their sole remaining comfort, that at least they might continue to look at Him, until the cloud hid Him from them: "A cloud received Him out of their sight." My dear brethren, when God is excluded from the eyes of the mind and from the heart of man, there can be no true joy nor consolation. But when God is kept constantly in the mind and the heart, there must necessarily be the greatest joy and true consolation. And that every just Christian can have if he wishes, and he can secure and enjoy the possession of it by the constant recollection of the presence of God. There is no trial or trouble in the world that cannot be assuaged and lightened for the just man by this recollection, as I now shall show.

Plan of Discourse.

Nothing more consoling for the just man in spiritual trials than to remember the presence of God; such will be the subject of the first part. Nothing more consoling for the just man in bodily trials than to remember the presence of God; the second part.

O omnipresent God, grant us by the intercession of Mary and our holy guardian angels to practise the recollection of Thy presence, that earthly things, like dark clouds, may never take Thee away from us, and that we may see how sweet and consoling even in the midst of troubles is the thought of Thy presence.

In what
spiritual
trials consist.

The trials that affect the soul are the many dangers and occasions of sin; anxiety and confusion of mind; the violent and frequent attacks we have to sustain from the desires of the flesh; the wiles of ungodly men who seek to betray us, and with whom we have to deal almost daily; the hateful suggestions and violent temptations with which the devil assails us;—such are the trials to which the holiest servants of God are exposed. The devil acts with us like a hunter; the game that he has caught in his toils gives him no further trouble than merely to keep possession of it; but he puts forward his best efforts to secure that which still runs about free. So the devil troubles himself little about souls that are sunk in vices; he allows them to en-

joy a certain repose and quiet, for, he says, I have them safe enough, and all I need do now is to prevent them escaping me by repentance. But good and pious souls he seeks for with the greatest eagerness, because he has no part in them yet; and it is on them that he pours out the full vial of his malice, that he may bring them under his yoke by mortal sin, or at least that he may satisfy his hatred of God by tormenting in this world those faithful servants of God whom he has no hope of tormenting in eternity. And the Lord often permits His holiest servants to be made the objects of such attacks, in order to prove their virtue and constancy in His love, and to increase their merit in heaven; therefore He warns us by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation. For gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation."¹

But do not fear or be downcast, just Christians! Whatever dangers or temptations assail you, your God is present with you. "Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world,"² were the words which Our Lord spoke to His disciples when He sent them as lambs among wolves, without scrip or staff, to wander through the world preaching the Gospel in the face of the most violent persecutions; go, said He, but be comforted; for I shall accompany you. And this one thought gave them such courage that they went through the world with joy and gladness. This one thought should console you, too, and more than suffice to strengthen you in the midst of the worst trials that can assail your souls. A child never feels so safe as when it is on its mother's lap or carried in her arms; all the other children or servants in the house may then attack it, or threaten it with sticks; it will simply look at its mother, and not feel the least fear as long as she protects it, and it imagines that no one in the world will be able to do it any harm; nay, small as it is, it will clench its little fist and shake it against those who are threatening it, such confidence has it in its mother. Why should I be afraid of twenty men who are running at me with drawn swords, if I have a hundred thousand armed soldiers

He who
keeps God
before his
eyes need
not fear
them.

¹ Fili, accedens ad servitutem Dei, sta in justitia et timore, et præpara animam tuam ad tentationem. Quoniam in igne probatur aurum et argentum, homines vero receptibiles in camino humillationis.—Eccles. ii. 1, 5.

² Ecce ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad consummationem sæculi.—Matt. xxviii. 20.

surrounding me ready to fight for me? “Alas, alas, alas, my Lord, what shall we do?”² cried out the servant of the Prophet Eliseus when he saw a whole army coming against them. “Fear not,” said the Prophet to him; “for there are more with us than with them; and the Lord opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Eliseus.”³

For he has
an al-
mighty
Lord to help
him.

Can any power, my dear brethren, be compared with that of the great Lord who in the Holy Scriptures gives Himself the name of Almighty? Nearly all the commands He gave the prophets commence with these words: “Thus saith the Lord Almighty.”⁴ And King David addresses Him: “Thou art terrible, and who shall resist Thee? Thou hast caused judgment to be heard from heaven; the earth trembled and was still.”⁵ Nor does He require arms or weapons to overthrow the greatest potentates of earth. Gnats, and flies, and frogs were enough for Him to humble the pride of Pharaoh with all his soldiers and warriors, and to bring him to submission. A breath of his mouth, that is an act of His will, is enough for Him to destroy the universe and reduce it to nothing. And that is the great, mighty, all-powerful God whom I have at all times present with me, in whose arms, on whose lap I rest, according to the words of St. Paul: “Upholding all things by the word of His power.”⁶ He it is who loves me, if I am just and in the state of grace, with a love far greater and more tender than that of the mother for her only son whom she carries in her arms. He it is who keeps His eyes always fixed on me to see what I want: “He will not take away His eyes from the just.”⁷ He it is who has counted all the hairs of my head, and so exactly, that not one of them can be lost without His knowledge and consent. “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered,”⁸ as Christ assures His apostles. He offers me His omnipotence, and has it in readiness to protect and defend me; or, to use the words of Holy Writ, He has surrounded me with His whole divinity as

¹ Heu, heu, heu, domine mi! quid faciemus?—IV. Kings vi. 15.

² Noli timere: plures enim nobiscum sunt, quam cum illis: et aperuit Dominus oculos pueri, et vidit; et ecce mons plenus equorum et curruum igneorum in circuitu Elisei.—Ibid. 16, 17.

³ Hæc dicit Dominus omnipotens.

⁴ Tu terribilis es, et quis resistet tibi? De cœlo auditum fecisti iudicium; terra tremuit et quævit.—Ps. lxxv. 8, 9.

⁵ Portansque omnia verbo virtutis suæ.—Heb. i. 3.

⁶ Non auferet a justo oculos suos.—Job xxxvi. 7.

⁷ Vestri autem capilli capitis omnes numerati sunt.—Matt. x. 30.

with a wall and a rampart, that none may come near me. "Oh, what a pleasing thing it is," cries out St. Augustine, "to see God in arms for you!"¹

What have I, then, to fear, as long as I am determined never to leave my God, but to keep always in His friendship? Who can harm me while He is my defender? "If God be for us, who is against us?"² I can boldly ask with St. Paul; who will dare to oppose us? Come, all ye demons, from the nether depths; vent all your malice and rage against me, as far as you can; assail me with the most horrible suggestions; collect against me all the temptations that the perverse, vain world, the wanton flesh, treacherous companions, and my own wicked inclinations and desires supply you with; as long as I have my God on my side to fight for me, I laugh at you and all your devices. You can indeed attack, disquiet, and torment me, if my Lord permits you; but you are too weak and impotent to make me lose His love or fall into mortal sin, if I do not deliberately consent to you, nor will you have my consent, if God, who is present with me, helps me with His grace, and He has promised me His help in all temptations. If the Lord permits you, I have said; for neither the devil, my dear brethren, nor anything can assail me, nor give me the least trouble, unless with the permission of God. This appears clearly from the history of Job. How long and persistently Satan had to petition the Lord before receiving permission to do Job any harm. At last he was allowed to carry out his wish; but within certain bounds and on certain conditions, which had to be strictly observed; for the Lord permitted Satan first to attack Job in his temporal wealth,*but commanded him to spare his person. "Then the Lord said to Satan: Behold all that he hath is in thy hand; only put not forth thy hand upon his person."³ He afterwards gave Satan leave to afflict Job's body as he pleased, but strictly forbade him to interfere with his soul: "And the Lord said to Satan: Behold he is in thy hand, but yet save his life;"⁴ that you must leave in peace and quiet. Mark, my dear brethren, how little the devil can do against us; he is indeed a cruel executioner, but he dare not lay hands on any one until the Supreme Judge has passed sentence.

Without
whose per-
mission no
power on
earth can
hurt him.

¹ *Magnum spectaculum videre Deum armatum pro tel*

² *Si Deus pro nobis, quis contra nos?*—Rom. viii. 31.

³ *Dixit ergo Dominus ad Satan: Ecce universa quæ habet in manu tua sunt; tantum in eum ne extendas manum tuam.*—Job i. 12.

⁴ *Dixit ergo Dominus ad Satan: Ecce in manu tua est; veruntamen animam illius serva.*—*Ibid.* ii. 6.

And the same is to be understood of wicked men who try to lead others into sin.

This is a
great consolation for a
servant of
God.

Oh, what a consolation for the faithful servant of God to know that not a snare can be laid for him without the consent and permission of his good and most loving heavenly Father! What a comfort even in the midst of dangers and temptations to have this good Father always at one's side, and to know that He is fighting against the enemies of our souls. "What happiness it is," exclaims St. Cyprian, "to fight while God is looking on!"¹ For I can rely on His help with child-like confidence, and say to my soul, that is perhaps disturbed at first: "Fear not, for there are more with us than with them." I am indeed weak and feeble, but the Lord, who is with me, is all-powerful; I am naturally inclined to evil, and if I were left to myself would easily consent to sin; but the Lord, who is with me, has promised me His help, nor will He allow me to be tempted above my strength. If I begin to grow weak and to yield, I can confidently call out to that Lord, as St. Peter did when he found himself sinking in the water, "Lord save me,"² or else I am lost! See, Lord, the birds of prey are after me; help me, lest they should devour me! Thy enemies are now attacking me; Thou knowest my weakness and frailty; save me! They are doing this to dishonor Thee, and to make me offend Thee; do Thou be my protection; defend my soul and Thy own honor; do not allow me to renounce Thy friendship and shamefully to go over to Thy enemies! What a happiness, I repeat, to fight under the eye of God! What consolation in all dangers and temptations to have the Almighty always with one and before one's eyes!

Proved by
examples
from Scripture.

This thought, says Cornelius à Lapide, has always been a shield behind which faithful servants of God have found sure protection from the shafts of their enemies. This was the thought that encouraged Job, when he was so cruelly ill-treated by the devil that he became one wound from head to foot, and was reviled by his friends, ridiculed by his own wife, and forced to take refuge on a dung-hill. "Deliver me, O Lord," he sighed forth, "and set me beside Thee, and let any man's hand fight against me."³ As long as Thou art with me, I can defy

¹ Quanta felicitas Deo spectante congrédi!

² Domine, salvum me fac.—Matt. xiv. 30.

³ Libera me Domine, et pone me juxta te, et cujusvis manus pugnet contra me.—Job. xvii. 3.

my enemies; let all the men in the world rise up against me, and they will not be able to harm me. This was the thought that gave Moses such indomitable courage that he feared neither king nor tyrant; for, as St. Paul writes of him: "By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the fierceness of the king; for he endured as seeing Him that is invisible."¹ St. Anselm thus interprets these words: "Him that is invisible, that is, God whom he saw not, he endured as seeing, that is, he expected to be assisted by Him with as much confidence as if he saw Him with the eyes of the body."² It was this thought of the presence of God that made David so fearless in the midst of his enemies and in dangers of all kinds both of soul and body, so that he dared to challenge all nations and all calamities to rise up against him: "I will not fear thousands of the people surrounding me; arise, O Lord, save me, O my God."³ For "though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me."⁴ "The Lord is my helper: I will not fear what man can do unto me."⁵ The Lord is my helper: and I will look over my enemies."⁶ Truly, I am surrounded by snares; but "my eyes are ever towards the Lord; for He shall pluck my feet out of the snare."⁷ Encouraged by the same thought, the heroic Machabees engaged in battle against an army of thirty-five thousand men, and overcame them: "So fighting with their hands, but praying to the Lord with their hearts, they slew no fewer than five and thirty thousand, being greatly cheered with the presence of God."⁸

But, you think, is not God present everywhere in any case, and what should we have to fear in temptations? True, but in what does His presence help me by way of consolation, if I do not remember it? I may have a thousand armed men to protect me

This comfort is only for him who thinks of the presence of God.

¹ Fide reliquit Egyptum, non veritus animositatem regis; invisibilem enim tanquam videns sustinuit.—Heb. xi. 27.

² Invisibilem, id est, Deum quem non videbat, tanquam videns, id est, ac si eum præsentem ibi cerneret, sustinuit, id est, auxilium ejus expectavit, ac si corporis oculis coram se videret præsentem et adjuvantem.

³ Non timebo millia populi circumdantis me; exurge Domine, salvum me fac, Deus meus.—Ps. lli. 7.

⁴ Etsi ambulavero in medio umbræ mortis, non timebo mala, quoniam tu mecum es.—Ibid. xxii. 4.

⁵ Dominus mihi adjutor, non timebo quid faciat mihi homo.—Ibid.

⁶ Dominus mihi adjutor, et ego despiciam inimicos meos.—Ibid. cxvii. 6, 7.

⁷ Oculi mei semper ad Dominum, quoniam ipse evellet de laqueo pedes meos.—Ibid. xxiv. 15.

⁸ Manu quidem pugnantes, sed Dominum cordibus orantes prostraverunt non minus triginta quinque millia, præsentia Dei magnifice delectati.—II. Mach. xv. 27.

on my journey, but if I am travelling along a road beset with robbers and murderers I shall not be a whit more cheerful or less anxious, in spite of my strong escort, unless I know of its existence. The least noise would frighten me, and cause me to tremble with fear lest it should be a robber coming to attack me. The two disciples that were going to Emmaus did not recognize Our Lord at first, and so, although they had Him in their midst, they continued to nourish gloomy and desponding thoughts: "But their eyes were held, that they should not know Him."¹ Magdalene stood in the garden and spoke with Jesus after His resurrection, but she still continued weeping bitterly for having lost the Lord. She "saw Jesus standing: and she knew not that it was Jesus."² The poor cripple at the pool of Bethsaida lamented that he had no one to help him, although Jesus was standing by his side at the time and about to heal him; for he knew not Our Lord. Therefore it is not the presence of God, but the frequent recollection of it which fills our hearts with a child-like confidence in the divine assistance, and thus gives a feeling of true comfort and security to the soul, and makes it courageous in spite of the attacks and snares of its enemies. The same recollection and thought of the presence of God brings comfort and consolation in bodily trials, as we shall now see in the

Second Part.

Bodily sufferings are trials.

The trials that afflict the body, interfere with its well-being, and thus make life a burden to us, are weakness and sickness of all kinds, melancholy and sadness, chagrin and vexation, poverty and want, misfortune and losses in temporal affairs, humiliation and shame before men, afflictions, persecutions, and whatever else deserves the name of cross or trouble, which either really afflicts us now, or which we apprehend in the future. These trials, too, in accordance with the hidden decrees of the Almighty, for the most part attack pious and just men; for such is the prophecy of Our Lord: "Amen, amen I say to you, that you shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice and you shall be made sorrowful."³ Such were the words He addressed to His disciples and, in their persons, to all His servants. The

¹ Oculi autem illorum tenebantur, ne eum agnoscerent.—Luke xxiv. 16.

² Vidit Jesum stantem, et non sciebat quia Jesus est.—John xx. 14.

³ Amen, amen, dico vobis quia plorabitis et flebitis vos, mundus autem gaudebit, vos autem contristabimini.—John xvi. 20.

world, that is, they who love the world and live according to its maxims, will rejoice; but you, My dear children, will be visited by trials, for that is necessary for you, that you may enter into the eternal joys of My heaven: "Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God."¹ These trials are of course less to be feared than temptations and dangers that threaten the soul, for they are more useful than injurious to our salvation; yet they appear to our weak nature more difficult and painful, and hence we require more consolation in them to bear them with Christian patience and resignation.

But where will the afflicted and troubled man find this comfort and consolation in his crosses and trials? It is vain and useless to seek it from the world; for it is the Lord alone who ordains these trials and sends them down on men; and therefore it is He alone who can take them away from us, or mitigate them. We generally throw the whole blame of our sufferings on men, or on accidental, natural occurrences, and therefore we break out into complaints: that man, that neighbor of mine, that husband, or wife, or child of mine is the cause of all my troubles. My poverty or sickness comes from that misfortune, that loss, that premature death. If people had only left me alone, and had not interfered with me, I should not have to suffer this or that annoyance; I should be able to live in peace and quiet, etc. But, my dear brethren, that will not do; we are wrong from the very first in those complaints; nothing in this world happens by chance; no man, nor beast, nor misfortune can hurt or annoy us without the consent of the almighty God. "Shall there be evil in a city, which the Lord hath not done?" asks the Prophet Amos.² Hear how Christ Himself spoke to Peter, when the latter drew the sword to defend Him on the eve of His bitter Passion and Death: "The chalice which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?"³ It is not Judas who sold Me to My enemies, nor the high-priests and scribes who have taken Me prisoner, nor the ungrateful people who cry out "crucify Him, crucify Him," nor the unjust judge Pilate who condemns Me to death, nor the soldiers and executioners who scourge Me, crown Me with thorns, and nail Me to the cross; it is not they who have prepared for Me this bitter chalice of suffering; but it is My heavenly Father who has filled it to the

We can find
no comfort
in them, un-
less from
God.

¹ Per multas tribulationes oportet nos intrare in regnum Dei.—Acts xiv. 21.

² Si erit malum in civitate, quod Dominus non fecerit?—Amos iii. 6.

³ Calicem quem dedit mihi Pater, non bibam illum?—John xviii. 11.

brim with pain and sorrow, and given it to Me to drink. Therefore it is God alone who lays the cross on our shoulders, and it is from Him alone that we must seek consolation in bearing it.

And that
comfort we
find by
recollecting
His pres-
ence.

But we need not go far to find it. We have a Comforter present with us at all times, in all places; all we need do is to remember His presence and think with a lively faith: God is with me; He sees what I have to suffer; He has ordained and it is His will that I should suffer as I do; God is with me, who could in a moment free me from all sufferings if it so pleased Him. God is with me, who means so well with me, and has such fatherly love for me; He has the greatest compassion for me in my sufferings; nor would He allow me to be thus tormented, were it not for the good of my soul. He is with me and hears my deep sighs and sees my hot tears, but He makes no effort to help or free me from my misery; this cross must then be very good for me. God has so ordained it; He is looking at me, and He has prepared for me a crown of glory in heaven according to the measure of the pain I am now suffering. Could we find anything better adapted to inspire us with patience and resignation than such a thought? Could a pious, just man, who loves God, find any greater consolation in calamities of every kind, than what he derives from the consideration of those words of the Psalmist, "I am with him in his trouble: I will deliver him and I will glorify him?"¹ Certainly, if the presence of a dear friend, to whom we may confidently make known our sorrow, trusting in his sympathy, is such a source of comfort that sick people and others who are in affliction feel their burden greatly lightened, and imagine they have got rid of the half of it by relating to their friends what they have to bear, what must not the constant presence of God do for His faithful servants who with the utmost confidence and in secrecy open their hearts to Him to tell Him of their distress, as they would to a loving father?

As many
servants of
God have
found.

"My soul refused to be comforted," says David of himself; "I remembered God and was delighted and was exercised, and my spirit swooned away."² What he means is, if I am sometimes sunk into a bitter sea of affliction, surrounded with persecutions and adversities outwardly, and filled with anxiety and trouble inwardly, the moment I think of God, all the clouds of sadness disappear, and my soul is filled with joy and consolation, so that

¹ Cum ipso sum in tribulatione; eripiam eum et glorificabo eum.—Ps. xc. 15.

² Renuit consolari anima mea; memor fui Dei et delectatus sum. et exercitatus sum, et defecit spiritus meus.—Ps. lxxvi. 3, 4.

it can hardly bear the excess of heavenly comfort that has been imparted to it. O glorious martyrs and champions of the faith of Jesus Christ, it was the same recollection that made you invincible and so sweetened your torments that your executioners were more wearied with tormenting you than you in bearing their cruelty; the thought of the God who was at your side and preparing the martyr's crown for you gave you that indomitable courage!

A youth of noble birth and still more noble in his soul, who was sent to a university to study, came across a school-fellow who lived in the same house as himself, and who was of the same condition in life, but very unlike him in his moral character; his whole day was spent in taverns, and in drinking and gambling, and even still worse. Oho, thought the other young man, this will not do for me. I must leave this house, or else I will lose my precious soul. And he went to another lodging, that was kept by a poor but pious priest. His parents, hearing of what he had done, wrote a sharp letter to him, asking if he were not ashamed to live in such poor quarters, and reminding him that the chief object of his being sent away was not to acquire great learning, but to learn how to live as the rest of the world, and telling him he must go back at once to his former lodging. And there are still foolish parents of the kind, who care little about the piety of their children, as long as the latter are well posted in the vain usages of the world. And there are children enough who waste the money their parents send them, and the flower of their youth as well, in idleness, feasting, carousing, and other things even worse still, so that, when their years of study are at an end, they bring nothing home with them but bad morals. Not so, however, was it with that young man. He wrote back to his parents, saying that he was willing to obey them as a child ought in all things lawful; but in this he could not obey them, because his soul would be in danger. Enraged at this answer, the parents refused to send any more money to him, and left him in a foreign country without resources. The poor young man knew of no refuge in his distress but the God whom he loved so well. He took the Holy Scriptures in his hand and opened them, and his eyes fell on the passage of the twenty-sixth psalm, "My father and my mother have left me; but the Lord hath taken me up;"¹ and on that verse of the ninetieth psalm, "I

Confirmed
by an exam-
ple.

¹ Pater meus et mater mea dereliquerunt me; Dominus autem assumpsit me.—Ps. xxvi. 10.

am with him in his trouble; I will deliver him and I will glorify him.”¹ Good! he exclaimed, full of joy and consolation; my father has given me up, and my mother cast me off; my friends have abandoned me; I have no money; my clothing is getting bad, and I can not replace it; I will lose the good opinion of men, but at all events God is still with me: “The Lord hath taken me up.” Let father, mother, and friends, then, go where they will; let me be without food, clothing, and the good opinion of men as long as may be; these words, “the Lord hath taken me up,” are enough for me; they are my only consolation, and I require nothing else!

All who are in trouble should seek comfort in that way.

Poor, afflicted, sorrowful, forsaken, and pious Christian, who are burdened with many crosses and trials, I pity you. But do you know what you have to do? One thing alone; think of the God whom you love, and who is with you in your sorrows; “The Lord hath taken me up,” this will be your best consolation. A premature death deprives the parents of their child, the child of its parents, the husband of his wife, the wife of her husband, the friend of the person he loves so well; ah, while you sigh and moan, think of those words, “I am with him in his trouble;” “The Lord hath taken me up;” I have still my God with me, who takes an interest in me, and death cannot deprive me of Him. Poor sick man, who can hardly enjoy a moment free from pain and illness, think of that: “The Lord hath taken me up;” my God is with me, and no sickness can take Him away from me. Poor man, desolate widow, who have no help on earth and have a house full of little children to provide for, while you are despised and looked down on by every one in the bargain, take heart, and remember that God is looking after you, and that you need not be ashamed of your poverty before Him. Unfortunate man of business, who have lost much lately, think of that, “the Lord hath taken me up;” I have still my God, whom no lawsuit or bankruptcy can deprive me of; as long as I possess Him by being in the state of grace, I am rich enough. And so should all of you think, when under the pressure of trouble; imagine that God says to you what Elcana said to his disconsolate wife, Anna: “Anna, why weepest thou? and why dost thou not eat? and why dost thou afflict thy heart? Am I not better to thee than ten children?”² Just

¹ Cum ipso sum in tribulatione: eripiam eum et glorificabo eum.—Ps. xc. 15.

² Cur fles, et quare non comedis? et quam ob rem affligitur cor tuum? numquid non ego mellior tibi sum, quam decem filii?—I. Kings i. 8.

Christians, why do you weep? Why is your heart so sorrowful? Is it not enough for you that I, your Lord and God, am with you, and that I love you? Am I not better for you than the father, mother, friend, you have lost by death? Am I not better for you than the money, health, prosperity, honor, and all that the world could give you? Am I not reward enough for you, when, after having borne these trials for a short time, you will dry your tears, and possess Me forever in My blissful heaven?

See, my dear brethren, what a joyful, pleasant life we can lead in the midst of trials and misfortunes, if we only keep in the state of grace, and often think of the presence of God. "Blessed is the people," cries out the Psalmist, "that knoweth jubilation," and seek their consolation in Thee, the highest Good! "They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance, and in Thy name they shall rejoice all the day; and in Thy justice they shall be exalted; for Thou art the glory of their strength."¹ Truly, O Lord, we have reason to say to Thee what the queen of Saba said to Solomon, to express her astonishment at his wisdom: "Blessed are thy men, and blessed are thy servants who stand before thee always."² Is it possible to swim in the water and not be wet; to stand in the midst of the fire and not be warmed? How is it possible, then, to be always in the source of all sweetness, that is, in Thee, O God, and not experience consolation?

Sinners, alas, you cannot expect any of this consolation as long as you remain in the slavery of the devil, without repentance and amendment! You, indeed, have your share, as well as the faithful servants of God, in the troubles and miseries of this life; but not the slightest part of the comfort of the just falls to your lot. The very presence of God, which brings relief and consolation to them in their afflictions, only makes your crosses heavier and more burdensome. For there is nothing more terrible to the sinner than to remember that he is in the presence of God, who sees the filth of his sins and vices, and must punish them strictly as his judge. Reason, then, have you to fear and tremble when you think of the divine presence. Meanwhile, if you are bent on it, do your best to keep the thought of God out of your minds, that you may indulge your unbridled passions with greater license; the time will come when you will indeed

Happy they
who con-
stantly keep
God before
their eyes.

Exhortation
to sinners
to be con-
verted.

¹ Beatus populus qui scit jubilationem. Domine, in lumine vultus tui ambulabunt, et in nomine tuo exultabunt, tota die, et in justitia tua exaltabuntur; quoniam gloria virtutis eorum tu es.—Ps. lxxxviii. 16, 17, 18.

² Beati viri tui, et beati servi tui, qui stant coram te semper.—III. Kings x. 8.

be desirous of being able to forget that God, but against your will you must think of Him always in the eternal flames of hell. But how is that, O my God? Is it really the case that the remembrance of Thee, which is so sweet and agreeable to Thy servants even in the midst of their troubles, will one day be the greatest torment to Thy enemies? Truly, it is so. If a lost soul could shut out all thought of God, it would be freed from its worst torture; but not a moment can pass without its thinking of Him, and seeing, when too late, what it lost in Him. It will say to itself, full of rage and fury, That is the God I might have possessed forever in heaven, if I had only chosen to do so, and had thought of Him a little oftener during my life; now I shall have no share in Him for eternity. "The wicked shall see and shall be angry; he shall gnash with his teeth and pine away; the desire of the wicked shall perish."¹ Ah, sinners, be converted! Do penance and be reconciled to God! If you do not wish the thought of God to be part of your eternal pain amongst the damned, make it now your joy and consolation among the just.

To the just,
to walk in
the presence
of God.

Let us all, my dear brethren, make trial of this, and for a time practise this keeping in the presence of God; and we shall see how sweet the Lord is, and experience that there is no sorrow or trouble in life so great that cannot be alleviated and sweetened by the constant recollection of the presence of God. Let us now begin on earth what we hope and desire to do in heaven. In this alone does the indescribable, eternal, blissful, happiness of the elect in heaven consist, that they have their God always with them, and unceasingly see Him clearly and enjoy the light of His presence. If you were to take God out of heaven, or out of the minds and memories of the blessed, there would be an end of their happiness, and heaven would become a horrible hell. If God were to go down into hell, there is not an angel or a blessed soul that would wish to remain in heaven; but all of them, if they were permitted, would descend into the abyss in order to be with the God they love and to see Him, and they would have a joyful heaven in the very midst of hell. This vision causes the elect to feel such joy and pleasure, that, although they are always satiated, they are never tired of it, as we are of worldly pleasures after having enjoyed them for

¹ Peccator videbit et irascetur, dentibus suis fremet et tabescet, desiderium peccatorum peribit.—Ps. cxi. 10.

a time. Near six thousand years have passed since the angels first began to know God and to see Him without the least interruption; but not one of them would, if it were free for him to do so, wish to cease thinking of God even for a moment, during a long eternity. But why do I speak of those joys, I who am still so far away from them in this vale of tears, groaning under the weight of a thousand crosses and trials that I have to bear daily and hourly? All I can do is to sigh with David, and say: "My soul hath thirsted after the strong living God; when shall I come and appear before the face of God? My tears have been my bread day and night; whilst it is said to me daily: Where is thy God?"¹ "Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly and be at rest?"² When will that happy moment arrive when I shall come to the place of my repose, to the possession of that highest Good, in which all my consolation and joy are to be found? But my wish is in vain; I must wait until it shall please the Lord to call me out of this vale of tears.

At least, then, I shall comfort myself as far as I can with a foretaste of heaven; I shall keep in the friendship of God, and like the Apostle St. Paul, shall place my thoughts in heaven, so that like him, too, I shall be able to say: "Our conversation is in heaven."³ I am indeed in banishment, and have many evils to suffer; but my conversation is in heaven, that is, with the Lord who makes the joy of heaven. For if it is God, and God alone, who can fully satisfy the human heart, as St. Augustine says—"Thou hast made us, O Lord, for Thyself, and our hearts are uneasy till they repose in Thee"⁴—it follows necessarily that the more a man associates with God in this life, the more he cultivates a familiarity with Him (which is done by the frequent recollection of God's presence), the greater, too, must be the consolation and joy of his heart even in this life. So it is; the constant vision of God makes the happiness of the elect in heaven; and the constant recollection of the presence of God makes the happiness of the human soul on earth, as far as happiness can be had here. In this, then, shall all my joy and pleasure consist in future; in all my actions I will keep God be-

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion.

¹ *Sitivit anima mea ad Deum fortem vivum; quando veniam et apparebo anto faciem Dei? Fuerunt mihi lacrymæ meæ panes die ac nocte, dum dicitur mihi quotidie: ubi est Deus tuus?* —Ps. xli. 3, 4.

² *Quis mihi dabit pennas sicut columbæ, et volabo et requiescam?*—Ibid. lrv. 7.

³ *Nostra conversatio in coelis est.*—Phil. iii. 20.

⁴ *Fecisti nos Domine ad te; et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te.*

fore my eyes; remembering His presence, I shall be strengthened against all attacks of temptation and all dangers of the soul, and I shall be comforted and encouraged to be patient in all bodily trials, until at last I shall see face to face the same God with whom I have thus been familiar during my life. Amen.

On the Constant Recollection of the Presence of God, as the best Means of Avoiding Sin, see the preceding Third Part.

ON THE REVERENCE WE OWE TO GOD AND HOLY THINGS.

TWENTIETH SERMON.

ON REVERENCE IN CHURCH.

Subject.

1st. The church is the house of God; therefore we must enter it with fear and reverence. 2d. The church is a holy temple of God; therefore we must behave in it with fear and reverence.—
Preached on the feast of the dedication of a church.

Text.

Introibo in domum tuam, adorabo ad templum sanctum tuum in timore tuo.—Ps. v. 8.

“I will come into Thy house, I will worship towards Thy holy temple in Thy fear.”

Introduction.

Such were the sighs that David, flying into the desert of Maon from Saul, sent forth to the tabernacle of Moses, or, as Cajetan thinks, to the celebrated temple which he had wished to build, but which his son Solomon completed with such magnificence and such an immense outlay of money. I use the same words to-day, when we offer our heartfelt thanks to God for the annual recurrence of the feast-day of the consecration of this cathedral; for in them the royal prophet gives us in brief a description of the respect we owe our temple, of the manner in which we should enter it: “I will come into Thy house,” and of how we are to behave in it: “I will worship in Thy fear.” Both our entering into and our behavior in church should be characterized by that reverence. Why? David gives the reason: “I will come into Thy house;” because the church is the house of God. We

must adore therein with fear; why? “I will worship towards Thy holy temple in Thy fear;” because the church is a holy temple. There, my dear brethren, you have the divisions of my sermon.

Plan of Discourse.

The church is the house of God; therefore we must enter it with fear and reverence; the first part. The church is the holy temple of God; therefore we must behave in it with fear and reverence; the second part.

Give us this fear and reverence in Thy house, O God of goodness; we ask this of Thee through the intercession of Mary, of our holy guardian angels, and of the patrons of this church; that, as often as we enter it, we may think and say with Thy prophet: “I will come into Thy house; I will worship towards Thy holy temple in Thy fear.”

Although
God is pres-
ent every-
where,

Let no one imagine that, when we speak of the house of God, we think of it in the same light as we do of our own houses, or even of those of kings and great potentates; for men build houses or castles or palaces either through necessity or for comfort. Through necessity, that they may have a home and a place of rest and shelter from wind and weather, from cold and heat, rain and snow; or for comfort, that they may change their residence in the different seasons of the year. To have such ideas of the house of God would be an insult to that great Lord, and would prove that we do not fully believe in His perfections; since we should look on Him as if he had to protect Himself from the weather, or to borrow additional comfort or luxury from creatures; and in that case He would have been badly off during eternity, when there was neither place nor creature outside Himself; and, moreover, it would be absurd to think that the Divine Majesty could be confined between four walls. No; far higher are the ideas that our faith gives us of our great God; for, besides His other perfections, we acknowledge in Him an endless eternity, and an unlimited omnipresence, by the first of which He comprehends all time, and the second, all space. “Whither shall I go from Thy spirit?” asks David, full of the deepest reverence towards God; “or whither shall I flee from Thy face? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I descend into hell, Thou art there. If I take my wings early in the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there

also shall Thy hand lead me.”¹ Wherever I go, in the dark night or in the clear day, I find Thee, my God! Wherever I am, whatever I do, I am in God; everything is surrounded by His infinite majesty; and for Him this wide world would be too small a house; nay, God Himself is a house which contains the universe.

Although God has been and will be in Himself from all eternity, yet, as He chose a particular time in which He wished to be known and adored by rational creatures, so He has also reserved special places in which He shows forth His majesty and glory in a particular manner to His creatures, that they may render Him special service and homage. These places are our churches, consecrated to the divine service, in which He has, so to speak, set up the throne of His glory to receive from us the expression of our reverence and homage, and give us in return His gifts and graces. He invites us to come before Him in the church that we may make known to Him our wants and necessities; and there He will hear what each one has to say to Him, and He is ready to enter into a friendly conversation with us, and to grant with joy any reasonable request we make of Him. To this He bound Himself when He promised king Solomon, speaking of the temple in Jerusalem, “I have heard thy prayer, and I have chosen this place to Myself for a house of sacrifice. My eyes also shall be open, and My ears attentive to the prayer of him that shall pray in this place. For I have chosen, and have sanctified this place, that My name may be there forever, and My eyes and My heart may remain there perpetually.”² On that account, my dear brethren, the church is called the house of God, a title that God Himself used, not only in the Old, but also in the New Testament: “My house shall be called the house of prayer.”³

He has chosen the church as His special dwelling.

If we had not these proofs at hand, the zeal with which God protects the honor of His house would be in itself enough to show that it is something specially dear to Him, and that He considers it as His very own property, since He guards it with

Which He wishes to be held in great respect, as He shows in

¹ Quo ibo a spiritu tuo, et quo a facie tua fugiam? Si ascendero in cœlum, tu illic es; si descendero in infernum, ades. Si sumpsero pennas meas diluculo, et habitavero in extremis maris, etenim illuc manus tua deducet me.—Ps. cxxxviii. 7, 8, 9, 10.

² Audiui orationem tuam, et elegi locum istum mihi in domum sacrificii. Oculi quoque mei erunt aperti et aures meę erectę ad orationem ejus qui in loco isto oraverit. Elegi enim et sanctificavi locum istum, ut sit nomen meum ibi in sempiternum, et permaneant oculi mei et cor meum ibi cunctis diebus.—II. Paralip. vii. 12, 15, 16.

³ Domus mea domus orationis vocabitur.—Matt. xxi. 13.

the Old
Testament.

such care. He had for a long time borne with the sins and vices of king Baltassar, without chastising him; but when Baltassar seized the sacred vessels of the temple and profaned them at his banquet, God could no longer keep back His avenging hand. "The same night Baltassar, the Chaldean king, was slain," as the Scripture says.¹ This punishment was inflicted on him because he had profaned the sacred vessels, as the Prophet Daniel had foretold: "Thou hadst lifted thyself up against the Lord of heaven; and the vessels of His house have been brought before thee; and thou, and thy nobles, and thy wives, and thy concubines have drunk wine in them. Wherefore He hath sent the part of the hand, which hath written this that is set down."² Heliodorus, too, learned by sad experience what it is to profane the temple of the Lord, as we read in the third chapter of the Second Book of Machabees. He forced his way with his soldiers into the temple, with the intention of carrying off the treasure; "but the Spirit of the almighty God gave a great evidence of His presence, so that all that had presumed to obey him, falling down by the power of God, were struck with fainting and dread."³ Heliodorus himself was beaten by angels until he was more dead than alive: "And he, indeed, by the power of God lay speechless, and without all hope of recovery;"⁴ and he would actually have lost his life, if Onias, the high-priest, had not prayed for him. Oh, said he to his king afterwards: "He that hath His dwelling in the heavens is the visitor and protector of that place, and He striketh and destroyeth them that come to do evil to it."⁵ Whenever the king of Israel or his subjects dared to lift their hands against the temple, they felt at once the vengeance of God chastising the whole land.

And Christ
in the Gos-
pel.

Does not Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself give proof of the great reverence He had for the temple that Solomon built to the Divine Majesty, and of the respect in which He wished all to hold it? That He showed in His childhood, when He went to the

¹ Eadem nocte interfectus est Baltassar rex Chaldæus.—Dan. v. 30.

² Adversum Dominatorem cœli elevatus es; vasa domus ejus allata sunt coram te, et tu et optimates tui, et uxores tuæ, et concubinæ tuæ vinum bibistis in eis; idcirco ab eo missus est articulus manus, quæ scripsit hoc, quod exaratum est.—Ibid. 23, 24.

³ Spiritus Omnipotentis Dei magnam fecit suæ ostensionis evidentiam, ita ut omnes qui ausi fuerant parere ei, ruentes Dei virtute in dissolutionem et formidinem converterentur.—II. Mach. iii. 24.

⁴ Et ille quidem per divinam virtutem jacebat mutus, atque omni spe et salute privatus.—Ibid. 29.

⁵ Ipse qui habet in cœlis habitationem, visitator et adjutor est loci illius, et venientes ad malefaciendum percudit ac perdit.—Ibid. 39.

temple in Jerusalem. Nor was He deterred from going by the inconveniences which such a journey offered at His tender age. It was in the temple, too, that He gave proof of His wonderful wisdom. "They found Him in the temple sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions,"¹ says St. Luke of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, who had been seeking Him for three days in sorrow. When He afterwards went to Jerusalem, He appeared every day in the temple: "And in the day-time He was teaching in the temple; but at night, going out, He abode in the mount that is called Olivet."² In the temple He was occupied in instructing the ignorant and sinners in the faith, and in teaching them holiness of life; and this He did daily, as He Himself testifies: "I sat daily with you teaching in the temple."³ In the temple He showed His generosity and mercy in healing the sick, the lame, and all who came to Him: "And there came to Him the blind and the lame in the temple; and He healed them."⁴ After His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when He was followed by an enthusiastic crowd of people singing His praises, He went at once to honor His heavenly Father in the temple. "And He entered into Jerusalem, into the temple."⁵ This meekest and mildest of men, who, as the Prophet Isaias describes Him, was not capable even of opening His mouth to speak an angry word—"He shall not cry, nor have respect to person, neither shall His voice be heard abroad"⁶—yet on two occasions showed wonderful zeal and displeasure. When was that? On two occasions, when the temple was profaned. He, as St. John Chrysostom remarks, who suffered without a word so many insults and injuries offered His own person, He who presented His sacred countenance to the spite of the rabble, His head to the sharp thorns and rude blows, His body to the scourges, His hands and feet to the nails, without saying a word, could not look on patiently while His Father's house was being dishonored. He found some people in it who were selling, buying, and changing money; all the articles in which they trafficked were for the use of the temple, for they

¹ *Invenērunt illum in templo sedentem in medio doctorum, audientem illos et interrogantem eos.*—Luke ii. 46.

² *Erat autem diebus docens in templo, noctibus vero exiens morabatur in monte qui vocatur Oliveti.*—*Ibid.* xxi. 37.

³ *Quotidie apud vos sedebam docens in templo.*—Matt. xxvi. 55.

⁴ *Et accesserunt ad eum cæci et claudi in templo, et sanavit eos.*—*Ibid.* xxi. 14.

⁵ *Et introivit Jerosolymam in templum.*—Mark xi. 11.

⁶ *Non clamabit, neque accipiet personam, nec audietur vox ejus foris.*—Is. xlii. 2.

consisted of oxen, sheep, lambs, and other things that belonged to sacrifice and gave the devout an opportunity of offering. Yet He grew exceeding angry at the sight: "And when He was entered into the temple, He began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the chairs of them that sold doves."¹ He even stigmatized them publicly as robbers: "Is it not written: My house shall be called the house of prayer to all nations? But you have made it a den of thieves."² He did not show such zeal against any other sin. He ate and drank with public sinners; He saved the adulteress that was brought to Him from being stoned, and absolved her from her sin; He defended the public sinner Magdalene against the Pharisees; but He gave full vent to His wrath when the temple was dishonored. We do not read of His having ever taken a rod in His hand to chastise other sinners; but He actually beat away with His own hand those who were profaning the temple: "And when He had made as it were a scourge of little cords, He drove them all out of the temple,"³ with such marks of anger that His disciples were amazed, and thought Him carried away by excess of zeal. And yet the temple no longer contained the tables of the law, which were held most sacred amongst the Jews, nor the miraculous rod of Aaron, nor the Ark of the Covenant, nor the oracle, or place in which God was wont to give answers; in the whole building there was neither picture nor monument of any saint; its whole sanctity consisted in the fact that it was the place appointed by God for sacrifice. But this was quite enough to inspire Our Lord with that great zeal for the honor of the temple, and to act as He did, in order that others might treat it with proper respect. From this it is clear that He has reserved to Himself the right to avenge the insults offered His house, as the Prophet Jeremias says: "The vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance of His temple."⁴

The churches of Christians are the special

All the peoples and nations of the world at all times, even heathens, idolaters, and Turks, have had the greatest esteem, respect, and reverence for their temples, for they look on them

¹ Et cum introisset in templum, cepit ejicere vendentes et ementes in templo, et mensas nummulariorum et cathedras vendentium columbas evertit.—Mark xi. 15.

² Nonne scriptum est: quia domus mea domus orationis vocabitur omnibus gentibus? Vos autem fecistis eam speluncam latronum.—Ibid. 16, 17.

³ Et cum fecisset quasi flagellum de funiculis, omnes ejecit de templo.—John ii. 15.

⁴ Ultio Domini est ultio templi sui.—Jerem. li. 11.

as places in which the deity dwells in a special manner, as St. Justin testifies of the heathens, and the Holy Scriptures of the Jews. We have often remarked, says St. Augustine, that this reverence towards our churches is innate even in barbarous and infidel people; “that is proved by the tombs of the martyrs and the basilicas of the Apostles, which gave refuge to the inhabitants of the city and strangers who fled to them.”¹ The city of Rome was given up to plunder, and the cruel conquerors put every one to the sword, men and women, old and young; and those whom they spared they reduced to slavery; but their cruelty did not dare to cross the threshold of a church; “the bloodthirsty foe came so far, but there his wrath was restrained.”² But I will dwell no longer on this. What were the temples of former times, not those of the Turks or heathens, in which there was nothing but stocks and stones, or the bones of some mortal, but even the temple of Solomon with all its glory and splendor, in comparison to our churches? If it deserved to be called the house of God, how much more do not they merit that title? “A shadow of things to come,”³ as St. Paul writes to the Colossians, in which not sheep and goats are offered, as in the old temple, but the true flesh and blood of the Son of God are offered to the true, living God, who is there present. And how much more reason than all those people of old have we not to boast: “Neither is there any other nation so great, that hath gods so nigh them, as our God is present to all our petitions.”⁴ Much more suitable for us are the words of the Patriarch Jacob, which we read in the Office of to-day: “How terrible is this place! this is no other but the house of God, and the gate of heaven.”⁵

So that the church is really the house of God! And what is there in this that should first excite my astonishment? The great dignity and majesty of the place itself, or the wonderful favor by which the infinite majesty of God condescends to choose it as His constant dwelling on earth? “Is it credible, then,” I may well exclaim with Solomon, “that God should

dwelling
of the true
God.

A great
happiness
for us.

¹ Testantur hoc loca martyrum et basilicæ apostolorum, quæ in vastatione urbis ad se confugientes suos alienosque receperunt.—S. Aug. de Civit., l. i., c. 1.

² Hucusque cruentus sæviebat inimicus; ibi accipiebat limitem trucidatoris furor.

³ Umbra futurorum.—Coloss. ii. 17.

⁴ Nec est alia natio tam grandis, quæ habeat deos appropinquantés sibi, sicut Deus noster adest cunctis obsecrationibus nostris.—Deut. iv. 7.

⁵ Quam terribilis est locus iste! non est hic aliud nisi domus Dèi et porta cœli.—Gen. xxviii. 17.

dwell with men on the earth? If heaven and the heavens of heavens do not contain Thee, how much less this house, which I have built!"¹ What a great honor for thee, O holy temple, to be the house of such a great God! What glory for the stones and timber of which thou art composed to make a palace for thy Creator! Happy the walls of this church, which surround the building in which God has fixed His special dwelling-place! But why do I speak to lifeless creatures? Happy mortals, to whom it is granted to enter this palace and house of God as often as you please, and to hold a friendly conversation with your God as long as you wish! Come, all of you, no matter what may be your condition; you are all invited to enter. No one will be refused audience here.

Therefore
we should
enter them
with the ut-
most rever-
ence.

But wait a little! Before entering, think for a moment what is this house, and to whom you are coming. If it were the court of a king to whom you were about to present a petition, says St. Chrysostom, how carefully would you not weigh every word you intend to utter, and how modest and composed you would be in your dress and outward behavior! You must know that you are now about to enter the house of God, and to speak with the great Lord and King of kings, who can see not only your outward appearance, but the inmost recesses of your heart, and who is worthy of infinite reverence and respect. Be careful, then, to compose your outward and inward senses, and especially your mind and heart, that there may be nothing in you displeasing to Him. Remember what God said to His servant Moses, when He spoke to Him from the thorn-bush: "Come not nigh hither, put off the shoes from thy feet: for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."² He also commanded him to make a laver, in which even the priests should wash their hands and feet when they were about to offer sacrifice; and that, too, under pain of death: "Thou shalt make also a brazen laver with its foot, to wash in; and thou shalt set it between the tabernacle of the testimony and the altar. And water being put into it, Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and feet in it, when they are going into the tabernacle, lest perhaps they die."³ By this, as the Venerable Bede remarks, the Lord wished

¹ Ergone credibile est, ut habitet Deus cum hominibus super terram? Si cœlum et cœli cœlorum non te capiunt, quanto magis domus ista, quam ædificavi?—II. Paral. vi. 18.

² Ne appropies huc; solve calceamentum de pedibus tuis; locus enim in quo stas terra sancta est.—Exod. iii. 5.

³ Facies et labrum æneum cum basi sua ad lavandum, ponesque illud inter tabernaculum

to foreshadow the humble reverence and inward purity that they should have who enter into the holy church of God. They must first take off their shoes and wash their hands and feet; that is, they must leave outside at the door all inordinate desires of earthly things, all thoughts and cares of ordinary worldly occupations, and especially all the filth of sin; nor should the church be visited for any other purpose but to adore the great God with the utmost respect and reverence, to hear the divine truths in sermons and to fulfil them, or to repent of one's sins and beg pardon for them from God.

But, alas, how many are there who think of this when they leave their houses to come to church? O consciences of many men! what answer do you make to this? With what motive, for what reason, with what respect and reverence do you come here? Is it to adore your God with all humility, or to insult Him? Is it to repent of your sins, or to carry a still greater load of guilt home with you? Is it to implore grace and mercy from God, or to call down His wrath and indignation on your heads? To hear truth in sermons, or to gratify your curiosity, and make fun afterwards of what you have heard? To speak with God alone, or to hold a conversation with men, to see them and be seen by them, to salute others and talk with them? Truly, all is not gold that glitters, nor is everything devotion that has the outward appearance of it. It is not merely to pray that many go to church. Not all are brought thither by the Holy Ghost, but, as St. Augustine says, "they go to keep profane appointments in the church under the guidance of the devil."¹ I will say no more on this head. I cannot see into hearts and intentions; but He who is present in the church sees everything clearly enough, and He will not allow the profanation of His house to go unpunished. My dear brethren, when we go to church, let us think, as we are on the way, Now I am going to the house of the great God. That thought, if we have any faith left, must excite us to greater recollection of spirit against distractions in prayer; to greater humility and reverence towards the divine majesty; to greater modesty and reserve in our outward senses; to greater devotion and fervor in our love of God; to greater confidence of obtaining what we ask from Him. Let us therefore say with David: "I will come into Thy house,"

Many fail to do this.

testimonii et altare. Et missa aqua lavabunt in ea Aaron et filii ejus manus suas et pedes, quando ingressuri sunt tabernaculum; ne forte moriantur.—Exod. xxx. 18-21.

¹ Diabolo ductore, in Ecclesiæ conventum pergunt.

but "in Thy fear." The church is the house of God. No other proof do I require to show that it is a holy place, and therefore that we should behave in it with the deepest reverence, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

The churches are holy because the incarnate God is in them.

I need not take long to look about me, or to consider the images of the saints and the statues that adorn the walls and the ceiling and portray heaven to us, nor the relics of the saints which are kept in the church, nor the pulpit from which divine truths are announced, and all are exhorted to holiness of conduct, nor the confessionals set up on both sides as so many sacred seats of judgment, in which the priest, sitting in the place of God, absolves from sin and restores the grace of God to the penitent. All these things do indeed inspire with respect every one who considers them in the spirit of faith. What Our Lord said about the stones praising Him, if man refused to do so, could be applied to our churches: "I say to you, that if these shall hold their peace, the stones will cry out."¹ Their beauty, their ornaments, their altars, their pictures, their confessionals and pulpits, their very walls and the stones of which they are built would cry out and say to us, these are holy places, which ought to be treated with respect. The church is the house of God; the Holy of holies is on the altar, God and Man, really present; we are criminals, and there is the Judge who can acquit or condemn us; we are sick, and there is the Physician who can restore us to life, or pronounce sentence of death on us; we are poor and needy, there is the rich King of heaven, who can increase our wants or free us from them; we are in constant danger of losing our souls, and there is the mighty Helper who can succor us in temptations or abandon us in them; in a word, the great God is there with His whole divine nature. This one fact, I say, must be enough to establish the sanctity of the place, for, as the Prophet says: "Holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, unto length of days."²

Hence the saints have always been respectful in church.

If the eyes of our faith were opened like those of St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom, we should see, as they did, how the heavenly spirits stand around the altar, like soldiers in presence of their king, adoring God, who is present there, with the most profound humility, prostrating themselves on the ground, and trem-

¹ Dico vobis, quia si hi tacuerint, lapides clamabunt.—Luke xix. 40.

² Domum tuam decet sanctitudo, Domine, in longitudinem dierum.—Ps. xcii. 5.

bling with awe and reverence at the sight of His majesty, while we, poor worms of the earth, have such little respect for the sanctity of the place. No wonder, my dear brethren, when I consider the holiness of our churches, that a St. Jerome did not dare to enter a church after having given way to sudden anger or other inordinate emotion, for he looked on himself as unworthy to appear before Infinite Sanctity in such circumstances. Nor am I surprised that the early Christians had the custom of prostrating themselves on the ground at full length on entering a church, in order to testify their respect for the Divine Majesty on Its throne of glory. I am not surprised that the world has seen kings and emperors kneeling barefooted on the floor of the church to show their humble reverence for Jesus Christ Our Saviour, whom they knew to be present there. All this, I say, does not surprise me, for it requires only a little consideration, not to speak of love or devotion, to see that the greatest fear and respect are due to the Divine Majesty.

But what does surprise me is that there are Christians in the world who firmly believe all the mysteries of our religion, and yet show such little respect in church; nay, it is a wonderful thing that people are getting little by little to lose their astonishment at the abuses and dissolute conduct that some are guilty of in church. Where are our outward signs of humility? Where the folded hands? the bended knees? the downcast eyes? the modesty of deportment? Where the silence that should be observed in the holy place? Alas, what am I saying? To bend both knees, or fold the hands, or to sit down in silence and say the rosary or read our prayer-book, is no longer a respectable thing to do in the eyes of the world. Such a thing is looked on as only fit for women. Holy St. Augustine, thou in thy time didst look on talking in church as so great a crime that thou didst say: "If it is wrong to speak idly outside the church, what sort of a sin must it be when committed in the church? He who indulges in useless and idle talk in the house of God must be considered as one who gives poison to others or attacks them with a sword, for he neither hears the word of God himself nor allows others to hear it. What an account that man will have to render at the last day for the mischief done himself and others as well!"¹ And

Many nowadays show little respect, either inward or outward.

¹ Si extra Ecclesiam occupari otiosis sermonibus malum est, in Ecclesia verbocinari, quale peccatum est? Qui in Ecclesia ineptis et incongruis fabulis occupatur, quasi venenum et gladium reliquis hominibus ingerere vel præbere cognoscitur, dum verbum Dei nec ipse audit, nec alios audire permittit. Qui talis est, et pro sua et pro aliorum destructione in die iudicii redditurus est rationem!—8. Aug. Serm. de Orat.

thou, too, St. John Chrysostom, hast spoken severely against those who in church move their mouths to laughter from some vain cause, and thou hast maintained that they are not to be tolerated. What would both of you say if you were in our churches now, and saw how many behave themselves therein? Laughing, talking, staring about, nodding to each other seem to have become a sort of necessity with some; and what is thought of it? The same abuse is prevalent to-day that you considered intolerable: "More respect is shown to loose women than to God."¹ When the former enter the church, a deeper reverence is made to them than to the God who is present; the back is turned to God; they must be honored with the face; the eyes, that should be turned to the hidden Saviour on the altar, stare around at vain creatures; the heart, that should be sunk in God alone, is filled with a thousand sinful thoughts and desires. The blind and the lame who were cured by Our Lord did not merely enter the temple; they went up to Jesus and prayed to Him and were cured: "There came to Him the blind and the lame to the temple, and He healed them." How many there are who enter our consecrated temples nowadays, but never turn their thoughts to Jesus, although they are within the walls where He is; their bodies are in the church, but their hearts are elsewhere. Ah, what a deplorable thing that is! sighs forth St. Augustine. "I am filled with sorrow when I think of our Christian brethren, who enter the church in such a manner as to have their bodies only there, while their hearts are elsewhere; if that which man sees is inside, why should that which God sees remain outside?"²

Nay, even
their souls
are stained
by sin.

But what am I saying of interior recollection and reverence? If I could see into hearts, I should find many defiled with the filth of sin who dare present themselves before the eyes of God in His holy house. "They make a brothel of the house of God,"³ is the complaint of St. Anastasius. "Son of man," said God to the Prophet Ezechiel, when the latter had been brought in spirit to the temple of Jerusalem to see the abominations that were practised in the house of the Lord; "Son of man, dig in the wall;" and when he had dug in the wall, and a door had opened, he heard again: "Go in and see the wicked abominations which

¹ Scortis reverentiæ plus quam Deo exhibemus.

² Movet me dolor magnus adversus fratres nostros Christianos, qui sic volunt intrare in Ecclesiam, ut hic corpus habeant, et alibi cor; si intus est quod videt homo, quare foris est quod videt Deus?—S. Aug. de Verb. Dom., l. i., Serm. 6.

³ Ex Ecclesia Dei lupanar efficiunt.

they commit there. And I went in and saw, and behold every form of creeping things, and of living creatures, the abomination and all the idols of the house of Israel, were painted on the wall all round about. And He said to me: If thou turn thee again, thou shalt see greater abominations which these commit; and behold, women sat there mourning for Adonis," the heathen god of love. "Turn thee again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these. And behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men having their backs towards the temple of the Lord, and their faces to the east."¹ Christians, if God were to call out to me, "Dig in the wall," open the hearts of some of those who come to My temple, and if at the same time He sent forth a light which would enable us to see into each other's hearts, what should we behold! Oh, no, my God! rather keep them closed and covered up, that we may be spared the sight of such abominations! For what hideous pictures should we not find painted there! What impure images! what unchaste desires, and longings, and pleasures! Even at the time when Thy divine heart, full of goodness and mercy, is ready to pour down blessings on us, how many a hypocritical Herod we should find in the company of the pious wise men, and adoring Thee, O God, only in outward appearance! How many an envious Judas we should see going to Thy sacred table, and opening his impious mouth to receive the heavenly food! How many should we not find bending the knee before Thy cross and Thy altar, while their minds are filled with the thought of Adonis, of unchaste love! Nay, how many who turn their backs on the altar to admire the beauty of a creature, so that they thus constantly defile themselves with impure desires! Well is it indeed for us, O Lord, that hearts and the sins therein are covered up from our gaze. Scandalous and wicked enough are the abuses that are openly committed, that even a heathen or a Jew would be ashamed to be guilty of in his temple.

In truth, my dear brethren, if one of those infidels, knowing nothing more of the place where the divinity is adored but what the light of reason teaches him, were to come into our Christian

They are put to shame by heathens.

¹ Fili hominis, fode parietem. Ingredere et vide abominationes pessimas, quas isti faciunt hic. Et ingressus vidi, et ecce omnis similitudo reptilium et animalium, abominatio et universa idola domus Israel depicta erant in pariete in circuitu per totum. Et dixit ad me: adhuc conversus videbis abominationes majores, quas isti faciunt. Et ecce mulieres ibi sedebant plangentibus Adonidem. Adhuc conversus videbis abominationes majores his. Et ecce in ostio templi Domini inter vestibulum et altare quasi viginti quinque viri dorsa habentes contra templum Domini, et facies ad orientem.—Ezech. viii. 8-16.

and infidels, churches, and see the dissolute conduct of the young, the talking, laughing, and greetings interchanged between grown-up people, would he not think that he was at some profane gathering? But if he were told that this place is the sanctuary of our religion, where we offer God the homage due to Him, and celebrate the most holy mysteries—what? he would exclaim; either your God is blind, or else there is no reason to believe that He is present when you come to adore Him. But he is assured that all believe firmly that the true, living God is really present here in a special manner, and that He is looking at every one who comes to adore Him. Truly, then, he must say, either your God is very little concerned about the honor paid Him, or He has not power to avenge Himself for the insults offered Him. But, we reply, we believe this God to be most jealous of His honor, so that He will not tolerate anything against it, and at the same time to be the undisputed Lord of life and death, and that He will one day judge us strictly for all the thoughts, words, and actions of our lives, and will reward or punish us eternally; His instrument to punish being the fire of hell, while the ministers of His wrath are the demons. The heathen thus instructed in our doctrine, and on the other hand convinced of our want of reverence, would draw his own conclusions when he saw how disrespectfully we act towards God before His very altar. You, he would say to us, look on our gods as stocks and stones, that have eyes and see not, ears and hear not, hands and feel not, so that they cannot punish, and we know by experience that we have not much to fear from them. Nevertheless, come into our temples, and you will see that we are much more respectful than you are in yours. “We enter the temples modestly,” says the philosopher Seneca, writing of heathendom; “we cast down our eyes, and observe the utmost modesty of behavior.”¹ The greatest amongst us lie down on the floor of the temple with chains about our necks, as history tells us of the Romans. We dare not tread the floor of our temple unless with bare feet, as we read of the Saracens. We must not cough, nor expectorate, nor even breathe loudly in our temples, as we are told of the Turks.

That is a disgrace to our religion and an insult to God.

O Christians! Catholics! can we not be justly reproached? What a disgrace to our religion! Must the true God, who calls Himself “a jealous God,”² look on and be patient, while a wild

¹ Intramus templa compositi. vultum submittimus, in omne argumentum modestiæ fingimur.

² Deus æmulator Dominus.—Deut. vi. 15.

barbarian shows more respect to a stone image, or to an ox or a calf, than His own children pay to His divine Son when He is offered up on the altar? Oh, horrible! cries out St. John Chrysostom; “where are we to find salvation, if we lose it in the very house of God?”¹ Where shall we obtain pardon of our sins, and appease the anger of God, if in the very place of refuge we defile ourselves still more with sin with our eyes, our hearts, and our outward behavior, and render the Almighty still more embittered against us? Where will honor be paid to our God, if He does not receive it even in His own house, before His own altar? Is it possible that the eye of God, whose watchfulness is sometimes unable to keep us from sin in our homes, at table, in the street—is it possible, I say, that it cannot find a place even in a consecrated church where it can inspire us with fear and force us to behave with due respect? Hear how God complains of this by the Prophet Jeremias: “Is this house, then, in which My name hath been called upon in your eyes, become a den of robbers? I am He; I have seen it, saith the Lord.”² We see with our own eyes that the holy sacrifice is frequently offered in our churches, that sinners are absolved from their guilt, that the Lord is praised with public prayers and devotions; all this goes on before our eyes; and in that house, in the presence of the sacred humanity of Christ, we offend Him! I am He, says Our Lord in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, in which He has indeed concealed but not destroyed His dignity; I am He, behold Me ready to be your food and to give you My blessing. I am He who has redeemed you; I am He who protects and preserves you; I shall one day be your judge; and that is the return you make Me for My goodness? I have seen it; I know that you have come into My house to insult Me. I have seen you turn your backs on Me, and gratifying your eyes with the view of other objects. I have seen that some of you remain at the door in order to get a better view of those who come in. I have seen some of you stand before Me, when I am exposed for public adoration, with shameless irreverence talking to each other. I have seen all that. “Therefore thus saith the Lord God: Behold My wrath and My indignation is enkindled against this place.”³ Ah, sinners, shall we

¹ O rem horrendam! quando salus erit?

² Numquid ergo spelunca latronum facta est domus ista, in qua invocatum est nomen meum in oculis vestris? Ego, ego sum; ego vidi, dicit Dominus.—Jerem. vii. 11.

³ Ideo hæc dicit Dominus Deus: Ecce furor meus et indignatio conflatur super locum istum.—Ibid. 20.

still persist in our evil ways? Have we not places and occasions enough to allow all liberty to eyes, ears, and tongue? Let us at least spare the house of God, and not turn it into a theatre of scandal and wickedness. Sin, sin freely, if you are bent on doing so; but do not come to church! Alas, where is my zeal carrying me?

Exhortation
and resolution
to be
very rever-
ent in
church.

My dear brethren, we boast, and justly, too, that we have the true faith, that our religion is the only one in the whole world that deserves the name, that salvation is not to be hoped for outside of it, that our God is the only God who deserves to be adored, before whom the heavenly spirits are awe-stricken, and even the devils tremble: "The devils also believe and tremble."¹ We acknowledge all this; why, then, do we not adore that majesty as we ought? Why should our God be worse treated by us than the heathens and infidels treat their false deities? Why should Christians be the only ones to show disrespect in their temples? Why should God be less honored than a king in his palace is by his attendants? Oh, what great respect is shown in that latter case, and how little to the God who has life and death in His hand! Ah! let us, whenever we enter a church, and as long as we remain there, say with a lively faith: "I will come into Thy house; I will adore towards Thy holy temple in Thy fear." The church is the holy temple of God; therefore it should never be entered without fear and reverence. Let the terrible threat of St. Paul sink deeply into our hearts: "If any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy."² Oh, let not those words be verified in us! We now unanimously promise to observe due reverence in our churches, as is becoming their sanctity. And do Thou, O God, fulfil the word Thou didst speak to Solomon at the dedication of the temple, and grant us what we ask this day, that this house may be a place of security and refuge for the poor and oppressed, in which they may find comfort and patience in their trials; for sinners, that they may lay aside the burden of their iniquity; for the just, that they may be encouraged to constancy in Thy service; for all who adore Thee therein, that they may obtain their petitions, and receive grace, blessings, and help from Thee. And finally, grant the request that we all now make prostrate before Thee, that, after having adored Thee in

¹ Dæmones credunt et contremiscunt.—James ii. 19.

² Si quis autem templum Dei violaverit, disperdet illum Deus.—I. Cor. iii. 17.

Thy holy house here on earth, we may be received into the house of Thy glory, there to praise Thy holy name forever and ever. Amen.

For several sermons on this subject, see the preceding Second Part.

TWENTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON DEVOTION TO OUR LORD IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT.

Subject.

Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament should be held by us in the greatest honor. 1st. This is due to that most holy mystery; 2d. It is required by the gratitude we owe Him for the wonderful love He shows us therein.—*Preached on the feast of Corpus Christi.*

Text.

Dignus es, Domine Deus noster, accipere gloriam et honorem.—Apoc. iv. 11.

“Thou art worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor.”

Introduction.

If ever a feast was instituted with good reason to give expression to sentiments of devotion, thanksgiving, and joy, it is that which we celebrate to-day, on which Christians publicly adore their God concealed under the appearances of bread and wine, and acknowledge themselves as His servants and obedient subjects. There is no feast-day in the whole year on which the Catholic world displays greater pomp and outward signs of triumph in all countries, towns, and villages, than on this feast of Corpus Christi; and good reason there is for that, as I shall now show in the form of a meditation.

Plan of Discourse.

Thou art worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor. Thou art worthy, O Lord, of all praise and honor in this most holy sacrament. This is due to that most holy majesty; as I shall show in the first part. It is required by the gratitude we owe Thee for the great love Thou showest us therein; as I shall

prove in the second part. But if we refuse Thee that honor and love, then we must look on ourselves as discourteous and wicked.

Grant by Thy grace, O God, that this discourse of mine may be to Thy honor and glory, through the intercession of Mary our Mother and of our holy guardian angels.

All the
mysteries
of our re-
ligion de-
serve to be
honored
by a special
feast-day.

Great is the mystery proposed to us by the Catholic Church in the incarnation of the Divine Word in the chaste womb of a Virgin. It is a mystery of love that the same God should be born in a wretched stable as a little child, wrapped up in swaddling clothes, and nourished at the pure bosom of His Virgin Mother. It is a mystery deserving of the greatest admiration that the adorable Son of God should be circumcised and presented in the Temple as a sinner. It is a sublime mystery that the seemingly poor and abject child should be acknowledged by the kings from the East as the true God, and be adored by them. An incomprehensible mystery that the Almighty Creator should be seized by His own creatures, laden with chains, accused as a malefactor, publicly condemned to death, and executed as a common criminal. A joyful mystery that He who was thus put to death and buried, rose again from the dead by His own power. A mystery full of grace, that the Holy Ghost visited the world in visible form, and filled it with His gifts and graces. "Thou art worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor." Reasonable it is that we should therefore thank and praise Thee, that we should solemnly renew the memory of those mysteries every year, as we do in the Catholic Church at certain periods, honoring Thee with devout admiration, or with love and gratitude, or with heartfelt compassion, or with joy and exultation.

Yet we have
only the
bare annual
recollection
of them.

But, my dear brethren, when I consider the matter more closely, and compare one with another, I can find no mystery which more deserves our gratitude, homage, confidence, devotion, and love, or which should excite in us a more heartfelt joy, than that which we celebrate to-day and during the octave by publicly adoring our God hidden under the outward appearances of bread and wine, and always present in our midst. For of all the other mysteries I have mentioned, what have we now but the mere figure? All that remains of them is their memory, as Pope Urban IV., who instituted this feast, says: ' "The other mysteries that we celebrate we renew in our minds and spirit,

¹ *Alia quorum memoriam agimus, spiritu menteque complectimur; sed non propter hoc realem eorum præsentiam obtinemus.*

but we have not on that account their real presence." On the feast of the Annunciation we think with joy of the approaching advent of Our Lord, and how He, being conceived by the Holy Ghost, was made man in the chaste womb of the Virgin Mary. But all this happened long ago, and the Son of God is no longer conceived in that way; all that we do is to remember a past event. On Christmas day we look with feelings of the deepest love on the new-born child lying on the straw in the manger; that Child has been there, but is there no longer. On New Year's day we wonder that the Child of a week old should already shed the first drop of His precious blood for our redemption; but that blood does not flow now. Soon after, on the feast of the Epiphany, we learn with joy and exultation how the three holy kings cast themselves down at the feet of this Child, and offered Him their presents to signify that they believed Him to be God, King, and mortal Man; but the kings are no longer on earth, nor is the Child in the lap of His Mother. On Good Friday we saw with sorrow of heart the Incarnate God hanging on the cross between two thieves for our salvation, and giving up His spirit; but He does not hang there now. On Easter Sunday our feelings of exultation returned at seeing Him rise glorious from the tomb, although He does not rise now from it. Forty days later we congratulate Him on His triumphal Ascension into heaven, and gaze after Him until the cloud hides Him from our view; but He no longer ascends thither. And finally, on Pentecost Sunday, we await in imagination with the disciples of Christ the coming of the Holy Ghost; but He does not any longer show Himself visibly on earth. So that in all those mysteries we have nothing but the figure and remembrance to recall to our minds what happened long ago, and of which we have no real presence now.

Quite different is it, my dear brethren, with the mystery we celebrate to-day of the real presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. "In this sacramental commemoration of Christ," says Pope Urban, "Jesus Christ is present with us in His own substance."¹ The very same Lord who lived on earth we have now with us in this mystery. The Lord who to-day is honored by public processions celebrated with the utmost pomp in every town and village of Christendom, in which people of all conditions vie with one another in showing their devotion to Him, is

But in the
Blessed
Sacrament
we have
Christ really
and truly
present.

¹ In hac vero sacramentali Christi commemoratione, Jesus Christus præsens in propria substantia est nobiscum.—Urban IV. in Clement un. de Reliq.

the very same incarnate God who seventeen hundred years ago left Himself to us, as our food and drink, in His last supper. He who is offered daily in the holy Mass to the Eternal Father is the same who for our salvation came down from heaven; the same who was wrapped in swaddling-clothes and laid in a manger, circumcised in the temple, and adored by the three Wise Men; the same who for our sake was crucified, who arose again from the dead and ascended into heaven, whence He sent the Holy Ghost down into the world. So that in this one mystery we have an abridgment of all the others. True, He is present under a different appearance, in a different manner to that in which He came into the world, yet He is really the same in substance and essence; in spite of the lowly garb in which we find Him here, He still remains the great God that He is; He still remains the almighty God, to whom nothing is impossible; the loving, generous, merciful Saviour who in former times went through towns and countries doing good to all and healing all; the same who fed so many thousand people in the desert with a little bread; who gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb; the touch of whose garment brought relief to the suffering; who, commiserating the tears of the unhappy, raised the dead to life and gave them back to their sorrowing friends; He is the same who now wishes to remain with us, that we may have a sure refuge in all trials and troubles of soul and body. We cannot, indeed, see Him with our bodily eyes, nor feel Him with our hands, nor taste Him in our mouths; yet our infallible faith, the word of God, makes us perfectly certain that we really have Our Lord in His divinity and humanity present with us. Hence the Prophet David, foreseeing in spirit this mystery, calls it an abyss of wonders that God is pleased to show us: "He hath made a remembrance of His wonderful works, being a merciful and gracious Lord."¹ St. Thomas of Aquin and other holy Fathers call this sacrament a miracle of miracles, a master-piece, incomprehensible to us men, of the infinite wisdom of God.

Hence we
must show
it special
honor.

O glorious privilege of our religion! Happy the members of the Catholic Church! What a great honor and glory it is for you to have the King of heaven and earth, God and Man, dwelling amongst you in such a wonderful manner, living and conversing with you constantly! In former days Martha thought herself highly honored in having Jesus Christ in her house on

¹ *Memoriam fecit mirabilia suorum, misericors et miserator Dominus.*—Ps. cx. 4.

even one occasion, and in being allowed to entertain Him as her guest. How far greater is not our honor and happiness in being able to visit Him whenever we please, to speak with Him, to open our minds to Him, nay, to receive Him so often into our bosom! O Christians, have we not just reason to rejoice exceedingly on account of this mystery, the holiest thing of our religion? Have we not just reason to show the great God who dwells amongst us the utmost reverence and love, and to make this day especially one of joyful exultation and thanksgiving? Truly, "Thou art worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor." And if we failed in doing this, the Catholic Church would justly accuse us of being weak in our faith in this Most Holy Sacrament; or else all laws of decency and honor would condemn us as guilty of the greatest rudeness and discourtesy in forgetting the respect due to such a mighty King. O Lord our God, Thou art indeed worthy of infinite honor and glory. But now my mind is filled with the thought of Thy wonderful, incomprehensible love for us poor mortals, a love which specially manifests itself to the world in this mystery, and makes us guilty, if we are wanting in the reverence and love we owe this sacrament, not merely of rudeness and discourtesy, but of the most criminal ingratitude, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

If we consider every circumstance, either what Our Lord has given to us in this sacrament, or the love with which He has given it, or the manner in which He has given it, we shall find that the love of Jesus for us is unspeakable, infinite. It is God who shows us His love in the mystery of His incarnation and birth; truly a great love, of which the Holy Ghost gives us some idea when He says: "God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son."¹ It is God who proves His love in His bitter Passion and death, an unheard-of love, and, as the Apostle calls it, an excessive love: "For His exceeding charity wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together in Christ, by whose grace you are saved."² And it is the same God who proves His love for us in the Most Holy Sacrament; but what a love! Hear what the Apostle of

In the
Blessed
Sacrament
Christ
shows a
wonderful
love for
us, since He
gives Him-
self to us
for all time.

¹ Sic Deus dilexit mundum ut Filium suum unigenitum daret.—John iii. 16.

² Propter nimiam charitatem suam qua dilexit nos, et cum essemus mortui peccatis, convivificavit nos in Christo, cujus gratia estis salvati.—Ephes. ii. 4, 5.

love says: "Before the festival day of the Pasch, Jesus, knowing that His hour was come, that He should pass out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end."¹ Such are the words of the Evangelist in relating the history of the Last Supper, in which Jesus instituted the Blessed Sacrament. "He loved them unto the end;"—what is the meaning of that? Does it mean that Jesus loved them as long as He was in this mortal life? Truly it does, for, O Lord, Thou hast proved Thy love for us even unto death, since Thou gavest up Thy life to save us from eternal death; and that would still be true, although Thou hadst never instituted the Blessed Sacrament. But St. John means something more than that, as St. Augustine says of those words, "unto the end." There are two kinds of ends, he says, "One is the end of defection, the other that of perfection."² The first is, when a thing ceases to exist, or, as we say, when it comes to an end. Thus, when the sun goes down this evening, the day comes to an end and will never return again. It was not in this sense that Jesus showed His love for us in the Blessed Eucharist, as if it came to an end with His death; but He was pleased to love us until the end, that is, without end. For the first attribute of one who loves truly is to wish to be always with the object of his affection, to be seen by him, and to have friendly intercourse with him; this constant intimacy never becomes tedious or wearisome, and if the person whom he loves is separated from him, his desires always go forth to him, his constant wish is to be reunited to him. Ask Jesus Christ Our Lord why He remains day and night on our altars, and so often shows Himself to the people exposed in the monstrance. O good Lord and God, what art Thou doing here on earth? Why dost Thou remain in this vale of tears? Heaven is the only place fit for Thy glorified body, and He who is no longer on the journey to eternity, and has not gone astray on the road, must have His dwelling in His fatherland. Dost Thou remain here to redeem the world? But that Thou hast done already by Thy death. Heaven is now opened, hell is overcome, Thou hast shown us the way to paradise by Thy example. What art Thou doing here, then, O dear Saviour? Is it to give Thy grace to those who visit Thee? But Thy bodily presence is not required for

¹ Ante diem festum Paschæ sciens Jesus quia venit hora ejus, ut transeat ex hoc mundo ad Patrem, cum dilexisset suos qui erant in mundo, in finem dilexit eos.—John xiii. 1.

² Finis defectionis, et finis perfectionis.

that. The water in holy Baptism, the oil in Extreme Unction, the creatures used in the other sacraments, give us Thy grace without Thy being really present in them; and in the same way Thou couldst have so instituted the Sacrament of the Altar that it would give us grace while the bread remains bread, just as the water remaining water washes us from the stain of original sin in Baptism. Why, then, permit me to ask Thee again, dost Thou remain always amongst us? Ah, the Son of God answers: Love compels Me to do that; one who loves cannot be without the object of his affections; "My delight is to be with the children of men."¹ It is a joy and pleasure for Me to be with men, and therefore I have fixed My dwelling among you. That was the consolation He gave His apostles when He was about to ascend into heaven: "Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world,"² as if He wished to say: My dear children, you are sorrowful because I am about to leave you and go to My Father; but be comforted; I will divide Myself between My Father and you. The visible presence of My human nature will indeed be taken from you; but I will leave Myself with you on earth in My whole substance and essence, and I promise faithfully that I will remain with you till the end of the world. "Having loved His own, who were in the world, He loved them unto the end." "O end without end, without measure, without limit!"³ cries out St. Bernard in astonishment.

The other end is the end of perfection, namely, when a thing has reached its highest perfection; thus we say, the work of a building is ended, when the last hand has been put to it, and there is no more to be done in the way of improving it. Now, in this sacrament Christ has loved us to the end of all perfection, as far, namely, as His love can go; He loves us, so to speak, with all the strength of His power, His riches, His wisdom, and as it were infinitely; for if love has this property, as all who love know it has, that it willingly shares all it has with the loved one; if gifts are bestowed according to the greatness of the love and the wealth of the lover, how could the love of Jesus Christ for us go any farther? Truly He is rich and wealthy enough; but could He give us a more valuable gift? He is infinitely wise; but could He invent a more beautiful means of bestowing this

And gives
Himself
completely.

¹ *Deliciæ meæ esse cum filiis hominum.*—Prov. viii. 31.

² *Ece ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad consummationem sæculi.*—Matt. xxviii. 20.

³ *O finem sine fine, sine modo, sine termine!*

gift on us than the institution of the Blessed Eucharist? In this sacrament, says the Council of Trent, "He has poured out the riches of His divine love for men,"¹ so that He has nothing more left that He could give us; His whole Godhead, His whole humanity, His whole body, all His blood, His life, His soul, His graces, His merits, His satisfaction, He gives to men, and to all men who receive Him worthily in this mystery. "What better gift than Himself could even He bestow on us?"² asks St. Bernard. He has given me my being and life by creating me out of nothing; He gives me that life every moment by preserving me; He has given me a memory to think of Him, an understanding to know Him, a will to desire and love Him; He has given me eyes to see with, ears to hear with, a tongue to speak with, and my other senses; He has given me the sun to enlighten me, fire to warm me, the earth to support me, the air to refresh me; all these creatures are for my use and benefit; all are gifts from Him. O Lord, I cannot thank Thee enough for them; they are more than I deserve! But they are not enough for Thee, nor can they be compared with the extent of Thy love for me. Not one of these goods can satiate my heart; in spite of them I still remain poor and needy, as long as I have not Thee, the Author of all good, so that Thou must bestow Thyself on me! And this, my dear brethren, is what the God of love has done in the most perfect manner in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, in which He gives Himself completely to us men. "He has given us heaven," cries out St. Augustine in astonishment; "He has given us the earth, He has given us His kingdom, and even Himself; what more could divine charity bestow on us? O God, so prodigal of Himself, if it is allowed to say so! Although He is omnipotent, He could not give us more; although He is infinitely wise, He knew not how to give more; although His riches are endless, He had nothing more to give."³

And that, too, under the sacramental veils; another proof of immense love to sinners.

Thirdly, how does He give Himself to men in this mystery? Concealed under lowly accidents. But, we might ask, would He not have shown greater love if He had come to dwell among us undisguised, in visible form, so that we might have seen Him and conversed with Him as one friend does with another? Oh, no,

¹ *Divitias divini sui amoris erga homines velut effudit.*

² *Quid poterat dare seipso melius, vel ipse?*

³ *Dedit cœlum, dedit terram, dedit regnum suum, dedit seipsum; quid ultra dare potuit charitas divina? O Deum, si fas est dicere, prodigum sui! Deus cum sit omnipotens, plus dare non potuit; cum sit sapientissimus, plus dare nescivit; cum sit ditissimus, plus dare non habuit.*

my dear brethren! The very fact of His concealing Himself from our sight is a new master-piece of His love, and a special benefit to all of us, sinners as well as just. Why so? I will tell you. In the first place, with regard to sinners: it is a real benefit for a weak sight not to be exposed to strong rays of light; and therefore, when one has weak eyes, the blinds are drawn, and the rays of the sun excluded; for how could such a one bear them? Even the glimmering of a small lamp is disagreeable in such a case, and the person would prefer to be left in total darkness. Now, what else are sinners and wicked men, but the people of whom the Prophet Isaias speaks: "Bring forth the people that are blind, and have eyes,"¹ and that cannot bear the light of which Christ Himself says: "Every one that doth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, that his works may not be reproved"?² When Moses came down from the mountain, where he had been speaking with God, his countenance was so full of light that the Israelites, after having defiled themselves with the sin of idolatry, could not bear to look at him, and he had either to hide himself from them, or to cover his face with a veil when he had to speak to them: "He put a veil upon his face."³ Imagine, my dear brethren, that Jesus Christ is standing here in all His glory on the altar, without the sacramental veils; bring into the church a sinner, one who is actually an enemy of God, and see how he will act. Fear, trembling, shuddering, would be weak words to express his sentiments at the first sight of Our Lord; for he would feel a kind of death agony. When Adam and Eve had sinned by eating the forbidden fruit, the Scripture says: "When they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in paradise, Adam and his wife hid themselves from the face of the Lord God amidst the trees of paradise."⁴ The mere sight of the God whom they had offended was intolerable to them. Therefore Cain, after having slain his brother, "went out from the face of the Lord."⁵ So hard is it for one who has sin on his conscience to stand before the Lord God. And if now, while I am speaking, Christ showed Himself in public, would not a sinner, if one were present, run at once out of the church, provided the

¹ Educ foras populum cæcum, et oculos habentem.—Is. xliii. 8.

² Omnis enim qui male agit, odit lucem, et non venit ad lucem, ut non arguantur opera ejus?—John iii. 20.

³ Posuit velamen super faciem suam.—Exod. xxxiv. 33.

⁴ Cum audissent vocem Domini Dei deambulantis in paradiso, abscondit se Adam et uxor ejus a facie Domini Dei in medio ligni paradisi.—Gen. iii. 8.

⁵ Egressusque Cain a facie Domini.—Ibid. iv. 16.

door were open, to escape the sight of his Judge? Not one who is conscious of evil would remain in the church; for it is certain that he would see Christ as his sins deserve, that is, angry with him; and who could bear that sight without almost dying of fear? A single angry look that Philip II. of Spain cast on two nobles who were misbehaving in church had such an effect on them that one lost his reason, and the other died. What effect would the angry looks of Jesus Christ, who is now the King of glory and Judge of the living and dead, have on the sinner conscious of guilt? "They shall perish at the rebuke of Thy countenance."¹ Hence the mere sight of the offended God, a single angry look of Jesus Christ, would create more havoc amongst sinners than the Ark of the Covenant did amongst the Bethsamites when they saw it without its usual covering: "He slew of the people seventy men, and fifty thousand of the common people; because they had seen the Ark of the Lord. And the men of Bethsames said: "Who shall be able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?"² It is, then, a great grace and blessing for me and all sinners that Jesus withdraws Himself from our bodily eyes, and remains hidden under the sacramental veils. Oh, how mild and loving the Heart of Jesus must be, since He does not wish to meet openly one who is His enemy and who merits nothing but wrath and vengeance, but remains with him constantly, showering benefits on him without being seen by him, lest the sight of that great majesty might terrify him and drive him away; and thus hidden under the lowly accidents, Our Lord encourages the sinner to approach Him without fear, ask pardon for his sins, and recover His grace and friendship!

And also to
the just.

I turn now to you, my dear brethren, whom love and devotion have assembled here to honor the hidden God. It is for the sake of the good and just alone that Jesus is present in the Blessed Eucharist; and even to them He gives proof of a greater love by remaining hidden under the veils than if He appeared amongst us in visible form. For, although they would not, like sinners, be stricken dead with fear at the sight of Him, yet astonishment would almost kill them, and instead of having an intimate love for Him, their reverence for Him would be too great. When the Queen of Saba saw Solomon in the glory of

¹ Ab increpatione vultus tui peribunt.—Ps. lxxix. 17.

² Percussit de populo septuaginta viros, et quinquaginta millia plebis: eo quod vidissent arcam Domini. Et dixerunt viri Bethsamitæ: quis poterit stare in conspectu Domini Dei sancti hujus?—I. Kings vi. 19, 20.

his royal magnificence, she fainted with wonder: "She had no longer any spirit in her."¹ The great beauty of Judith did not hinder her from going in safety through the Assyrian camp; nay, instead of inspiring those who beheld it with sinful desires, they were rather struck with astonishment: "Their eyes were amazed, for they wondered exceedingly at her beauty."² For that which is very great and majestic is not so much loved as feared on earth; an ordinary beauty attracts hearts, but an extraordinary one repels them and makes them tremble with awe and cast down the eyes, so as not to behold it. Oh, how would it then be, my dear brethren, if the Son of God showed Himself on the altar without veils, not as He was while in a mortal body, "despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity,"³ but in His heavenly glory, surrounded by light and adorned with a majesty before which the angels tremble? What eye could behold Him without being blinded? When He showed a few rays of His glory on Mount Thabor, even His own disciples, who had known Him for some time, and were on such familiar terms with Him, fell to the ground with fear and awe: they "fell upon their face, and were very much afraid."⁴ What effect would that countenance, which is beautiful above every beauty, which makes a heaven of itself that the angels desire to behold, and the elect cannot be satiated with gazing on for all eternity—what effect would the countenance of the most beautiful among the sons of men, Jesus Christ, have, if it were shown to us without the sacramental veils? Not only would men be amazed, but their wonderment would draw the souls out of their bodies, and, in any case, all love and confidence in Our Saviour would be at an end, for no one would dare to approach Him through fear and awe, or to converse with Him, or to make known his wants to Him. Thus this priceless mystery of the altar would no longer be what St. Bernard calls it, "the Love of loves,"⁵ a covenant of love between God and man, but a sacrament of glory and majesty alone, before which we should bend the knee, not in love and confidence, but in fear and terror. No; Our Saviour, who loves us unto the end in the most perfect manner, wished to treat

¹ Non habebat ultra spiritum.—III. Kings x. 5.

² Erat in oculis eorum stupor, quoniam pulchritudinem ejus mirabantur nimis.—Jud. x. 14.

³ Despectum et novissimum virorum, virum dolorum et scientem infirmitatem.—Is. liii. 3.

⁴ Ceciderunt in faciem suam et timuerunt valde.—Matt. xvii. 6.

⁵ Amor amorum.

with His pious and just souls only in a friendly and confidential manner; and therefore He did not choose to be feared as God in His majesty, but rather to deal with us as a father with his beloved children, as a brother with his brothers and sisters, as a bridegroom with his bride. “Eat, O friends, and drink,” He seems to say to us, “and be inebriated, My dearly beloved.”¹ “Come to Me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you.”² Come all, without exception; come also, ye poor and needy, who are vile and abject in the eyes of the world, and make known your wants and troubles to Me; tell Me what ails you, and I will refresh you. Come without fear; I am ready for you at any moment. Mark, my dear brethren, how, in order to have that friendly intimacy with us, the good God has found such a wonderful manner of concealing His majesty, so as not to frighten any one or hinder confidential intercourse. Therefore He has concealed Himself behind a curtain, that no ray of the divine light may burst forth on us. “To spare our weakness, He does not manifest Himself in the splendor of His majesty,”³ says Hugh of St. Victor, but acts as kings and princes sometimes do, who disguise themselves, and thus mix with people of much inferior condition, so as not to inspire such great feelings of reverence as usual, but rather to be able to treat with their subjects on a confidential footing.

A benefit
little prized
by sinners,
who abuse
it to dishon-
or Christ
all
the more.

O my God, how Thou dost disguise Thyself for our advantage! And how shamefully we misuse that benefit! Oh, the pity of it! Even because God has hidden His majesty through love of us, we think less of Him! With reason mayest thou complain, O holy Prophet Isaias: “His look was as it were hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed Him not.”⁴ Many act towards Him as if the accidents under which He hides Himself were the white garment in which Herod mocked Him; they think little of Him, because they cannot see His holy countenance clearly, and they dishonor Him as if the sacramental veils were the bandage that the Jews put over His eyes, while they struck Him with their fists: “His look was as it were hidden and despised.” Fie, for shame! When I consider some Christians, who kneel carelessly on one knee, and talk and laugh with each other before the Blessed Sacrament, in whose

¹ Comedite, amici, et bibite, et inebriamini charissimi.—Cant. v. 1.

² Venite ad me omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis, et ego reficiam vos.—Matt. xi. 28.

³ Ut nostræ infirmitati parcat, semetipsum in suæ majestatis claritate non manifestat.

⁴ Quasi absconditus vultus ejus et despectus, unde nec reputavimus eum.—Is. liii. 3.

presence the devils tremble and the angels show the utmost reverence and humility, I seem to see the rabble soldiery who bent the knee in mockery before Our Lord. When I see how some continue talking while the sacred Host is raised on high during the elevation, I seem to hear the *Ecce Homo* with which Jesus was shown to the jeering crowd that cried out: Crucify Him, crucify Him. When I think how many come to the church to take part in processions without faith, adoration, or reverence, nay, out of sheer curiosity or vanity, to see and to be seen, while they stare round at others, and nod to them, and indulge in impure looks and desires, bowing most profoundly, meanwhile, if some one passes by for whom they have respect, and saluting him with more reverence than they do their Lord and Creator, I seem to be witnessing the painful procession of Christ to Calvary, in which He was also accompanied by wicked men, not out of pity, but to gloat over His agony. And when I think, moreover, how some go to the sacred table as if they were sitting down to their ordinary food, without preparation, without repentance, with consciences burdened by sin, with hatred and enmity against their neighbor, or with hearts filled with some unlawful passion for a creature, and thus swallow down the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, it seems to me that I behold that terrible tragedy of Mount Calvary in which Jesus was hung on the cross between two thieves and cruelly done to death. Oh, shame! "His look was as it were hidden and despised;" thus we despise the God who conceals Himself through love for us! Oh, how ungrateful we are for such a benefit! How will it be with us when the same Saviour will one day no longer hide Himself from us for our advantage, but with wrathful countenance will appear before us as our Judge? Then the wicked will in vain wish to hide themselves from Him. "Then shall they begin to say to the mountains: fall upon us; and to the hills: cover us."¹

But I hope I have none such here before me. Just Christians, I address you again; consider whether the fact of Christ's concealing Himself in this sacrament does not lessen your reverence and devotion for Him. Alas! when I think of this, I must be ashamed of—what shall I say?—of my inattention, or of my blindness? Even that very benefit and love Thou showest me, O Lord, in hiding Thyself under the accidents, which should move me to greater love and confidence in Thee, has sometimes made me

And also
by many of
the just, who
do not profit
by it as they
ought.
Explained
by a simile.

¹ Tunc inclinant dicere montibus: cadite super nos; et collibus: operite nos.—Luke xxiii. 30.

quite stupid and forgetful of Thee as well as of myself. Thou hast been so often with me, and I with Thee; and yet, through want of a lively faith, I have acted as if I knew not who Thou art. It has been with me as with the prisoner in the story. The king's son once visited him out of pity, but in disguise, and asked him how he was, how long he had been in that place, and how he managed to bear the hardships of his lot. The poor man, not knowing who was speaking to him, and thinking from the meanness of his dress that he was some ordinary individual, gave him nothing but short answers, because he was rendered so ill-humored by his long imprisonment. Thus the conversation was soon brought to an end. When the prince went away, the guard asked the prisoner if he had been any better for the visit he had received. Better? answered he; not I; what could I expect from such a mean-looking stranger? But do you not know who your visitor was? continued the guard. He was the king's son. What! cried out the poor man in amazement; was that the prince? O unhappy man that I am! was he my visitor? Fool that I was! What an opportunity I have lost! What precious time I have squandered uselessly away! If I had only known that, I should not have to eat bread and water any longer, nor would this wretched prison confine me. I would have acted quite differently; I would have thrown myself at his feet, and embraced them, and moistened them with my tears, and not let them go until he had released me. Ah, if I could only have the same opportunity again! Such were the well-grounded lamentations of the poor wretch.

O my God, who art here concealed and disguised, I, a miserable worm, may with still better reason exclaim, how often hast not Thou, the Son of the eternal, almighty God, visited my soul! I have had Thee with me as often as I have been to holy Communion; as often as I have appeared before Thy altar in the church; but, stupid and senseless wretch that I am! how I have squandered away the golden opportunity! I have behaved in Thy presence as if Thou wert a complete stranger, although my faith told me plainly enough who Thou wert. Coldly, heartlessly have I met Thee, as if I had to do with a mortal like myself. Love, mercy, and the desire to help me drove Thee to me; and I have sent Thee away with a few words, with a few prayers gabbled in some way or other out of my prayer-book! Often have I allowed Thee, my sovereign Benefactor, to sit alone in my

heart, when I went about my ordinary business immediately after holy Communion. Ah, those might have been happy moments for me, for Thou wert ready to fill me with Thy graces and gifts. How uselessly I have spent them! They were golden opportunities for me to lay my wants of body and soul before Thee. But, alas, through inattention I have foolishly lost them! That shall never be the case again, O Lord! I will make a better use of Thy goodness, and go oftener than hitherto to Thy holy table; nor will I allow any business or occupation to keep me from holy Communion on the appointed days.

But I had almost forgotten something. The last thing I have to tell you about the Blessed Sacrament, my dear brethren, is a new and wonderful invention of the love of Jesus Christ. In what manner has He disguised and given Himself to us? Under the appearances of bread and wine. Well do I know, although I cannot understand it, that God gave Himself to the world when He became man, and lived three and thirty years amongst us; that God gave Himself to man when He shed every drop of His Blood for us, and sacrificed His life on Calvary (a love that we could not even imagine or think of, much less hope for); but in this sacrament I find a love to which the other love must, so to speak, yield. "For the first gift," as St. Thomas of Aquin says, "is and remains separated from him to whom it is given."¹ Christ is not thereby united with us mortals. But in this sacrament, when I receive it worthily, the Son of God is given to me so completely, that I possess Him really and truly as my own property, and use Him as if I were, so to speak, His lord. He who communicates worthily, says St. Augustine, "is enriched with the possession of the entire deity."² I receive Him into my body as real food which I eat, as real drink which I swallow; could there be a closer and more perfect union than this? What is more our own than the food we eat, which becomes changed into our flesh, blood, and nature? To such a degree has Christ loved us. O Christians, what words can we find to express the tenderness of His love? He has been pleased to become our food, and, as it were, to be changed into our substance, and to change our substance into His, according to what He says in the Gospel of St. John: "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me and I in him."³ O won-

Finally,
Christ has
given Him-
self to us as
our food
and drink.

¹ Tale donum adhuc est in aliqua separatione ab eo cui datur. ² De toto Deo dives est.

³ Qui manducat meam carnem et bibit meum sanguinem, in me manet et ego in illo.—
John vi. 57.

derful invention of God's love for His creatures! "O ecstasy of immense love!" cries out St. Thomas of Villanova, "O excess of fervent charity!"¹ If a man who takes pleasure in feeding birds, dogs, and other animals were pleased to feed from his own table a worm of the earth, and were so enamored of that miserable thing as to give it his own flesh as its food, would we not say that love had driven that man out of his senses? To such a holy excess has God's love for us brought Him. With reason is this mystery called by distinction the Sacrament of Love.² If God stood in need of food and drink, could a more precious food be set before Him, than what He has given to us poor worms of the earth?

We owe,
then, special
love and
gratitude to
Our Lord.

And will not that love be able to draw our hearts and our love after it? Will it not be able to induce us to offer the homage of all our praise to God out of gratitude for the favor He has conferred on us? If the meanest peasant brings us a present we thank him for it on account at least of the good will he has shown. Truly, O Lord, Thou art worthy to receive glory and honor! If we have hitherto been cold-hearted towards Thee in spite of Thy goodness to us, we can no longer contend against the generosity Thou showest in thus giving Thyself to us. Thou art worthy, we acknowledge it, of all honor and love! This only must we regret, that we have no honor or love to give Thee that is worthy of Thy gift. If Thou art in earnest in what Thou sayest by the wise Ecclesiasticus, "Give to the Most High according to what He hath given to thee,"³ O my God, what shall we then do? What can we poor mortals give Thee in return for such a gift? "What shall I render to the Lord," we may well ask with Thy servant David, "for all the things that He hath rendered to me?"⁴ And I may say, too, with St. Bernard: "What shall I give Thee for Thyself?"⁵ I am not able to repay Thee for the first of Thy benefits to me, creation; and if I were to give myself and all that I have and am, my life and a thousand lives, if I had them, what would it all be in comparison with what Thou hast bestowed on me in giving me Thyself, O great God? If all the riches on earth were mine, and I renounced them for Thy sake, would I even then make Thee an adequate return for Thyself?

¹ O extasin exuberantis amoris! O ferventis charitatis excessum!

² Sacramentum charitatis.

³ Da Altissimo secundum datum ejus.—Eccles. xxxv. 12.

⁴ Quid retribuam Domino pro omnibus quæ retribuit mihi?—Ps. cxv. 12.

⁵ Sed quid retribuam tibi pro teipso?

But, O Lord, Thou art as good as Thou art loving; Thou knowest my poverty, the narrowness and meanness of my heart, and Thou art quite satisfied if I devote it completely to Thy service. Oh, if I only once emptied it altogether to make room for Thee, just as Thou hast emptied Thyself for me! But, alas, in how many parts I divide myself against Thy will! How often have I not given and sacrificed my memory and understanding, my heart and my love, to different creatures, although I could expect nothing good from them, while I have left Thee alone, O God, without love, although Thou hast given Thyself to me, and art worthy of infinite love, if it were mine to bestow! Ah, my Saviour, I have often told Thee with my lips that I give my heart and my whole self to Thee; but I have been either false in my words, or else I have not been constant in my resolution. But now, O Lord, overcome by Thy wonderful, incomprehensible love, I will in truth be wholly and completely Thine forever. Therefore, prostrate now before Thy altar, I present to Thee my heart and my love, and I wish this gift to be irrevocable. I consecrate to Thee completely my body and soul, all the thoughts of my mind, all the movements of my understanding, and especially all the actions of my whole life. I now renounce and annul beforehand all desires that might be opposed to this full abandonment of myself to Thee, and that might enter my mind through weakness or forgetfulness. And I furthermore assert that I do not wish to love anything in the world but Thee, or on Thy account, since Thou hast loved me in such a wonderful manner. I desire to be wholly Thine, in life and death, in time and eternity, in which, as I confidently hope, I shall be able to make up for my present imperfect love by an all-perfect and unchangeable one, when I shall praise Thee with the angels forever and ever. Amen.

Conclusion
and resolution
to show
Him that
love and
gratitude.

For another sermon on the same subject, see the following Fifth Part.

TWENTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON ACCOMPANYING THE BLESSED SACRAMENT WHEN IT IS
CARRIED TO THE SICK.

Subject.

When the Blessed Sacrament is carried to the sick, all who are in the neighborhood should accompany it. This is required, 1st. by the honor and glory of God; 2d. by the welfare and salvation of our souls.—*Preached on the feast of St. Bartholomew, Apostle.*

Text.

Omnis turba quærebat eum tangere; quia virtus de illo exibat, et sanabat omnes.—Luke vi. 19.

“And all the multitude sought to touch Him; for virtue went out from Him, and healed all.”

Introduction.

Wherever Our Lord showed Himself in public during the three years of His public life, the people came together in crowds to follow Him, to hear His doctrine, and to be cured of their bodily diseases. “All the multitude;” but the Pharisees formed an exception to this rule, because the honor shown Our Lord by the people was a thorn in their side. Otherwise, as we read in to-day’s gospel, there was “a very great multitude of people from all Judea, and Jerusalem, and the sea-coast both of Tyre and Sidon, who were come to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases.” If the Saviour were to appear now in the streets of this town, my dear brethren, how many would run out of their houses to see Him and to accompany Him? But what a strange question, you think. Would there be even one found who would not run at once to see Our Lord? For my part, even if I were lame and crippled, I should have myself carried out in order to do homage to the Son of God. And besides, what better opportunity could we have of making known our wants and asking Him to help us? I am of the same opinion as you, my dear brethren, and I believe that every one who is not kept in bed by illness ought, if such an occasion were to arise, to go out and meet Our Lord. But, after all, why do I ask what you would do if the Saviour came through our streets? Does He

not go through them frequently, nay, almost every day, when the Blessed Sacrament is carried to the sick and dying? But how many people do we see accompanying their Lord on those occasions? Alas, it would be necessary to get together all the poor beggars off the streets to form some kind of an escort, so few are there, generally speaking, who do honor in that way to the Blessed Sacrament. Nay, how many proud Pharisees there are who would be ashamed of such an act of devotion?

Christ Jesus, Thy honor is concerned in this. Thou hast the hearts of all in Thy hand; behold, I now offer Thee my tongue; lay on it such powerful and impressive words that those who hear me to-day may be induced in future to pay Thee the honor Thou deservest! Mary, Mother of the Lord, and all ye guardian angels of those present, help me to do this! It concerns the honor of your Son, of your King! Trusting in your help, I begin, and say—

Plan of Discourse.

When the Blessed Sacrament is borne to the sick it is but right that all who are in the neighborhood should accompany it, if possible; for that is required by the glory of God, who is thus carried through the streets, as I shall prove in the first part. It is required by the welfare and salvation of our souls, as I shall show in the second part.

When, as I said on another occasion, the words “the prince comes” are heard in the antechamber of the palace, what a sudden change takes place amongst the courtiers, attendants, and lackeys present! They all stand up at once; conversation is broken off, and each one assumes the most respectful posture, ready to accompany his prince, although the latter may be only going from one room to another. If one of them were through inadvertence to remained seated, not to speak of his continuing his conversation or laughter, his rudeness would bring him into disgrace, although the prince would not feel it so deeply, as the want of respect occurs only in the privacy of the palace. But if it happened in the public streets, when he is going through them, then it would be looked on as an act of treason committed before the eyes of the people. Hence kings and princes are wont never to appear in public unless accompanied by a number of soldiers and attendants, in order to receive the honor due to their high rank. To say nothing of other similar matters,

Kings and
princes ap-
pear in pub-
lic with
great pomp.

which we know of by our own experience, consider what the Holy Scripture says of the glory of king Solomon, the greatest of all earthly kings: "And Solomon was magnified above all the kings of the earth for riches and glory. And all the kings of the earth desired to see the face of Solomon."¹ What pomp, and splendor, and astonishing magnificence there was whenever he showed himself outside his palace! "King Solomon hath made him a litter of the wood of Libanus," as we read in the Canticle; "the pillars thereof he made of silver, the seat of gold, the going up of purple."² Before taking his seat in this litter, there were four thousand chosen men all adorned with gold and silver, and mounted on splendid horses, of which he had forty thousand in his stable, ready to accompany him: "And Solomon had forty thousand horses in the stables, and twelve thousand chariots and horsemen."³ Behind him there went two thousand footmen with a countless number of satellites, whose only business was to keep off the crowds of people. "Go forth," was cried out aloud, "go forth, ye daughters of Sion, and see king Solomon in the diadem wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals."⁴

How much more, then, should not Christians accompany their Lord through the streets!

Christians, you hear the bell ringing which announces that the Blessed Sacrament is about to be carried through the streets to the sick. What is to be done? Who is about to pass by? Oh, what a great Lord is coming out of His palace, out of the church! O truly, as your faith tells you, "Behold a greater than Solomon here,"⁵ a greater and nobler than all the kings and potentates of earth. Shame! cries out St. John Chrysostom, that we should compare earthly kings to Him! There is an infinite distance between the majesty of a mortal monarch and that of the Most High God. Kings, emperors, monarchs of earth! you are indeed raised above all others; honor and respect are due to you from your subjects; but what are you compared to the King of heaven? Nothing but His poor servants, before whom you must bow your crowned heads, and lay your sceptres with all submission at His feet; mere subjects and vassals you are of

¹ Magnificatus est igitur Salomon super omnes reges terræ præ divitiis et gloria. Omnesque reges terrarum desiderabant videre faciem Salomonis.—II. Paral. ix. 22, 23.

² Ferculum fecit sibi rex Salomon de lignis Libani; columnas ejus fecit argenteas, reclinatorium aureum, ascensum purpureum.—Cant. iii. 9, 10.

³ Habuit quoque Salomon quadraginta millia equorum in stabulis, et curruum equitumque duodecim millia.—II. Paral. ix. 25.

⁴ Egredimini et videte, filiæ Sion, regem Salomonem in diademate, quo coronavit illum mater sua in die desponsationis illius.—Cant. iii. 11.

⁵ Ecce plus quam Salomon hic.—Matt. xii. 42.

that Monarch from whom you have, so to speak, received for a time the loan of your lives; who, as He has placed you on the throne, can now in a moment, if it seems good to Him, hurl you down from it! Christians, behold the Son of God is carried publicly through the streets; Jesus Christ, the Lord of hosts, is coming! Go forth and see your king in the diadem! Out of your houses at once! Look at, honor, and adore your King, your God, in His majesty and glory! Alas, there are a few poor servants and lackeys and little children, may be, preceding Him, and one or two poor women following Him; that is all! Ah, what a mean parade for such a glorious monarch! Ye angels and courtiers of heaven! where are ye? Do ye allow your King to go thus unaccompanied? But what am I saying? Whole legions of heavenly spirits go with Him, but because they are invisible to mortal eyes, they do not make any outward show. Go forth, ye daughters of Sion! ye mortals, Christians, for whose sake He appears in public! Come forth out of your houses, and do honor to your King, that every one may see what a great monarch is passing by! Are you not all His servants, His attendants? If so, where is the homage, the respect, which you owe Him?

Are you perhaps ashamed of Him, that you refuse to appear in public with Him? Alas, what a disgrace! For it seems not only that you are ashamed of Him, as experience teaches, since so many of you remain in your houses when He is passing by, paying as little attention to Him as if He were a poor leper shaking his rattle at the door and asking for an alms; but how many Catholics there are who are ashamed to have the Blessed Sacrament brought publicly to their houses when they are sick! How many there are who prefer to lie in bed for months without this Food of their souls, and, as sometimes happens, actually defer receiving the Viaticum until they are at the point of death, so great is their aversion to having the Blessed Sacrament brought to them publicly! If it could be brought during the night, or privately during the day, so that no one could know what was going on, then they would willingly receive holy Communion; otherwise they are ashamed to do so. I do not and cannot understand what silly ideas such people have got into their heads; they must imagine it to be a disgrace to them if people can say, the great God has given public audience in that house; Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has conferred on that man

But many
are ashamed
to be seen
in public
with Him.

the great grace and favor of entering into his house and feeding him with His own sacred flesh and blood. They must think it a dishonorable thing to give people an opportunity of saying, that lady or gentleman is walking in the street with God; that lady or gentleman is not ashamed to accompany Jesus Christ Our Saviour. As if that could possibly be a disgrace in the eyes of any decent person!

How disgraceful!

But so it is, O Almighty God! We are ashamed of Thee; and therefore so few are found to go with Thee in public. If we were compelled to carry the cross with Thee in Thy shameful procession to Calvary, as Simeon was, we should look on it as an honor and privilege to be allowed to share in Thy shame and disgrace; but in that case we should have some sort of an excuse for refusing to go with Thee, and it would indeed be a hard thing for us to be put to public shame and ridicule before all the people. But now all Thou askest of us is to follow Thee as Thou art borne on the triumphal throne of Thy unheard-of love to the sick and dying, in order to add to the pomp of Thy appearance in public. And lo, that is what we are ashamed of; Thou art too mean for us to associate with; we are afraid of what people might think of us if we showed Thee that honor! Ah, you courtiers and nobles, are those your sentiments when you accompany your sovereign through the streets of a town? By no means; not one of you wishes to be the last to put in an appearance on such an occasion; nor would any of you think of excusing himself unless he was kept at home by grievous illness; while you consider it your duty to put on your most magnificent apparel, to add to the pomp of the occasion and to attract the attention of the people to your presence in the procession; and as it passes, all, young and old, men and women, run to the windows and out into the streets to see their prince and do him homage. Should not a true Christian also look on it as an honor to do similar homage to the great King of heaven and earth? Should not each one of us say with the Scribe in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou shalt go"?¹ wherever I see Thee, whether Thou art brought to or from the church or the house of a sick person, I will follow Thee; and I shall look on it as an honor and a glory to be allowed to do so. But that is what we are ashamed of. God is too mean for us. But what do I say of kings and princes? A vain woman (alas,

¹ Magister, sequar te quocumque ieris.—Matt. viii. 19.

that I must have recourse to such a simile to show how shameless is our rudeness and discourtesy to God!)—a vain woman can nowadays expect so much honor to be shown her that even a person who is utterly unacquainted with her will deem it his duty to see her home. For this purpose young gentlemen wait at the doors of the churches to pay compliments to the ladies as they come out, and after making more profound bows to them than they did to their God, to offer to escort them home. They never think of asking then, What will people say of me? Their conduct is then irreproachable according to the foolish wisdom of the vain world. But to show that courtesy to the great God who is concealed in the Blessed Sacrament, who loved us even to the death of the cross, who is forced by love to remain with us in that ineffable mystery even to the end of the world, in spite of the insults offered Him by Jews, heretics, sorcerers, wicked Christians, and bad priests, who receive Him unworthily and ill-treat Him on the altar—to show, I say, such courtesy and attention to God, that is looked on as a thing to be ashamed of! Therefore He is allowed to go through the streets alone, or accompanied at most by a few children or poor people.

Might not Our Lord complain of us in the impressive words that He has placed on the tongue of His Prophet Isaias, “Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken. I have brought up children, and exalted them, but they have despised Me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib; but Israel hath not known Me, and My people hath not understood”?¹ I have fed My children with My own flesh and blood, and raised them, as it were, higher than the angels of heaven, who do not enjoy the great favor of having Me as their food; but My beloved children despise Me; they are ashamed of Me; they will not accompany Me in public. Irrational animals, that have received only an animal existence from their Creator, have often shown Me more honor than My rational creatures, who believe in My real presence in this sacrament. Such was the honor I received from the mule, during the life-time of My servant Antony of Padua, that, as I was carried through the streets in the monstrance, fell down on its knees to adore Me as its Creator, and would not get up until I had disappeared from its view. Such was the honor I received from a flock of sheep,

Christ may
well com-
plain of
them.

¹ Audite coeli, et auribus percipe terra, quoniam Dominus locutus est. Filios enutrivit et exaltavi: ipsi autem spreverunt me. Cognovit bos possessorem suum, et asinus praecepe domini sui; Israel autem me non cognovit, et populus meus non intellexit.—Is. 1. 2, 3.

that adored Me on bended knees as I passed by. Such was the honor I received from a swarm of bees, that surrounded Me as I lay in a Host that was lost, and built around me a chapel of wax, in which I remained until a Catholic, to his greatest astonishment, found Me. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib;" so have unreasoning creatures paid homage to Me. "But Israel hath not known Me, and My people hath not understood; but they have despised Me." My own children and domestics, the companions of My table, are ashamed of Me; they act as if they knew Me not; they refuse Me the honor of coming a dozen steps with Me in public. Christians, what an intolerable reproach that is! And what answer can we make to it? There is nothing for us but to be filled with confusion at the thought of the little honor and respect we show God, who is present with us and is worthy of all love.

Our Lord is
not less
worthy of
honor be-
cause He is
hidden un-
der the
accidents.

I know well where the difficulty lies in part. We do not see the great Lord with our bodily eyes; we do not recognize His majesty under the homely guise of bread, and therefore He seems almost contemptible to us in outward appearance. But why should that be so? A prince comes along in his coach, which is covered in on all sides with glass, so that not a glimpse can be had of his person, and the most we can see is his mantle; do we show him less honor or respect on that account? Should his servants and footmen therefore be ashamed of him, and refuse to accompany him? By no means. But you cannot see him. No matter; we know that he is the king or prince, and that is enough for us. Some vain creature of whom you are enamored comes along, enveloped in a large cloak as a protection against the rain; (ah, must I again bring forward that simile?) do you show her less honor or love? Are your bows less profound than if her face were uncovered? Christian faith, where art thou? Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Our Saviour, is coming along. We see nothing of Him but the white clothing; He is veiled under the appearance of bread; do I therefore owe less credence to the assurance of my infallible faith, which tells me that I am in the presence of the Sovereign God, worthy of all reverence and love, who is passing by? Why, then, should I be ashamed to go with Him in public?

We owe
Him all the
more honor
because He

Yes, some will say, when a prince or a king goes publicly through the streets there is something worth seeing, and therefore curiosity drives the people out of their houses to look at him

and pay him their homage; but it happens almost daily that the Blessed Sacrament is brought to the sick and dying. Is that your argument? So you think less of your Benefactor because He appears often to bestow benefits on you? And the great God must be robbed of the honor due to Him, because He deigns almost daily to come to us and comfort the sick and dying with His own flesh and blood? And less respect is shown to Jesus Christ, for the very reason which makes Him worthy of still more respect and love? If we had no other favor to expect from Our Lord in this sacrament but that of His dwelling with us constantly, showing Himself so often to us, although hidden under the sacramental veils, and entering so often the houses of the poorest beggars as well as the palaces of the great, would not that alone be happiness and grace enough for us? Would not that alone be reason enough for showing Him the greatest honor possible? If there were but one town in the world, in which a sacred Host were consecrated by one priest and exposed once or twice a year to the public veneration, and carried in procession through the streets, what a concourse of Catholics would flock to the place at the appointed time from all parts of the world, to see the wonderful and astonishing mystery! And all who saw it would boast of it for the rest of their lives. I have had the great honor and happiness, they would say, of seeing Jesus Christ, my Saviour, in the monstrance, concealed under the appearance of bread, and of adoring Him on bended knees. Is the benefit less, my dear brethren, now that our loving Lord has saved us the trouble of making a long journey, and is present with us in all Catholic towns, villages, and districts? Are we less fortunate now that we can see our hidden God almost daily as He is carried through the streets, and adore and accompany Him? Why, then, should we be so rude and discourteous as to refuse that slight sign of honor and love to our good and loving God, whose infinite majesty is worthy of the utmost pomp and magnificence? But if the thought of the honor due to Our Lord is not enough to make us rejoice at the opportunity of accompanying Him as He is carried to the sick, at least the profit and advantage of our own souls should excite us to show Him that respect, as we shall see in the

is frequently
carried
through the
streets.

Second Part.

When mighty princes and great lords go through the streets, especially when they are entering or leaving a church, or taking

When kings
and princes

publicly enter a church, the poor people crowd round them, begging for alms.

part in a procession, or performing any other work of devotion, nearly always you will find a crowd of beggars and poor people who run after them, or meet them at the church doors and go down on their knees before them, humbly begging an alms; while others, of a better station, who have private business with the prince, wait for their opportunity when they can see him, so as to place their petition in his own hands; for they either fear that they would have a difficulty in seeing him in the palace, or else they imagine that he will be more kindly and mercifully disposed when engaged in works of devotion; as indeed many a one has experienced to his great good fortune, when he thus succeeded in doing more in an hour than he could have done in years by depending on patrons and advocates, or on bribes and presents.

When Christ is borne to the sick, the Almighty appears in public.

My dear brethren, are we not all poor and needy beggars in the sight of God, and do we not stand in need, at all times, in all places, as well with regard to the soul as to the body, of His help and assistance?—for all benefits that we require, both spiritual and temporal, must come from His generosity. But, see, there where the Blessed Sacrament is carried through the street, comes Jesus Christ, that most rich and generous God, out of the church, or on His way back to it. Come quickly, ye poor beggars! I mean you who are in the neighborhood, and who are in need of this Lord's help, as every one is; now is the time for you to present your petition! He is ready to give most generous alms; for He is the same most loving Saviour who, while in the mortal body, passed through town and country doing good to all: "Who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil."¹ He is the same to whom Andrew and Peter came, and they were raised to the dignity of apostleship from being poor fishermen; the same to whom Nathanael and Nicodemus came, and they were enlightened by Him with the knowledge of the most sublime mysteries; the same to whom parents brought their children, that they might be blessed by Him; the same to see whom all the inhabitants of Capharnaum flocked together. "And when it was evening after sunset," as we read in the Gospel of St. Mark, "they brought to Him all that were ill and that were possessed with devils; and all the city was gathered together at the door;"² and all the sick who were present were cured, while those possessed by the evil spirit were freed

¹ Qui pertransiit benefaciendo et sanando omnes oppressos a diabolo.—Acts x. 38.

² Vespere autem facto, cum occidisset sol, afferebant ad eum omnes male habentes, et demonia habentes; et erat omnis civitas congregata ad januam.—Mark i. 32. 33.

from him. He is the same to whom Magdalene came uninvited, as He was sitting at table in the house of the Pharisees; she was a notorious sinner, and she obtained pardon of all her sins, and became like a seraph on fire with divine love. He is the same to see whom Zacheus, because he was of small stature, climbed a tree; and this holy curiosity merited for Zacheus the forgiveness of his sins, the honor of entertaining Our Lord, and subsequent sanctity of life. He is the same to whom the people lowered down the poor paralytic man through the roof, for it was otherwise impossible to get at Him on account of the crowd of people; and the sick man was cured by Him at once both in body and soul. He is the same around whom the poor and oppressed thronged in such numbers that He had to retire from the land and get into a boat. The same who by the touch of His garment healed the sick: who with one word, or by merely laying on His hands, gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, the power of motion to the lame, at a single doleful cry from them. He is the same who often did not wait for the poor to appeal to Him, but sought them out Himself, asked them if they were in want of anything, and helped them even before they besought Him. Thus He said to the blind man by the wayside: "What wilt thou that I do to thee?"¹ And as soon as the blind man gave expression to his wants, "Jesus said to him: Receive Thy sight, thy faith hath made thee whole."² So, too, with the woman who had been infirm for eighteen years, and was bowed together. "Whom when Jesus saw," says St. Luke, "He called her unto Him, and said to her: Woman, thou art delivered from thy infirmity. And He laid His hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight."³ In the same way He restored health unasked to the dropsical man who chanced to come in His way: "He, taking him, healed him, and sent him away."⁴ The same good fortune was in store for the man who had been eight and thirty years sick, and who had been sitting by the pool of Bethsaida waiting for help: "Him when Jesus had seen lying, and knew that he had been now a long time, He saith to him: Wilt thou be made whole?"⁵ And when the sick man did not

¹ Quid tibi vis faciam?—Luke xviii. 41.

² Dixit illi. respice, fides tua te salvum fecit.—Ibid. 42.

³ Quam cum videret Jesus, vocavit eam ad se, et ait illi: mulier, dimissa es ab infirmitate tua. Et imposuit illi manus, et confestim erecta est.—Ibid. xiii. 12, 13.

⁴ Ipse vero apprehensum sanavit eum, ac dimisit.—Ibid. xiv. 4.

⁵ Hunc cum vidisset Jesus jacentem, et cognovisset quia jam multum tempus haberet, dicit ei: vis sanus fieri?—John v. 6.

even directly answer this question, but complained that he had no one to help him, "Jesus saith to him: Arise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole."¹ Still greater was the good fortune of the widow of Naim; she was weeping bitterly and accompanying the dead body of her only son to the grave, not having the least idea that he could ever be restored to her. "Whom when the Lord had seen," says St. Luke, "being moved with mercy towards her, He said to her: Weep not. And He came near and touched the bier. And he that was dead sat up and began to speak; and He gave him to his mother."²

We should
all run after
Him, then,
for we all
need His
help.

See, my dear brethren, it is the same merciful and generous Lord who passes by your houses along the streets, actually engaged in a work of love, for He is on His way to visit the sick, or has visited them, and therefore is more than ever inclined to be merciful and generous. Go out, then, quickly, and accompany Him; cry out to Him in the silence of your hearts, for He can hear your sighs and desires plainly enough, as well as if they were articulate words. Oh, truly, that is the best occasion to ask an alms from the Lord, and to present to Him any petition you please! Are you not often blind and ignorant in your souls through not knowing your duties, or the necessary truths of salvation? Go at once; the bell is ringing; Jesus is passing by. Call out to Him in thought, like the blind man: "Son of David, have mercy on me."³ Are you not suffering from spiritual maladies and frailties? Listen! Jesus is coming; force your way to Him like that woman in the Gospel, who had been suffering twelve years from an issue of blood: she "came behind Him, and touched the hem of His garment. And the woman was made whole from that hour."⁴ Are you not often assailed by temptation, and in danger of committing sin, and being lost forever? Behold, Jesus is coming; go to Him at once and call out to Him, like the disciples when they were in danger of being swallowed up by the raging billows: "Lord, save us, we perish."⁵ He can save you from danger, as He did His disciples

¹ Dicit ei Jesus: Surge, tolle grabatum tuum, et ambula. Et statim sanus factus est homo ille.—John v. 8, 9.

² Quam cum vidisset Dominus, misericordia motus super eam, dixit illi; noli flere. Et accessit et tetigit oculum. Et resedit qui erat mortuus, et coepit loqui. Et dedit illum matri suæ.—Luke vii. 13, 14, 15.

³ Fili David, miserere mei.—Ibid. xviii. 39.

⁴ Accessit retro, et tetigit simbriam vestimenti ejus. Et salva facta est mulier ex illa hora.—Matt. ix. 20, 22.

⁵ Domine, salva nos, perimus.—Ibid. viii. 25.

on that occasion: "Then rising up He commanded the winds and the sea, and there came a great calm."¹ Have you not sometimes sick people at home, whom you would willingly see restored to health? Jesus is passing by your house; pay Him the homage due to Him, follow Him, and say, like Martha and Mary, with child-like confidence: "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick."² Lord, my husband, my wife, my father, my mother is lying sick; if Thou wilt Thou canst give back health again. Are you not often oppressed with the weight of troubles, downcast, helpless? Listen to the bell! It is Jesus who is passing, the almighty God, who is best able to counsel, comfort, and help you; only tell Him what is the matter with you.

And this all the more, because you will never find the Lord more merciful and better disposed to help you than when you further His honor and glory before the world by publicly accompanying Him. It is true that He is pleased to be adored, honored, and humbly addressed in the churches; but there He, generally speaking, finds people enough to honor Him. It is while He is being carried through the streets that He is in want of servants to pay to His majesty the public respect due to it; and therefore he who serves Him in that way, and is not ashamed of Him before the world, will be enriched by Him with costly gifts and graces. To go to Jesus and visit Him in the church is a good and holy work, that the generous Lord will not suffer to go unrewarded; but to go with Him and adore Him in the street is a far better, holier, and more meritorious work, that brings much more profit to the soul; for it is one of the most excellent acts of religion, by which we stand up for the honor of God before all who are looking on. It can well be called an act of faith, which one thus makes public profession of; an act of humility and mortification, by which one overcomes himself, and laying aside all human respect, goes with Jesus into the houses of the poorest; an act of the pure, sincere love of God, by which one testifies before all men that he wishes to be in the company of his Lord on all occasions, in all places; an act of true charity towards one's neighbor, for thus one visits the sick along with Jesus, and prays for his fellow mortal, when he is in extreme necessity, that he may have a happy death. Pleased indeed shall we be when it comes to our

And He has a special desire to bestow His gifts on us under those circumstances.

¹ Tunc surgens imperavit ventis et mari, et facta est tranquillitas magna.—Matt. viii. 26.

² Domine, ecce quem amas infirmatur.—John xi. 3.

turn, and we have to go into a long eternity, to have some one helping us in the same way. The devils then run in troops into the house of the sick person, surround his bed, as many saints assure us from what they have seen themselves, and strain every effort to bring the soul to destruction in the last moments; so that all the faithful, who are brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, and who wish one day to be together in heaven, should, at all events if they are in the neighborhood, go with Jesus to the house, and unite in prayer to protect the soul of the dying person from the attacks of the devil. I will say nothing of many indulgences which the Popes have granted to those who thus accompany the Blessed Sacrament when it is brought to the sick, in order to encourage every one to a pious practice so meritorious in itself and pleasing to God. I only ask: Will Jesus Christ, our most generous Saviour, bestow no reward for the honor thus shown Him? Has He not assured us that whosoever honors Him will be honored by His Father? "Every one therefore that shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven."¹ Will Jesus Christ suffer the charity thus shown to one's neighbor to go unrewarded? Has He not assured us that what we do for the least of His little ones is done for Himself? "With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again."² Humanly speaking, I know not how one who has had the pious habit of accompanying Our Lord to the sick can die without the last sacraments, or an unhappy death.

Exhortation
to accom-
pany Christ
in public,
after the
example of
pious Chris-
tians.

Come, then, my dear brethren, let us make this resolution for the honor and glory of our loving Lord, and for the health and salvation of our own souls and those of others, that, as often as the bell gives the signal of Our Lord's approach, we shall at once go and join the procession. The business that we interrupt for this purpose for a short time will surely not suffer. To you especially, ladies and gentlemen, do I address this exhortation, that you may give good example to others, and encourage them to imitate you. In many towns the laudable custom is for the highest in rank to be the first to accompany the Blessed Sacrament with burning torches, which they keep always ready for the purpose; so that it is a pleasure to see how well Our

¹ Omnis ergo qui confitebitur me coram hominibus, confitebor et ego eum coram Patre meo qui in coelis est.—Matt. x. 32.

² In qua mensura mensi fueritis, remetietur vobis.—Ibid. vii. 2.

Lord is escorted whenever He is carried to the sick, as if a procession had been expressly arranged in His honor. Even kings and emperors have been seen, as I have elsewhere told you, to give in their own persons good example in this respect. When Philip II., that famous king of Spain, had, according to his usual custom, once followed the Blessed Sacrament as it was brought to a dying person, through many streets full of stones and mud, he being bareheaded and displaying the utmost humility, and had entered the sick person's house, and returned in the same humble manner to the church when the Blessed Sacrament was brought back, the priest asked him if he was not tired. Tired? said the king; I have never heard my servants complain, although they have to wait on me day and night; and must I feel tired when paying due respect to the greatest of all kings, whom we cannot honor enough? On another occasion the sun was very hot, and was darting its burning rays down on his bare head, when a page came and offered him his hat to protect him from the heat; let it be, said Philip; the sun will do me no harm, for this is an occasion when we must not pay any attention to rain or wind, heat or cold. Such, too, was the holy custom in vogue amongst the archdukes and emperors of Austria, down to the time of Charles VI, bequeathed to them as a sacred legacy; so that, whenever they saw the Blessed Sacrament carried to the sick, they descended from their carriage, knelt down in the street, and then accompanied it to the house of the sick person on foot. Oh, if such an example were given in every part of the Christian world, how much more splendid would be the escort of our great and hidden God when He goes through the streets!

Ah, my dear brethren, when we remember with a lively faith that Jesus Christ, true God and Man, is really present in the Blessed Eucharist, we are not surprised that kings and emperors should show Him such honor. Let no one, then, be ashamed of being the first to introduce such a holy custom. Think of the threat uttered by Our Lord Himself: "He that shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him the Son of man shall be ashamed, when He shall come in His majesty, and that of His Father, and of the holy angels."¹ Remember, too, how much good you can do, and what great things for the glory of God, if, as is certain

Conclusion
and resolution.

¹ Qui me erubuerit et meos sermones, hunc Filius hominis erubescet, cum venerit in maiestate sua, et Patris, et sanctorum angelorum.—Luke ix. 26.

to be the case, your example encourages others, or even one individual, to imitate you in publicly honoring the great God. And if sometimes a lady or gentleman should happen to be not quite up to the mark in dress, then say with king Philip, this is an occasion on which I must pay due honor to the Monarch of heaven, and therefore I must not mind my dress; neither wind nor rain, nor heat nor cold will do me any harm now. So it shall be, O Saviour worthy of all honor and love! We shall hold Thee in greater respect in future; our faults in that way were the result of want of reflection; but now we are resolved to show and acknowledge before the world that Thou art our true God, who art carried through the streets, and that we esteem it a privilege and a happiness to accompany Thee, and add by our presence to the outward pomp of Thy appearance in our midst. If sometimes, when I hear the bell, I am unable through sickness or other cause to leave my room, I will at all events go down on my knees, adore Thee humbly at a distance, and beg of Thee to be gracious to the sick person to whom Thou art brought. O Lord of hearts, urge all to this practice by Thy powerful grace, so that, after having humbly accompanied Thee here on earth, we may be with Thee on Thy triumphal entry into heaven. Amen.

Another introduction to the same sermon for the second Sunday after Pentecost.

Text.

Exi cito in plateas et vicos civitatis, et pauperes ac debiles, et cæcos et claudos introduc huc.—Luke xiv. 21.

“Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city; and bring in hither the poor and the feeble, and the blind and the lame.”

Introduction.

Who has ever heard that the poor and needy have to be compelled to go to a splendid banquet, as we read in to-day’s Gospel? And yet such is really the fact. The banquet, my dear brethren, according to interpreters, signifies the Blessed Sacrament, to receive which we are often invited by Jesus Christ, who gives Himself to us as our food therein; but many Christians excuse themselves and seldom go to holy Communion. On this occasion, however, my thoughts take another direction with regard to devotion to the Blessed Eucharist, which may perhaps come as a surprise to you, although it is one of the most important acts of our

faith; and that is, accompanying the Most Holy Sacrament when it is brought to the sick or dying. Alas, necessary indeed would it be to gather together the poor, and the blind, and the lame off the streets to accompany their God, so few are there, generally speaking, to show Him that much honor! Christ Jesus, &c.—*Continues as above.*

On the Blessed Sacrament as our Viaticum, see the following Fifth Part.

TWENTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON FREQUENT COMMUNION.

Subject.

We should often receive holy Communion. 1st. It induces us to lead pure and holy lives; 2d. It also helps us to purity and holiness of life.—*Preached on the feast of St. Matthew, Apostle.*

Text.

Videntes Pharisei, dicebant discipulis ejus: quare cum publicanis et peccatoribus manducat Magister vester?—Matt. ix. 11.

“And the Pharisees, seeing it, said to His disciples: Why doth your Master eat with publicans and sinners?”

Introduction.

No matter what Our Lord did during His life on earth, He could not please the envious Pharisees; they were always finding fault with Him. If He preached to the people who thronged around Him, they cried Him down as a seducer of the people. If He called and converted sinners, they murmured against Him: “This man receiveth sinners.”¹ They cried Him down as the ringleader of all the wicked. If He ate and drank with converted sinners, as we read in the gospel of to-day of His doing with Matthew, formerly an unjust publican, but now a faithful disciple of Our Lord, they complained of Him, and asked with displeasure: “Why doth your Master eat with publicans and sinners?” My dear brethren, there are Pharisees nowadays amongst Christians, who, I will not say find fault with everything that pious people do, but murmur and grumble against them because they approach so often the table of the Lord.

¹ Hic peccatores recipit.—Luke xv. 2.

What, they say, is that man doing so often at the communion-rail? Why does that person go so often to Communion? It would be better for him to remain away; God must not be made so common; that person is not yet holy enough to receive that sacred food so frequently, etc. But I do not wish to speak of those Pharisees to-day. Even amongst just and pious Christians there are some who do not dare to sit at table frequently with Jesus, that is, to receive holy Communion; for, as they pretend, they are not holy, nor pure, nor worthy enough to approach the sacred table often. I refute them in their own words, and say:

Plan of Discourse.

You are not pure, nor holy, nor worthy enough to receive holy Communion frequently; for that very reason you must receive it frequently: for it will induce you to lead a pure, holy, worthy life, as I shall show in the first part. You are not pure, nor holy, nor worthy enough to receive holy Communion frequently; for that very reason you must receive it frequently: for it will help you to purity, holiness, and worthiness of life. This I shall prove in the second part, for the consolation and encouragement of the pious, who communicate frequently in the month, and for the exhortation of the tepid and slothful, who seldom make their appearance at this table.

Christ Jesus, my Saviour, and at the same time the food of my soul! if it is true that Thou findest no greater pleasure in heaven than in the pure hearts of men, give words to me, that I may animate myself and all here present to receive Thee often with confidence and purity of heart! This I beg of Thee through Thy most pure Mother, in whose virginal womb Thou didst become man, and by the intercession of the holy angels.

What have I to say, then, my dear brethren? Is it my intention to invite all without exception to the table of the Lord, and to urge them to communicate frequently, in spite of their sinful lives? God forbid! Woe to me, if I, who should keep you from sin as far as possible, were to encourage you to commit such a dreadful sacrilege! And woe to all who dare even once to appear at that table with sin on their souls, and thus, as St. Paul says, to make themselves guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. Oh, no; I acknowledge openly, as the ground-work of my faith, that purity of life and holiness of soul are a necessary preparation for receiving the Blessed Sacrament worthily. I ac-

To communicate worthily, our souls must be pure and holy.

knowledge, too, that the oftener one communicates, the freer should he be from sin. I hold with the early Christian Church, in which the deacon, before giving holy Communion, used to cry out with a loud voice, "Holy things are only for the holy!"¹ According to the explanation given by St. John Chrysostom, the following was the meaning of those words: if there is any Christian among you who is not holy, let him not dare to approach this table; for the bread of angels is not to be cast before dogs and swine. He who has not on the wedding-garment at this feast will fare like the guest of whom we read in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Then the king said to the waiters: Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the exterior darkness."² What had the poor man done? "And the king went in to see the guests: and he saw there a man who had not on a wedding-garment."³ That was all. There you have a picture of the Christian who, being despoiled of the nuptial robe of grace by sin, dares to approach the table of the Lord. If the body, the soul, that is fed with the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, were free as crystal from all stain, whiter than snow in innocence, glowing with the love of God like a seraph, would that be too much for such a holy sacrament? Holy things are for the holy alone. He who wishes to go to holy Communion, and not commit a grievous sin thereby, must be pure and holy. Instead of disputing this, I assert that it is an infallible truth, which I should wish to engrave deeply on the hearts of all men.

Exactly, you exclaim; that is the very thing that keeps me back; therefore I do not dare to communicate often, because I find no traces of such purity and holiness in myself yet; it is better for me, then, to abstain from the table of the Lord. Before answering this, I must first ask you a question. Attend now to what I am saying; you go four times a year, on the great feast-days, to holy Communion, or, at all events, once a year, to perform your Easter duty. Is not that so? I hope it is, at least; although it is a bad sign that you do not go more frequently, and that you have to be driven, with a whip as it were, to Communion by the fear of eternal damnation. Now tell me, on those feast-days, or on Easter Sunday, are you pure and holy

This purity
we can have
always.

¹ *Sancta sanctis.*

² *Tunc dixit rex ministris; ligatis manibus et pedibus ejus, mittite eum in tenebras exteriores.*—Matt. xxii. 13.

³ *Intravit autem rex ut videret discumbentes, et vidit ibi hominem non vestitum veste nuptiali.*—Ibid. 11.

enough to receive worthily or are you not? In the latter case, how do you dare to approach, when you know you are not worthy? But if you are worthy, why are you not so every month, every week, nay, every day and always? Is there perhaps something special in Easter Sunday, or Pentecost, or Christmas day that cleanses you from the filth of sin, and makes your soul holy and pure? No, there is not a day in the whole year that has such power, says St. John Chrysostom; you must cleanse yourself and make yourself pure and holy. But if you can do that, as you must, on the days on which you desire to make a worthy Communion, you can also do it now, and thus you can always be in a state to receive Our Lord worthily.

The longer one remains away from holy Communion, the less able he is to preserve this purity; shown by similes.

Again, if you are not holy enough now, do you think you will be holier, purer, or worthier when the appointed feast-day or Easter comes round? That is to say, after the conscience has been still more sullied by oft-repeated sins, and when the soul has been overgrown with the weeds of bad habits, when the account-book is filled with new debts; then you will be in a better, purer, and holier state, and more worthy to go to holy Communion? O ye foolish virgins! you allow your lamps to go without oil, and yet imagine that, when the Bridegroom comes, you will be all the better prepared to receive Him with burning lamps! Try it, and you will see the result! I know you not, He will say to you, and will close the door in your face. What foolish reasoning it is to say: If I clean out my house every week, or at least once a month, that is, if I purify my conscience by confession, I do not yet think myself sufficiently pure to receive the great God; therefore I will leave it unswept, uncleaned, for a quarter of a year, half a year, a whole year; then it will be pure enough! What says St. Augustine? "He who is not worthy to receive every day will not be worthy to receive once a year."¹ This, says St. John Chrysostom, is what destroys a Christian community and brings it to ruin.² If you are always ready and worthy to communicate, "Then every day is Easter, when the soul is pure."³

In what consist the purity and holiness required for

And in what does this purity and holiness of the soul consist which is required for holy Communion? If it consisted in some extraordinary degree of perfection, which is the privilege of only

¹ Qui non meretur quotidie accipere, non meretur post annum accipere.

² Hoc est quod universa perturbat.

³ Semper est Pascha, cum adest cordis munditia.

a few souls by a special grace of God, then I know not how the apostles of Christ urged our forefathers in the faith to communicate daily without exception, whenever they were present at Mass; a custom that lasted for two hundred years in the Church. Nay, St. Jerome testifies to the fact that it was continued down to his time in Spain. The Christians of those days were not angels, but inclined to evil just as we are. O my God, and how could I and so many other priests dare to approach Thy holy altar, and feed ourselves with our own hands with Thy flesh and blood? And how, O God, couldst Thou have imposed that daily duty on me and others like me, knowing, as Thou dost, how imperfect and miserable we are? How couldst Thou invite all men, no matter what their state or condition, and even those who were formerly great sinners, to Thy table? But that is what Thou wishest, and with a desire so intense that it seems as if Thou canst not do without us. Thou dost exhort us all to frequent Communion by the Church and the servants of the Church, as St. Ambrose and St. Thomas of Aquin remark: "All Catholic Doctors praise that custom, and constantly exhort the faithful to observe it,"¹ although Thou knowest well, O Lord, how many faults and imperfections we are subject to daily. The only conclusion, then, that I can arrive at is that the holiness and purity required are such that all men can attain them if they will. And so it is, my dear brethren. We can all have that holiness at all times, if we only desire it sincerely. To be in a state of grace, to have no mortal sin on one's conscience which is not repented of and confessed, and, moreover, to have no wilful attachment to mortal sin, therein consists the purity, the sanctity of soul that is required in order to receive this sacrament with fruit. This is an article of faith taught by the Council of Trent.

Hence, if I am frequently in the state of grace, I am fit, as far as the purity of my soul is concerned, frequently to approach the table of the Lord, and to communicate every day even, without dishonoring or profaning this holy sacrament. Therefore those parents do wrong who do not have their children instructed as soon as they arrive at the age of reason, under the pretext that they are too young, and deliberately keep them from holy Communion, although the children would wish to go, thus depriving them of the many graces which they would obtain

a worthy
Communion.

We should
and can
live so as
to be able
to commu-
nicate wor-
thily every
day.

¹ Omnes doctores Catholici laudant, hortantur, admovent incessanter populum fidelem.
etc.

in this sacrament. I am now speaking, my dear brethren, of that preparation of conscience which is absolutely necessary for worthy Communion, and not of actual devotion, and acts of other virtues, which pious Christians are wont to make in order to receive more abundant fruit from this sacrament. Nor am I speaking of the preparation made by those who study a higher perfection, and who always live in union with God, whom they are determined never to offend, even by a deliberate venial sin; but, although better is better, good still remains good. I have said, moreover, that one should have no wilful attachment to any mortal sin. Oh, would to God that all communicants in the world had those dispositions! For he who has no wilful attachment to mortal sin, what is he? He is a man who is ready to lose all he has, his property, honor, repose, comfort, health, his very life itself, rather than consent to a single word, thought, or act by which he might lose the grace and friendship of God. When a man is so determined, in spite of the dangers, occasions, and inclinations to sin that beset him, even if the whole world were to be against him, is he unworthy of receiving his God, who is so desirous to be received by us? But such is the man who is in the state of grace, and such you can be every week, every day, every hour, if you wish, so that you can be always pure and holy enough to make a worthy Communion; and indeed St. Augustine advises all Christians so to live as to be able to communicate every day.¹ But this is not a mere counsel. You are bound under pain of eternal damnation to avoid all mortal sin, and to keep always in the state of sanctifying grace, and therefore to be in such purity of soul as will enable you to communicate worthily.

Hence he
who dares
not com-
municate
frequently
does not
wish to lead
a holy life.

Now, O slothful Christian, come forward again with your lame excuse, and say, I am not holy or worthy enough to go often to the table of the Lord; what I say to you is: Go often to that table, and you will be forced and compelled to be often pure and holy enough. But if you do not go often because you dare not, then I turn your own words against yourself, and say: You dare not go often, because you do not wish to lead a pure, holy life, as becomes a Christian; you will not give up your sins and bad habits; you will not do violence to yourself to restrain your evil inclinations and desires, to avoid the proximate occasion of sin, to shun dangerous company, to renounce the evil habit of cursing and swearing and running down your neighbor's

¹ Sic vive ut quotidie merearis accipere.

character, to lay aside that secret hatred and anger against others, to refrain from gratifying your carnal desires; you wish to continue the life you have been hitherto leading. That is the whole difficulty with you; that is the stone that trips you, the obstacle that keeps you from frequent Communion. Put it out of your way; amend your life; avoid sin; live in a pious and Christian manner; you can do that every day; you are bound to do it every day.

Do not, then, put forward, to the great damage of your soul, that silly argument: I am not pure and holy enough, therefore I will keep away from holy Communion; but rather adopt this Christian resolution: I will often go to the table of the Lord, and therefore, that I may receive worthily and with profit to my soul, I will begin and continue constantly, after having purified my conscience from the filth of sin, to avoid grievous transgressions; therefore I will lay aside that evil habit, shun that occasion and company, renounce that hatred and anger; I will diligently practise the Christian virtues and works of devotion, in order to prepare a fitting welcome for God in my soul. If I fall now and then through human weakness and frailty, I will rise at once, repent of the mishap, and acknowledge it in confession, that I may not deprive myself of the great advantage of holy Communion. If I commit small faults every day through precipitation and forgetfulness with half advertence, they shall not hinder me from receiving my Lord. O my God, I am not an angel; I am a poor mortal, subject to many imperfections; that Thou knowest well, and didst know it when Thou didst institute this sacrament of Thy love that I might frequently receive it! I am comforted by the words of Thy servant Laurence Justinian, "Let no servant of God abstain from this sacrament, although actual devotion may be wanting." Hear this, O Christians, who sometimes omit holy Communion because you are dry in spirit, anxious, downcast, and pusillanimous! For although you seem to yourselves to be tepid and cold with regard to actual devotion, remain not away, but trust in the goodness and mercy of God, and go with courage and child-like confidence; the divine fire will warm and inflame you, or at least keep you from a greater evil.¹ So it is; if you are not pure and holy enough, then purify yourself by penance, and go often to the table of the Lord; this will help you to purity and holiness of life. I shall explain how, in the

Conclusion
to lead a
holy life al-
ways, and
communi-
cate often.

¹ Nemo servorum Dei ab hoc prorsus se subtrahat sacramento, quamvis actualis devotio desit. Licet aliquando tepide, tamen confidens de Dei misericordia, fiducialiter accedat.

Second Part.

The holy
Communion
is the best
of all means
to keep from
sin and
lead a holy
life.

Amongst all the holy sacraments, works of devotion, and spiritual helps, there is none better, more certain, more powerful in keeping men from evil, and encouraging them to goodness and holiness, than the Sacrament of the Altar. Why? The reason is evident. Fire warms better and penetrates more quickly when it is applied in its own substance, and works immediately its proper effects, than when the heat is conducted from a distance through some medium. Light a fire in your stove; it will warm your room certainly; but you can hold your hand to it without burning yourself. Try now to hold it in the midst of the flame, or to touch a burning coal, and see how long you will be able to keep it there. So it is with the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. All the other sacraments are but signs and instruments by which Jesus Christ works and dispenses His grace; while this sacrament is nothing but Essential Holiness in its substance, the Author of all grace, Jesus Christ Himself in Person, who is concealed under the accidents, body and soul, divinity and humanity. Therefore He the mere touch of whose garment was able to heal the sick must necessarily do more in the soul of man when He is really present in it than when He merely sends His power to it by instruments different from Himself. All the efficacy that is divided among the other sacraments is contained in this one; its power extends over the whole life of man, and it is instituted for the sole purpose of making man perfectly holy, nay, I might say god-like, as the Saviour Himself assures me in the Gospel of St. John: "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me, and I in him."¹

Shown from
the Fathers
and by sim-
iles.

The Blessed Eucharist is a certain remedy against mortal sin;² hence experienced confessors know of nothing better for sinners to do, after they have repented of their sins, to keep constant in the new life they have begun, than to communicate frequently. Nay, theologians are of opinion that there are some for whom it is not only advantageous, but even necessary to such an extent, that they are bound almost under pain of sin not to absent themselves from Communion for a long time, since they cannot avoid mortal sin without it. It is a shield against all temptations and allurements to evil. "We go away from this table," says St. John Chrysostom, "breathing forth fire like lions, terrible to the

¹ Qui manducat meam carnem et bibit meum sanguinem, in me manet et ego in illo.—John vi. 57.

² Antidotum quo a peccatis mortalibus præservamur.

devil.”¹ The demon and his followers tremble when they see a Christian whose lips have touched the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. Our Saviour on the altar is a fire, as St. Paul says: “Our God is a consuming fire,”² which burns up in us the fuel of sin and carnal desires, and quiets and stills our evil inclinations. A costly wine is offered us at this table which preserves virginity and holy purity: “Wine which maketh virgins to spring forth,”³ as the prophet Zachary saw it in spirit. Are you often plagued with impure thoughts and imaginations, with frequent temptations against chastity? Come, then, is the advice St. Bernard gives you, come all the more frequently to the table of the Lord, and receive the flesh and blood of the Immaculate Lamb. With one word the Saviour put to flight a whole legion of devils; much more easily can He by His real presence banish the impure spirit out of your soul. St. Gregory relates that St. Maxentius, Bishop of Syracuse, was once caught in a violent storm at sea, and was on the point of perishing, as the ship was already full of water, when he gave holy Communion to all on board and received it himself; at once the ship was brought to port as by an invisible hand; but as soon as they all landed, it fell to pieces. Evagrius tells us of a Jewish boy who, seeing some Christian children going to holy Communion in the church, went also through curiosity and with childish simplicity and received the bread of angels. The father, hearing of this, was so enraged that he shut his son up in a glowing oven, and kept him there. After the lapse of three days the mother came to the oven and found the child still living, unhurt and cheerful, and he told her that a beautiful lady kept constantly sprinkling water on him, so that he did not feel the heat of the oven, and moreover she brought him food and drink when he was in want of it. Thereupon the mother and the child were instructed, and embraced the Christian faith. Now, if the holy Communion has such wonderful power to preserve the life of the body in the midst of the greatest dangers, what will it not do to save a pious man from the dangers of the soul? With reason did David say, when prophesying about this sacrament: “Thou hast prepared a table before me, against them that afflict me.”⁴

In a word, this sacrament is the food without which the soul

Without
Communion

¹ *Tanquam leones ignem spirantes ab hac mensa recedimus, diabolo facti terribiles.*

² *Deus noster ignis consumens est.*—Heb. xii. 29.

³ *Vinum germinans virgines.*—Zach. ix. 17.

⁴ *Parasti in conspectu meo mensam adversus eos qui tribulant me.*—Ps. xxi. 5.

the soul
cannot long
retain her
life.

cannot preserve its life, that is, sanctifying grace. Such is the meaning of Our Lord's own words: "Amen, amen, I say unto you: Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you."¹ Therefore has the Lord left us His body as the food of our souls, to give us to understand that, as the life of the body is preserved by food, so also our souls must receive their spiritual nourishment and life by that sacramental food. To show this all the more clearly, He has been pleased to preserve the bodily lives of many by this sacrament. For five Lents St. Felix of Rome took no other food but the Blessed Eucharist. The Emperor Louis the Pious lived for forty days without any other nourishment. The same heavenly food kept St. Catharine of Siena alive and well for many Lents. The holy Abbot Severus used to receive holy Communion on Sunday morning, and eat a little blessed bread in the evening; nothing more did he eat the whole week, and he kept up that custom for many years. A young girl twelve years old lived from the Easter of the year 823 to the Easter of 825 without taking anything but the holy Communion, and she was in good health the whole time. For fifteen years the holy hermit Nicholas lived on nothing else. Now, my dear brethren, if this holy sacrament, although it was not instituted by Our Lord for the preservation of the life of the body, yet so often kept it strong and vigorous, what wonder-working effects must it not have in nourishing the soul, for which purpose it was specially appointed by Christ? "That is not the bread," says St. Augustine, "which goes into the body, but it is the bread of eternal life that feeds the very substance of our souls."² But what better am I if my barn is full of corn, and my house of bread, if I let them lie there without making use of them? I might die in the midst of plenty. What good is it to us Christians daily to honor and adore that costly, precious, and sanctifying food on the altar, if we so seldom receive it? Is it any wonder that our souls dry up and grow cold in devotion and the love of God, and at last we die in sin? "Christ is the Bread of life," says St. Augustine, "and that Bread is ours, so that, as we say Our Father, so we can say our Bread. But we ask for that Bread to be given to us daily, since, according to Our Lord's command, we

¹ Amen, amen dico vobis, nisi manducaveritis carnem Filii hominis et biberitis ejus sanguinem, non habebitis vitam in vobis.—John vi. 54.

² Non est iste panis qui vadat in corpus, sed panis vite æternæ, qui animæ nostræ substantiam fulcit.—S. Aug., l. ii., Sermon. xxviii. de Verbis Dom.

pray: Give us this day our daily bread.”¹ “Therefore,” says St. Ambrose, “if this is our daily bread, why do we eat of it but once a year?”² How can that help to sanctify and preserve the life of your soul?

Philosophers and physicians ask the question, how long one can subsist (precluding a miracle, such as was wrought in the case with those who lived on the holy Communion alone) without food or nourishment? It is true that one could do without food for three days and nights; and we read in the Scripture that Esther and the ladies of her court fasted for that period: “Neither eat nor drink for three days and three nights; and I with my handmaids will fast in like manner.”³ We read of some women who ate nothing for twenty or thirty days, and did not die of hunger; but I think there are few women and still fewer men of that kind now on earth. According to the usual course of nature, say the doctors, no one who is in good health can suffer hunger longer than eight days, and many would die before that time. Those learned gentlemen may explain the reason of that themselves; I have no time to devote to the question. To return to my subject; if I were asked how long the soul can subsist without the divine food of the holy Eucharist, and remain in the state of grace, I must answer that I cannot lay down any general rule. The Catholic Church, which is so slow to command anything under pain of mortal sin, still recognizes as her obedient children those who go to Communion once a year, and that about Easter time; this is the only command of the kind that she urges under pain of eternal damnation; but she adds the words, “at least” once a year. But what earnest desires she gives expression to, partly in general councils, partly by the writings of her Fathers and Doctors, that the faithful should communicate daily, and how she laments that this custom expired with the early Christians! “Ah,” cried out St. John Chrysostom, if he said Mass without giving any one holy Communion, “ah, to no purpose is this a daily sacrifice! To no purpose do we stand at the altar, for there is no one to go to holy Communion!”⁴ St. Augustine lays down a rule that it

Therefore one should communicate frequently to live piously.

¹ Panis vitæ Christus est, et Panis hic noster est, et quomodo dicimus. Pater noster, sic et panem nostrum vocamus, etc. Hunc autem panem dari nobis quotidie postulamus.—S. Aug. L. de Orat. Dom.

² Si panis est, si quotidianus est; quomodo illum post annum sumis?

³ Non comedatis et non bibatis tribus diebus et tribus noctibus, et ego cum ancillis meis similiter jejunabo.—Esther iv. 16.

⁴ Ah sacrificium frustra quotidianum! Incassum assistimus altari; nullus qui communicet.

were well all Christians observed: "To receive holy Communion every day is a practice that I neither praise nor condemn."¹ And elsewhere he says: "Let each one do what he believes best to be done according to the pious dictates of his conscience."² But, O great saint, explain yourself more clearly! "I recommend Communion every Sunday, as long as the will is not inclined to sin," and the conscience is pure.³ Truly, great saint, you would have some trouble to persuade every one to do that! Hear this, ye Christians, who go to the table of the Lord at Easter or a few times a year! I believe that your excuse is true enough; that you are not holy and pure enough; that you have no relish for frequent Communion, nor zeal, nor devotion. What else can you expect, since you allow such a long time to elapse without tasting that heavenly food! Go, then, frequently to holy Communion, and you will begin to relish it, and to gain in fervor and devotion, and the efficacy of this sacrament will keep you pure and holy.

Experience shows that they who go often to Communion live piously.

I call as witnesses all those who have experienced the effects of this sacrament. Early Christians, I do not appeal to you. Your bones have long since crumbled into dust in the grave! I do not call upon you to relate what fruit you derived from the daily reception of the holy Communion; let it suffice to say that the mere name of Christian was enough to put an end to all suspicion of vice, as Lucifer, one of the early bishops, testifies.⁴ O golden times! Now, indeed, we may cry out with grief: O iron times! Yet there are still some pious and zealous Christians in the world; for truly we see them, God be praised! in this town of ours; but must you not acknowledge that they are the very ones who communicate frequently? And what fruit do they derive from it? It is enough to know that they are and remain pious. If they were to tell me that it does them no good whatever, that in spite of frequent Communion they are only prouder, more vain, more hard-hearted to the poor, more given to anger, more impatient under adversity, and more inclined to carnal pleasures, then I would say that the bad state in which they are is due, not to frequent Communion,—for no one will ever persuade me that they are more weak and liable to sin because

¹ Quotidie Eucharistiæ communionem percipere nec laudo, nec vituperō.

² Faciat id unusquisque quod secundum fidem suam pie credit esse faciendum.—S. Aug., L. de Eccles. Dogm., c. 53.

³ Omnibus Dominicis diebus communicandum suadeo et hortor, si tamen mens peccandi non sit.

⁴ Hac una religiosa voce, Christianus sum, omne crimen excludetur.

they approach frequently the spring of all grace and holiness—but to some secret sin that they still have on their consciences through culpable ignorance, which hinders the fruit of this sacrament; there must be something in their morals and outward conduct that is displeasing to God, and that they refuse to amend through human respect or some other cause. But experience proves the contrary. Examine and question, my dear brethren, those who are seen nearly every Sunday and holy-day approaching the altar rails. What sort of people are they? Are they not married women and maidens who live indeed in the world, but care little for conforming to the corrupt usages of the world; who are dressed modestly and in a Christian manner; who are most frequently to be seen at public devotions and sermons in the churches; who are most diligent in leading those under their care to God; who are sometimes careful even to anxiety about the fulfilment of the duties of their state, and would not deliberately offend God even in the least thing; who know how to be resigned to the will of God in all adversities? Are they not men who give a good example of a Christian life; who are known to act honestly to every one, to be charitable to the poor, kind to their neighbor, peaceful, humble, zealous for justice and the honor of God; in a word, Christians who in all their actions show that they are in earnest about going to heaven? People who go to Communion every week, and still live an unchristian and vicious life, if even a few such may be found here and there, are to be looked on as monsters rather than Christians; you will not find many such among true believers.

On the other hand, point out to me amongst Christians those who are tepid in the service of God; who are vain and passionate, given to all the vices according to the spirit of the world and their unmortified flesh; who seldom think of God and the salvation of their souls, and I will show you that they are the very ones who are seldom seen to approach the table of the Lord; or else they themselves must acknowledge that they have some secret sin on their consciences, and that they go to holy Communion through human respect or hypocrisy, without true devotion. Palladius relates a wonderful thing, which you have likely heard already. A young man had been trying for a long time to induce a pious married lady to consent to his impure solicitations, but to no purpose; at last, to be revenged on her, he called in the help of a sorcerer, who by his diabolical art changed

On the contrary, they who seldom communicate are either wicked or tepid; shown by an example after the manner of a simile.

the lady in outward appearance into the likeness of a wild horse. It is easy to imagine what an effect this had on her husband and the other members of her family. St. Macarius, to whom she was brought, freed her by his prayers and restored her to human shape; but he gave her this advice: Dear sister, go frequently to holy Communion; for, do you know why God permitted this change to be wrought in you? Remember that it is a long time now since you approached the table of the Lord; that is the sole reason, as God has revealed to me. This punishment was inflicted on you because you have not been to the immaculate sacraments of our Redeemer for five weeks.¹ Ah, Christians! five weeks, five months, eight months, twelve months go by before some think of receiving Our Lord, and God knows how they do it when the time comes! If He were to show us their souls in visible form, what a horrible beast we should often behold; more like a swine, wolf, lion, serpent, mule, or horse, than a human being, on account of sins and vices! What sorcerer has changed that precious image of God into such a monster? Sin; anger, revenge, avarice, pride, impurity, and sensuality have had that effect on the souls of those who are given to such vices. But how did they fall into those sins? Because they have been for a long time without going to holy Communion; otherwise they would not have committed them. "I am smitten as grass," says the Prophet David in their person, "and my heart is withered, because I forgot to eat my bread,"² that bread of life which would have preserved the life of my soul if I had received it. Now, O Lord, I know and see how true it is that they who abstain for a long time from Thy table are bound to go to ruin at last: "For behold they that go far from Thee shall perish,"³ but, on the contrary, "he that eateth this bread shall live forever."⁴

Exhortation
to communi-
cate often
and wor-
thily.

My dear brethren, are we in earnest, as Christians should be, about leading a pious and holy life, and going to heaven? If so, the best means of succeeding is frequently to receive the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. Why should we try to excuse ourselves from making use of this means, thus robbing our souls of the most wonderful proof of the divine generosity which God

¹ Hæc tibi acciderunt, quod jam quinque hebdomadis non accessisti ad intemerata nostri Salvatoris sacramenta.

² Percussus sum ut fœnum, et aruit cor meum; quia oblitus sum comedere panem meum.
—Ps. ci. 5.

³ Quia ecce qui elongant se a te peribunt.—Ps. lxxii. 27.

⁴ Qui manducat hunc panem, vivet in æternum.—John vi. 59.

left us before His departure out of this world, and of the happiness of having our God as our food, a happiness that the angels would envy us if they did not already possess Him perfectly? If we were prohibited from ever taking part in this banquet, we should have just reason, like the Chanaanean woman, to beg of Our Lord with hot tears to give us at least some crumbs from His table, poor, hungry, and needy as we are. But Christ invites us all without exception to come to His table: "Come, eat My bread, and drink the wine which I have mingled for you."¹ "Come to Me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you."² He shows plainly enough the great desire He has to be received by us. "With desire I have desired to eat this Pasch with you,"³ such were the words He spoke to His disciples when He was about to institute this sacrament. But He is not content with merely inviting us; He threatens us if we do not come. "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you." And in spite of all that, are we still determined to remain a long time away from holy Communion? If we were kept away from it by violence we should make every effort to free ourselves. When that enemy and persecutor of the Catholic faith, queen Elizabeth, reigned in England, before she began to banish the Catholics, to imprison them and to torture them, she caused a heavy fine to be inflicted on all who would dare to say Mass in her dominions, to cause Mass to be said, to go to holy Communion, or to show respect to the Blessed Sacrament. The fine to be paid by those who went to holy Communion was four hundred golden crowns. When a certain rich Catholic nobleman heard of this, he at once sold all his property and turned it into ready money, that he might have the means of paying the fine frequently. In the joy of his heart, and filled with consolation, he exclaimed: for the sake of the money I will not give up my habit of communicating frequently. Whenever he had the chance he went to holy Communion secretly; but there were so many spies on Catholics then that it was not possible for him to keep his devotion secret for any length of time, so that he was apprehended more than once; but without showing the least concern, he produced on each occasion the four hundred crowns which he had ready in a bag, and publicly protested that he never

¹ Venite, comedite panem meum, et bibite vinum quod miscui vobis.—Prov. ix. 5.

² Venite ad me omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis, et ego reficiam vos.—Matt. xi. 28.

³ Desiderio desideravi hoc Pascha manducare vobiscum.—Luke xxii. 15.

spent his money better and with more satisfaction than in paying that fine for having received his God as his food. So desirous were Christians of those days to receive holy Communion. But now there is no one to keep us from it, and yet we wantonly remain away for three months, six months, or a whole year. If we were allowed to receive our God but once in our lives, with what desire would we not long for that great favor, if we really loved Him! If there were only one town in the world in which one priest could say Mass and give the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ to the faithful, how many of us would set out at once for that place, in spite of the discomforts and expense of a long journey, that we might have the great happiness of receiving Our Saviour? But we have that happiness now at hand every week; nay, oftener if we wish. In all Catholic towns and countries there are priests in plenty who daily celebrate the holy sacrifice and are ready to give us holy Communion. And shall we, then, have less desire for Our Saviour, because He is so good and generous as to give Himself to us whenever we please? Pious souls, who are in the habit of communicating every week, keep up that holy habit! And you others, as far as your business will allow you, begin that same holy habit!

Conclusion
and resolution.

O dear Saviour! we all thank Thee for Thy unheard-of love, and for Thy friendly invitation to Thy holy table! If we were not in need of receiving Thee often we should be induced to do so by the love and friendship Thou showest in inviting us. Ah, my Lord, we are indeed ungrateful to Thee when we remain away for a long time from Thy table! If Thou wert dwelling a hundred thousand miles from this town; if we had to cross the stormy sea, or climb rugged mountains to see Thee, Thou wouldst still be well worth all that trouble as the food of our souls. But Thy infinite goodness has kept Thee always in our neighborhood, and we need not go to any trouble to come to Thee, so that, if we do not receive Thee often, we are truly ungrateful wretches! Yes, O Lord, we will come to Thee, and frequently, too, and always with becoming humility and respect, but at the same time with child-like confidence and love! Thy infinite majesty, which is really present in this most holy sacrament, should inspire us with a holy fear; but Thy infinite goodness and generosity, which, so to speak, are prodigal in their offers of treasures of grace in the same sacrament, shall fill us with desire and confidence. When we consider our unworthi-

ness, we shall say with all humility, like the centurion in the Gospel: "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof;"¹ and with St. Peter: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man;"² but when we remember our misery and wretchedness and Thy most kind invitation, we shall hasten to accept it like Zacheus, and shall receive Thee with joy into the house of our soul. And with each visit of Thine shall salvation come to us; and thus, according to Thy desire, Thou shalt dwell in us, and we in Thee, during this mortal life, until we shall one day enjoy Thee, no longer under the appearance of bread, but face to face in the heavenly country. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the second Sunday after Pentecost.

Text.

Et cœperunt omnes simul excusare.—Luke xiv. 18.

"And they began all at once to make excuse."

Introduction.

We are all invited, my dear brethren, rich and poor, sick and healthy, blind and lame, without exception, to a great banquet, in which no other food is laid before us but the great, infinite God Himself, in His whole substance and essence; instead of bread we have the body, and instead of drink, the blood of Jesus Christ. For according to most commentators the supper mentioned in to-day's Gospel signifies the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, which is prepared for our reception in the holy Communion. Our Lord sends forth His servants to invite all men: "Come, eat My bread, and drink the wine which I have mingled for you."³ Come freely to the table of the Lord, as often as you please; the Lord is waiting with great desire to be received by you. But what do we do? What St. Gregory complained of long ago: "The rich man invites, and the poor man hastens to accept; but when we are invited to the divine banquet, we make excuses!"⁴ We act like those who are mentioned in the Gospel; we all make excuse. Months, half years, whole years pass by before many have an appetite for the heavenly feast, and think of preparing for holy Communion; we cannot

¹ Domine, non enim sum dignus ut sub tectum meum intres.—Luke vii. 6.

² Exi a me, quia homo peccator sum.—Ibid. v. 8.

³ Venite, comedite panem meum et bibite vinum quod miscui vobis.—Prov. ix. 5.

⁴ Homo dives invitat, et pauper occurrere festinat. Ad Dei vocamur convivium, et excusamus.

come, they say. The one alleges his temporal affairs as an excuse, another the state of his household, a third his unworthiness, a fourth, this, a fifth, that; I cannot and dare not go so often to the table of the Lord, they exclaim. Thus we seek pretexts to rob ourselves of a great good. Truly a deplorable thing amongst Christians! To-day, my dear brethren, I will examine only one of those excuses, which sometimes keeps even pious souls from frequent Communion; it consists in their saying that they are not pure and holy enough, etc.—*Continues as above.*

On Unworthy Communion, see the foregoing Second Part. On Frequent Communion as a Mark of Predestination, see the following Fifth Part.

TWENTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON THE NECESSITY OF THE WORD OF GOD FOR THE JUST.

Subject.

To hear the word of God in sermons often and constantly, when possible, is a necessary means for all sorts of men, even for those who are innocent and just, to work out their salvation properly.—*Preached on the fourth Sunday in Lent.*

Text.

Sequebatur eum multitudo magna.—John vi. 2.

“And a great multitude followed Him.”

Introduction.

Wherever Our Lord went during the three years of His public mission, He was always followed by a great crowd of people; but not all of them were animated by the same motive. Some went through curiosity to see the miracles He wrought; others were intent on watching all He did and marking what He said; others were carried to Him to be healed of the bodily diseases from which they were suffering; and others went to listen to His preaching and instructions. The first were moved by curiosity and the desire of seeing something new that might excite their astonishment; the second class were animated by hatred and envy, and amongst them were the Scribes and Pharisees, who tried to find fault with the doctrine of Our Lord; the third class

was composed of those whom bodily anguish drove to Him to seek relief. The very best motive amongst them all was that of those who followed Him to hear the word of God, to feed their souls with it, to be instructed in good, and to learn the right way to heaven, on which all depends. Among the great crowd of which to-day's Gospel speaks there must have been beyond a doubt very many who followed Our Lord for this latter reason, and they were so desirous of hearing Him that they were insensible to hunger and thirst, and had to be fed miraculously by the merciful Saviour. My dear brethren, do we nowadays come to Our Lord in the church in the same way? I do not wish now to examine the many different motives for which many go to church; I merely ask if we are all eager to hear the word of God in sermons. Ah, it is much to be desired that we were always in those dispositions, which are not merely advantageous but even necessary for our souls! I have elsewhere shown that it is a bad and dangerous sign for a Christian seldom or never to hear a sermon; for, generally speaking, those who are in a bad or dangerous state of soul are enemies of the word of God. I say now—

Plan of Discourse.

To hear the word of God in sermons often and constantly, when possible, is necessary for all sorts of men, even for those who are innocent and just, to work out their salvation. Such is the whole subject of this sermon. The object of it is, to encourage those who usually come to listen to me (since the others would not understand it) to a greater desire of the word of God and more constancy in hearing it.

Give us Thy grace to this end, O dear Lord; we ask it of Thee through the intercession of Thy virginal Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

When I say that it is necessary to hear the word of God in sermons in order to work out our salvation properly, I do not speak of an absolute necessity, as if we could not possibly save our souls without it. Baptism is necessary for all men; faith in the one true God is necessary for all who have attained the use of reason; supernatural sorrow is necessary for those who have committed mortal sin. I do not say that sermons are necessary in that sense, for otherwise, how could those who live amongst heathens, infidels, heretics, save their souls, since they have no opportunity of hearing the word of God? No; what I mean is that, consider-

Of what kind the necessity of hearing the word of God is.

ing our innate ignorance in divine things, the many temptations, allurements, and evil inclinations that assail us, our own natural weakness and frailty, which makes it impossible for us to withstand those temptations for a long time, and moreover our propensity to many kinds of vice and our inconstancy in good, it is, generally speaking, very difficult, nay, hardly possible for a man to work out his salvation as he ought, unless he is frequently enlightened, instructed, moved, and comforted by hearing the word of God.

For what
class of men
it is neces-
sary.

Again, speaking of this latter kind of necessity for all men, no matter what may be the state of their souls, I do not wish to say that there is no exception whatever; for there is no doubt that those who are sufficiently instructed in divine things and in what concerns their salvation, who have already laid good foundations for a Christian life, and who continue to live piously, attending to the duties of their state, and are zealous in the service of God, and also religious in their convents, who spend the whole day in prayer, meditation, and spiritual reading, nay, who are occupied in their hearts with God even while engaged in manual labor—these people, I say, are not at all in such want of the word of God as others who have not such instruction, knowledge, good foundations, or occupations, although all religious of both sexes have their sermons at appointed times, thereby showing the power and efficacy of the word of God, without which no one can promise himself that he will long remain in a good spiritual state. We must leave to the infinite wisdom, inscrutable providence, and mercy of God, who as far as He Himself is concerned wishes all men to be brought to the knowledge of the truth and to be saved,—we must leave to Him the care of those Catholics who are living in distant countries, amongst heretics, infidels, and heathens, and who have been born and brought up amongst them; and we must only trust that the good God will supply for the want of sermons by extraordinary graces, lights, and other helps; for, since there are no priests in those places, there can be no sermons; and there is no doubt that God does supply in that way. I am speaking, then, particularly of those who are living in the world, whatever may be their sex or condition, and are engaged in worldly occupations and business in a place where there is frequent opportunity of hearing the word of God. For all these, whether they be young or old, great or small, rich or poor, of noble or lowly condition, learned or ignorant, experi-

enced in worldly affairs or not, the frequent hearing of the word of God is, humanly speaking, necessary in order to enable them to work out their salvation properly, no matter what may be the state of their souls.

And in the first place, I insist to-day on that necessity for innocent, just, and pious souls. Oh, what a desirable state is that of baptismal innocence, the state of justice, in which the soul, being adorned with sanctifying grace, keeps constantly in the friendship of God! But without the guidance and influence of the word of God, how long can that state last? Our infallible faith teaches us that, in order to do any good work deserving of heaven, we stand in absolute need of the forestalling and helping grace of God, which, according to theologians, consists in the enlightenment of the understanding and the movement of the will. Without this enlightenment and movement, no one can dare to hope that he will remain long in the state of innocence in the midst of so many snares, temptations, and dangers. Now, in the present arrangement of His providence, the almighty God has determined to give His graces in the ordinary course, at a convenient time, and by the ways and means which render us best disposed to receive those graces; among which means the chief is the hearing of the word of God. "Faith, then, cometh by hearing,"¹ writes St. Paul to the Romans; so that all supernatural, meritorious works, since they must spring from faith, must find their origin first in what is heard or understood by signs. "And hearing by the word of Christ,"² continues the Apostle; that is, you must receive the doctrine by the word of the Lord. "How shall they believe Him of whom they have not heard?" he asks farther, "and how shall they hear without a preacher?"³ That is, how can men hear the word of Christ if there be no one to announce and explain it to them? And I add: What can a preacher do for them if they do not come to church to hear him?

Amongst them are even the just and innocent.

St. Augustine says straight out that it is almost as bad as tempting God to think of persevering in good and living according to the Gospel law without ever hearing the word of God in sermons, which explain and set forth that law, provided we have the opportunity of doing this. What are you thinking of? he

For God wishes us to be kept in grace thereby; shown by examples.

¹ *Fides ex auditu.*—Rom. x. 17.

² *Auditus autem per verbum Christi.*—*Ibid.*

³ *Quomodo credent ei quem non audierunt? quomodo autem audient sine prædicante?*—*Ibid.* 14.

asks—not quite in the same words, but something to that effect, —what are you thinking of? St. Paul, the great Apostle of the gentiles, after he had received that bright ray of light from heaven, and was moved to conversion by the powerful voice of Jesus Christ Himself, was still obliged to go to Ananias, a man like himself, to be taught and instructed by him. “And he, trembling and astonished, said: Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”¹ So we read of St. Paul in the Acts of the Apostles. “And the Lord said to him: Arise, and go into the city, and there it shall be told thee what thou must do,”² and how you are to live in future. Cornelius, the centurion, is spoken of in terms of the highest praise in the Acts of the Apostles, as a man who was always inclined to virtue, and who was given to prayer and works of devotion with his whole family, while he was very generous to the poor, and unwearied in the service of God: “A religious man and fearing God with all his house, giving much alms to the people, and always praying to God.”³ Yet an angel was sent from heaven to direct him to another man, from whom he had to learn how he was to live in future: “Thy prayers and thy alms,” said the angel to him, “are ascended for a memorial in the sight of God. And now send men to Joppe, and call hither one Simon, who is surnamed Peter; he will tell thee what thou must do.”⁴ But why send for Peter? Could not the angel have instructed Cornelius? An angel can give more light to the human understanding in a moment than the most learned men in a long time; why, then, did not the angel teach Cornelius what he had to do? No, a man had to do that. Christ appeared to St. Paul; why did He not instruct him? No, again that instruction had to come from another man: “Arise and go into the city, and there it shall be told thee what thou must do.” For God has so ordained that men should be instructed by men and learn His will from them. Hear what the Abbot Moses, according to Cassian, says of this: “Christ sends him to Ananias, preferring that he should learn from another man, rather than from God immediately, lest he might give an example of presump-

¹ Tremens ac stupens dixit: Domine, quid me vis facere?—Acts ix. 6.

² Et Dominus ad eum: surge et ingredere civitatem, et ibi dicetur tibi quid te oporteat facere.—Ibid. 7.

³ Religiosus ac timens Deum cum omni domo sua, faciens eleemosynas multas plebi, et deprecans Deum semper.—Ibid. x. 2, 4.

⁴ Orationes tuæ et eleemosynæ ascenderunt in memoriam in conspectu Dei. Et nunc mitte viros in Joppen, et accersi Simonem quendam, qui cognominatur Petrus; hic dicet tibi quid te oporteat facere.—Ibid. 5, 6.

tion to those who were to come after him, and who might persuade themselves that they should be taught by God Himself and not by men.”¹ The Prophet Moses, too, was well aware of this. When he was with the people of Israel in the desert, he earnestly begged of Hobab, his brother-in-law, to remain with him, and show him the way: “And he said: Do not leave us, for thou knowest in what places we should encamp in the wilderness, and thou shalt be our guide.”² When Hobab, through love of his own country, refused to remain, Moses made him splendid promises to try to induce him to change his mind: “And if thou comest with us, we will give thee what is best of the riches which the Lord shall deliver to us.”³ Wonderful, my dear brethren, is this anxiety on the part of Moses; for, did not God Himself by His angel always show the way to the Israelites? During the day-time He went before them in the form of a cloud, and at night like a pillar of fire; why, then, should there be such anxiety to secure the services of a man to be their guide? De Lyra answers this by saying: “Although God was the leader of that people, yet Moses wished to be under the direction of a skilful man; from which we learn that, though God is our guide in holiness of life, yet we must not neglect the help we can have from men.”⁴

And should one of us, then, who is not visibly guided either by Our Lord or by His angel, one who might be called ignorance itself in divine things, and weakness, frailty, and inconstancy itself in good,—should one of us have such confidence and reliance on his innocence and justice, or on what he imagines to be his unchangeable virtue and piety, as to think that he has no need of a preacher to instruct him in the duties of the Christian life, or to strengthen and comfort him on the way to heaven? No, no; we must put such presumptuous thoughts out of our heads. “Let us not tempt God,” says St. Augustine, “by refusing to listen to him who preaches the Gospel.”⁵ That will not

Without the word of God we cannot long remain just.

¹ Mittit hunc ad seniore, eumque illius potius doctrina, quam sua censet institui; ne scilicet quod recte gestum fuisset in Paulo, posteris malum præsumptionis præberet exemplum, dum unusquisque sibi met persuaderet, simili modo se quoque debere Deo solius magisterio atque doctrina, potius quam seniorum institutione formari.—Cassian. Collat. II., c. 15.

² Noli, inquit, nos relinquere: tu enim nosti in quibus locis per desertum castra ponere debeamus, et eris ductor noster.—Num. x. 31.

³ Cumque nobiscum veneris, quidquid optimum fuerit ex opibus, quas nobis traditurus est Dominus, dabimus tibi.—Ibid. 32.

⁴ Quamvis Deus esset Dux illius populi, tamen Moyses volebat habere directionem hominis periti; ex quo docemur, quod licet Deus nos dirigat in via morum, tamen non debemus negligere adiutorium humanum.

⁵ Non tentemus Deum, ut ad Evangelium discendum nolimus prædicantem hominem audire.—S. Aug. in Prolog. L. I. de Doctor. Christ.

do. All, no matter how learned or clever they are, or how pious and holy, are in need of this means to be kept away from evil, and constantly encouraged to good; for without it our cleverness will soon degenerate into folly, and our piety into sloth or wickedness. John Moschus tells us of an abbot who was a very simple-minded but holy man, and was on such familiar terms with the angels that they appeared to him daily and served his Mass. This good priest used constantly to make a mistake in one of the rubrics; he was often warned by the deacon, but to no purpose. Why should I mind what that man says to me? he thought; if I go wrong, certainly the angel, who is always with me, will tell me of it, for he must know more of the ceremonies of the Mass than my deacon. At last, wearied by the importunity of the deacon, he asked the angel's advice as to what he should do. By all means, was the answer, you must at once obey the deacon's warning, for he is right in what he says. And how is it, asked the abbot, with his usual holy simplicity, that you have said nothing to me of a fault I have been committing for such a long time? God has ordained, was the reply, that men should be corrected by men.¹

Shown by
similes.

To make the matter still plainer to our understanding, my dear brethren, if a piece of ground, no matter how fertile, is not sown, what sort of fruit will it produce? The same kind that we expect from waste, barren land; that is, useless weeds, thistles, and thorns. No matter how strong and healthy a man may be, if he takes no nourishment for five, six, or eight days, what will become of him? Of course, he will begin to look like a living skeleton, that ought to be carried to the church-yard, even before he has fully learned how to fast. If the traveller, in spite of his strength, has to go along a slippery and dangerous road in the dark night, without any light to guide his steps, what can he expect but to stumble and fall, and perhaps break an arm or a leg? Such are the similes the Holy Scripture makes use of to explain the necessity of the word of God. "The seed is the word of God," says Our Lord Himself, explaining the parable of the sower in the Gospel of St. Luke.² If that seed is not properly received, that is, if the word of God is indeed heard in a sermon, but with an ill-prepared heart, there is hardly any hope of reaping the fruit of good works; for the seed falls on a

¹ Quare vos non dixistis mihi? Deus ita disposuit ut homines ab hominibus corrigantur.

² Semen est verbum Dei.—Luke viii. 11.

rock, or by the wayside, or among thorns, and brings no fruit to those who thus hear the word of God. What will be the consequence, then, when one rarely goes to a sermon? What fruit can the soul produce, no matter how good and innocent it is, if the seed of the divine word is seldom or never planted in it? Nothing can grow in it but weeds, thorns, and thistles, faults and imperfections of all kinds, sins and vices. The word of God is the food of the soul, and that, too, we have on the authority of Our Lord Himself: "It is written: not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God."¹ Of which St. Augustine says: "As the body is when it has been many days without food, so is the soul that is not fed often with the word of God;"² the body must necessarily grow weak, sicken, and die when deprived of its proper food; the soul must in the ordinary course of things become tepid in the divine service, and lose its spiritual life, if it is kept long without the word of God. The word of God is a light on the dark road that leads to heaven, according to the Prophet David: "Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths."³ As long as I am enlightened by this lamp "I have sworn and am determined to keep the judgments of Thy justice,"⁴ and to fulfil Thy holy will in all things. Without this light, how could a poor, ignorant mortal travel along the dangerous and mostly unknown road that leads to eternity, on which so many of the wisest, most learned, holiest, and bravest of the servants of God have lamentably come to grief? How could he hope to escape the dangers, occasions, and temptations to sin that surround him on all sides, and to avoid the attacks of the robbers that are always lying in wait for his soul and plotting against its life? There is no doubt, says St. Bernard, that, although a man is of good will to persevere in the way of salvation and in the friendship of God, and to gain heaven, yet, by neglecting the word of God, or through culpable ignorance, he can easily go astray, or fall through weakness, frailty, sloth, or tepidity.

Let no one, then, deceive himself and say, as people often do, Oh, what a holy man that is! how pious he is, how zealous in prayer; how diligent in visiting the church; how charitable to

It is a sign of little piety to hear ser-

¹ Scriptum est: non in solo pane vivit homo, sed in omni verbo quod procedit de ore Dei.—Matt. iv. 4.

² Qualis est caro quæ post multos dies non percipit cibum, talis est anima quæ assidue non pascitur verbo Dei.—S. Aug. Sermon. lvi. de Temp.

³ Lucerna pedibus meis verbum tuum, et lumen semitis meis.—Ps. cxviii. 105.

⁴ Juravi et statui custodire judicia justitiæ tuæ.—Ibid. 106.

mons but
seldom, as
really good
people
know.

the poor, etc.! Be assured, says St. Augustine, if that man seldom comes to hear a sermon, although he has the opportunity and time, there will soon be an end of all his piety and apparent holiness; at all events, he will never attain to true, constant virtue. "If the soul is not fed with the word of God, it becomes dry and barren, and unfit for any good work."¹ Well was this understood and realized by St. Clare, whose first and chief care with regard to her convent was to furnish her sisters with the opportunity of frequently hearing the word of God explained, so that by this means and the strict observance of the rules of the Order they might make daily progress in true virtue and perfection. When Gregory IX. forbade priests to enter convents of nuns, unless with special permission, Clare was so disturbed and anxious, since that law deprived her of the opportunity of hearing sermons, that in a sort of holy desperation she exclaimed: no one need come with alms any more to this convent, for we do not want food for our bodies, since we have been deprived of the food of our souls, which is so necessary for the spiritual life. When the Pope heard of this, he made an exception in favor of preachers; for he considered it necessary, even for religious in their convents, who are always occupied with God and divine things, frequently to be refreshed, comforted, and quickened by the word of God.

By hearing
sermons
the good are
kept from
sin.

Oh, how many Christians there are of those who have preserved their baptismal innocence, or who have done true penance for their sins, who, if they wished to acknowledge the truth, would have to admit that they would often have fallen in that violent temptation, in that dangerous company into which they came against their will, and would have committed many sins, were it not for the sermons they had heard, and the good resolutions that the word of God inspired them with! For they learned to know their last end for which God created them, and why they are in the world, which is only to love God with all their hearts and serve Him zealously, keep His commandments, and thus save their souls. They knew what they had to do and avoid in order to attain this end. And thus, having often heard the gravity and deformity of sin explained, they conceived a hatred, horror, and fear of all mortal sin, and made the firm resolution rather to lose everything in the world, and to suffer all

¹ Anima si verbi Dei cibo non pascitur, arida et inutilis, et ad nullum opus bonum congrua invenitur.

conceivable torments and a thousand deaths, than consent to one grievous sin. They learned how to guard their eyes, ears, tongue, and the other senses, to shun all unnecessary occasions and dangers of sin, to be modest in outward demeanor, to be recollected in spirit, to walk in the presence of God, to be constant in prayer, to go frequently to the sacraments, to have the holy habit of hearing Mass daily, to make the supernatural intention in all their actions, to examine their consciences every night before going to bed, to use other means to overcome the attacks of temptation, and to keep always in the friendship of God. They learned the different obligations of their state of life, and, urged on by the grace of God, did their best to fulfil them. They were enabled to represent to themselves in the most lively manner what they never would have thought of otherwise, the shortness of life, of which we cannot promise ourselves a single moment with certainty; the uncertainty of death, on the moment of which depends happiness or misery for eternity; the strict account that each one must give at the tribunal of God's justice on the Last Day, in presence of the angels, the saints, the reprobate, and the demons, of all the thoughts, words, and actions of his life; the terrible pains of hell that are in store for the wicked, and that will never have an end, and that are incurred by even one mortal sin of thought, although it is committed for a worthless thing; the indescribable joys of heaven, the remembrance of which is a source of comfort to the good and pious even in this vale of tears; and from all that they learned the emptiness and vanity of all perishable, earthly goods, and despising them, fixed their hearts on the true and solid goods of heaven. Often did they enter the church to hear a sermon with sorrow and trouble in their hearts, but they returned after having received heavenly consolation in their trials, which they learned to bear with patience and resignation to the will of God, and they resolved for the future to accept all crosses and trials from the hand of God, who means so well with them, and to make a better use of them. They saw how unhappy is the state of the sinner, how blissful that of a servant, friend, child of God, and how ineffable the peace, repose, and joy of conscience in the state of grace; and thus they were encouraged, strengthened, and urged on to persevere with fervor in the way of the Lord, and to begin with renewed zeal each day. Truly, they must acknowledge to themselves that it is so. It is to Thy light and

Thy divine word, which we have heard so constantly, O Lord, that we must ascribe our preservation from so many sins, our victories over so many temptations, and the faithful service that we have tried to render Thee.

Sinners
would not
lead such
bad lives if
they often
heard ser-
mons.

Ah, vain children of the world, tepid in the service of God, careless in that most important affair of your soul and its salvation, if you had not neglected that same means through love of comfort, heedlessness, sensuality, and over-indulgence in sleep; if you had been diligent in hearing sermons; if you had received the Gospel truths with well-prepared hearts,—long ago you would have commenced to lead Christian and edifying lives! Unhappy sinners, how many of you might still have preserved your innocence, and kept your souls free from the filth of sin, if from your youth you had been accustomed to hear the word of God and to receive it with joy! But now your souls are like uncultivated ground, and are full of the weeds of sin and vice, because you have had little or none of the seed of God's word planted in them, and thus, through your own fault, they are become like barren, dried up ground, weakened and sickened by long-continued hunger and thirst, while divine love has died within you, as it was so long deprived of the nourishment of the word of God; thus it is that you have fallen so shamefully, as you had not the light of God's word to guide your steps. Ah, be converted and begin now at least to make use of this powerful means and to hear sermons, for that will induce you to do true penance and amend your lives.

Therefore
parents
should early
accustom
their chil-
dren to hear
sermons.

Hence parents will see the importance of their making a firm resolution, if they fear God, to accustom their children from their tenderest years to hearing Christian instructions and sermons. For, although the children will not understand all they hear, yet they will learn many truths which will be useful to their souls their whole lives long. Thus they will learn to hate sin and love virtue, to have a true love of God, to despise earthly and transitory things, to value heavenly goods, to work out their salvation carefully (and that is a matter in which parents are bound under pain of mortal sin to help their children); and all these truths will be thus impressed on their tender minds, so that they will grow up in the knowledge of them, and thus in many instances preserve their innocence untainted to the end. What man of sound reason does not know that this heavenly school is much better for children than those to which they are sent away

from the eyes of their parents, to learn a foreign language and worldly manners, or than keeping them at home, teaching them idleness, standing at the door talking and looking about them, indulging in too much sleep, dressing in the latest fashions and bowing and scraping, things that will not be of the least use to them afterwards in the married state or in any other, as far as the divine service is concerned; and meanwhile the flower and bloom of their age, which God wishes to reserve specially for Himself, is thus given to the vain and perverse world, nay, often to the devil himself, since children thus brought up are very easily led into sin. "Come, children," parents should say in the words of the Holy Ghost to the Psalmist, when the bell rings for the sermon on Sundays and holy-days, "come children, hearken to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord."¹ Come with me, and I will bring you where you will learn to fear God, to serve Him, to love Him above all things with your whole hearts, so that we may one day all rejoice together in heaven.

Such, too, should be the determination of every one here, no matter how just and pious, learned and experienced, prudent and intelligent he may be otherwise. Morally speaking, the spiritual food of the word of God is necessary for all Christians to enable them to work out their salvation properly. And let no one put forward the pretext suggested by worldly wisdom, that is folly in the sight of God: I do not want any one to preach to me; I know well enough what to do and avoid in order to gain heaven; I have already heard sermons enough, so that there can be nothing new in them for me now. What? Do you know all that can be said of the Gospel truths? That is indeed a proud and presumptuous thing for you to say! Preachers have to study for many years what they say in the pulpit for their own good and that of others; they must diligently collect matter out of the Holy Scriptures, out of the commentaries of the Scriptures, the holy Fathers and other spiritual writers; they must pray fervently to God to suggest to them the truths He wishes them to explain to their hearers, and how those truths are to be explained so as to be useful; and when they have thus spent ten, twenty, or thirty years, not one of them would be so proud and presumptuous as to maintain that he knows all that can be said about moral theology and the Gospel truths. And yet one who is occupied all the week with temporal cares, and

And no one should rely on his own knowledge alone.

¹ Venite filii, audite me: timorem Domini docebo vos.—Ps. xxxiii. 12.

has but one hour during that time to devote to the study of divine things, of which he learns simply what he can hear and bring away with him, pretends to know all about them! Supposing even (although I cannot believe it) that you have heard all that can be said of the truths of faith, is your memory so wonderfully good that you do not require to be reminded of them now and then? Where is the man in the whole world who does not forget much that he has either heard, or read, or otherwise learned? Consider this one fact: the preacher has his matter deeply impressed on his memory; he reflects on it often; he makes notes of the sermon, and studies how he is to treat his subject so as to make the deepest impression on the minds of his hearers; he has to read many books that bear on the subject, and then he puts everything down in order on paper, word for word; after that he must still read it perhaps ten times from beginning to end, so as to commit it to memory, and finally he repeats it almost word for word in the pulpit. Who would not think that he could not possibly forget it? And yet I can with truth say of myself (I cannot speak for others, who may have an angelic memory) that if I were asked how I treated this or that subject a month ago, I could not tell. And yet one who has heard the subject treated of once or twice many years ago can boast of having such a good memory that he does not require to be reminded of it!

For the
chief end of
sermons is
to urge men
to do good.

Be that as it may, to be instructed in good, to learn the divine truths and to be frequently reminded of them, is, you must know, the least fruit to be derived from the frequent hearing of the word of God; the chief end of the preacher is to move the wills of his hearers, that they may fulfil what they hear, and learn and regulate their lives according to it. We may know a great many good things; the difficulty lies in doing them. If, then, you are the wisest and most experienced man on earth in what concerns the divine service and the salvation of your soul, you are nevertheless in constant necessity of hearing the word of God, to be moved and impelled to live in accordance with the truths you have learned. King David was certainly enlightened in heavenly things by the Holy Ghost; he knew well what terrible sins are adultery and murder, and what a miserable thing it is to be in the state of mortal sin, an enemy of God, a slave of the devil, a child of reprobation, a sacrifice for hell; and yet for a long time he was not moved to repent and reconcile

himself with God, whom he so ardently loved before, until the Prophet Nathan showed him in a simile the abomination he was guilty of. Then at last he came to himself, as if he had awakened out of a deep sleep, and he repented of and detested his sin, sighing forth from the depths of his heart: "I have sinned against the Lord."¹

There is no doubt, then, my dear brethren, that the frequent hearing of the word of God in sermons is morally necessary for all men, no matter what their state or condition may be, even if they are amongst the most just and innocent, to enable them to work out their salvation properly, and to keep in the state of grace. Therefore I conclude with the words of the Holy Ghost I have already quoted for you: "Come, children, hearken to Me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord." Come, children of God, come sinners, too, unhappy children of reprobation as you still are, if you wish to become again children of God; I will teach you true penance, the fear of God, the love of God; neither I, however, nor any other preacher in the world can do that by his own strength, but the Holy Ghost will speak by preachers as His instruments and mouth-pieces, and will move your hearts and enlighten your minds so that you will do good. Come, and if possible, come always on the appointed days, with hearts desirous of hearing the word of God; that most important of all affairs, our eternal salvation, our last end, for which alone we are in this world, the honor and glory of God, whom we are bound to love above all things, the progress and safety of our immortal souls, the saving them from hell and bringing them to heaven, all depend on it. Come, then! Amen.

Conclusion
and exhortation
often to hear the
word of
God.

For several sermons on this subject, see the First, Second, Third, and Fifth Parts.

¹ Peccavi Domino.—II. Kings xii. 13.

ON HEARING HOLY MASS EVERY DAY.

TWENTY-FIFTH SERMON.

ON THE HOLINESS OF THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS.

Subject.

The sacrifice of the Mass in our Christian religion is infinitely holy: 1st. on account of the priest who offers it; 2d. on account of the victim offered.—*Preached on Trinity Sunday, the first after Pentecost.*

Text.

Ecce ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad consummationem sæculi.—Matt. xxviii. 20.

“Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.”

Introduction.

What a comfort and happiness for the apostles of Christ! And what a comfort and happiness for all true Catholics, too, who have the true faith announced by the apostles, to hear from the lips of the Infallible Truth, Jesus Christ, the assurance, “Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world!” I am with you by My paternal providence, so that all that happens to you will, if you are so minded, turn out to the advantage of your souls. I am with you by My light and inspirations, that you may not go astray in doubt. I am with you by My help in the persecutions and attacks of your enemies, so that they cannot injure you without My permission. I am with you by My grace and protection in temptations, that you may not be overcome by them. I am with you by My consolation in trials and adversity, that you may not lose heart in them. I am

with you by My strength in suffering until death, that you may bear it for My sake courageously. But besides this, “Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world,” by My real presence on the altar as a victim constantly offered to My and your heavenly Father in the holy Mass, an infinitely holy sacrifice, by which you can give Him infinite honor, infinite thanksgiving for all His benefits, infinite atonement and satisfaction for all your offences, and obtain from Him most effectually all imaginable graces. Oh, what a comfort and happiness, I repeat, for us Catholic Christians! On this presence of Jesus Christ in the holy Mass I shall speak, my dear brethren, in this and the following four sermons. In truth, it is a most useful and consoling subject for all men, whether they are sinners or just. Most Catholics, as I hope, hear Mass every day, but perhaps many of them know not what a wonderful and sublime mystery they assist at. That all may have a due knowledge of it, I now say—

Plan of Discourse.

The sacrifice of the Mass in our Christian religion is an infinitely holy sacrifice. Such is the whole subject. Infinitely holy on account of the priest who offers it: the first part. Infinitely holy on account of the victim offered: the second part. Therefore we will assist daily at this sacrifice with the greatest reverence; such will be the conclusion.

To which end we beg Thy grace, O most Blessed Trinity, through the intercession of Mary, the Queen of heaven, and the holy guardian angels.

The mere name of a sacrifice offered to God is the name of a holy thing, a mystery deserving of reverence; for the word, according to its Latin signification, means nothing else but a holy thing, a holy office, the holiest practice of the true religion, without which no religion can exist; a practice the end and aim of which is to offer to the infinite majesty of God the service, honor, and adoration due to Him; a practice by which we testify and protest before heaven and earth that God is the supreme and sovereign Lord over us and all creatures; that He has full power of life and death over us according to His good will and pleasure; a practice by which we sink deep into the abyss of our nothingness before the infinite majesty of God, and freely acknowledge that we receive from Him all we have and are, that

The mere name of sacrifice means something holy.

we still belong to Him, and that we receive our being from His preserving hand every moment of our existence; a practice by which, besides the victim offered, we present to God at the same time our bodies and souls and whole being; and as the victim is consumed, so we offer ourselves to be consumed, nay, annihilated, with the greatest readiness for His honor and glory, according to His will and pleasure. Could any more holy or sublime act than this be imagined? And should not that alone be a sufficient inducement to us always to assist at that august sacrifice with the utmost reverence and devotion?

Hence in the Old Law the greatest reverence was observed in offering sacrifice.

That it is, my dear brethren, which takes away the wonder I should otherwise feel when reading of the manner in which the Jews in the Old Law used to offer sacrifice. What a magnificent temple Solomon had to build for the sole purpose of sacrificing to God in a becoming manner! It was by its size and the art displayed in its construction a wonder of the world, an immense treasure-chamber by reason of the wealth of silver and gold vessels, censers, and countless articles of the kind that were used in sacrifice. And how costly the vestments the priests had to put on before officiating! Some of the books of the Old Testament are half full of the laws relating to the ceremonies and to the different usages intended to foster devotion which had, by command of God, to be observed most exactly before, during, and after the sacrifice. Holy Writ itself testifies to the devotion and reverential awe with which the people assisted at those rites. When Solomon caused the priests to offer many sacrifices, “all the children of Israel,” says the Sacred Text, “saw the fire coming down and the glory of the Lord upon the house; and falling down with their faces to the ground, they adored and praised the Lord. And the priests stood in their offices, and the Levites with the instruments of music of the Lord.”¹ Hegesippus relates that, when Pompey took Jerusalem, he could not sufficiently express his astonishment at the devotion and reverence with which the Jews assisted at their sacrifices: “Pompey was amazed at the heroism of the men, who in the midst of the turmoil of war were in no way wanting in reverence at their holy rites.”² God Himself often showed in a miraculous manner

¹ Omnes filii Israel videbant descendentem ignem, et gloriam Domini super domum; et corruentes prout in terram super pavimentum stratum lapide, adoraverunt et laudaverunt Dominum. Sacerdotes autem stabant in officiis suis, et Levitæ in organis carminum Domini.—II. Paral. vii. 3. 6.

² Stupebat Pompeius acres virorum animos, quibus in medio belli furore sacrorum reverentiæ nihil defuit.

how pleasing those sacrifices were to Him. When Solomon brought the ark into the temple, there were so many victims offered that they could not be counted: "They sacrificed sheep and oxen that could not be counted or numbered."¹ And the Lord showed how pleased He was, for His glory filled the temple like a bright cloud, in which He permitted a visible ray of His divine splendor to appear: "And the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord."² The same Solomon in his youth offered a thousand head of cattle on one day as a holocaust, and the following night the Lord gave him in a vision that wisdom which made him celebrated over the whole world. When the people of Israel had assembled in Masphat, and knew not what to do to defend themselves against the mighty army the Philistines had brought to attack them, they fled to Samuel, who at once offered sacrifice, and the result was that God so frightened the enemy by thunders and lightnings, that they took to flight, and a few of the Israelites followed and utterly routed them. I say nothing of many other miracles by which God signified His pleasure in sacrifices.

And what were those ancient sacrifices, after all? "Weak and needy elements,"³ as St. Paul calls them. They were mere shadows and figures of the holy Mass: "Now all these things happened to them in figure."⁴ As a magnificent building surpasses the mere sketch made of it on paper, so, too, nay, infinitely more excellent, is the holy Mass compared to all the sacrifices of the Old Law put together. How and why? In order to come to the pith of the question, consider the priest who then offered, and Him who now offers, and you will see that there is an infinite distance between the holiness of the two sacrifices.

The chief priests in the law of nature were Noe, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Melchisedech; and in the written law of Moses, Aaron, Heli, Samuel, Mathathias and many others. They were the holiest and best of their priests. But holy and good as they were, they were only mere creatures, poor, miserable, weak, sinful men, inclined to evil, who, if they could have offered all the treasures of the world as a holocaust to God, would not even then have offered Him anything suitable to His majesty, on ac-

Although their sacrifices were mere figures of the Mass.

For those who then offered were mere men.

¹ Immolabant oves et boves absque æstimatione et numero.—III. Kings viii. 5.

² Et non poterant sacerdotes stare et ministrare propter nebulam: impleverat enim gloria Domini domum Domini.—Ibid. 11.

³ Infirma et egena elementa.—Gal. iv. 9.

⁴ Hæc autem omnia in figura contingebant illis.—I. Cor. x. 11.

count of the person from whom the gift would come. God was indeed satisfied with those sacrifices at that time, for He knew that they had nothing better to give Him, and He received them with pleasure from the hands of the priests, but only because they were figures and shadows of that Priest from whom He was afterwards to receive the true and perfect sacrifice. We Catholics are now living in those desirable times which Jesus announced to the Samaritan woman at the well: "The hour cometh and now is, when the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth,"¹ and not as formerly, in figures and shadows. For now for the last seventeen hundred years an infinitely holy Priest has been offering to the God of infinite holiness an infinitely holy sacrifice, which is the Mass, that is daily said on the altars in our churches.

The sacrificing priest is now the incarnate God, Jesus Christ Himself.

But you will ask, my dear brethren, are not our priests who stand at the altar and say Mass men too? By all means! Often, indeed, we have too much that is human in us; and it were much to be desired that some of us were not even worse than many priests in the Old Law! But you must not look at us on the altar as if we were the only persons offering the sacrifice. No, we are, so to speak, but the poor laborers who perform the outward ceremonies, the plenipotentiaries who stand there in the name of our great Sovereign, to furnish the outward signs and pronounce the words of consecration with our lips. Standing beside us there is another invisible Priest, whose person we represent, and who is the principal offerer, who makes use of us as mere instruments, and of whom the Prophet David says: "Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech."² He is the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ Himself, who not only filled His priestly office on the cross, when He offered and sacrificed Himself in a bloody manner to His Father for the salvation of the world, but now continues to offer Himself until the end of the world and to fill the same office of priest in an unbloody manner on our altars. Hear what St. John Chrysostom says: "When, O layman, thou seest the priest celebrating, remember that he is not the principal person there, but believe firmly that the hand of Jesus Christ is put forth in an invisible manner."³

¹ Venit hora et nunc est, quando veri adoratores adorabunt Patrem in spiritu et veritate.—John iv. 23.

² Tu es sacerdos in æternum, secundum ordinem Melchisedech.—Ps. cix. 4.

³ Verum et tu, laice, cum sacerdotem videris offerentem, ne ut sacerdotem putes hoc facientem, sed Christi manum invisibiliter extensam.—S. Chrys. Hom. 60 ad pop.

And the Council of Trent has published the following decree as an article of faith: "The same who offered Himself on the cross now offers Himself by the ministry of the priest."¹

And to consider the matter duly, if Jesus Christ were not the chief priest on the occasion, the words of the consecration, in which the substance of the sacrifice consists, would be false and untrue. For, what are those words? "This is My body; this is the chalice of My Blood." If I pronounce those words at the altar, what do I mean by them? Do I wish to say, this is my own body, my own blood? By no means; for it is clear enough that the bread is not changed into my body, nor the wine into my blood; it must be, then, that these words refer to the body and blood of Christ; and therefore, since the priest does not say: This is the body of Christ, the chalice of the blood of Christ, but: This is My body, the chalice of My blood, it is beyond a doubt that the priest is not speaking in his own name, but that Jesus Christ is speaking by his mouth. "It is not the man," says St. Chrysostom, "who makes the body and blood of Christ of what he has before him, but Christ Himself, who was crucified for us." To understand this better, remember, my dear brethren, the preparation the priest makes before he proceeds to the consecration. He makes the confession of his sins, in which the Mass servers join, for, no matter how holy they may be, they have to acknowledge themselves sinners in comparison with such a holy action as that which they are about to perform. After that come the divine praises, different prayers and spiritual instructions for the priest as well as for those who hear Mass. Next come the profession of faith, a repetition of prayers, some aloud, others in a low voice, a renewal of the divine praises, and a recommendation to God of the Church at large, of spiritual superiors, princes, friends, relatives, and general and special needs. All this is said by the priest in his own person, and in the name of those who are assisting at Mass. "In all other things that are said," says St. Ambrose, "God is praised, and prayers are offered for the people, for kings, and for others."² That is, all those things which make up half the Mass are not yet the true sacrifice, but only a preparation by which the priest and assistants make ready for it; but when he comes to the chief part, which consists in the wonderful tran-

In His Person alone the sacrifice is offered.

¹ Idem nunc offerens sacerdotum ministerio, qui seipsum in cruce obtulit.—Trid., Sess. xxii., c. 2.

² Per reliqua omnia quae dicuntur, laus Deo deferatur, oratio præmittitur pro populo, pro regibus, pro cæteris.—S. Ambr. de Sac., l. iv., c. 4.

substantiation, he no longer speaks in his own person, but in that of Jesus Christ. "When he is consecrating the venerable sacrament," says St. Chrysostom, "the priest uses, not his own words, but those of Christ."¹ No mere creature can by his own power change bread and wine into the substance of Our Lord Jesus Christ, so that what was before bread and wine becomes after the words of consecration, and still retaining the outward appearances as before, the body and blood of the Lord, the former substance of the bread and wine having completely disappeared. "This is not the work of human power,"² says St. Chrysostom; the same Lord who instituted this sacrifice in the Last Supper renews this wonder of His omnipotence on our altars. "He who did those things in the Supper, does the same things now."³ We priests are but the servants; He is the Lord and Master. "We hold the place of ministers; He it is who consecrates and changes."⁴ When you see the priest beginning to utter the wonderful words of consecration, imagine you hear the powerful voice of the Lord Himself, who by the breath of His mouth commanded all things to be made out of nothing, and they were made—"He spoke and they were made;"⁵ and who at the word of the priest, His servant, orders the destruction of the whole substance of bread and wine, and at the same time enters into the accidents, invisible to our eyes, but visible to our faith, and remains there.

Hence the Mass is always holy and meritorious, no matter what sort the priest is who says it.

From this it follows, my dear brethren, that, as St. Chrysostom remarks, the Mass is always good, always holy, always pleasing to God, always of the same merit and value, no matter who the human priest is who says it; for whether he is pious or wicked, a friend or an enemy of God, in the state of grace or the state of sin, that does not touch the essential part of the sacrifice; the piety of the priest does not make its substance and essence holier in itself; nor can the wickedness of the priest, provided he has the right intention, detract in the least from its holiness and dignity; just as the wickedness of the servant does not lessen the merit and value of the generous alms which a good master gives to the poor, through Christian charity and mercy, by the hands of that servant. Why so? Because the giver of the alms

¹ *Ubi venit ut conficiatur venerabile sacramentum, jam non suis sermonibus sacerdos, sed utitur sermonibus Christi.*

² *Non sunt humanæ virtutis opera hæc.*—S. Chrys., Hom. lx. ad pop. Ant.

³ *Qui tunc ipsa fecit in ipsa cœna, idem et nunc ipse facit.*

⁴ *Nos ministrorum tenemus locum; qui vero sanctificat et immutat ea, ipse est.*

⁵ *Ipse dixit, et facta sunt.*—Ps. xxxii. 9.

is not the godless servant, but the pious master. In the same way, too, the chief priest in the holy Mass is not the man who stands at the altar, but Jesus Christ Himself, the Holy of holies.

Therefore we Catholics alone have in our true religion a sacrifice which is infinitely holy and pleasing to God, as far as the person is concerned who offers it. O dear Christians! what sentiments of esteem, reverence, humility, modesty; what attention and fervent devotion should not arise in us whenever we assist at the holy Mass, if by faith we only represent to ourselves Jesus Christ, the Son of God, present on the altar, and offering to His heavenly Father, in our stead and for us, a most pleasing sacrifice! What honor and happiness for the Mass server to think to himself, as indeed is the fact: I am now acting as an attendant on the Person of my Lord Jesus Christ in this most holy mystery! All this should make a still deeper impression on us when we consider the excellence of the gift offered in the Mass. What is that gift, that victim? It is one of infinite value and holiness. Therefore the Mass is an infinitely holy sacrifice, not only on account of the priest who offers, but also on account of the victim offered, as we shall see in the

We should, then, always assist at it with great reverence.

Second Part.

Every gift must bear some proportion to the high position of him who gives it, and also to the dignity of the person to whom it is presented. A penny is a suitable offering for a poor man, but not so for a prince. A gold piece is a suitable gift for a king to bestow, if it is given to a poor man; but not so if it is to be offered to another king. What were the victims of the Old Law? Pigeons and turtle-doves, oxen and calves, sheep and lambs, rams and goats; that was all. Oh, what a poor present to offer the great God! Yet those things bore some proportion to the poverty of the priests of those days, who, being mere mortals, had nothing better to offer. Now it is, as we have seen, God, Jesus Christ Himself, who offers. True it is that, if He were to immolate even a dove or a lamb on the altar, that trifling sacrifice would have an infinite value in the sight of God, on account of the supreme dignity of the person offering. Yet the gift would still be in itself too mean and worthless, since it is both possible and becoming for God to give something much better. Therefore, that the gift might be proportioned to the infinite God

A gift should correspond to the dignity of the giver and to that of the receiver.

who offers and the infinite God who receives, it must also be in itself of infinite value and excellence.

That is the case with the Mass, in which the gift is God Himself.

Such is the case, my dear brethren, with what is offered in the holy Mass. The gift that Jesus Christ presents to His Eternal Father is the life of a God; it is He Himself, in all His infinite greatness, with His divinity and humanity, His body and soul, His flesh and blood—that immaculate lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world, of whom the Apostle St. Andrew said to the tyrant who tried to make him sacrifice to false gods: “I sacrifice daily to the Almighty God on the altar the unspotted Lamb, whose flesh all the faithful people present eat, and yet the Lamb that was sacrificed still remains whole and living.”¹

As He was offered on the cross.

To understand this better, we must know that the holy Mass is still the same sacrifice that Jesus Christ offered on the cross; such is the express teaching of the council of Trent: “One and the same is the victim, one and the same the offerer, by the ministry of the priest, who offered Himself on the cross, the only difference being in the manner of offering.”² Therefore the Catholic Church, on the ninth Sunday after Pentecost, says in the secret prayer the following words: “As often as the commemoration of this victim is celebrated, the work of our Redemption is being performed,”³ not otherwise than if the Son of God again shed His blood and lost His life for us on the cross; with this sole difference, that on the cross He really shed His blood and lost His life, but in the holy Mass He does this morally and mystically. The love of Jesus Christ for His Eternal Father, and for us, too, is indeed so great that, if necessary, He would hang on the cross until the end of the world in His own person, so that He might always offer Himself for the service of the divine majesty and for our reconciliation with God. But as this would hinder the glory that is due to His adorable body, and, moreover, as it is not suitable that such a terrible, murderous spectacle which the Jews perpetrated on Our Lord should continue so long on earth, therefore, by the institution of the holy Mass, He has found a wonderful means of being in glory in heaven and at the same time, without actually shedding His

¹ Ego omnipotenti Deo immolo quotidie immaculatum agnum in altari, cujus carnem posteaquam omnis populus credentium manducaverit, agnus qui sacrificatus est integer perseverat et vivus.

² Una eademque est hostia, idem nunc offerens sacerdotum ministerio, qui seipsum in cruce obtulit, sola offerendi ratione diversa.

³ Quoties hujus hostiæ commemoratio celebratur, opus nostræ redemptionis exercetur.

blood, of always suffering and dying. How is that? I will explain this mystery to you briefly.

Just as on the cross the blood was really separated from the body of Christ, so it is also separated at the consecration in the Mass. For by virtue of the words of consecration, "this is My body; this is the chalice of My blood," under the appearance of bread there is only the body, and under the appearance of wine only the blood of Christ, although both are united under either appearance, since Christ cannot any more really die. Just as the body of Christ hung lifeless on the cross, so the same body is in the accidents as if He had not life, since it appears to be lifeless food and drink. And just as Christ remained attached to the cross until His sacrifice was consummated, so He remains under the accidents of bread and wine until they are consumed. Thus Our Lord has become an everlasting sacrifice, which, according to His prediction, will be always offered upon our altars to the Eternal Father till the end of the world. O love of Jesus Christ for men, who can comprehend thee?

Thus, my dear brethren, the holy Mass is an infinitely holy sacrifice, because the priest who offers it is the infinite God, and the victim offered is the same infinite God. From this it follows that we have nothing holier, higher, worthier, more perfect to present to God than this divine sacrifice. Prayer, fasting, alms-giving, watching, penance and bodily mortification, and all imaginable works of piety that man can perform; praises, blessings, thanksgivings, and all the acts of love of the angels and blessed in heaven, ye cannot approach this in worth and excellence! A single Mass is of more value in the sight of God than all the other acts put together. Why? Because they are and remain the acts of creatures, but the holy Mass is the work of God; nay, it is God Himself. O most loving Saviour, under what great obligations are not we Catholics to Thee, since Thou hast, without any merits of ours, caused us to be born and brought up in the bosom of the holy Catholic Church, in which alone this most holy sacrifice is to be found that we can daily offer up to Thy divine majesty!

And is it possible, my dear brethren, that, as long as we are in good health, we can allow a single day to pass by without assisting at this divine sacrifice? If there were only one place in the world in which Our Lord would descend in visible form once in the year, and again hang on the cross as He did on Calvary,

In what this likeness consists.

Hence the Mass is of infinite value and holiness.

We should hear Mass daily.

to offer Himself to His Eternal Father for all present, and to give them countless graces and blessings, what a concourse of Christians there would be to that place, in spite of distance, from all parts of the world! What innumerable pilgrimages would be made to it! I believe that the whole Catholic world would assemble there to assist at the divine sacrifice with the utmost devotion, modesty of behavior, reverence, and humility. Is not that so? Ah, how great is our good fortune! Not merely in one place alone, and that at a distance from us, but in all the churches of this town, which are but a few steps from our doors; not merely once a year, but every day, and nearly every half-hour of the forenoon, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, offers Himself up for us, although not so that the eyes of the body can see Him, yet He is visible enough to the eyes of faith. Thus daily, hourly, He renews on our altars in a mystic manner His sufferings and death on the cross. Daily, hourly, if we wish to take the trouble of going a few steps, we can have our share of the great treasure of graces that He then so liberally distributes. What is the matter with us, Christians? What ails us? Shall we always continue so slothful, tepid, and sunk in earthly things, that we do not care to assist at this holy sacrifice even once in the day?

And with
the utmost
reverence.

Or, if we do hear Mass once a day, as I hope all good Christians do, is it possible that we do not display the greatest devotion, love, fervor, humility, and reverence? We have already seen that the Jews in the Old Law were most reverent when offering their sacrifices, which consisted of nothing better than sheep, oxen, and goats immolated by a sinful mortal. How should we not, then, behave at this sacrifice, in which the great God offers, and the great God is Himself offered? Truly, we are not worthy of being present at such mysteries if we do not feel a shudder of holy awe at the entrance of the church, or at least at the beginning of the Mass. Faith, where art thou? If thou didst shine with all thy light in our hearts, we should imagine, when we are entering the church to hear Mass, that we are being led into heaven, before the throne of Jesus Christ; and at the words of consecration we should think that heaven was ravished out of itself with admiration, while hell trembles with fear because the Son of God is immolated to His Eternal Father. During the whole Mass we should think we see the angels, as St. John Chrysostom often saw them, descending from heaven

in visible human form, barefooted, with downcast eyes and folded hands standing round the altar, and at the consecration prostrating themselves on the ground to adore their Lord, and maintaining that humble posture till the end of Mass. St. John Chrysostom assures us that he more than once witnessed that sight.

And we poor worms of the earth, how do we assist at such an infinitely holy mystery? Ah, I am ashamed when I think of it. I can often hardly bear to look at the bad behavior of some Catholics at Mass. To hear Mass on bended knees, with downcast eyes, folded hands, meditating on the holy mysteries or praying orally: oh, that is well enough for the common people; but it would be a mortal sin against the present usages of the world; it would be a most unbecoming thing for a gentleman or lady who has seen the world. To sit down in an easy posture, with the hands in the breast of your coat; or to stand with your hands in your pockets, idly staring around you, bowing to those who come in and go out; to gaze at another's beauty, and thus often stain your souls with sinful desires; to laugh and talk, and, if there is that much piety left, to bend one knee at the consecration, but without attention, devotion, or reverence—that is the way to hear Mass nowadays, according to the fashion of the world. O world, that strivest against the holy law and life of God in all thy maxims and usages! Dost thou act even in the same way during the holy mysteries in which the Saviour offers Himself again for thee with incomprehensible love, and during which the angels and devils tremble!

Hear, all of you who forget the proper modesty, reverence, devotion, and attention during Mass! either you believe what the faith infallibly assures us of with regard to the sacrifice of our religion, or you do not believe it. Whatever answer you make to this, you are still inexcusable. For, if you believe that in the holy Mass the great God is present offering, and the great God is present as the victim offered, then you are more shameless and in a certain sense more wicked than the Jews and heretics. The former crucified Our Lord, and mocked Him as He hung on the cross, offering Himself for the salvation of the world; but they did so through ignorance, as St. Peter says, not knowing that Christ was God. The latter often pillaged the tabernacle and trampled the sacred Host under foot; but they did that because they denied the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. But you Catholics, by your misconduct and

Many do quite the contrary.

Exhortation and conclusion.

bad behavior, mock and turn into ridicule even that very God whom you know to be present. If, on the other hand, you are wanting in faith; if you do not believe that Jesus Christ is the priest and the victim in the Mass, then why do you come to church to be present with us at this sacrifice? You are guilty of idolatry; for you wish to be looked on as adoring the Lord God in the Mass, although you do not believe in your hearts in what you are doing outwardly. What shall I say to you then? Shall I tell you to remain away from the church, to separate yourselves from the communion of the faithful, to give up hearing Mass? No, my dear Christians! far different shall our conclusion be. We will hear Mass daily; not a day shall pass on which we do not offer to God this infinitely pleasing sacrifice; but we shall always assist at it with due respect, with profound humility and modesty in our outward and inward demeanor, with minds recollected in God, and with outward attention, uniting our prayers with all possible devotion with the prayer of Jesus Christ, and offering up our life and death in union with His. All this we shall do if we only bring before our minds with lively faith, as we intend doing in future, that we are assisting at an infinitely holy sacrifice, in which God is the priest and the victim immolated and offered to God. Let this be the resolution of us all. Amen.

TWENTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE HONOR GIVEN TO GOD IN THE HOLY MASS.

Subject.

In the holy Mass an infinite honor is given to God, therefore we should be present at it with due reverence.—*Preached on the second Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Homo quidam fecit cœnam magnam.—Luke xiv. 16.

“A certain man made a great supper.”

Introduction.

Not to lose time with a lengthy introduction, by this man is understood Jesus Christ, Our Saviour; the great supper which He prepares for the faithful is His own flesh and blood, which are

placed on the altar in the holy Mass as a victim, and at the same time as food and drink. I showed in the last sermon that this is an infinitely holy sacrifice, in which the priest is God Himself, and the victim God Himself. I now continue and say—

Plan of Discourse.

In the holy sacrifice of the Mass an infinite honor is given to God. What a happiness for us Catholics, but at the same time how unjustly we act when we offer that sacrifice without due reverence! There you have the whole subject of this sermon. The conclusion of it shall be the resolution to amend the faults we have been guilty of hitherto in this respect.

Give us Thy grace hereto, O dear Lord; we expect it from the hands of the Blessed Virgin Mary, through the intercession of our holy guardian angels.

The end of all created things is to honor God, their Creator. The angels in heaven have no other occupation for all eternity but to praise, honor, and adore God and do Him all the homage they can. Of the heavens, with the countless stars that adorn them, the Prophet David says: “The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of His hands.”¹ Of all visible creatures on earth he says elsewhere: “Be Thou exalted, O God, above the heavens, and Thy glory above all the earth.”² Of reasoning beings in particular God Himself says by His Prophet Isaias: “And every one that calleth upon My name, I have created him for My glory, I have formed him, and made him.”³ So that all created things must honor their Creator. But if we consider all the homage that creatures can render to God, there is nothing more excellent and more pleasing to Him than sacrifice; for, as theologians say, sacrifice is an act of religion which is of its nature directed to honoring the Creator, and thereby it is distinguished from all other acts of virtue and devotion. There is no doubt that we can also honor God by these latter acts, and therefore all our thoughts, words, and actions during the day should be directed to Him by a supernatural intention, as St. Paul says: “Therefore, wheth-

The end and aim of sacrifice is, above all things, to honor God.

¹ Coeli enarrant gloriam Dei, et opera manuum ejus annuntiat firmamentum.—Ps. xviii. 2.

² Exaltare super coelos, Deus, et super omnem terram gloria tua.—Ibid. lvi. 6.

³ Omnem qui invocat nomen meum, in gloriam meam creavi eum, formavi eum, et feci eum.—Is. xliii. 7.

er you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do," no matter what it is, "do all to the glory of God."¹ But if God is honored by those things, it is not the result of any natural property they have in themselves, but of our intention and motive. Sacrifice, on the contrary, is of such a nature that its immediate end and object is to honor God. In almost all other exercises it might be said that man acts more for himself and his own advantage than for God; for, if I pray, it is mostly to obtain favors from God; if I repent of my sins, it is to appease the anger of God and incline Him to be merciful to me. Whatever good works I do are for the purpose of increasing my reward in heaven. If I go to the sacraments, it is to unite myself with God and thereby to sanctify my soul all the more. But if I offer sacrifice, what is my object? To pay due honor to God. Such should be my chief end and intention if it is to harmonize with the work I am doing.

And God
alone is
honored by
sacrifice.

And further, it is God alone who is honored by sacrifice. Almost all other acts of homage or titles of honor can be offered to men, as far as the outward work is concerned. The title of honorable is given to many gentlemen; that of learned, to lawyers; princes are called Your Highness; kings, Your Majesty; emperors, Most Mighty; the Pope, Your Holiness. We bend the knee before bishops and kings; we light candles and have torchlight processions to honor the public entry of great personages; we make such deep reverences before men like ourselves, especially when we are in want of their assistance, that they might almost be taken for acts of adoration. "Abraham rose up and bowed down to the people of the land, to the children of Heth;"² that was when he was asking the people of Heth for a burying-place for his wife Sara. In the same manner Jacob acted towards his brother Esau, when he saw him coming towards him, and feared lest he might attack him: "And he went forward and bowed down with his face to the ground seven times, until his brother came near."³ Joseph's brethren were just as obsequious to him: "They bowed down with their faces to the ground: bowing themselves, they made obeisance to him."⁴ Abigail acted in the same manner towards David: "She arose

¹ Sive ergo manducatis, sive bibitis, sive aliud quid facitis, omnia in gloriam Dei facite.—I. Cor. x. 31.

² Surrexit Abraham, et adoravit populum terræ, filios videlicet Heth.—Gen. xxiii. 7.

³ Et ipse progrediens, adoravit pronus in terram septies, donec appropinquaret frater ejus.—Ibid. xxxiii. 3.

⁴ Adoraverunt proni in terram; incurvati adoraverunt eum.—Ibid. xlii. 26, 28.

and bowed herself down with her face to the earth.”¹ And these demonstrations of submission were made generally with the face bowed down to the very ground, an act of reverence that is seldom paid to the almighty God. “Many things,” says St. Augustine, “are taken from the divine worship, and used to show honor to men, either through excessive humility or through vile adulation, but in such a sense that they to whom the honor is paid are still looked on as men deserving of respect and veneration; but excess in this way might be called adoration.”² Yet, as the same holy Doctor assures us, there was never a people so barbarous as to offer sacrifice to one whom they did not look on as a god. “But who ever attempted to offer sacrifice unless to one whom he looked on as god, whether truly or falsely?”³ When St. Paul cured with a single word the lame man at Lystra, and restored to him the use of his limbs, so that he who was lame from his birth could walk with the greatest ease, the inhabitants wished to offer sacrifice to St. Paul and his companion Barnabas; but they did so because they looked on them as gods who had visited them in human form. “They lifted up their voice, saying: The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; but Paul, Mercury.”⁴ But when Paul and Barnabas protested that they were not gods, but men like themselves, who came to announce the true God, they had some difficulty in persuading the people; when, however, the latter were finally convinced that their visitors were not gods, they brought away the victims that had been prepared for the sacrifice, and abandoned their original intention.

Therefore, if we, like the Jews, sacrificed by immolating animals, even then our presence at such a sacrifice would be a holy action, for we should thereby make public profession that we look on God as the sovereign Lord of life and death, and of all things. But now, my dear brethren, to come to our subject, the greater and more excellent a lord is, the greater the honor that must be paid him, and this honor has to bear proportion to the dignity and majesty of him to whom it is given, or else it

Infinite honor is due to God; the sacrifices of the Old Law could not give it to Him.

¹ Quæ consurgens adoravit prona in terram.—I. Kings xxv. 41.

² Multa de cultu divino usurpata sunt, quæ honoribus deferuntur humanis, sive humilitate nimia, sive adulatione pestifera: ita tamen ut quibus ea deferuntur, homines habeantur qui dicuntur colendi et venerandi, si autem eis multum additur, et adorandi.—S. Aug., l. x. de civ.

³ Quis vero sacrificandum censuit nisi ei, quem Deum aut putavit aut finxit.

⁴ Levaverunt vocem suam, dicentes: Dii, similes facti hominibus, descenderunt ad nos. Et vocabant Barnabam, Jovem; Paulum vero Mercurium.—Acts xiv. 10, 11.

will not be pleasing in his sight. Since, then, God is an infinitely great lord, who has in Himself infinite perfections in an infinite degree, it follows that a similar, that is, an infinite honor, is due to Him. But where can we find on earth a gift that is suitable for that infinite Lord? What sacrifice can we offer Him that will render Him infinite honor? In the Old Law there was certainly nothing of the kind, even if all the sacrifices they then had were all heaped up together. Why? Because in all their circumstances they were too vile and unworthy. The priests who offered were, as we heard in the last sermon, poor, miserable mortals, subject to sins and vices; the victims were only sheep, oxen, goats; the manner of offering was to slay those animals and burn them. There was nothing in all this that bore any resemblance to the infinite majesty of God, and therefore it is no wonder that God sometimes felt but little pleasure in such sacrifices and so often rejected them.

It is given
Him in the
Mass by a
God, who
offers and
is offered.

Thus, in order to give that great Lord the honor due to Him, it was necessary that God should remain on the throne of His glory to receive the sacrifice, and at the same time descend on our altars to offer it. The same God, too, had to be the person who offered Himself with the utmost humility and reverence before the Divine Majesty, since it is God to whom the offering was to be made. In this way alone God is honored as becomes His dignity and majesty, and the desire of the Prophet David is fulfilled: "Praise ye Him according to the multitude of His greatness."¹ Yes, my dear brethren, this is perfectly fulfilled, and we find it all in our holy Mass. For He who offers is, as I told you before, the incarnate God, Jesus Christ, true God of true God, the object of the infinite, eternal love of the Father; He who is equal to the Father in all things: in nobility, majesty, omnipotence, wisdom, beauty, glory, happiness, holiness, eternity, incomprehensibility, immensity, and all other perfections—He it is who offers sacrifice to the Father, of whom the Father said: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."² What an honor it is to receive a sacrifice from such a Son! And what does He offer? Not the dead, perishable flesh of a lamb, or an ox, or any other animal, of which the ancient sacrifices consisted, but His own flesh and blood; His holy, living, and vivifying flesh, that stainless flesh which He

¹ *Laudate eum secundum multitudinem magnitudinis ejus.*—Ps. cl. 2.

² *Hic est Filius meus dilectus, in quo mihi bene complacui.*—Matt. xvii. 5.

received in the holy and immaculate womb of the Virgin Mary, which the power of the Holy Ghost united to the divine nature and made to exist with it in the Person of the Eternal Word. In a word, His offering is Himself in all His greatness and immensity. Could the Lord God receive any greater honor outside Himself, than what He has in such a sacrifice?

Finally, in what manner is that sacrifice offered? The marks of respect that we men give each other generally contain some act of humiliation; for instance, we uncover the head, bow it down, bend the body, and, according to the dignity of the person, bend the knee to show our respect. But it is the almighty God who in a special manner can and will be honored by His creatures only by humiliation: "Great is the power of God alone, and He is honored by the humble,"¹ says the wise Ecclesiasticus. Therefore, in the holocausts of the Old Law, which were for the sole object of honoring God, the victim was thrown into the fire and burnt to ashes and as it were annihilated, whereby those who offered testified to God that they were as nothing in His sight, and that they were ready to give up all they had, even their lives, for His honor and glory, just as the victim was destroyed instead of them in the fire. Judge now, my dear brethren, of the immense honor and glory that the Son of God daily renders His Eternal Father in the holy Mass, inasmuch as He makes of Himself as it were a holocaust and burnt-offering, with a humiliation which cannot be more profound. For this King of glory condescends to come down on the altar at the word of a poor mortal, and to place Himself in the hands of the priest, although the latter may be the most wicked of men. What a humiliation for the same God to hide Himself under the lowly appearances of bread and wine, so that not the least ray of His divinity, humanity, glory, or majesty is seen! What an annihilation it is for Him to shut Himself up in the narrow compass of the sacramental species, so that He has placed His human body in each particle of the consecrated Host in such a position that it cannot exercise any of its senses in a natural manner! What a humiliation it is for Him thus to renew daily His Passion and death, and to place Himself in the condition of the death which He suffered for us on Calvary! What an annihilation for Him to become our food and drink, to be eaten and drunk by the priest and others who receive holy Commun-

And that
with the
utmost
humiliation
of the Di-
vine Maj-
esty.

¹ Magna potentia Dei solius, et ab humilibus honoratur.—Eccius. iii. 21.

ion, and thus to lose the sacramental life He received in the consecration; nay, He would even lose His natural life thereby, if that were not now immortal and preserved by a miracle! What a humiliation for Him to put on the appearance of a sinner, who acknowledges by the act of sacrifice that he deserves to be deprived of life and to be annihilated! Oh, truly, an infinite humiliation, because it comes from such an infinitely high person!

Hence God receives infinitely more honor from the Mass than all creatures could give Him.

Hence, whenever holy Mass is celebrated, the Almighty receives an infinite honor, such as all the creatures of the whole world could not give Him through all eternity. Truly, my dear brethren, that is the case. Imagine that the Almighty creates, as He can do, millions of the most beautiful heavens, and fills them all with seraphim, who for all eternity shall praise, love, and honor their Creator with the greatest zeal and fervor; that He creates, moreover, countless worlds, all inhabited by men who for many hundred thousand years serve Him with the holiness of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and that at last all those holy men are slain in His honor and offered to Him as burnt-offerings; what inconceivable honor would thus be rendered to God! And yet it is all a mere nothing compared to what is rendered Him in the holy Mass. A single Mass gives God more honor than all I have said, and He has more pleasure in it than in all the homage that all possible creatures can ever give Him; because in every Mass a God offers, and a God is offered, and that, too, with the utmost humiliation and self-abasement. Hence the holy Martyr Ignatius with reason calls the Mass “the glory of God,”¹ and the priest prays during Mass, when he raises the sacred Host above the chalice: “by Him, and with Him, and in Him is to Thee, Almighty God, in union with the Holy Ghost, all honor and glory.” God Himself prophesied this by Malachias: “I will not receive a gift of your hand. For from the rising of the sun, even to the going down, My name is great among the gentiles.” Why? “And in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to My name a clean offering.”²

We give Him that honor when we hear

It seems to me now, my dear brethren, that you will perhaps feel a secret envy towards us priests, since we have the great privilege, in preference to all others who are not priests, of of-

¹ Dei gloria.

² *Munus non suscipiam de manu vestra. Ab ortu enim solis usque ad occasum magnum est nomen meum in gentibus; in omni loco sacrificatur et offertur nomini meo oblatio munda.*—Mal. i. 10, 11.

fering daily at the altar that most holy sacrifice by which God is honored in a special manner, which you, with all your prayers and good works, cannot approach. True, if there is anything on earth that can be made the object of a holy envy, it is the incomparable happiness of priests. But be satisfied and contented; you share in our happiness; Jesus Christ did not wish to be the only one to pay infinite honor to the Blessed Trinity; for He has instituted the Mass as a sacrifice in which all Catholics can share; in it, namely, He gives Himself to all the faithful in general, and to each one in particular, so that each and every one present may offer Him to the Eternal Father. The sacrifice is offered not by the priest alone who says Mass and represents the person of Christ, the High-Priest, but by all those who, being united with Christ as His members, hear Mass with devotion and offer it to God. The only difference between you and us is that we priests have the power of changing bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, a power that lay people have not. But when the body and blood of Christ are thus present on the altar, all Christians of both sexes who are present can offer Him with all His infinite merits to God, in union with the priest, nay, with the Son of God Himself. Such is the meaning of the honorable titles given by St. Peter to all Christians: "But you are a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people; that you may declare His virtues, who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."¹ The same appears still more clearly from the prayers which the priest says on the altar during Mass in the name of all those present. "We offer to Thee, O Lord," he says; and, "receive, O Most Holy Trinity, this offering we present to Thee." When he turns to the people, saying, "Pray, brethren," he continues in silence, "that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the Father Almighty." After having prayed for the absent, that they, too, may receive the fruit of the holy sacrifice, he adds, "and all those present who offer Thee this sacrifice of praise." Immediately after the consecration he says: "We, Thy servants, and Thy holy people, offer Thee a pure host, a holy host, an immaculate host, the holy bread of eternal life, and the chalice of everlasting salvation." There is, then, no doubt that all the faithful present who hear Mass devoutly in union with Jesus

Mass devoutly.

¹ Vos autem genus electum, regale sacerdotium, gens sancta, populus acquisitionis; ut virtutes annuntietis ejus, qui de tenebris vos vocavit in admirabile lumen suum.—I. Pet. II. 9.

Christ, their Head, whose members they are, offer that holy sacrifice with the priest, and consequently give their heavenly Father the same honor that Jesus Christ, His only-begotten Son, gives Him, that is, an infinite honor.

We honor
thereby
each of the
divine per-
fections.

By the same holy sacrifice we honor nearly all the divine perfections in particular. We honor God as the Creator and First Cause of all things, for we offer Him the incarnate Word, His own beloved Son, as the first-born and head of all creatures. We honor Him as our Sovereign Lord, who has the most perfect right to do with us as He pleases, to preserve our lives or take them away, nay, to annihilate us, if it seems good to Him; this supreme sovereignty we acknowledge before heaven and earth by that sacrifice which represents and renews in a mystical manner the death of Jesus Christ, our Head and Chief. We honor Him as our last end, to whom we are bound by countless titles to render all service, obedience, submission, love, and honor; for, when we offer Him Jesus Christ, our Head, we offer ourselves completely as members united with that Head, and thereby we protest that we are ready to honor, adore, obey, and completely submit to our God with all our hearts, to serve Him at all times, and to love Him with our whole hearts above all things, just as our Head subjects Himself to God on the altar with the most willing obedience—honors, loves, and adores Him infinitely. We honor in this sacrifice the infinite mercy of God, which has saved us from eternal death and the pains of hell; for we offer Him the bitter Passion and cruel death of His beloved Son, by which we are freed from eternal ruin. We honor His infinite wisdom and omnipotence, which show themselves in no mystery of our religion more than in this; for He manifests His wisdom by this mystery, which no human or angelic understanding could ever have thought of or looked on as possible; His omnipotence, by the many astounding miracles that are constantly wrought in this mystery. We honor His beneficence towards us; for we offer Him an infinite return, that is, the flesh and blood of His only-begotten Son, for all the benefits we have ever received and are still to receive from His hands; and this return we make Him with humble gratitude. We honor His justice; for we offer to it a superabundant, nay, infinite satisfaction, for all our sins and shortcomings. All these divine perfections we honor in the same manner in which Jesus Christ our Saviour honors them; that is, with an infinite honor.

What an exceeding great happiness that is for us Catholics, my dear brethren! Have we ever really thought of this before? Have we ever reflected, when hearing holy Mass, that we thus offer Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to our Eternal Father, in order to give Him the honor due to Him? O Christians, let us remember this with a lively faith whenever we enter the church to hear holy Mass; then we shall learn to appreciate better than we have hitherto done this most august sacrifice; then shall we be determined not to allow a day to pass, as long as we are in good health, without assisting at this mysterious sacrifice, and that, too, with all possible devotion, with constant attention and the utmost reverence.

What a happiness for us!

With all possible devotion, constant attention, and the deepest reverence, I say; for, my dear brethren, you can easily see from what has been said what a grievous insult they offer the Lord who in any way wilfully misbehave in the church during Mass. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, offers Himself for us on the altar to His Eternal Father, and thereby honors Him with an infinite honor; we are there for no other purpose than to offer the same sacrifice with Jesus Christ, and the same infinite honor to His Eternal Father; and should we, then, give Our Lord occasion to make the same reproach to us that He made to the envious and wicked Pharisees: "I honor My Father, and you have dishonored Me"?¹ Mark what a terrible insult it is; at the very time (so, my dear brethren, you must imagine you hear Our Lord addressing you)—at the very time when I am giving My Father an infinite honor on the altar by offering Myself in the holy Mass, you despise and turn into ridicule Me and My Father by your unseemly conduct, impertinent behavior, and want of reverence. Even at the time when you hear the priest, who represents My Person, saying, "Brethren, lift up your hearts," and the Mass server answers in the name of all present, "We have lifted them up to the Lord," your hearts are filled with all kinds of idle distractions, you look about you, talk, laugh, and are never more dissipated in spirit than when in the presence of your Lord. Even at the time when I humble Myself infinitely before the Divine Majesty, abase Myself to the lowest degree, nay, empty Myself and annihilate Myself, so to speak, you stand, or sit, or walk about filled with pride, often dressed as gaudily and showily as if you were in a theatre, and your only wish were to be seen by others and

How injurious to God to assist irreverently at such a holy sacrifice.

¹ Honorifico Patrem meum, et vos inhonorastis me.—John viii. 49.

admired by them. Even at the time when I am immolating and offering to My heavenly Father My most pure and immaculate blood for the sins of the world, you offer your eyes by unchaste and impure glances, and your hearts by wicked thoughts and desires, or by a want of modesty in dress, to the demon of impure passion. Thus you abuse, to dishonor Me and My Father, even that most holy means that I have instituted for the sole purpose of giving Him due honor. This is the abomination which the Prophet Daniel speaks of as having been seen in the holy place, in the church of God, before the altar of God, on which God is sacrificed.

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion of
amendment.

Oh, no, great God, far be such wickedness from all those who are here present! We rejoice with our whole hearts that Thou art such a great Lord, that we poor, miserable creatures have nothing whatever of our own worthy of Thy majesty or of being presented in Thy sight, or capable of giving Thee due honor. But at the same time we rejoice and offer Thee our most heartfelt thanks that Thy wonderful wisdom and omnipotence have found such a holy and incomprehensible means of enabling us to give Thee infinite honor, glory, and adoration, and to render Thee an infinitely pleasing service. This service, this honor, this adoration we shall give Thee every day without exception in the holy Mass, and that, too, with due reverence, attention, modesty, and humility. Far from us be all wilful distractions, and much more all unlawful thoughts and desires! As it is, we think of Thee so seldom during the day, since we are busied with earthly cares and domestic concerns; at least, then, we must give our whole hearts to Thee in Thy holy place, at that most happy time when we are hearing Mass. Far from us all curiosity and staring around! We give, alas, too much liberty to our eyes in the public streets, in company and conversation with others, to the danger and loss of our souls; at all events, then, while we are assisting at the divine mysteries, before which the angels and devils tremble with awe, we shall keep our eyes under restraint and modestly cast down to earth. Away, then, with all laughing and talking; outside the church we have time enough for that, without introducing it into Thy holy house, before Thy very throne, and during this most sacred rite. Away with all luxury, extravagance, and vanity in dress! We must not hold with the usages of the perverse world before Thy altar, but rather appear with the utmost modesty and humility when Thy divine Son,

our King and Lord, humbles and abases Himself in such a wonderful manner before Thy majesty. If we have hitherto been wanting in this respect, we humbly acknowledge our fault and repent of it with our whole hearts. With the help of Thy grace we shall do better in future, and we shall come before Thee with more devotion, humility, and respect, so that, when we hear holy Mass, we may be able to say with Thy divine Son, Our Lord and Saviour, I, too, give my heavenly Father due and infinite honor. Amen.

TWENTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

ON THE MASS AS A SACRIFICE OF ATONEMENT.

Subject.

The holy Mass is a sacrifice of infinite atonement, which appeases the anger of God, so that He does not vent it against sinners.—*Preached on the third Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Hic peccatores recipit et manducat cum illis.—Luke xv. 2.

“This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.”

Introduction.

Woe to me and all sinful mortals if Jesus were not here to receive sinners and eat with them! But He does that daily, to my great comfort and that of all sinners, when He offers Himself as a sacrifice of atonement in the holy Mass to appease the anger of His heavenly Father against the sins of the world, and gives Himself to repentant sinners who return to Him as the food of their souls. And this, my dear brethren, is the first advantage we derive from the wonderful and infinitely holy sacrifice of the Mass; namely:—

Plan of Discourse.

The holy Mass is a sacrifice of infinite atonement, which appeases the anger of God, so that He does not vent it against sinners. There you have the whole subject of this sermon. Sinners, no matter how great your guilt is, or has been, let not a day pass without hearing Mass! Such shall be the conclusion.

For which we beg Thy grace, O Lord, through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

Sin is so hateful to God that He would at once damn the sinner, if there were no one to appease His anger.

Every mortal sin is such an immense evil, such a terrible offence against God, such a grievous insult offered the Divine Majesty by a mere creature, such a wicked contempt of His holy will, and so deserving of the anger of God, that He would be compelled, so to speak, to hurl men into hell amongst the demons, without the least pity, mercy, or respite, the moment the sin is committed, if there were not some one to stay the course of divine justice, and to offer to appease the anger of God by making full satisfaction. Unhappy spirits! formerly beautiful angels and inhabitants of heaven, now hideous demons, you have found to your great and irreparable loss what it is to offend the great God, and that, too, at a time when there was no one to take your part and intercede for you. At the very moment, my dear brethren, when those angels in the fore-court of heaven gave way to a single proud thought against God, they were all at once hurled down into hell, in spite of their beauty, in spite of the excellence of their nature, in spite of their great number, in spite of the faithful service and homage they would have rendered their Creator for all eternity if they had been restored to favor. Unfortunate Adam, not a whit better would you have fared, after having broken the command of God by eating the forbidden fruit, if there had not been one who promised to atone fully for you and to appease the anger of God against you. And how would it have been with all men up to our own times, after all the shocking sins and vices with which they have filled every hole and corner on the globe, if they had not some one to atone for them?

Hence the Old Law had many sacrifices of atonement, which, however, had not the power of offering adequate atonement.

In the Old Law they who violated the commandments of God had no other means of obtaining pardon for their offences and being reconciled with God than the promised satisfaction of the Saviour, who was yet to come. In virtue of that, and in union with it, they had, besides other sacrifices, their sacrifice of atonement, which they called a sacrifice for sin. There was no sacrifice so common in those days, none so urgently recommended by God as this, so that His just anger might be appeased, and men be saved from the punishment they deserved for their manifold transgressions. And yet, in spite of the frequency of this sin-offering, how sharp and terrible were not sometimes the chastisements inflicted by divine justice on sinners! What great and ter-

rible calamities did He not send down on whole countries, nay, on the whole human race, on account of sins and vices! It was nothing strange in those days, as we read in Holy Writ, for the sinner to die suddenly after having committed sin, or to be burnt to ashes by fire coming down from heaven or bursting up from the earth, to be swallowed up alive by the earth, to be devoured by wild beasts and be hurled at once into hell. But why was that? Was their sacrifice of atonement worth nothing in the sight of God? Yes, but it was not worth much in comparison with ours. For it was in itself too mean to be able to appease the wrath of God fully. The Prophet Moses had in the name of God announced the divine law to the Israelites, and had prescribed different sacrifices of atonement for all classes and conditions of men in case they offended God. Thus, for instance, "if the priest that is anointed shall sin, making the people to offend, he shall offer to the Lord for his sin a calf without blemish. He shall take also of the blood of the calf, and carry it into the tabernacle of the testimony. And if all the multitude of Israel shall be ignorant, and through ignorance shall do that which is against the commandment of the Lord, they shall offer for their sin a calf, and shall bring it to the door of the tabernacle. If a prince shall sin and through ignorance do any one of the things that the law of the Lord forbiddeth, he shall offer a buck-goat without blemish, a sacrifice to the Lord. And if any one of the people of the land shall sin through ignorance, he shall offer a she-goat without blemish; and the priest shall take of the blood with his finger, and shall touch the horns of the altar of holocaust." ¹ St. John Chrysostom is amazed at all this. Why, O Moses, he asks, dost thou issue such commands as these? Dost thou think that the blood of a calf or a goat can wash away the filth of sin from a reasoning soul, or appease the anger of God? Truly, no; those sacrifices have not that power! Or else, if they are endowed with efficacy, it is only in virtue of their being symbols and foreshadowings of the immaculate Lamb who is to come, just as those criminals who fly to the statue of the emperor

¹ Si sacerdos qui unctus est peccaverit, delinquere faciens populum, offeret pro peccato suo vitulum immaculatum Domino. Hauriet quoque de sanguine vituli, inferens illum in tabernaculum testimonii. Quodsi omnis turba Israel ignoraverit, et per imperitiam fecerit, quod contra mandatum Domini est, offeret pro peccato suo vitulum, adducetque eum ad ostium tabernaculi. Si peccaverit princeps et fecerit unum e pluribus per ignorantiam quod Domini lege prohibetur, offeret hostiam Domino, bircum de capris immaculatum. Quodsi peccaverit anima per ignorantiam de populo terræ, offeret capram immaculatam; tolletque sacerdos de sanguine in digito suo, et tangens cornua altaris holocausti.—Levit. iv. 3—30.

find there a sure refuge, not because that statue has the power in itself to protect them, but because it represents the sacred person of the emperor. And with good reason does the Prophet Micheas ask: "May the Lord be appeased with thousands of rams, or with many thousands of fat he-goats?"¹ Nay, Our Lord Himself is represented by St. Paul as saying: "For it is impossible that with the blood of oxen and goats sin should be taken away. Wherefore, when He cometh into the world, He saith, holocausts for sin did not please Thee."² Hence the patriarchs and prophets used to cry out fervently to God: Send us, O Lord, that immaculate Lamb, who shall take away the sins of the world, that He may be offered to Thy justice, and completely reconcile Thee with the human race, which has so often and grievously offended Thee, and offer Thee full satisfaction for all our sins!

For God requires full satisfaction, which the incarnate God alone can give Him.

For the angry God, in order to be fully reconciled to us, requires a full atonement for the insult offered Him by sin, a complete restitution of His injured honor; and no mere creature can give Him that. If all the angels and elect in heaven, and the holiest men on earth, countless in number, were to offer themselves to God to undergo the most cruel torments for millions of years, and to sacrifice to Him their lives in the midst of such long-continued torments, nay, along with that, to burn forever in hell—all that would not, according to theologians, have the least effect in atoning for one mortal sin to the divine justice. For, on one side, the meaner and viler the person who offends, and the greater and higher the person who is offended, the greater also is the malice of the offence and the insult, and, of course, the greater the atonement required to wipe it out. And on the other side, the higher and greater the person to whom satisfaction is to be made, and the meaner and viler the person who has to make it, the meaner and viler, too, is the satisfaction itself. Now, since the infinite majesty of God is offended and insulted by a miserable creature, the wickedness of sin and the injury it offers to God are in a certain sense infinite, and require an infinite atonement. And since all the services that all mere creatures can offer to God seem and are almost infinitely worthless, so the atonement rendered by such services is infinitely inade-

¹ Numquid placari potest Domini in millibus arietum, aut in multis millibus hircorum pingulum.—Mich. vi. 7.

² Impossibile enim est sanguine taurorum et hircorum auferri peccata. Ideo ingrediens mundum dixit: Holocaustomata pro peccato non tibi placuerunt.—Heb. x. 4, 5, 6.

quate, and therefore it is not possible for a mere creature to satisfy God fully for even one mortal sin and restore His injured honor. Therefore the man who undertakes to render this satisfaction must be God as well, that, as man, he may be burdened with the load of sin by which God is insulted and offended, appear before the same God, and offer His atonement; while, as He is also God, He lends to this act an infinite value and satisfying power.

This is what Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has fully accomplished in taking on Himself human nature, as St. Paul says: "Wherefore, when He cometh into the world He saith: Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not; but a body Thou hast fitted to Me. Then said I, behold, I come, that I should do Thy will, O God."¹ Thou didst not find any pleasure in the sacrifices that men formerly offered Thee; let, then, this body of Mine be completely sacrificed to Thee; I am willing to give it up to sorrow and suffering, and to shed My blood even to the last drop by a violent and painful death on the cross, that I may satisfy Thy justice fully for the sins of men, and offer Thee complete atonement for them. What Christ thus said to His heavenly Father in the first moment of His life He afterwards fulfilled on the cross, inasmuch as He completed the sacrifice by shedding His blood and suffering a shameful death; and so He has offered to God an infinite atonement for the sins of an infinite number of creatures, if such a number were possible; He has completely restored the injured honor of God, appeased His anger, and brought about a full reconciliation between God and man.

Now, my dear brethren, as I have already shown, that same sacrifice that was then offered in a bloody manner for the salvation of the world on the cross is still offered on our altars in an unbloody manner in the holy Mass. The same unspotted Lamb, Jesus Christ, now offers His sacred flesh and blood to His heavenly Father for the sins of the world, as He did then; the same death of the cross is now renewed in a mystic manner as often as the priest says Mass; and hence the same complete atonement for sin is offered to the angry God every day. Such is the express teaching of the Council of Trent: "The holy Council teaches that this sacrifice is truly propitiatory."² For Jesus, Our Saviour, foresaw the many grievous sins and abominations that even

And which
He has giv-
en Him on
the cross.

And still
gives Him
daily in the
holy Mass.

¹ *Ingressus mundum dixit: hostiam et oblationem noluisti, corpus autem aptasti mihi; tunc dixi: ecce venio ut faciam, Deus, voluntatem tuam.*—Heb. x. 5, 7.

² *Docet sancta synodus, sacrificium istud vere propitiatorium esse.*—Trid. Sess. xxii. c. 2.

Christians would commit till the end of the world, thus daily, nay, hourly, drawing down the anger of God on the world; and consequently His unheard-of love was not satisfied with merely offering Himself once on the cross, but He instituted this mystery that we might offer Him daily, hourly, nay, every moment almost, as an atonement to appease the anger of God. And in reality hardly a moment passes in which in some part or other of the world bread and wine are not changed into His body and blood by a priest, nay, by many priests, and thus the holy sacrifice consummated. For the sun that in its course makes evening in one part of the world brings on the morning at the same time in another; when it is dark night here, it is daylight elsewhere; and those hours which are in the middle of our night are elsewhere the hours of noontide; so that wherever it is forenoon Mass is said, and thus at all hours and moments Mass is said nay, many Masses, in some part or other of the globe. A mathematician once calculated that the priests of our Society—and they are indeed the smallest in number of the clergy on earth—said Mass every half hour in different parts of the world. Thus it appears that every minute, in many countries, still more towns, and in countless churches, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, offers Himself as a victim to His heavenly Father, still repeating the words He spoke in the Gospel of St. John: “And for them do I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth;”¹ that is, as St. Jerome explains, I give Myself, I sacrifice Myself, that they may be cleansed from their sins and made holy. It is as if the Son of God said: Heavenly Father, the sacrifice I now offer on the altar is for all men in general, and especially for My select and chosen true Church, but more particularly still for those who, being present in the church, assist at this sacrifice with becoming devotion; take them into Thy grace and favor; they are poor sinners who have deserved Thy anger by their misdeeds, nay, they have frequently merited hell; but, behold, here am I, Thy beloved Son, to offer Thee complete atonement in their stead, and complete restitution of Thy injured honor. If the wickedness of men cries out to Thee for vengeance, much more powerful is the voice of My flesh and blood, crying out to Thee for grace and mercy; “for them do I sanctify myself;” for them do I offer and sacrifice Myself. O loving Saviour, how fortunate it is for us poor, sinful mortals that we have such a

¹ Pro eis ego sanctifico meipsum, ut sint et ipsi sanctificati in veritate.—John xvii. 19.

powerful sacrifice of atonement for our sins daily at hand! If Thou hadst not invented this wonderful mystery of love, how would it have been with us long ago, after we had so often and grievously offended Thee? How would it be with us still? for our conscience often accuses us of unfaithfulness to Thee.

Truly, I now feel myself compelled to agree with those who maintain that the world would long since have been destroyed by the angry God on account of its wickedness, if the holy sacrifice of the Mass had not stayed His hand, and saved the world from its well-deserved punishment. This, my dear brethren, is the argument brought forward in support of this opinion: amongst the many cruelties that Antichrist is to practise against the Christian Church will be also this one prophesied by the Prophet Daniel, that by the permission of God he will hinder and put a stop to the holy sacrifice of the Mass: “And it took away from Him the continual sacrifice, and cast down the place of His sanctuary.” This sacrifice can be no other than the holy Mass, for the Christian Church has no other, and will have no other till the end of the world. But, O God of goodness, why wilt Thou allow that wicked man to carry out his evil design in those dangerous and calamitous times? Hear the reason that Daniel gives: “And strength was given him against the continual sacrifice because of sins; and truth shall be cast down on the ground, and he shall do, and he shall prosper;”¹ as if he wished to say: On account of the many sins and full measure of the wickedness of men, the just God will in the last days of the world pour out His wrath upon it and will punish it with terrible plagues, which Jesus Christ Himself afterwards announced in the Gospel. The Almighty God could not, so to speak, do that as long as the holy Mass is celebrated as a sacrifice of full satisfaction and atonement for sinners. That He may, then, not be hindered in His just vengeance, He will allow Antichrist to put a stop to this sacrifice for a time; and thus He will act as He did once with His servant Moses, who was praying to Him. “Let Me alone,” said He, “that My wrath may be kindled against them, and that I may destroy them.”² Pray no longer, Moses! do not prevent Me from pouring out My wrath on a wicked people! In the same way, during those last days, God will say to Our Lord: Beloved

Without
this atoning
sacrifice
the world
would long
ago have
been de-
stroyed.

¹ Ab eo tulit jure sacrificium, et dejecit locum sanctificationis ejus. Robur autem datum est ei contra jure sacrificium propter peccata; et prosternetur veritas in terra, et faciet, et prosperabitur.—Dan. viii. 11, 12.

² Dimitte me, ut irascatur furor meus contra eos, et deileam eos.—Exod. xxxii. 10.

Son, pray no more, offer Thyself no longer for the sins of the world, that I may let loose all My anger against the wicked. Therefore, if the corrupt world is not punished now as severely as it will be in those times, we must ascribe that to the holy Mass that is offered daily, hourly, nay, every moment, throughout the world, for in it the blood of Jesus Christ is unceasingly crying out for mercy and pardon.

Since we
sin daily,
we should
make dili-
gent use
of this pow-
erful means.

There, my dear brethren, we have a most powerful means of appeasing the divine anger against sin, and averting from ourselves and those who belong to us well-merited chastisements that have been decreed against us. When the Patriarch Jacob heard that his brother Esau was coming, filled with rage, to meet him with a powerful army, he was at his wit's end to know what to do to escape the danger that threatened him and his family. At last a thought struck him: "I will appease him with the presents that go before, and afterwards I will see him; perhaps he will be gracious to me."¹ The plan succeeded to perfection; for when Esau met Jacob, and was greeted by him with a lowly obeisance, "then," says the Scripture, "Esau ran to meet his brother and embraced him; and clasping him fast about the neck and kissing him, wept."² Christians, who of us is there whose conscience does not reproach him with sin and transgressing the divine law? Ah, daily, hourly, we fall into sin only too much, and sometimes most grievously. Daily we call down on our heads the just wrath of God. Daily we deserve to suffer from His avenging justice all sorts of calamities. Let us, then, make the resolution of appeasing Him with gifts, of regaining by presents the favor of the God whose wrath we have aroused. And what shall we give Him? One present alone, but that the most costly and the most agreeable to Him, namely, His own most beloved Son, the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, my Saviour, which I will offer Him daily in the holy Mass, at which I will assist with devotion, and also with contrition for my sins and a firm resolution not to commit them again. Thus I will find favor with Him, as Jacob did with Esau; the anger of God will be altogether appeased when He sees the gift of infinite value I present to Him; He will meet me in a friendly manner and be again completely reconciled with me.

¹ Placabo illum muneribus quæ præcedunt, et postea videbo illum; forsân propitiabitur mihi.—Gen. xxxii. 20.

² Currrens itaque Esau obviam fratri suo, amplexatus est eum, stringensque collum ejus, et osculans, flevit.—Ibid. xxxiii. 4.

Sinners, no matter how great and abominable your crimes, ah, let none of you despair of the mercy of God. Only come and hear Mass every day, and you can have the firmest hope of being reconciled with God, no matter how great His anger has been against you. Plutarch tells us that when Themistocles was banished and was compelled in his extreme necessity to seek refuge with king Admetus of Molossa, whom he had conquered on a former occasion, he feared, and not without reason, that he would find in the king, not a good friend, but a vindictive enemy. Hear what the distressed man did; he managed to get possession of the eldest son of Admetus, and taking the prince on his arm, he advanced fearlessly into the king's presence. Most gracious monarch, he said, I appear before you with fear, but at the same time with hope; with fear, when I remember what I have done against you, on account of which I might have reason to find an enemy in you; but with still greater hope that your royal mercy will take into account more the love of this prince whom I bear in my arms than the hatred towards your enemy, who now humbles himself before you; more the value of this precious pledge which you see before you, and which I now offer you on my knees, than the war I waged against you. He gained his point. The sight of his child had such an influence over the father's heart that he at once admitted Themistocles to his friendship, and gave him an honorable position in his kingdom. Sinners, read over all the prayer-books you can find, and you will not see in one of them a more powerful prayer than this. If you have grievously offended God and brought down His just anger on you, so that you dare not appear before Him on account of the multitude and deformity of your sins, then do like Themistocles; take the only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father; you have Him there daily on the altar; hear holy Mass with devotion and reverence, and imagine that you hear Jesus saying to you from the altar what He once said from the crucifix to a despairing sinner: "Take Me and give Me for yourself."¹ Offer to the Eternal Father this priceless pledge, this Love which is there slain, this most sacred blood which is there mystically poured out; and say to Him with confidence: O my God, behold this gift of infinite value, which I now offer and present to Thee in satisfaction for my sins! God must indeed be exceedingly wroth if He refuses to be appeased at the sight of such a gift.

And not even the worst sinner should despair of being reconciled to God.

¹ Accipe me et da pro te.

By the sacrifice of the Mass he will receive the grace of penance.

And not only will He be thus induced to restrain His anger against you, but you will also thereby, as was the case with Themistocles, be admitted to His full favor and friendship, and He will forgive a great part of the punishment due to your past sins. For with regard to the favor and friendship of God, you must know that in the present arrangement of divine Providence you cannot receive that unless in the sacrament of penance, or if you have no opportunity of receiving the sacrament, by perfect contrition for your sins; thereby man can recover immediately the sanctifying grace and the friendship of God that he had lost by mortal sin. The power of the holy Mass does not extend to restoring sinners to the grace of God in that way. And how, then? The Council of Trent tells us in the following words: "The Lord, being appeased by this oblation, forgives even enormous sins." In what manner? "By giving the grace and gift of penance."¹ If, then, Mass is said for a sinner, or he himself hears it with proper attention, reverence, and devotion, the good God gives him, in consideration of this infinitely valuable sacrifice of atonement, interior inspirations and illuminations by which he may see the unhappy state in which he is, the deformity and malice of his sins, and the great danger he is in of eternal damnation; and He moves his heart to resolve to free himself from that state at once by true penance. In the same way we read that many of those who witnessed the crucifixion of the Son of God were converted: "And all the multitude of them that were come together to that sight, and saw the things that were done, returned, striking their breasts."² Many repented of the horrible crime they had been guilty of towards the innocent Lord, begged pardon of God, and were converted with their whole hearts; a great grace that was given them in virtue of that infinite sacrifice. That it is which should be the greatest inducement for those who are in the state of sin to hear holy Mass. True it is that, while they are in that unhappy state, they cannot perform a single work, no matter how holy it is in itself, not even hearing Mass, which is meritorious of eternal life; nevertheless, since they are in the greatest need of the grace of conversion, and that grace is a great one, and the holy Mass is a most powerful means of obtaining all graces, but especially

¹ Hujus oblatione placatus Dominus peccata etiam ingentia dimittit, gratiam et donum poenitentiae concedens.—Trid., Sess. xxii., c. 2.

² Omnis turba eorum, qui simul aderant ad spectaculum istud, et videbant quae fiebant, percutientes pectora sua revertebantur.—Luke xxiii. 48.

that of repentance, because it is a sacrifice of atonement, and since, as I believe, many sinners will not receive this grace unless they hear Mass and thus obtain it—therefore, O sinners, do not remain away from the holy sacrifice. Nay, as long as you are in good health and have the opportunity, hear more than one Mass in the day, and say often with sorrow of heart, like the publican: O God, be merciful to me a sinner; O God, I implore of Thee by the flesh and blood of Thy Son, who is the infinite atonement and satisfaction for our sins, be merciful to me, a poor sinner! Doubt not that you will in that way certainly obtain the grace to repent and amend your lives, unless through hardness of heart you obstinately reject the grace that God will offer you.

Further, with regard to the punishment due to past sins (and his concerns just souls as well), amongst all good works, penances, and mortifications of the flesh, there is again no more powerful means of rendering ourselves partakers in the infinite satisfaction of the life and death of Jesus Christ, and of blotting out the punishment that still remains due to our sins, than the holy sacrifice of the Mass; for therein Christ Himself renews His life and death, and offers them to His Father as an atonement for our sins. Hence, in my opinion, confessors can impose no better penance on their penitents, after the latter have repented and confessed, than the hearing of the holy Mass in order to blot out the punishment still due to their sins. For the same reason there is nothing more profitable for the poor souls in purgatory than the holy Mass, as I shall prove on another occasion. Dear Christians, think of this every day, and do not forget the poor souls when you enter the church to hear Mass.

After all this, what am I to think of many Christians nowadays, my dear brethren? I cannot understand how a man who is enlightened by the grace of faith, and who has committed many grievous sins that his conscience reproaches him with,—I cannot understand how such a man can allow a single day to pass by without hearing holy Mass. Imagine that half-an-hour's walk from here is living a very rich man, who is willing to bestow gratis to all who come to him great sums of money. Now, there is a man in town notoriously involved in debt head and ears, but he will not take the trouble to go to that generous man, and prefers to remain idly at home with his arms folded, standing at the door. What would you think of him? Would you not be surprised at his extreme laziness and stupidity? Would

And have
the punish-
ment due to
his sins less
ened.

How foolish
to neglect
such an
easy means
of atone-
ment.

you not say that it would serve him quite right if he and his family were to fall into the utmost poverty? Would you have any pity for him if his creditors were to throw him into the deepest dungeon, and there let him rot away? No, you think; it is his own fault; he has only himself to thank for it all. Now, my dear brethren, there is perhaps no one of us, when he considers the years of his past life, who must not acknowledge that he has contracted almost infinite debts with the Divine Justice on account of his sins; and at the same time we are so wretchedly poor that we have nothing in our possession by which we can reduce that debt in the least. Meanwhile there is an infinitely rich Lord, who can and will supply us with an infinitely great sum to pay off our debts, and that, too, gratuitously; that Lord is Jesus Christ in the holy Mass, and He offers us therein the infinite merits of His bitter Passion and death to present to God, and thus wipe out our debts. To share in these merits, we need not undertake a journey of even half-an-hour; we have the opportunity in almost every street, and at our very doors; we need only go to church and hear Mass with attention and devotion. And shall we neglect that easy and beautiful means of paying our debts to God, for the sake of fooling away our time at home, or indulging in a longer sleep, or tricking ourselves out in the fashion, or making some trifling profit in our temporal affairs, which after all we may fail to make, because we have not the blessing of God, since we neglect to hear Mass? We often try to excuse ourselves, and say that we cannot attend to prayer and the meditation of divine things, on account of our domestic cares; we cannot give alms on account of our own poverty; we cannot fast on account of the delicate state of our health; we cannot wear hair-shirts, or take the discipline, or practise other bodily mortifications to atone for our sins, because our health does not permit it. Very well! I am quite willing to believe that such is the case. But is it such a difficult thing to make ourselves partakers of the infinite merits of Jesus Christ by hearing holy Mass, in order to pay the debts we have contracted with the Divine Justice by our sins? What excuse have we to urge for neglecting this most desirable opportunity that is daily offered us? It would serve us quite right if God were to show us no mercy in the next life, but to keep us for a long time in that fiery prison in which the souls are confined who owe anything to His justice. Is not that so, my dear brethren?

But in future we shall act more prudently, and every day, while we have health and the opportunity, hear holy Mass with due attention and devotion. Like poor criminals condemned to death and on our way to execution, laden with chains, we shall present ourselves before the Divine Majesty, and as a preparation say to God: Behold me here before Thee, O God of justice, a poor sinner laden with debt, who have not a single farthing of my own to pay with; but (oh, what a consolation for us sinners!) “have patience with me, and I will pay Thee all;”¹ nay, I will give Thee infinitely more than I owe Thee. Behold, I offer Thee the blood of Thy dear Son! That is a treasure which is infinitely greater than all the debts that the sins of numberless worlds could contract. This payment Thou canst not refuse; in this blood I sink my hitherto ungrateful, obstinate heart, as the poor widow in the Gospel cast her mite into the treasury. Thou canst take revenge on it; but I beg of Thee, let it be a revenge of love and mercy. Cleanse it from all undue attachment to creatures; wound, cut, burn, and inflame it with the fire of Thy divine love, that I may remain free from all sin in future, and love Thee, my God, with my whole heart, as Thou wishest and desirest me to love Thee. Think of this intention, my dear brethren, before every Mass you hear. Amen.

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion.

TWENTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

ON THE MASS AS A SACRIFICE OF THANKSGIVING.

Subject.

The holy Mass is, 1st. an infinite thanksgiving for the benefits we have received from God; 2d. an infinitely powerful means of receiving continually fresh benefits from God.—
Preached on the fourth Sunday after Pentecost.

Text.

Exi a me, quia homo peccator sum, Domine.—Luke v. 8.

“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

Introduction.

Peter, what art thou saying? That Christ must depart from thee, because thou art a sinful man? Truly, for my part, al-

¹ Patientiam habe in me, et omnia reddam tibi.—Matt. xviii. 29.

though I must acknowledge myself unworthy to be in the presence of Jesus Christ, yet the prayer I address to Him is quite contrary to that, and I say: O Lord, remain with me; go not from me; do not abandon me; for I am a sinful man! Alas, if Thou takest Thy presence from me, and other sinners like me, what will become of us? Where shall we find an advocate to plead our cause with the angry God? Where the means of paying the debts we have contracted with His justice by our sins? So it is, my dear brethren; we cannot be grateful enough to Our Saviour for His wonderful goodness in remaining with us to the end of the world in His bodily presence, and offering Himself every day in the holy Mass as a sacrifice of atonement for our sins, as I showed in the last sermon. Nay, for the very reason that we cannot sufficiently thank Him for this and other benefits, and since we are, moreover, always in need of His benefits, we find in the same holy sacrifice a new and priceless advantage, which will form the subject of this sermon.

Plan of Discourse.

The holy Mass is an infinite thanksgiving for the infinite goodness of God in our regard; the first part. The holy Mass is an infinitely powerful means of receiving continually all imaginable fresh benefits from God; the second part. Therefore we should hear it daily with great desire.

Grant us all the grace to practise this conclusion, O Lord; we ask it of Thee through the intercession of Mary and Thy holy angels, that we may not have to say: "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man."

The greater
the benefit
the greater
should be
our grati-
tude.

Just as there is nothing more odious or unjust than ingratitude towards one from whom we have received benefits, so there is nothing more just, becoming, and necessary than to show that we are grateful to our benefactor. And our thankfulness should, as far as possible, be proportioned to the greatness of the benefit received. To this end in the Old Law sacrifices of thanksgiving were instituted, by which the faithful testified to God the grateful feelings of their hearts for all the good things they received from Him, whether in general or particular. God Himself prescribed to the Israelites certain feast-days in the year, on which the people had to assemble and offer sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for different special benefits; such, for instance, as their being brought out of Egypt, freed so miraculously from

the heavy yoke of Pharaoh, and settled in the promised land; their being wonderfully fed in the desert with the Manna or bread from heaven; their having received the Law through the Prophet Moses; their having been so often assisted in a most wonderful manner by God to gain the victory over their enemies, and many similar favors. Every year they had to offer sacrifice of thanksgiving to God in memory of those benefits.

Christians, how many good things have we not hitherto received from our loving and most generous God! Ah, what am I saying? What good thing is there that we do not owe to Him? What have we within or without us, that we must not with thankful hearts ascribe to the inexhaustible goodness of God? Consider yourselves, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot; are you not simply made up of benefits received from God? From the first moment of our lives to the present, can we find a single instant in which we have not enjoyed the fruits of the divine liberality? I will say nothing now of any benefit in particular, as I shall speak on that subject hereafter more in detail, when I come to explain to you how we are bound to be grateful to God. "What shall I render to the Lord," we should all say with the Prophet David, "for all the things He hath rendered to me?"¹ Ah, yes, what return can I make the Lord for all the benefits He has bestowed on me? O most generous God, I find nothing that I can offer Thee. Every good thing I have is Thine by countless titles, and I dare not arrogate anything to myself. So that, if I give Thee all I have and sacrifice it to Thee, I give Thee nothing that is not Thine already; and even if what I have really belonged to me, and I were to place it all in Thy hands, what would it all be compared to the good things I have received from Thee, my infinite Benefactor? Must I not, then, acknowledge with Thy servant David in all humility: "My substance is as nothing before Thee"?² What would it be in comparison with Thee? in comparison with the greatness of Thy goodness, which, as Thou hast given Thy beloved Son for me, is infinite? in comparison with the love Thou hast for us in doing us good, which is immense? in comparison with the end for which Thou dost good to us, which is an eternal, blissful heaven? "What wages shall we give Him?" we may well ask, as the younger Tobias said to his father out of

We daily receive from God countless benefits, for which we of ourselves can make no return.

¹ Quid retribuam Domino pro omnibus quæ retribuit mihi?—Ps. cxv. 12.

² Substantia mea tanquam nihilum ante te.—Ibid. xxxviii. 6.

gratitude to the companion of his journey. "Oh, what can be worthy of His benefits?"¹ O my God, what can I give Thee that will be an adequate return for Thy goodness to me? If I were to burn all the wood of Libanus, and to sacrifice all the animals on earth as a holocaust to Thee in thanksgiving for Thy benefits, I must still acknowledge with the Prophet Isaias: "And Libanus shall not be enough to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt-offering."² Nay, if all the wood in the world were set on fire, and all men and angels and other creatures were consumed in it to Thy honor and glory, it would not yet be enough to make an adequate return for what Thou hast done for me; for, no matter how small the benefit Thou conferrest on me, it is in a certain sense infinite, since it comes from Thy hand, which is of infinite dignity, and which with infinite love bestows on me benefits that have for their object my eternal happiness. What shall I render to the Lord? What return can I make Thee, for Thou dost expect me to show my gratitude, and that in a way befitting the good Thou dost me? How can I, a poor mortal, discharge this obligation? I have nothing. I can do nothing.

We offer
Him an
infinite
thanksgiving in the
holy Mass.

Yet, after all, there is something I can do. I am not so poor as I thought. I have in my power a hidden treasure which is infinitely pleasing to Thy Majesty, and which Thou canst not refuse to accept; a treasure that is not only equal to all benefits Thou hast ever conferred on me and all creatures, but even surpasses them, and is infinitely greater than all Thou canst give to creatures outside Thyself. For this treasure is as great as Thou Thyself art, and it is the flesh and blood of Thy Son Jesus Christ, my Saviour, united with His divinity;—of that Son who is equal to Thee from all eternity. This treasure I have daily in my hands, and can present it to Thee, not only as a complete but a superabundant return for Thy goodness. So it is, my dear brethren. Whenever we assist at the holy Mass with due attention and devotion, we make the Divine Generosity and Goodness an infinite return for infinite blessings; for therein we offer to the Almighty the Author of all good, who comprises in Himself all riches and treasures, and that is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of the Eternal Father. This is what the Prophet David foresaw in spirit when he asks: "What shall I

¹ Quam mercedem dabimus ei? aut quid dignum poterit esse beneficiis ejus?—Tob. xii. 2.

² Libanus non sufficet ad succendendum, et animalia ejus non sufficent ad holocaustum.—Is. xl. 16.

render to the Lord for all the things that He hath rendered to me?" For he at once answers: "I will take the chalice of salvation, and I will call upon the name of the Lord. I will sacrifice to Thee the sacrifice of praise; in the courts of the house of the Lord, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem."¹ This is one of the chief reasons, says St. Irenæus, why the Son of God instituted the holy Mass; namely, "that we may not be ungrateful to God."² Our Lord knew well our poverty and impotence, and that of ourselves we had nothing to repay God for His goodness to us; in this wonderful manner, then, He has left us a gift that we can daily present, as He Himself has given us to understand in the institution of this sacrifice. For the holy Evangelists say, and the priest, too, says after them, immediately before the consecration: "Who, the day before He suffered, took bread into His sacred and venerable hands, and having raised His eyes to heaven, to Thee, God, His almighty Father, giving thanks to Thee, blessed, and broke, and gave to His disciples." The priest admonishes all of this act of thanksgiving in the words, "Let us return thanks to the Lord our God;" and when the server has answered, "It is right and just," he continues: "It is truly meet and just, right and available to salvation, that we should always and in all places give thanks to Thee, O holy Lord, Father Almighty, Eternal God, through Christ Our Lord," whom we now offer Thee by way of fitting thanksgiving for Thy benefits to us.

And indeed, my dear brethren, we thus fulfil to the utmost all the obligations that gratitude imposes on us. For if true gratitude requires that we should often think of the benefits received, how can we find a better means of recalling them to our memory than the holy Mass? For therein the greatest of them all, without which the other graces and gifts of God would help us in no way, and which is the foundation and origin of them all, namely, the great work of our Redemption, the sufferings and death of Our Saviour, is not merely represented as in a figure, but is really renewed and continued in a mystic manner. Therefore Our Lord said, when instituting this sacrifice: "Do this for a commemoration of Me;"³ let it remind you of the sufferings and death by which I freed you from eternal death, and gained

Thus we
may be su-
preinely
grateful
to Him.

¹ Calicem salutaris accipiam, et nomen Domini invocabo. Tibi sacrificabo hostiam laudis; in atriis domus Domini; in medio tui Jerusalem.—Ps. cxv. 13, 17, 19.

² Ne ingrati simus erga Deum.

³ Hoc facite in meam commemorationem.—Luke xxii. 19.

all heavenly gifts and graces for you. Again, if true gratitude requires that I should express my thanks to my benefactor, and praise and honor him, how could I do that better than in the holy Mass, in which Jesus Christ, the High-Priest, in our stead offers His heavenly Father, by way of most humble and perfect thanksgiving, an infinite honor and adequate praise; in which we, united with our Head as His members, offer the same thanksgiving to the sovereign God? Finally, if gratitude requires us to render some service, or present some gift in return for the favor received, where can we find a more costly present for our good God than His own beloved Son, whom we offer to Him in the Mass? Thus, by merely hearing Mass, provided we are not wanting in attention and devotion, we completely fulfil, and in the most perfect manner, all the obligations and duties of an infinite gratitude.

Hence we should never neglect this sacrifice.

Christians, what a great happiness this is for us! I say again. O loving Saviour, how great, how incomprehensible is Thy love and fatherly care of us, in providing us with such a means of giving due honor to the infinite majesty of God, of satisfying the claims of His justice against us, of returning adequate thanks for His generosity! Should not this impel us anew not to allow a day to pass without assisting at a sacrifice that is so useful and necessary for us? Every day, hour, and moment we enjoy the gifts of God's goodness; is it not right, then, that we should thank Him for them at least once a day? What excuse can we offer if we are ungrateful, with such a rich treasure at our disposal? If the careless servant in the Gospel was so severely punished because he hid in the ground the talent entrusted to him, what will not the lazy and tepid Christian have to fear, who allows such a vast treasure to lie idle, and does not make use of it! No, my dear brethren, not a day shall pass, as long as we are in good health, on which we shall not hear holy Mass; and that, too, because we are every day, hour, and moment in need of fresh gifts and graces from God. For the holy Mass is not only an infinite thanksgiving for benefits received, but also a most powerful means of obtaining fresh ones, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

The Mass is infinitely powerful in

There are three ways in which we go to work when we wish to obtain a favor from a king or prince: we try to get some good friend to say a word for us, or we present a petition setting forth

our wants, or else we endeavor to win the sovereign's favor by gifts and presents. The higher the person who undertakes to plead our cause, the more in favor he who hands in the petition the more costly the gift offered, the greater is the chance of obtaining the desired favor. But if these three things are united, then, indeed, there is not the least doubt that the sovereign will accede to our wishes. In all these ways together, my dear brethren, the holy Mass is a powerful means of obtaining all imaginable favors and graces from God. For, in the first place, our advocate in the holy Mass is an infinitely great lord, who holds the highest place in the favor of the Almighty, and that is Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, "always living to make intercession for us,"¹ as St. Paul says, and to put in a good word in our behalf. That is what He now does in heaven, seated on His throne of glory at the right hand of the Father, where He fills the office of advocate and intercessor for His children, whom He redeemed on earth; but in the holy Mass He intercedes for us in a special manner, that is, with the utmost humiliation, self-abasement, annihilation of Himself in the sight of God, just as He prayed for us with outstretched arms on the cross to His Father; for, as we have frequently seen already, the sacrifice of the Mass is a renewal and repetition of that of the cross. He prays for us with the powerful voice of His five sacred wounds, the marks of which He preserves in His glorified body; and never do those wounds shine so brightly as in the holy Mass, when He presents them to His Father. He prays, too, with the mighty voice of His merits, which, infinite as they are, He offers to God for us. Can we, dare we think, my dear brethren, that the petition of the Son of God, of His sacred wounds, of His precious blood, of His infinite merits, will make no impression on His Father's heart? Can there be any grace or favor too great for them to obtain?

Again, it is the same beloved Son of God who presents our petition and supplication in this holy sacrifice to His heavenly Father; for the prayers that we say while hearing Mass devoutly, and those that the priest says in his own name and that of all present, He unites with His own most powerful prayers, and thus offers them to His Eternal Father. Hence the prayers we say during holy Mass are much more efficacious in obtaining favors from God than those we say on other occasions and at other

obtaining
grace.

Because
Christ
therein
unites His
prayer with
ours.

¹ Semper vivens ad Interpellandum pro nobis.—Heb. vii. 25.

times, and a single memento that the priest makes at the altar for one who is absent is far better for the latter than even a long prayer that he might say for himself. Now, if every prayer of the just man has the right to the fulfilment of that magnificent promise that Jesus Christ makes, "Amen, amen I say to you: if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you,"¹ how much more powerful will not that prayer be, how much more speedily and efficaciously will it not be heard, when it is offered, not only in the name of Jesus Christ, but in union with His most holy prayer, with His sacred wounds, with His precious blood, with His bitter Passion and death, and with His infinite merits, and is thus presented by His own hand to God!

What a
source of
comfort and
confidence
for us!

O dearest Christians, what a comfort and happiness this is for us! I say again. What confidence should it not inspire us with in all trials and adversities! Imagine, if you can, that on a certain day the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, and all the angels and saints in heaven go down on their knees before the throne of God, and pray to Him for all those on earth who pray during that hour; and that at the same time they offer up all their merits for those who thus pray on earth, and then present their united petitions to the Almighty; would not that inspire you with the utmost hope and confidence of obtaining infallibly from God whatever you might ask for during that hour? Would any one allow that hour to go by without prayer? And with what devotion would not every one unite his prayers with those of the angels and saints! But we have daily in the holy Mass a far better opportunity than that, for God Himself, Jesus Christ, whose merits far surpass those of all the angels and saints, and whose prayer is far more efficacious in obtaining everything from God, His heavenly Father, than all the prayers of the saints,—Jesus Christ prays for us and offers up our prayers in union with His own to God. What confidence, then, should not that inspire us with! With what fervor and devotion should we not daily assist at this most holy sacrifice, and with full confidence explain our wants and necessities to God!

Because we
thus make
to God a
most costly
present.

Finally, if the best means of obtaining a favor from a great lord is to make him presents that he will be pleased to accept,—and experience teaches us that such is the case,—oh, what will we

¹ Amen, amen dico vobis, si quid petieritis Patrem in nomine meo, dabit vobis.—John xvi. 23.

not be able to obtain by the holy Mass from God, who is already so generous and faithful! For, besides the prayer of His divine Son, we make Him a most costly present; one that is infinitely greater and more precious than all imaginable gifts and graces that we desire or can hope for from Him; one that is even as great as God Himself; namely, Jesus Christ, His own beloved Son, in His own flesh and blood. Let the Divine Generosity and Liberality give us whatever He pleases out of the inexhaustible treasure of His graces, still, the present that we have first made Him in the holy Mass is worth far more than all that He can give us outside of Himself. Let Him give us even Himself, as we hope one day to possess Him forever in heaven, still we offer Him in this holy sacrifice a present of equal value, and not a whit less than what He has either given us, or will give us in eternity.

Can we, then, imagine that the God of goodness, who has promised an eternal reward to him who gives a cup of cold water to a poor man in His name, and who receives that cup of cold water as if it were given to Himself,—can we imagine, I ask, that such a God will refuse anything to him who offers Him His own beloved Son? No; not without reason does the priest say after the consecration, in the name of all present, “That we may be filled with every heavenly grace and blessing through the same Christ, Our Lord.” By these words the Catholic Church shows that we may have the utmost hope and confidence of obtaining by the holy Mass all supernatural graces that are necessary or advantageous for our salvation. And so it is; we can thus make sure of every heavenly grace: of the grace of true repentance for those in the state of sin; of the grace of constancy in good for those who are already converted to God; of the grace of patience for those who are suffering trials and adversity; of help against temptations, daily progress in virtue, the grace of perseverance, and a happy death for the just; there is not a single grace for which we should not ask, not a single one that we cannot obtain by this holy sacrifice. Moreover, we can by the same means obtain those temporal favors which are not injurious to our souls, such as averting calamities from a whole town or country, being restored to health even when health is despaired of, the increase of our temporal wealth, being saved from dangers that threaten our lives, success in our business undertakings, blessings in our domestic concerns, and so forth; all of which we

Whereby
we can ob-
tain every-
thing.

Shown by
examples.

can obtain from the divine goodness by the holy Mass, as many have experienced even miraculously.

St. Augustine tells us that a certain house was fearfully disturbed day and night by visitations of the hellish spirits; but when Mass had been said in it, those visitations immediately ceased and did not occur again. St. Gregory writes that a certain gentleman, who was kept a prisoner by the barbarians, found the chains falling of themselves from his hands and feet on certain days; and afterwards he discovered that those were the days on which his friends had a Mass said for him. In the Life of St. John the Almoner we read of a poor shoemaker who had received many blessings from God, and sufficient means not only to support himself and his family, but also to help the poor, because he used to hear Mass daily and would not omit doing so on any account; while a neighbor of his, another shoemaker, in spite of keeping at work day and night, could never raise himself out of the secret poverty that oppressed him, because he did not hear Mass on week-days, fearing lest it might interfere too much with his work and what he expected to make by it. At last he learned to profit by the good example of his neighbor, and began to assist at Mass daily, when he soon found that his prospects were beginning to improve. As a number of men were once at work in a silver mine, a large rock fell in upon them and crushed them all to death, with the exception of one, who remained indeed alive, but was so buried by the rock that he could not get out and was on the point of perishing of hunger. After a long time some workmen happened to find him, and to their great astonishment they saw that he was alive and well. Being asked how he managed to live for a whole year (for that was the duration of his imprisonment) in that condition, he answered that every day an invisible hand brought him bread and wine and a burning candle; only three days during that time was he left without this support, nor did he know why the favor was accorded to him on the other days, and why it was denied on those three occasions. Some time after, however, he found out the reason of that, by the help of his wife; she, thinking him dead, used to hear Mass for his soul every day and to offer for him a loaf of bread, a vessel of wine, and a candle; on three occasions only did she allow herself to be deceived by the devil so as to interrupt this pious practice, and it was on those days that her husband had to do without food and

light. Surius relates that St. Clovius, being most desirous of celebrating holy Mass, got down out of his ship with a hundred and eighty persons on what he thought to be a small island. When the holy sacrifice was completed, and they had all entered the ship again, the supposed island swam away from them and sank into the sea. They then saw to their great amazement that what they imagined to be an island was in reality a huge whale. Indeed, nothing short of a miracle could have made the monster keep still while so many persons were treading on its body. But the Almighty God kept him quiet to show how pleasing to Him is the holy Mass. Cæsarius writes that a priest named Andrew set out with many other pilgrims to visit the holy sepulchre in Jerusalem. When the time came for them to return home an opportunity of a ship to convey them was offered them on Easter Sunday; the other pilgrims availed themselves of it, but Andrew refused to do so, because otherwise he would not be able to say Mass on that day. Having said Mass, he went down again to the harbor to see if there might not be a chance of catching up with the vessel by means of a fast-sailing boat. On the way he met a beautiful youth riding a splendid horse, who said to him: You have lost your passage and the company of your fellow-pilgrims for the sake of saying Mass; get up now behind me, and I will be your guide and companion. Andrew did so, and at once fell asleep. After about an hour he awoke, and the young man, who was an angel from heaven, said to him: Do you know where you are? The priest rubbed his eyes and looked all about him in astonishment; it seems to me, said he, that this is my own country, and that I see the street in which I live, my house and the houses of my neighbors, the inns near me, and my friends and acquaintances; but it is impossible that I should have reached home overland in such a short time. Yet you have fully arrived at home, answered the angel; the way was shortened for you, because you said holy Mass. Meanwhile his former companions had to contend with adverse winds and stormy weather for many weeks, and after being on their journey for some months they arrived home wearied and in evil plight, while Andrew had been transported to his home in a few minutes without the least trouble or danger. By this God wishes to teach us that neither for a journey, nor for any business whatever, do we lose the time we spend in hearing Mass. In the lives of the ancient Fathers we read that some hermits were unable to hear Mass even on Sun-

days and holy-days because the priest did not dare to cross the Nile on account of a monstrous crocodile, which rendered the passage perilous, devouring all who came within reach. When the holy hermit Helenus heard of this, he went down to the river on a Sunday and spoke to the savage beast, commanding it to carry him over the river, and to wait on the other side until he returned. The animal most obediently took the holy man on its back, and brought him across in safety. Helenus then asked the priest to come over with him, but the latter was nearly beside himself with fear, although he saw that the hermit had crossed safely. Then Helenus turned to the crocodile; I see now, he exclaimed, that thou art the means of preventing so many holy hermits from hearing Mass; as soon, therefore, as thou hast set me on dry land, thou shalt die. And the sentence was at once carried out. The holy man landed safely and the crocodile died. The priest, now freed from his fear, entered a small boat, and having crossed the river, said Mass for his brethren, who were so eagerly longing for it. In all difficulties St. Philip Neri used to take refuge in the holy Mass, by which he received from God the most miraculous graces of conversion for Jews and heretics, complete restoration to health for the sick, and many other favors for different people. We read many similar examples in the Lives of the Saints by Baronius; for instance, how many were freed from most grievous maladies, from death and the dangers of death, from shipwreck and imprisonment, from the plague of locusts and other calamities.

While the neglect of this sacrifice has often been miraculously punished by God.

But those who have neglected this holy sacrifice have found out their mistake to their great loss, both temporal and eternal. I will bring forward but a few examples. A certain citizen hearing the bell ring for Mass, said that he did not care for the Mass, and mounted his horse to take a ride. On the way a devil met him and said to him: Since you do not care for hearing Mass in your parish church, come with me and hear mine. So saying he hurled him into a deep hole and carried off his soul to hell. A lady once wished to be thought clever because she never heard Mass quite through. One day her husband wished to keep her in church, but she resisted, and a black demon seized her in sight of the people, knocked her head against the top of one of the arches of the church, and took her soul down to hell, that she might learn how much worse it is to spend an eternity there than to hear a whole Mass. A huntsman was invited to

hear Mass on the feast of a holy martyr, but said that he preferred to go a-hunting. He went and had the good fortune to kill some partridges. As he was on the point of spitting them, to enjoy them with some good friends of his, the birds were suddenly restored to life by the power of God, were again covered with feathers, and flew at him, striking him so fiercely with their claws that he became stone blind. From these and similar examples taken from ecclesiastical history we can see clearly enough that a great deal depends on the holy Mass, and that we must not think lightly of it, but rather often assist at it with due attention and devotion.

Is it, then, possible, my dear brethren, that the Catholic Church has been obliged to command her children under pain of mortal sin to hear Mass on Sundays and holy-days? Did you ever hear that it was necessary for a magistrate to compel the beggars and poor of the town under a heavy penalty to go to some rich man who daily distributes generous alms? And what else are we but poor beggars in the sight of God? If we consider ourselves from head to foot, we shall find that we are nothing but poverty and misery, and that we are every moment in need of help from the hands of God; that our wretchedness, both of soul and body, constantly requires the divine assistance. But daily an inexhaustible treasury of graces and gifts is opened to us in the holy Mass on our altars, and yet we must be compelled to go on certain days to find it! Should not our poverty be a sufficient reason for us to have recourse every day to this infallible means of obtaining favors and graces? Come, then, in all your troubles and temptations, in all your doubts, difficulties, and dangers, come to holy Mass! Give your petition into the hands of Jesus Christ, that He may present it for you to His heavenly Father; and say to Him with child-like confidence, when you wish to obtain any favor for your soul: Behold, O my God, the present I here offer Thee is infinitely great; what I ask of Thee is infinitely smaller and less valuable than what I give Thee; Thy Son has promised that Thou wilt give us whatever we ask of Thee in His name; wilt Thou, then, refuse the trifle I ask of Thee, although I make Thee such a magnificent present? No, my dear brethren, that cannot be. Ask and you shall receive! Much more shall you receive when you have the prayer and sacrifice of the Son of God interceding for you. Never let your work hinder you from this holy practice; the half-hour that you spend in it will certainly

Conclusion
and exhortation to
hear Mass
often.

bring no loss to your business, but rather blessing and increase. If sometimes you are so busy that you cannot find time to hear Mass, or so ill that you are unable to go out, then go at least in heart and desire, and offer up in your thoughts to God all the holy Masses that are said on that day. This desire will not go without its reward from the good God, who sees the heart, and takes the good will for the deed. Think of this!

TWENTY-NINTH SERMON.

ON HOW TO HEAR MASS WITH FRUIT.

Subject.

1st. Whence comes it that not all profit equally by the holy Mass? 2d. How should we assist at it so as to profit by it?—*Preached on the fifth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Et tunc veniens offeres munus tuum.—Matt. v. 24.

“And then coming, thou shalt offer thy gift.”

Introduction.

I see, then, that God is not always and on every occasion pleased with sacrifice; for the gospel of the day says: “If, therefore, thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee,” that is, that you are living in hatred, disunion, or enmity with any one, “leave there thy offering before the altar;” such a sacrifice does not please Me. “Go first to be reconciled to thy brother.” Forgive him from your heart, renew your friendship with him, and then you can return, and I will receive your sacrifice favorably: “And then coming, thou shalt offer thy gift.” I have already, my dear brethren, preached four sermons on the holy Mass, and have shown that it is an infinitely holy sacrifice, in which God offers and God is offered; that it is a sacrifice by which we offer infinite adoration, honor, and glory to the Divine Majesty; a sacrifice of atonement whereby we offer to God’s justice an infinite satisfaction for our sins; a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving whereby we offer infinite thanks to the Divine Generosity for all the bene-

fits conferred on us, and at the same time present Him with a gift of infinite value, to obtain from Him all imaginable fresh graces and favors. And yet this most holy and venerable sacrifice does not help all who assist at it in an equal degree, nor does it offer to God the same honor, gratitude, and thanksgiving on all occasions, nor do all who hear Mass derive therefrom the same advantage and fruit, or receive the same graces and favors.

Plan of Discourse.

What is the cause of that? That I shall explain in the first and longer part of this instruction. In what way should we assist at the holy Mass, in order to receive many favors and graces by it? This I shall answer briefly in the second part. To hear Mass daily shall be the conclusion of this as it has been of the other four sermons on the same subject.

Do Thou help us thereto, O Lord, by Thy forestalling grace, which we confidently expect through the hands of Mary and the intercession of our holy guardian angels.

It is true that all the holy sacraments of the New Law of Jesus Christ have a special strength and efficacy either to atone for our sins, to increase sanctifying grace and our future glory in heaven, or to obtain new graces and benefits from God. This efficacy they have not merely in virtue of the devotion with which we receive them, nor of the prayers that we say, but *ex opere operato*, as theologians say; that is, they cause grace by the work itself that is performed in them, through the infinite merits of Jesus Christ which are united to the sacramental action. This is the chief difference between the sacraments of the Jews in the Old Law and ours. The former obtained nothing from God beyond what their own prayer, devotion, fervor, reverence, and especially their belief in the coming of the Messiah, merited for them in the sacramental action. But we Christians, besides the merit of our own devotion and other good works while receiving the sacraments, gain also a great treasure of grace, which is immediately conferred on us out of the inexhaustible merits of the Passion and death of Christ; yet, according to the teaching of the holy Fathers and theologians, even our sacraments do not of themselves cause the same degree of grace in every one who receives them, but give more to some and less to others, according to the difference of disposition, capacity, and preparation on the part of the recipient. For instance, two persons go

All the sacraments of the New Law can give grace; but they do so according to our preparation.

to holy Communion on the same day, at the same time; both are in the state of grace (that must be taken as a matter of course, for no sacrament produces its effect, baptism and penance excepted, unless he who receives it is free from the guilt of mortal sin); both receive in the holy Communion Jesus Christ, the Author and Dispenser of grace; and yet one will be richer in grace than the other and will merit more, because he has prepared himself better and has more charity than the other.

Such, too, is
the case
with the
holy Mass.

It is nearly the same with the holy Mass, which contains infinite treasures and graces, because Jesus Christ, the true God, is Himself the priest and the victim therein. By virtue of this sacrifice, when we assist at it with due attention, besides the merits of our own devotion and prayers, we also gain each time something of the infinite merits and satisfaction of Jesus Christ, who offers Himself for us to His Eternal Father; we receive also those graces which we have not merited ourselves, but which Christ has merited for us, and, moreover, something is always remitted of the punishment due to our past sins by virtue of the Passion and death of Christ, which for this purpose is mystically renewed in the Mass. We obtain from God what we ask, not merely in virtue of our prayer, but also on account of that most powerful prayer which Christ offers for us on the altar, and presents to His Father in our name. And yet, not all receive an equal share of the effects, fruits, and graces of this holy sacrifice. The first part of these fruits comes to him for whom the Mass is said, whether he be living or dead, if he is still in want of it. The second part comes to him who has the Mass said by a priest selected for the purpose. The third comes to the priest himself who celebrates this holy mystery, according to the measure of his devotion and charity. The fourth comes to him who serves the Mass. The fifth, to all Christians present who assist at the holy sacrifice with due attention and devotion. The sixth, to the Church at large, and to all the faithful, especially to those whom the priest makes a particular memento for, recommending them to God.

They who
hear Mass
receive
more or less
grace ac-
cording to
their dis-
position

With regard, now, to those who assist at the holy Mass—and it is of them alone that I now speak—we must remember that the fruits of this divine sacrifice, that is, the merits, satisfaction, and the graces of Jesus Christ, are given and dispensed to them according to the measure of the devotion, reverence, fervor, and good intention with which they hear Mass. Such is the

teaching of St. Thomas. "In works of satisfaction," he says, ^{and devo-}
"more regard is paid to the devotion of the person than to the ^{tion.}
multiplicity of his sacrifices." Such, too, is the reason why the Catholic Church places in the mouth of the priest, before the consecration, in the memento of the living, the words: "And of all present whose faith and devotion are known to Thee, for whom we offer," etc. From this it follows that one man can gain greater treasures of grace in one holy Mass than another who hears ten, twenty, or thirty Masses, if the former has more devotion, reverence, and charity during the one Mass than the other in the many Masses. It is like what would happen if a large sum of money, or a spring of water, were left open for every one, to take what he likes; he who has the larger hand, or the more capacious vessel, carries off the most money or water. If his hand is small, he can take only a little money; if the vessel is narrow or full of holes, it cannot contain much water, or it allows what has been poured into it to flow out again. Let a grown-up man put his hand into the coffer, and he will take away a large sum, whereas a little child will not be able to carry off much; and if the child puts in only two fingers it will have less still; but if one who is present does not stretch out his hand at all, he will have nothing. What is the holy Mass, my dear brethren? It is an inexhaustible spring of all imaginable graces and gifts of God, which we owe to the precious blood of Jesus Christ. It is an immense treasure of the infinite merits and satisfaction of Jesus Christ, a treasure which lies open to all who assist at this sacrifice, so that they can take from it what they please. The hand that we put into the treasure, the vessel with which we draw from this spring of grace, is the faith and fervor of devotion with which we hear holy Mass. According, then, as we are more or less fervent, or tepid and cold, or distracted and utterly inattentive, we shall derive more or less fruit, or even none at all, from the holy Mass.

It seems to me that this is just what happened on Mount Calvary amongst the crowd who were looking on at the death of Our Lord. Many of them, along with the centurion and some of those who helped to nail Our Lord to the cross, received the grace of conversion and true repentance; the good thief who was crucified beside Our Lord, through his perfect contrition and detestation of his sins, received complete pardon and was assured by Christ Himself that he would be that day with Him

As was the case with the bloody sacrifice on Mount Calvary.

in paradise. St. John, in the person and name of the whole Catholic Church, received Mary, the Blessed Virgin, as his loving mother; while she adopted as her children all the faithful in the person of St. John. Magdalene and the other holy women who accompanied Our Lord to the place of execution, and remained with Him till the end, received a great increase of sanctifying grace. There were others who derived no fruit whatever, although they were present at the crucifixion, through want of faith in Jesus Christ, their Saviour; nay, many, and perhaps the greater number, on account of their blindness and obstinacy, became more hardened in guilt, made their sins more inexcusable, and increased their eternal damnation. There you have, my dear brethren, an exact picture of the different sorts of Christians who assist in our churches at the bloodless sacrifice of the Mass. Some hundreds of Catholics hear Mass at the same time in the same church, in which the adorable flesh and blood of Christ is offered up to God for all of them, while the same inexhaustible spring of grace, the same infinite treasure, lies open to each and every one; but if we could see the state of their souls when they come out of the church after the holy sacrifice, we should find a great difference between them. Some return home striking their breasts like the people on Calvary the Gospel speaks of: "they returned striking their breasts."¹ For many Christians, after having heard holy Mass, are converted by the virtue of that adorable sacrifice, and return home justified before God. Others are clothed with a still more beautiful robe of sanctifying grace than that which they brought to church. Many a one goes away just as poor and miserable as when he came, without having gained the least merit. Many a one, like the scribes and high-priests, who assisted at the death of the Son of God for the sole purpose of mocking and laughing at His sufferings, comes away from the holy sacrifice still more abominable, and deformed, and hardened in guilt than he was before.

Hence they have little or nothing to expect who hear Mass without devotion.

For, what advantage can they expect who hear holy Mass through mere fashion and routine? who are present in the body only, while their minds and hearts are a thousand miles away? who do not consider what this sacrifice is, and why it is offered, and therefore have neither a lively faith nor a good supernatural intention? who, during the whole time of Mass almost, allow

¹ Percutientes pectora sua revertabantur.—Luke *xxiii.* 48.

their thoughts, desires, and eyes to roam about unchecked? who on Sundays and holy-days, through fear of eternal damnation and on account of the command of the Church, seek out the shortest Mass they can find? for, half-an-hour seems too long for them, and they are impatient for the Mass to come to an end. I would not give much for the merit gained by such people. They have had a vast treasure in their power, but did not think it worth while to stretch forth their hands to seize it; they were at a spring of grace, but the vessels they carried were full of holes, so that not a drop of the heavenly water remains to them. And what are we to think of those half-Christians, who misbehave in such a manner during the holy Mass that all pious Catholics must be scandalized at them? For they hardly bend both knees even at the elevation, when the great God is held up for public adoration; they keep on laughing and talking, and reading the news, and speaking of it; nay, they cast their impure eyes, thoughts, and desires on others, to whom they make more profound reverences than to their God who is offered for them on the altar; and often their only object in going to church is to conduct thither some fashionable dame, or to bring her home again. What advantage can such people expect to find in the holy Mass? Truly, the only treasure they will gain from it will be that of which St. Paul speaks: "But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath, against the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his works."¹ Instead of paying due honor to the Divine Majesty in the holy Mass, they offer Him the greatest insults and injuries; instead of satisfying the Divine Justice for their sins, they make themselves guilty of fresh sacrilegious sins; instead of receiving many graces and favors from the goodness of God, they place a rod in the hands of the Divine Justice to chastise themselves, and thus wickedly pervert the means of salvation into one of destruction to their souls and deeper damnation in eternity.

And that is what the devil seeks to do with all his might among Christians. You may not, perhaps, have heard what Pic de la Mirandole so beautifully says, that in all the false religions and sects in the world, and among heathens and infidels, never is the least irreverence to be seen amongst those present in their

And that is
what the
devil wish-
es.

¹ Secundum autem duritiam tuam et impenitens cor thesaurizas tibi iram in die iræ et revelationis justi iudicii Dei, qui reddet unicuique secundum opera ejus.—Rom. ii. 5, 6.

religious rites, because those rites give the devil little trouble; they are false sacrifices, from which men have little good to hope; and therefore he does not interfere in such superstitious practices; nay, since the honor of them comes to him alone, he tries to increase the devotion and reverence of those present at them. But since the devil knows well that the holy Mass is the only true sacrifice of our Catholic religion, and that it is of the greatest advantage to the faithful, while it inflicts the greatest harm on himself, there is nothing he desires more than to keep men from it altogether, or, if he cannot succeed in this, to inspire them with such tepidity and carelessness that, instead of benefiting them, it will rather be a means of adding to their sins and increasing their damnation.

Shown by a
simile.

In the fourth chapter of the First Book of Kings we read that the Israelites, being on the point of attacking the Philistines, had the Ark of God brought into the camp; and hardly had it arrived, when they set up cries of joy and exultation: "And when the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord was come into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, and the earth rang again."¹ But in the enemies' camp nothing was heard but moaning and lamentation; alas, they cried out, we are lost! "God is come into the camp. And sighing, they said: Woe to us. Who shall deliver us from the hands of these high Gods? these are the Gods that struck Egypt with all the plagues in the desert."² What shall we do? But they tried to encourage one another: "Take courage and behave like men, ye Philistines; lest you come to be servants to the Hebrews, as they have served you; take courage and fight."³ The greater the help our enemies receive, the greater will be our triumph when we shall have succeeded in overcoming them and bringing them under our yoke, even in the presence of their God. Mark, my dear brethren, how like this is to the conduct of the enemies of our souls. When the holy Mass begins, all the demons tremble with fear and dread; God is come into the camp of the Christians, they exclaim. Alas, we are lost! all our designs will be brought to nothing if we cannot do something to protect ourselves. This

¹ Cumque venisset arca Dei in castra, vociferatus est omnis Israel clamore grandi, et personuit terra.—I. Kings iv. 5.

² Venit Deus in castra; et ingemuerunt, dicentes: vae nobis; quis nos salvabit de manu Deorum sublimium istorum? hi sunt Dei qui percusserunt Ægyptum omni plaga in deserto.—Ibid. 7, 8.

³ Confortamini et estote viri Philistæi; ne serviatis Hebræis, sicut et illi servierunt vobis; confortamini et bellate.—Ibid. 9.

is the Mass at which Antony, Francis, and other men of the world made the resolution of declaring war on us; this is the Mass which has rescued so many souls from our grasp. What are we to do? Let us take courage, and redouble our vigilance and strength. See, there is a crowd of people hastening to the church; quick! run after them in all haste; there are sinners among them; if they hear Mass with attention and devotion, God will touch their hearts and convert them, so that they will be lost to us and be freed from our yoke. There are just men among them; if they hear Mass devoutly, God will so strengthen and protect them by fresh graces and helps that we shall never be able to overcome them again with all our snares and temptations. Go, then, and fill their imaginations with all kinds of thoughts, their minds with distractions, so that they may not attend to the sacrifice; see that they find some companion who will engage them in conversation, and keep them talking and listening to the news; or else see that some person comes in their way whose dress or appearance will attract their attention. In that way, in spite of their God who is present on the altar, we shall prevent them from deriving fruit from the Mass, and will bring many of them into our clutches by the sins they will commit.

So it is in reality, my dear brethren, and that is the reason why we are so poor in spite of the treasure we have at our command, and make the spring of salvation a source of eternal damnation. Ah, Christians, let not that be the case with us; let us not give the devil that satisfaction, but be more prudent in the affair of our salvation! But how? In what manner should we assist at this holy sacrifice so as to derive the greatest fruit and advantage from it? This I shall briefly explain in the—

Second Part.

The chief thing necessary to hear Mass with profit to our souls, and that on which all the rest depends, is, as we can readily conclude from what has been said, due attention, reverence, and fervent devotion during the whole time of the holy sacrifice. We shall have and retain that devotion and reverence if, on entering the church, or when the priest is going to the altar, we remember with a lively faith what has been said in the four last sermons; that is, that now is about to commence that incomprehensible mystery of the renewal of the Passion and death of Christ, at

We should
hear Mass
with devout
attention
and a lively
faith.

which the heavenly spirits cover their faces and tremble with awe; in which the Son of God is the high-priest who offers, and also the victim who is offered to God; by which infinite honor is given to the Most Blessed Trinity, while the goodness of God receives an infinite thanksgiving for His benefits, His justice an infinite atonement for all the sins of the world, and to us mortals is thus opened an infinite treasure of all imaginable graces.

With a pure
intention.

This thought must necessarily fill us with a holy awe and a great desire to assist at such an adorable sacrifice with the most perfect intention; and that intention is the other requisite to hear Mass with profit. It may be formed for the fourfold end already mentioned, in the following or some similar way: I prostrate myself with the utmost humility, sunk in my own nothingness, before Thy face, O Lord worthy of all love and honor, and I offer Thee with the priest this sacrifice of the flesh and blood of Thy Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, which alone is befitting Thee, and unite myself completely in life and death according to Thy holy will with that same sacrifice. I offer it to Thee for Thy infinite honor and glory, in public recognition of Thy supreme dominion over me and all creatures, as a sign of my subjection to Thy divine power; in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, of my holy guardian angel and patron saints; as a sacrifice of thanksgiving for all the benefits conferred on me and all creatures; to appease Thy just anger against me, a poor sinner; in satisfaction for my sins and those of the whole world; to lessen and blot out the punishment that the souls in purgatory still owe Thy justice; to obtain for me and mine from Thy Divine Majesty all the graces necessary to serve Thee faithfully to the end of our lives, and to serve Thee with zeal; to obtain Thy help in my present necessity and in the tribulation from which Thou knowest I am suffering, so that it may be good for my soul; and, finally, for the intention which Thou, O God, knowest to be most pleasing to Thyself. There, my dear brethren, you have a form of intention for hearing holy Mass, such as you can find easily in any prayer-book.

Intention
for the ig-
norant, who
cannot read.

They who do not understand it, or who through want of schooling cannot read, would do well to imitate the example of the companion of our holy Father Ignatius, St. Francis Xavier, and others of the Society. As they were once on their way to Spain, they overtook on the road a simple-minded but good and pious man, who earnestly begged of them to allow him to carry their bun-

dles, a request they had to grant at last. Every morning before leaving the place in which they had passed the night, they spent a full hour in the meditation of heavenly things, according to the rule and custom in our Society. The good man imitated them, and knelt down in a corner of the room until they had finished their devotions. The Fathers were astonished at this, and asked him one day during the journey how he managed to spend a whole hour in prayer on his knees. Hear, my dear brethren, the wise answer of this pious man. "I think to myself," said he, "O my God, these are holy people, and I am only their beast of burden; I know not how to speak with Thee, O Lord! But I unite my intention with theirs, and wish to say to Thee what they are now thinking and saying." By this means He attained eventually to great perfection and holiness of life. There you have a holy way of forming an intention for hearing Mass. In the beginning of Mass you must, then, say with that good man: My Sovereign God, I am but a poor beast of burden; I have not studied, and know not how to speak to Thee, nor how to act becomingly during this holy sacrifice; but I unite my intention with that of Jesus Christ, and wish to say to Thee all that He says in this sacred mystery; I offer Thee that most submissive service and self-abasement of Thy Son, the elevation of His mind, the fervor and love of His Heart, that most perfect adoration and thanksgiving He offers Thee in our name, the satisfaction He presents Thee for our sins, the powerful prayer He sends forth to Thy throne for me and others, the infinite merits He has heaped up for us. And I beg of Thee most humbly, O loving Saviour, intercede in this sacrifice for me with Thy heavenly Father, that He may grant me the graces which Thou knowest to be best for my salvation. Believe me, my dear brethren, that an intention of this kind is not a foolish one, but, when it comes from a well-meaning heart, is rather most pleasing to God and profitable for the soul.

If you were to do nothing else during the whole Mass but kneel down, and with folded hands and eyes downcast, or directed to the altar, keep on continually renewing that intention in thought, thus fixing your whole heart on the adorable sacrifice, you would hear Mass in a most excellent and profitable manner. A pious soul once said: I am sometimes filled with such darkness in the mind, and such dryness and want of fervor in spirit, that I sit there like a stock or a stone, and cannot say one devout prayer;

That intention should be kept alive during the whole Mass.

yet I do not interrupt my prayer, but keep myself during the holy Mass always in presence of Jesus Christ, my Saviour, just as a hungry dog lies down at his master's table, expecting to get the crumbs that fall from it. Think of this, pious Christians, who mean well towards your God, if you find no pleasure or fervor even in the thoughts of God Himself when you are engaged in works of devotion; by thus humbly placing yourselves before Him, that most generous God, you will receive and merit more from Him than you would on other occasions by long, fervent prayers filled with consolations. Finally, they who, after having made an intention of that kind, read their prayer-books or say the rosary during Mass, a practice which is not to be despised by any means, should unite their prayer with that which Jesus Christ offers His heavenly Father for us in this holy sacrifice, and briefly renew their intention several times, especially in the three chief parts of the Mass, the Offertory, the Consecration, and the Communion; and if they are saying the rosary, they could cast a flying thought at the holy sacrifice when they come to the name Jesus in the Hail Mary; for instance, "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus, who now offers Himself for us to His Eternal Father." It was often my intention to ask you to do that during the morning devotions, and to repeat those words all together in a loud voice, but I was afraid that the introduction of a new practice might cause confusion on account of its novelty. Therefore you might accustom yourselves to this practice privately during Mass; thus you will keep your hearts and minds fixed on the holy mystery, your devotion will be increased, and you will be saved from all distracting thoughts.

Conclusion
thus to hear
Mass in fu-
ture with
great profit.

O dear Christians, if we thus heard holy Mass every day, what great honor and glory we should give to God; how we should blot out the punishment due to our sins; what an immense treasure of merits we should heap up for eternity; what copious graces and benefits we should ask and obtain from the Divine Liberality! Then would be verified in us the words that St. Paul wrote to those Christians who knew how to profit by Jesus Christ: "I give thanks to my God always for you, for the grace of God that is given you in Christ Jesus: that in all things you are made rich in Him, so that nothing is wanting to you in any grace."¹ Ah, would to God that I had known this before, and had al-

¹ Gratias ago Deo meo semper pro vobis in gratia Dei, quæ data est vobis in Christo Jesu; quod in omnibus divites facti estis in illo, ita ut nihil vobis desit in ulla gratia.—I. Cor. i. 4, 5, 7.

ways heard Mass in that way! Hitherto I have heard Mass, and perhaps more than one daily, and yet I did not rightly understand what a precious mystery it is, and what immense graces God had prepared for me in it. Therefore in future I will hear Mass with such faith, intention, devotion, attention, and reverence, that I may merit after this short life to see face to face that God and Saviour whom I now adore and offer on the altar under the appearances of bread and wine. Amen.

ON GRATITUDE TO GOD.

THIRTIETH SERMON.

ON THE REASON WE HAVE FOR BEING GRATEFUL TO GOD.

Subject.

God deserves and expects from us mortals a constant, unceasing gratitude.—*Preached on the thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Cecidit in faciem ante pedes ejus, gratias agens.—Luke xvii. 16.
“He fell on his face before His feet, giving thanks.”

Introduction.

Amongst all the moral virtues none appears to be dearer and more pleasing to God than gratitude. This is what Tertullian says of to-day's Gospel. The ten lepers came to Jesus and begged of Him to heal them. They “lifted up their voice, saying: Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” “Go,” said our merciful Lord to them, “show yourselves to the priests;” that is, as the law then required, offer the sacrifice prescribed for lepers. And while they were yet on the way, they were healed of their loathsome disease. What happened? “One of them, when he saw that he was made clean, went back, with a loud voice glorifying God, and he fell on his face before His feet, giving thanks.” Mark, my dear brethren, how this Samaritan did not go on as he was told, to show himself to the priests. He forgot both temple and sacrifice in his eagerness to return and thank his Benefactor. And what is still more remarkable, Christ publicly praised him who thus came back, nor did He urge on him the necessity of offering the sacrifice commanded, but said to him: “Arise, go thy way; for thy faith hath made thee whole.” Why was that? “Because,” says Tertullian, “he had already made a sufficient

offering in giving glory to God;”¹ it was not necessary for him to offer any other sacrifice, because gratitude is the most pleasing of all the gifts that can be offered to God. It is of this gratitude to God that I am now beginning to speak, and I say, as the groundwork of my subject—

Plan of Discourse.

God deserves and expects from us mortals a constant, unceasing gratitude. Such is the whole subject of this sermon. O most generous God, we know and publicly acknowledge that we cannot return Thee adequate thanks for the innumerable benefits Thou hast bestowed on us. Add, then, this benefit to the rest, and urge us by Thy grace to unceasing gratitude!

This we beg of Thee through Thy merits and those of Thy holy Mother Mary and our holy guardian angels.

There is nothing that binds the hearts and minds of men closer together than benefits; and therefore the philosopher Aristotle says with reason: “he who receives a benefit finds fetters;”² for they chain his heart, as it were, and compel it by a sort of violence to be grateful to his benefactor. A natural instinct impels me to love him who does me good. But after all, to whom am I talking? To reasoning beings in a Catholic church, or to wild beasts in a forest? Even in the latter case I need not urge the obligation of gratitude, nor that of loving and honoring benefactors; for even the most savage animals are tamed by kindness, and allow themselves to be led about anywhere by those who are kind to them, while they show their gratitude by fawning on and caressing them. Even the most savage animals, I say; for experience teaches us daily of domestic animals, such as horses, oxen, cats, and especially dogs, with what wonderful fidelity and unwearied love they wait on man, their master, obey his behests in all things, no matter how difficult, and that, too, for the coarse and indifferent food they receive from him. How great the faithfulness, obedience, and submission of the dog to his master! Day and night he is ready at all times to defend him against robbers and murderers; and even when his master chastises him, he does not make any opposition, or show his teeth, but lies down at his feet and shows his willing-

Even wild animals are grateful to those who are kind to them.

¹ Satis jam obtulerat gloriam Deo reddens.—Tertul., l. 4 contra Marc.

² Qui beneficium invenit, compedes invenit.

ness to obey in all things. Why? Because his master feeds him. In what does that food consist? In a piece of bread that fell from the table, or a bone thrown to him.

Shown by
examples.

And according to Pliny, St. Basil, and others, lions, dragons, panthers, crocodiles, serpents are not a whit behind domestic animals in this way. It was a lion that astonished the whole city of Rome, when on one occasion a malefactor was sentenced to be thrown before him to be devoured. When the fierce animal saw the man, he lay down at his feet, licking them like a dog, and defended him against the other wild animals that ran up to attack him. What was the reason of this proceeding? Three years before, that same man had seen that lion in the desert suffering great pain from a thorn in his paw; he drew out the thorn and healed the wound. In the city of Carthage two fierce lions, that were tamed by kindness, used to follow Hannó through the streets like dogs. A panther once laid aside its natural ferocity and brought in safety through a forest beset with robbers a man who had lifted up its young out of a deep hole into which they had fallen. A terrible dragon once defended a man from the attacks of murderers and saved his life, because it had been brought up with that man while both were still young. Many similar instances are on record of eagles, storks, and serpents. True, then, are the words of Seneca, that "even wild beasts are sensible of kindness, nor is there any animal so savage as not to be tamed by diligence and made to love its benefactor."¹

Much more,
then, should
rational
creatures
see the ne-
cessity of
gratitude.

And yet, my dear brethren, I wish to show reasoning beings, and they, too, Catholic Christians, that a benefactor deserves to be regarded with feelings of thankfulness? Truly, there cannot be the least doubt of that, nor is there any one who will not see at a glance that such is the case. Therefore I cannot sufficiently express my astonishment at the envious Scribes and Pharisees. "The Pharisees therefore said among themselves," so we read in the Gospel of St. John, "do you see that we prevail nothing? behold, the whole world is gone after Him."² They spoke thus because they saw with great amazement that crowds of people were following Christ everywhere, in town and country; see, they exclaimed, how the people are all running after Him. O senseless Pharisees! what are you wondering at? Have you not

¹ *Officia etiam feræ sentiunt, nec ullum tam immansuetum animal est, quod non cura mitiget, et in amorem sui vertet.*

² *Pharisæi ergo dixerunt ad semetipsos: videtis quia nihil proficimus? ecce mundus totus post eum abiit.—John xii. 19.*

heard or seen how Christ acted towards the people? He "went about doing good and healing all."¹ Wherever He goes He does good; He fed the people miraculously in the desert; He healed the sick, made the blind to see, the lame to walk; He cleansed lepers, and freed those possessed by the devil; He comforted the sorrowful, raised the dead to life, and did good to all. And yet you are surprised that such a crowd of people should follow their Sovereign Benefactor? Reason itself, then, my dear brethren, convinces us, and we all readily agree, that we owe gratitude and love to one from whom we have received benefits.

Now to our subject. Who of us will refuse to acknowledge that we are surrounded on all sides by the proofs of God's goodness? What we have been up to this, what we still are, and what we hope to be in eternity is all an effect of the perfect goodness of God. I will reserve for a future occasion the enumeration of the particular benefits we owe Him. Let it suffice for the present to say, that whatever we have in or outside ourselves is nothing but a gift bestowed on us by God. Nothing but a gift, I say, and such a one as we cannot find amongst men on earth; because, no matter how generous one is, there is always some admixture of selfishness found in his generosity. He seeks his own advantage more than that of the person to whom he does good; he is generous because he hopes to get something better in return; or through a sense of duty and obligation, because he has first experienced the other's goodness; or because he is in need of a patron or advocate; or because he is afraid of being looked on by men as niggardly; and thus worldly policy is the motive of his generosity; or else a sense of decency and fitness impels him to do good to his own relations and friends; or because he has a sensual attachment to a person, and thus he seeks the gratification of his passions; or, finally (and this is the purest and best motive for being generous), he is influenced by Christian charity and mercy to the poor, and even in this latter case he still seeks his own advantage, namely, the rich reward that God has promised him in the next life; or, else, he seeks the spiritual consolation that arises from the consciousness of having done a good work that is pleasing to God. Hence we cannot find a purely unselfish generosity amongst men. It is God alone who does good at every moment through the most perfect generosity, seeking nothing else but to do us good. For

All we have and are is a benefit from God, such as we cannot expect from man.

¹ *Pertransiit benefaciendo et sanando omnes.*—Acts x. 38.

what other motive could He have? He has nothing to expect from us; no evil to fear, no good to hope for. We must all say to Him with the Prophet: "Thou art my God, for Thou hast no need of my goods."¹ Thou art not in need of my gifts, nor of my love, nor can I add to or take away from Thy infinite happiness. Whether Thou lovest me, and doest good to me, or not, Thou art still the same in all things, and art infinitely happy in Thyself alone; nay, the very gratitude Thou expectest from us brings Thee no profit, but is rather a fresh benefit that we receive from Thee, since Thy grace must help us to be grateful. Thus God has no gain whatever beyond His own honor and glory from His liberality; all He looks for is our good. Prudent, therefore, was the action of that prince of whom our Father Drexelius writes; just before his death he was suffering great pain, and asked for something to drink; the desired refreshment was brought to him. His friends and courtiers were standing round. With the intention of drinking this last parting cup to those whom he loved best in this world, he turned his glassy eyes to those present and asked them one after the other if they would respect his last wishes. They all assured him of their readiness to do so, when, looking round the room once more, he caught sight of the crucifix, and fixing his eyes on it, he cried out with all his heart: Thee alone, O my crucified Saviour, can I look on as my best and dearest friend, and the truest I have ever found in this world. And so it is in reality, my dear brethren; our only true friend and benefactor is the almighty God.

Justly, then does God expect constant gratitude from us, as He always requires from men in the Law of Nature.

If, then, nature prompts us to be grateful to a man who is kind to us, although his motive is not an unselfish one; nay, if we feel bound to make some return even to irrational animals, to a dog, for instance, for services they render us when we compel them to do so: how constant should not our gratitude be to the most generous God, who does good to us out of pure liberality! And the Lord expects that from us and has expected it at all times in the history of the world. In the very beginning, after He had created all things in six days, "He blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it."² Why so? "That we might remember His goodness to us," is the answer given by Cajetan.³ Adam and Eve, our first parents, had been created the day before in

¹ Deus meus es tu, quoniam bonorum meorum non eges.—Ps. xv. 2.

² Benedixit diei septimo, et sanctificavit illum.—Gen. ii. 3.

³ Ad recolenda divina beneficia.

paradise, so that, when they saw the various creatures that He had made for their use, they might hold a feast of thanksgiving to their bounteous Creator; therefore the Lord made the seventh day a holy one. Afterwards, when He was on the point of destroying the sinful world by the deluge, He commanded the Patriarch Noe to take all kinds of beasts with him into the ark; but note the number He wished him to take of each kind: "Of all clean beasts take seven and seven."¹ But why was that the number fixed on, since those beasts were kept for the purpose of increasing afterwards? I will tell you, says St. John Chrysostom; God wished to have one more than the necessary number, that the animal that was over might be sacrificed to Him, when the flood was at an end, as an offering of thanksgiving.² Thus even beforehand the providence of God supplied man with the means of at once proving his gratitude for the divine benefits.

In the Old Law, whenever God bestowed some special benefit on His people, He always added a strict command to keep the anniversary of the day holy, and to celebrate it by a thanksgiving feast. Thus even at the present day the Jews, although their religion is no longer the true one, still keep up the old tradition of returning special thanks to God for having preserved their forefathers in life on the night when He slew all the first-born of the Egyptians. In the same way they celebrate the memory of their passing through the Red Sea, of their having been so wonderfully saved from their enemies, of their having been fed with bread from heaven, and so on. For the same reason they were commanded to keep in the Ark a piece of the manna, to remind them constantly of the gratitude they owed to God; "because," says St. Thomas of Aquin, "the manna was given to the people by the Divine Mercy, and therefore it was kept in memory of that mercy."³ Nay, says St. John Chrysostom, all the sacrifices of the Old Law were intended for no other purpose but to excite the people to gratitude.⁴ Such, too, is the meaning of the third commandment: Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. Remember,—what is the meaning of that? The word is not made use of in the other commandments. God does not say, remember to honor thy father and thy mother; re-

In the Written Law.

¹ Ex omnibus animantibus mundi tolle septena et septena.—Gen. vii. 2.

² Ut de impari numero statim posset offerre.

³ Quia manna ex divina misericordia est populo suo datum, et ideo in memoriam divinæ misericordiæ conservabatur.

⁴ Propter nihil aliud sacrificia fieri permisit Deus, quam ut gratitudinem ad omnes adduceret.

member that thou shalt not kill, or steal, or commit adultery. But He does say, Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. Why? That we may understand, says Cajetan, that the keeping holy of the seventh day is not pleasing to God on account of abstaining from servile works, but chiefly on account of the grateful remembrance we should then have of the benefits conferred on us by Him during the week. Remember! This is the thought we should foster every Sunday and holy-day, instead of profaning those days with idly walking about, drinking, gambling and dancing, and other amusements, as is unfortunately too often the case.

More justly
still does
He expect
it from us
Christians.

Now, if the Lord required such constant gratitude from His people in the Old Law, the law of fear and terror, which was but a figure of our Gospel Law, what constant gratitude has He not reason to expect from His Christians, from His children under the New Law, the law of love, that holy and perfect law, which is filled with such extraordinary gifts and graces? Hear what the Apostle St. Paul says of this: "All whatsoever you do in word or in work, all things do ye in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him."¹ And, again, to the Ephesians: "Giving thanks always for all things, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to God and the Father."² And to the Thessalonians: "In all things give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you all."³ Mark how he says that we should always give thanks without ceasing; for God never ceases for a moment showering down His benefits on us. If a man does good to me, the benefit ceases when it is conferred, as far as he is concerned; it lasts no longer than the help rendered me, or the enjoyment of the gift presented to me. But God is constant in doing good to me, so that I can say with truth, not only that all I have and am comes from Him, and was given me by Him either in my creation or afterwards, but I must also acknowledge that the same good God continues to give me all I have and am every moment of my life; for every moment, in preserving my being, He, as it were, creates it anew. Now, if I should never forget a benefit conferred on me by a man,

¹ Omne quodcumque facitis, aut in verbo aut in opere; omnia in nomine Domini Jesu Christi facite, gratias agentes Deo et Patri per ipsum.—Coloss. iii. 17.

² Gratias agentes semper pro omnibus in nomine Domini nostri Jesu Christi Deo et Patri.—Ephes. v. 20.

³ In omnibus gratias agite; hæc est enim voluntas Dei in Christo Jesu in omnibus vobis. — I. Thess. v. 18.

although many years may have passed since then, and the enjoyment of the benefit is at an end, truly, then I am much more bound to remember the goodness of God, who never ceases showering down benefits on me, and to whose generosity I owe every minute of my life. That is what the Apostle means by the words, "Giving thanks always for all things, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to God and the Father."

St. Basil, explaining the words of the same Apostle, "Whether you eat or drink," etc.,¹ says beautifully, If you sit down to table, pray in your heart, and give thanks to God; if you are eating bread, thank Him who feeds you; if you are dressing in the morning, return thanks to God, who has provided you with clothing. When you rise in the morning, thank God for having preserved you during the night. When you are going to rest, thank Him for having saved you from many a danger during the day. When you are studying or working, thank God for having given you an understanding or bodily strength. When you look up to heaven, or see the gardens, fields, and forests that are on the earth, thank God for having made such beautiful things for you. This was the meaning of the fire that God commanded Moses to keep always burning on the altar: "And the fire on the altar shall always burn, and the priest shall feed it, putting wood on it every day in the morning. This is the perpetual fire which shall never go out on the altar."² There you have a figure representing what our gratitude to God should be, as the learned Philo explains; for, as the gifts and graces of God never cease descending on us day and night, so should the flame of our gratitude be always fed, that it may never be extinguished.³ Hence comes that holy custom in most religious communities of the members using, instead of the usual greeting, the words, *Deo gratias*, thanks be to God, and being answered in the same terms. That custom, according to the opinion of St. Jerome and St. Bonaventure, owes its origin to the Blessed Virgin. It was observed by the martyrs in the midst of their torments, for they kept on crying out to the last moment of their lives, thanks be to God! thanks be to Christ, our God! And how earnestly the Catholic Church exhorts us to this per-

Nor should that gratitude ever cease.

¹ Sive ergo manducatis, sive bibitis, etc.—I. Cor. x. 31.

² Ignis autem in altari semper ardebit, quem nutriet sacerdos subiciens ligna mane per singulos dies. Ignis est iste perpetuus, qui nunquam deficiet in altari.—Le rit. vi. 12, 13.

³ Gratiarum actionem hæc sacra flamma figurat semper instaurandam, ne quando extinguatur.

petual thanksgiving! Daily we hear in the holy Mass before the Sanctus, "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God," and the server answers, "it is meet and just." "It is truly meet and just, right and salutary," continues the priest, "that we should always and in all places give thanks to Thee, holy Lord, almighty Father, eternal God, through Christ Our Lord." Thus God deserves and expects from us mortals a constant gratitude for the benefits He unceasingly pours down upon us.

Many Christians promise to be grateful when they are in distress, but do not afterwards keep their promise.

What is our conduct in this respect, my dear brethren? The whole day we spend in the enjoyment of the divine benefits. Do we think even once with attentive minds of our Sovereign Benefactor, and return Him due thanks? Yes, truly, when there is danger of some calamity, or temporal loss, or misfortune, or of the death of a dear child or friend, then, indeed, we can speak our God fairly; then we are ready to promise mountains of gold to prove our gratitude if He will only save us from the evil we dread. Nor are we to be found fault with so far. But when the danger and dread of the evil are past, and we have obtained what we sought for from heaven, how do we act then? It is even a great thing if we acknowledge that the Lord God is our special benefactor. But where is our promise? Are we eager to show our constant thankfulness by being more zealous in the divine service, by loving God better, by more carefully avoiding the dangers and occasions of sin, by shunning even deliberate venial sin? Ah, far from it. The remembrance of the divine generosity soon fades, and little or nothing of what we promised is fulfilled. "They are importunate in asking," says St. Bernard of most men, "uneasy until they have received, and ungrateful afterwards."¹ They resemble the camel that kneels down and bows itself to the earth to receive its burden; and when the load is secured on its back, it gets up again and goes on its way.

Shown by a simile.

A heathen, who was so dangerously ill that the physician despaired of his recovery, besought the god Jupiter to help him, promising that he would be ever grateful to him and sacrifice a hundred oxen as a thanksoffering. One of his domestics, who knew that the poor man was not able to make such an offering, reproved him for making a promise he could not fulfil. Fool, said the sick man to him, what difference does that make? A

¹ Importuni ut accipiant; inquieti donec accipiant; ingrati ubi acceperint.—S. Bern. l. iv. de. Confid.

promise costs nothing, and if by means of it I can recover my health, it will be well bestowed. Do you think that Jupiter will perhaps come down from his throne on Olympus to demand the fulfilment of my promise? I do not think so myself; I rather imagine he will not trouble himself about the matter. Such conduct in a blind heathen may be excused. But it is a deplorable fact that many Christians do not act better to the true God. During public calamities, or private misfortunes, oh, what beautiful promises are sent forth to heaven! what seemingly strong resolutions of amendment! what fervent determinations to love God in future! But the result shows that all these fine promises are like that of the heathen. You must know, however, that our God is not a god of wood or stone, who may be deceived by flattery and be cozened. To humble one's self before God, to speak Him fairly, to adore Him and beseech Him under pressure of calamity, or when there is something of importance to be obtained from Him, that is neither love nor gratitude, but selfishness and egotism.

True gratitude shows itself after the benefit has been received, and consists in the constant recollection of and thanksgiving for the goodness of God, that never ceases. The Prophet David had a correct idea of this when he foresaw the great victory that king Ezechias would gain over the Assyrians, and spoke thus to God about it: "The thought of man shall give praise to Thee; and the remainders of the thought shall keep holiday to Thee;"¹ that is, they will return Thee such thanks that they will be as pleasing to Thee as an agreeable feast-day. Mark those words, "The remainders of the thought shall keep holiday to Thee." Why did he not say that of the first thought, thus: "the thought of man shall keep holiday to Thee?" No; he says, that will bless and honor Thee: "The thought of man shall give praise to Thee." Why this difference? Because, answers de Lyra, it is a usual and common mode of gratitude to acknowledge the benefit received and return thanks for it at the moment when one receives it; but to retain it in one's memory, and whenever it recurs in thought to bless and honor God on account of it, that it is which makes an agreeable feast-day in the sight of God, and that is the gratitude which the pious Ezechias showed to God. "For he gave thanks to God, not only when the benefit

Gratitude
must al-
ways show
itself by
works.

¹ Cogitatio hominis confitebitur tibi; et reliquæ cogitationis diem festum agent tibi.—Ps. lxxv. 11.

was conferred, but also ever afterwards when it recurred to his memory.”¹ And ingratitude does not consist so much in not repaying a benefit, for that might be impossible to those whose poverty makes them unable to give anything; nor in the fact that one does not return unceasing thanks to his benefactor, for the absence of the latter might often render that also impossible; but, as the wise Seneca says, the worst form of ingratitude is to forget the benefits received.²

After the
example of
true ser-
vants of
God.

Therefore Lia gave her son the name Simeon, which means, “The Lord hears;” Anna called her son Samuel, “Asked of God.” The object of both mothers was that they might never see their sons without feeling their hearts moved by gratitude to God, who gave them to their prayer. The holy Pope Pius V., while still a religious, was once on a journey, and was obliged to take shelter with a poor peasant, who did what he could to make his guest comfortable. When after a lapse of many years Pius was raised to the papal throne, he happened to see this very peasant among a crowd of people at the door of a church. He recognized him at once, sent for him, and asked if he remembered how so and so many years ago he had given shelter to a Dominican monk. Truly, said the man, I have forgotten all about it. I am that monk, replied the Pope, and I have not forgotten to this day how good you were to me on that occasion; I am now fully able to recompense you. He then gave two thousand Roman crowns to the peasant’s two daughters, and to the man himself five hundred crowns, besides a yearly allowance. What I am most surprised at in this incident, my dear brethren, is not the generosity of the Pope in thus recompensing a slight service, but the wonderful memory he showed in not forgetting it; for it was dark night when he saw the peasant, and yet he recognized him at once the first time he saw him again after a lapse of many years, and after he himself had been raised to the highest dignity. From this I must conclude how grateful that holy man must have been to God, his Sovereign Benefactor, since he remembered for such a long time the small service that man rendered him.

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion to be al-
ways grate-
ful to God.

I conclude, my dear brethren, with the words of St. John Chrysostom, “Let us not forget the benefits conferred on us by God, but always keep the recollection of them alive, that we may

¹ Quia non solum egit gratias Deo semel, quando liberatus fuit, sed etiam post ea, quando istud beneficium occurrebat memoriæ.

² Ingratissimus omnium, qui oblitus est.

be thus urged to continual gratitude for them.”¹ Let us not allow wild animals even to surpass us in gratitude. O my God, to my shame I must acknowledge that I have been more senseless than the brute beasts in this particular. There is no one in the whole world from whom I have received and hope to receive more and greater benefits than from Thee, O most generous Lord; and, alas, there are none that I forget quicker, and for which I show less gratitude. The whole day long Thou dost not cease doing good to me; but how often have I returned Thee evil for good! Pardon, O Lord, my base ingratitude and forgetfulness. In future, like Thy servant David, “I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall be always in my mouth.”² Never will I cease to praise and bless Thee. I will bless Thee in the morning, and give Thee due praise; I will bless Thee in the evening, and with thankful heart recall the benefits conferred on me during the day; I will bless Thee the whole day in all my thoughts, words, and actions, which I shall direct to Thy honor and glory by the good intention; I will bless and thank Thee my whole life long, and will be especially careful not to offend Thee, my Sovereign Benefactor, by a deliberate sin; I will bless Thee every hour and moment, until, as I hope, from thanking Thee in this life, I shall be able to thank and bless Thee for eternity in Thy kingdom of heaven. Amen.

THIRTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF GRATITUDE TO GOD.

Subject.

God expects us to be grateful for the benefits He confers on us, His sole object therein being that He may be able to do us still more good; therefore we should at once offer Him our constant gratitude for even the least benefit.—*Preached on the fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Quærite ergo primum regnum Dei et justitiam ejus, et hæc omnia adjicientur vobis.—Matt. vi. 33.

¹ Non obliviscamur Dei beneficia in nos collocata, sed semper ea in mente nostra versemur, ut ad continuam gratiarum actionem mentem nostram compellant.

² Benedicam Dominum in omni tempore, semper laus ejus in ore meo.—Ps. xxxiii. 2.

“Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and His justice; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

Introduction.

What a good and generous God we Christians have, my dear brethren! Provided we only make it our first care to serve Him truly, and lead Christian, pious, and virtuous lives, so as to gain heaven, we can leave to Him and His providence the care of all that concerns the body, its nourishment and well-being; He will look after it and see that we want nothing that He knows to be good for our salvation. “Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you.” Ah, if we were not wanting in piety and child-like confidence in God, how well would it be for us, not only in spiritual, but also in temporal things! But at the same time I cannot help thinking what a debt of gratitude we owe that good God who means so well with us! Last Sunday I began to speak of this subject, and I showed how the Lord God deserves and expects a constant gratitude from us mortals, and that, too, with the utmost reason; for everything we have in and outside ourselves is a pure gift of the Divine Generosity, from which He has no profit whatever, except His honor and glory, and in which He has no other motive but to do us good. Now I continue, and mean to explain in detail what I barely alluded to in the last sermon; namely, that the Lord, in seeking this gratitude from us, does not look for any advantage for Himself, but rather for us; so that I might change the words of my text, and say with confidence to you: Be only grateful to God for the benefits received from Him, and all the other benefits that you can wish or desire will be added unto you, as I now proceed to show.

Plan of Discourse.

God expects us to be grateful for the benefits He confers on us, His sole object therein being that He may be able to do us still more good; therefore we should at once offer Him our constant gratitude for even the least benefit, and give Him thanks unceasing. Such is the whole subject.

That we may understand it, and thus be enabled to be always grateful, we beg of Thy grace, O good God, by the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels; then shall we experience the truth of Thy promise, “Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God,” etc.

If I could say with full confidence to a poor beggar, who does not know where to find the next mouthful, Listen to me, my good man; if you are not ashamed to beg, I have a capital plan to propose to you, which will place you above the reach of want all your life; there in that street lives a very rich man, who never refuses to give when he is asked; nay, he is most anxious to share his wealth with the poor; all you need do is to declare to him your poverty once only, beg him humbly to help you, and then thank him for what he gives you; if you do that, he will give you twice what you ask; if you thank him again, he will again put his hand into his pocket; and if you do not cease thanking him, he will never cease giving you more and more every day,—what would you think of that, ye poor people? If I were able to point out such a man as that to you, and you believed my words, would it not be exactly what you desire? Would you not be most willing to pay the required debt of gratitude? In my opinion, you would endeavor to learn how to make the most profound obeisances and reverences, in order to give to such a good man the thanks due to him; for what is cheaper and more easily purchased than that which you buy with gratitude alone? But there is no beggar who is so simple as to believe in the existence of such an individual; nor do I myself think that the world has ever yet seen such an example of generosity; for, if a man of that kind were anywhere to be found, he would soon be surrounded by such a concourse of poor people that his wealth, no matter how great it might be, would dwindle away in a short time.

Mere gratitude is an easy means for a poor beggar to acquire wealth.

My dear brethren, all of us on this earth are poor, needy beggars, who have to knock at the door of the almighty Father and Preserver of the world, to ask for alms. The so-called goddess of fortune (when people were in the habit of ascribing to mere chance their prosperity or adversity, and to say: that man is a favorite of fortune; that other is not so) was a mere fabulous creation of the poets. All that we have and are comes from nowhere else but from the hand of God's providence; God alone is the Giver and Dispenser and Preserver of all the goods we have or hope for. With reason, then, does the Apostle St. James say: "Every best gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change, nor shadow of alteration."¹ Therefore he who is in

We are all beggars, and can become rich if we are only grateful to God for what He has given us.

¹ Omne datum optimum, et omne donum perfectum desursum est, descendens a Patre luminum, apud quem non est transmutatio, nec vicissitudinis obumbratio.—James i. 17.

want, whether as regards the soul or the body, temporal or eternal goods, must have recourse to the almighty God. And, oh, how easy it is always to have audience with this Lord, any day or any hour! He awaits our petitions with the greatest desire to share with men the treasure of His gifts and graces, which cannot be exhausted, no matter what calls are made on it. The only return He expects for His gifts is gratitude; and the only reason why He expects that is that He may be, as it were, compelled and forced to bestow still greater and more numerous benefits on us. If I thank a man who has done me good, I am still under an obligation to him and am still his debtor, for he has a right to demand a favor from me. If I thank God for the good He does me, He places Himself under an obligation to me for my gratitude, and becomes, as it were, my debtor, for He binds Himself to repay me for my first act of gratitude with a fresh favor.

For He will
give us
fresh bene-
fits as a re-
ward for our
gratitude.
Shown from
the holy
Fathers.

“Such is Our Lord,” says St. John Chrysostom, “that when we show Him our gratitude, and acknowledge Him as our Benefactor, He becomes still more liberal in bestowing His gifts on us; for He does not require us to be thankful because He is in need of our thanks, but that He may enable us to reap the fruit of our first act of thanksgiving by giving us new benefits.”¹ “Gratitude,” says Albert the Great, “opens the fountain of the Divine Mercy.”² The greater and more constant the gratitude of the soul towards God, the more is the Divine Goodness compelled to shower down its favors on that soul. Almost in the same words did Theodore of Ancyra address the Council of Ephesus. The divine benefits are measured out according to the gratitude shown for them; therefore, if you give thanks for what you have received, and acknowledge with grateful heart your Benefactor, “you have not only done enough in return for what has been bestowed on you, but you have also compelled your Benefactor to be still more liberal in showering down His favors on you.”³ Such, too, is the teaching of other holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church. This is what Our Lord means by the words He makes use of in the Gospel of St. Matthew, “For to every one that hath, shall be given, and he shall abound; but

¹ Talis est Dominus noster, quando imprimis in eum gratitudinem declaramus, et benefactorem agnoscimus; largius nobis erogat bona sua.—S. Chrys. hom. 18 in Gen.

² Gratitude aperit fontem divinæ pietatis.

³ Non modo pro accepto fecisti satis, verum ad majorem quoque beneficiorum elargitionem donatorem adstrinxisti.—Theodore Ancyr., hom. de Nativ.

from him that hath not, that also which he seemeth to have shall be taken away.”¹ “Every one that hath” means, according to St. Denis the Carthusian, every one who is grateful for what he has;² and more will be given to him; but he who is ungrateful for what he has will lose it.

Such, too, is the teaching of the example of Jesus Christ; for it is most worthy of note that almost invariably before performing a miracle, especially one that was particularly beneficial to men, He first gave thanks to His Eternal Father. When He was about to feed the hungry multitude in the desert, and had not more than five barley loaves at hand, what did He do? “And Jesus took the loaves: and when He had given thanks, He distributed to them that were sat down.”³ Mark how, after He had given thanks, the few loaves were multiplied to such an extent that five thousand people had enough to eat, and there was left as much as filled twelve baskets. “They gathered up therefore and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above to them that had eaten.”⁴ When about to raise Lazarus from the dead, who had already been four days in the grave, He lifted up His eyes to heaven, and, as the Evangelist says, began by giving thanks to God: “And Jesus, lifting up His eyes, said: Father, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast heard Me. When He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice: Lazarus, come forth.”⁵ And the dead man came to life at once. That most wonderful of all miracles, and at the same time the greatest benefit He has conferred on us, namely, the Blessed Sacrament, in which He has given us Himself, God and Man, as the food and drink of our souls till the end of the world, He did not wish to institute until He had first given thanks. For, as the priest says on the altar, in the words of the Evangelist, “Who the day before He suffered took bread into His sacred and venerable hands, and having raised His eyes to heaven, to Thee, God, His Almighty Father, giving thanks to thee, blessed,” etc. The same happened when He changed wine into His precious blood; for the priest continues: “In like manner,

Christ teaches us the same by His example.

¹ *Omni enim habenti dabitur, et abundabit; ei autem qui non habet, et quod videtur habere, auferetur ab eo.*—Matt. xxv. 29.

² *Omni habenti, id est, grato.*

³ *Acceptit ergo Jesus panes, et cum gratias egisset, distribuit discumbentibus.*—John vi. 11.

⁴ *Collegerunt ergo et impleverunt duodecim cophinos fragmentorum ex quinque panibus hordeaceis, quæ superfuere his qui manducaverant.*—Ibid. 13.

⁵ *Jesus autem elevatis sursum oculis dixit: Pater, gratias ago tibi, quoniam audisti me. Hæc cum dixisset, clamavit voce magna: Lazare, veni foras.*—Ibid. xi. 41, 43.

after He had supped, taking also this excellent chalice into His holy and venerable hands, giving Thee also thanks, He blessed," etc. "All this," says Cajetan, "is to teach us that our petitions for future gifts should arise out of our gratitude for preceding ones,"¹ and also that gratitude is the best means of increasing and multiplying, even miraculously, as was the case with the loaves and fishes in the Gospel, the gifts and graces of God we already possess.

Pious servants of God have always experienced the truth of this in the Natural Law.

Just souls have always had happy experience of this. When the Divine Anger was about to destroy the whole sinful world and all its inhabitants, the Patriarch Noe and his family were saved: "But Noe found grace before the Lord."² And why was Noe the only one who found grace? Why were he and his family saved, when all the other inhabitants of the earth were drowned in the deluge? He had not implored that favor of God, for he knew nothing of the impending calamity until God revealed it to him, and yet God had resolved to save him even before he asked. What was the reason of that? What great merit had Noe in the sight of God more than others? Hear what St. John Chrysostom says in explanation of this, representing God speaking to Noe: "Thou art the only one whom I have found grateful; and therefore, when all the others are perishing, I command thee and thy family to enter the ark."³ For the people of those days were like brute beasts in their forgetfulness of God, and they ascribed the temporal goods they enjoyed to nature and their own industry, so that they did not thank their Creator for them. Noe, on the other hand, acknowledged with grateful heart that he owed all to God; and hence he and his family were saved from the general destruction in reward of his gratitude, although he had not asked that favor from God. Again, after the deluge, God was fully appeased, and made not only to Noe and his family, but also to all their descendants, that magnificent promise, "I will no more curse the earth for the sake of man;" never shall it be again inundated by a deluge; "I will no more destroy every living soul as I have done."⁴ What moved God to make this promise? Nothing but the gratitude of Noe, for hardly had that

¹ Ad erudiendum nos, quod petitio futurorum ex gratitudine præteritorum resurgere debet.

² Noe vero invenit gratiam coram Domino.—Gen. vi. 8.

³ Te solum inveni gratum; omnibus aliis pereuntibus, te jubeo ingredi cum omni domo tua in arcam.

⁴ Nequaquam ultra maledicam terræ propter homines; non igitur ultra percutiam omnem animam viventem sicut feci.—Gen. viii. 21.

holy Patriarch set foot on dry land, when, as the Scripture says, "he built an altar unto the Lord, and taking all cattle and fowls that were clean, offered holocausts upon the altar,"¹ as a thanksgiving for being saved from the flood. He so pleased the Lord thereby that he received that promise for himself and his descendants of never again being afflicted by such a calamity: "And the Lord smelled a sweet savor, and said: I will no more curse the earth."² See, says de Lyra, how man, by being grateful for one benefit, can merit another; thus Noe, after the benefit of being saved, received that of security."³

King David, considering the benefits he had received from God, cries out in astonishment: "What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that He hath rendered to me?"⁴ He does not say, What shall I render to the Lord for all the things He hath given to me or bestowed on me? but, All the things He hath rendered me. Why? What does he mean by that? "To render" means to give a person something I am bound to give him in gratitude. Was God, then, bound to give David anything out of gratitude? It seems, says St. Basil, as if David was the first to give, and God then gave him something in return. What did David give? Gratitude. He thanked his God for the benefit of creation and preservation: and this gratitude was looked on by God as a benefit for which He should make some return. It was as if they were vying with each other as to who should make the best return. God gave to David; David thanked Him; God rewarded this gratitude with fresh favors; David again thanked God; this gave a fresh impulse to the divine liberality; and so, since the gratitude of David was unceasing, God could not stop conferring favors on him. This it was that excited David's astonishment. O my God, he exclaimed, how is this to end? "What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that He hath rendered to me?" When Anna, who had long been unfruitful, at last bore a son, Samuel, she hastened to offer him in the temple for the service of the Lord in token of gratitude, and she intoned this joyful canticle: "My heart hath rejoiced in the Lord. There is none holy as the Lord is; for there is no other beside Thee, and there is none

In the Writ
ten Law.

¹ *Ædificavit autem Noe altare Domino, et tollens de cunctis pecoribus et volucribus mundis obtulit holocausta super altare.*—Gen. viii. 20.

² *Odoratusque est Dominus odorem suavitatis, et ait: nequaquam ultra maledicam terræ.*—Ibid. 21.

³ *Quia propter gratitudinem in aliquo beneficio meretur homo aliud beneficium; ideo post beneficium liberationis datur beneficium securitatis.*

⁴ *Quid retribuam Domino pro omnibus quæ retribuit mihi?*—Ps. cxv. 12.

strong like our God.”¹ Anna was now quite satisfied; she had obtained her request, for she had given birth to a son; and she desired nothing more. But God was not satisfied with that, because Anna showed herself grateful to Him, and therefore He, too, had, so to speak, to show Himself grateful to her. “And the Lord visited Anna,” says the Scripture, “and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters; and the child Samuel became great before the Lord.”² See, says St. John Chrysostom, what Anna gained by this transaction, “that is, by her first act of thanksgiving.”³ God gave her five children, which she never asked Him for, because she showed herself grateful for the first child He gave her.

In the New
Law.

The same assurance was given by St. Jerome to a noble lady named Letha, who had consecrated her daughter to the service of God. “I tell you confidently,” said he, “that you will have sons in return for having given your eldest child to God.”⁴ God cannot allow gratitude to go unrewarded, for He looks on it as a benefit conferred on Himself, which He is bound to recompense by fresh gifts. In the life of the holy monk Theodosius we read of a lady who was richly endowed by God with the wealth of this world, because she was always engaged in thanking Him, and employed her riches in works of Christian charity and piety, and devotion towards God, her Benefactor. Now it happened one day that her little son, as he was playing with his companions, fell into a deep well; every one thought that he would either be drowned or at least break his limbs. But when they came to the well to pull him out, they found him sitting on the top of the water, quite unhurt. When asked how it was that he did not hurt himself by the severe fall, he answered that a religious held him up, so that he sat on the water unhurt as if he were on solid ground. The mother, hearing this, gave herself no rest going from one convent to the other with the view of finding out her benefactor and thanking him for the great service rendered her. At last she came to the convent of St. Theodosius, and as soon as the boy saw that holy man, he cried out: See, mother, that is the monk who held me in his arms in the well. The mother then

¹ Exultavit cor meum in Domino. Non est sanctus ut est Dominus; neque enim est alius extra te, et non est fortis sicut Deus noster.—I. Kings ii. 1, 2.

² Visitavit ergo Dominus Annam, et concepit et peperit tres filios et duas filias; et magnificatus est puer Samuel apud Dominum.—Ibid. 21.

³ Tantum hac negotiatione lucrum fecit Anna.—S. Chrys. hom. de Anna.

⁴ Fidens loquor, accepturam te filios, quæ primum fœtum Domino reddidisti.—S. Hieron. ep. vii. ad Læthan.

fell at the feet of the holy man, who knew nothing of what had occurred, and thanked him with tears in her eyes. There are two reflections suggested by this incident, my dear brethren. The first is, the great gratitude of this woman, inasmuch as she was not satisfied with the joy she must have felt at having her son restored to her, but at once set to work to find her benefactor and thank him. Would to God that we always felt equally grateful to God, our Sovereign Benefactor, who daily showers down benefits on us! The other is the wonderful effect of gratitude; for who was it that protected the child in such evident danger? Who was it that held him up by means of the holy monk, and saved him from death? There is no doubt that it was God working by the ministry of His angels. And why did He do so? As a reward for the gratitude the pious woman showed Him for the temporal blessings He had conferred on her. So true is it that he who is thankful for the first favor has already merited the second, and holds it as it were in his hands. Oh, what a good God we have, who expects no other return from us mortals for His gifts and graces but gratitude; and that He expects solely with the view of bestowing fresh favors on us!

Ah, Christians, which of us must not acknowledge that he is in need of the divine goodness every moment of his life? And who does not wish to receive still more numerous and greater benefits from God? Nothing is more agreeable than to receive a good thing that we are eager to possess. But gratitude is the key to the inexhaustible treasury of that Lord of infinite wealth. Go with confidence and ask of Him what you wish; all you have to do is to return thanks for what He has already given you, and the new gifts and graces are already prepared for you. "Be nothing solicitous," is the exhortation given by St. Paul to the Philippians; "but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God;"¹ for gratitude gives prayer its greatest efficacy. Do you wish, therefore, to be in good health? Then thank God for the health He has given you hitherto. Do you wish to have means to support yourself and your family? Then thank God for the daily bread He gives you. Do you wish to bring up your children well, so that God may bless them? Then thank Him that He has preserved them in innocence up to this. Have you some

Hence, if we desire new favors, we should first return thanks to God for the old ones.

¹ Nihil solliciti sitis; sed in omni oratione et obsecratione cum gratiarum actione petitiones vestrae innotescant apud Deum.—Phil. iv. 6.

affair on hand that you wish to bring to a successful termination? Thank God for having so often helped you in your business and aided you with His fatherly protection. Are you visited by suffering, crosses, or trials? Thank God for having saved you from still worse, which many others have to complain of. Have you suffered loss in your temporal affairs through misfortune? Thank God for having preserved to you so long what His Providence knew to be for your good, and for having now taken it away for the same reason. Are you well endowed in temporal matters? Thank God for it, and through Christian charity share your wealth with those who have nothing, that so God may preserve it to you. If you have little, then thank God for that, too, and through gratitude give to Him, in the persons of the poor, some of the little you possess.

And even
for the
smallest;
for grati-
tude for
small favors
brings down
greater
ones.

Again, if you have done anything for your soul to the honor and glory of God, return Him most humble thanks for the grace He has given you, without which you could not do the least good action. But you must know, my dear brethren, that to say to one's self, "I do no good" (as is the custom with many, who undervalue and despise all their prayers, Masses, holy Communions, and other works of piety and devotion, although they try to do them well; and who look on them as if they were of no value whatever), is not humility, as those people imagine it to be, but ingratitude towards God, as St. Augustine says, for thus the grace of God is not appreciated and prized as it should be. No; no matter how small the good work is, you must look on it as a benefit from God, and thank Him for it, that you may thus merit more grace, and be able to do still more good. "Know that you have some good in you," such are the beautiful words of St. Augustine, "and know at the same time that you have nothing of yourself, so that you may neither be proud nor ungrateful."¹ In a word, learn to be thankful even for the smallest benefit, and let not one gift go without expressing your gratitude for it, so that you may thus become worthy of greater favors. For, just as some cheap domestic medicine may sometimes cure a dangerous illness, so gratitude for small favors can avert great evils and bring down on you great graces and gifts from God. The grateful man, says St. Chrysostom, no matter how poor he may be in body and soul, is already rich enough, and need not fear to be left without any good thing; "thanks-

¹ Et habere te cognosce, et nihil ex te habere, ut nec superbus sis, nec ingratus.

giving is a vast treasure of graces, a great source of wealth, an inexhaustible fund of good,"¹ with which one can in a short time obtain from God all blessings and graces.

A most interesting incident, which I cannot refrain from relating to you, is told by St. John Damascene in the lives of SS. Barlaam and Josaphat. A certain rich noble had chosen as the bride of his eldest son a young lady of noble birth also, and great personal beauty; but the son, who was unwilling to marry, stole away during the night to avoid his father's anger. On his way he passed by the cottage of a poor peasant, whose daughter was sitting at the door, occupied in some manual labor and at the same time unceasingly thanking and praising God. The young man listened with the greatest astonishment, and at last asked her, Why do you thank God so fervently, as if you were fully provided with all earthly goods, although, as I well see, you are very poor. What! answered the pious girl; do you not know that gratitude for small favors is sure to bring greater ones? It is true that I am poor and the daughter of a lowly peasant; but nevertheless I thank and praise my God unceasingly for the little He has hitherto given me, for I am certain that He who has given me that little can and will give me much more, if it seems good to Him. Yet I trouble myself little about earthly goods; for riches are more frequently a source of evil than of advantage to the soul. At all events, I know that God has bestowed countless graces on me, for He created me out of nothing to His own image, and gave me reason in preference to many other creatures; He has saved me from eternal damnation by shedding His precious blood and giving His life for me on the cross; He has called me to the one true faith, and often made me partake of His holy sacraments; He has prepared His blissful heaven for me, and there, if I am true to Him, I shall be happy with Him forever. How, then, can I be sufficiently grateful to Him for these good things, which the poor as well as the rich enjoy; and if I were to cease thanking Him, how could I appear at His judgment-seat? So spoke the pious girl. The young man, captivated by the wisdom and piety she showed, at once asked her in marriage from the peasant, her father. What? said the old man, are you jesting with us poor people? Do you mean to say that you, a noble, wish to marry a poor peasant's daughter? Yes, answered the young man; no other reason do

Shown by
an example.

¹ Magnus thesaurus gratiarum actio, magnæ divitiæ, inconsumptum bonum.—S. Chrys. hom. i. ad pop.

I desire as my wife; if you only give your consent, and she does not refuse me, then you will fulfil my dearest wish. No, replied the old man; I am now almost beyond my work, as you see, and I cannot let my daughter go from me. Very well, then, said the other; I will stay with you as long as you live. The peasant being at last convinced of his earnestness, gave his consent. The young man, fully satisfied, kept his promise, and was fortunate enough to find a large sum of money hidden away in a hut belonging to the peasant, which went to increase the property to which he still remained lawful heir. So far St. John Damascene. Is it not true, my dear brethren, that gratitude is a vast treasure, an inexhaustible fund of good things? The rich young man, who had refused to marry a young, beautiful, and noble lady, at last took to wife a poor peasant girl. Who brought that about? No one else but the God of infinite goodness and wisdom by His all-seeing providence. The poor girl, who always thanked God for the little He bestowed on her, was suddenly raised to the height of good fortune and richly provided for, and she prospered more by her gratitude to God than many a one nowadays who seeks to please and attract attention by extravagant dress and exposing herself to the admiration of the passers-by at the door or in the streets. It is a well-known fact that goods kept too long in the shop window are soon damaged, while those that are hidden away in the store-house are always fit for sale. I repeat, then, that gratitude is a vast treasury of graces.

Exhortation
to be grate-
ful especial-
ly that we
may obtain
spiritual fa-
vors.

Therefore, Christians, if you wish to obtain great favors from God, thank Him for small ones. But mark what that pious girl said; I do not trouble myself much about worldly goods. These are the least of the benefits that God bestows on us, although He does give them to the grateful. It is to heavenly, supernatural, and eternal goods that our wishes and desires should tend; and these we shall obtain in abundance from God, if we are only grateful to Him always. The grace of persevering in the friendship of God, the grace of a happy death, oh, what a magnificent grace! Can we desire any greater gift than that on which our happiness for eternity depends, and which is of the utmost importance for us? for no man with all his good works can merit it in the present arrangement of God's providence. And who will obtain that grace? Do you wish to know? He who during life was grateful to God. Hear the promise made by the Holy Ghost: "The sacrifice of praise shall

glorify Me;" that is, by gratitude I shall receive most honor; "and there is the way by which I shall show him the salvation of God." ¹ The Prophet David comforted himself with this assurance when he said: "Because I have not known learning, I will enter into the powers of the Lord;" ² or, as some interpret it, "because I cannot reach the number, I will enter into the powers of the Lord." This means, according to St. Bernard, I will enter into the kingdom of heaven, because I cannot reach the number. What number? The number of the divine benefits and the praise due to God; and hence David says: I always consider the benefits bestowed on me by God, and I find their number so great that I cannot comprehend it; therefore I make no end of my thanksgiving, and unceasingly praise my Benefactor, and that it is which makes me sure and confident of saving my soul; I will enter into the powers, the kingdom of the Lord.

Ah, my God, if I am without this one grace, this last gift of final perseverance, which I must have to enter into Thy eternal kingdom, of what good will all other gifts and graces be to me? But if that is already prepared for me, then let temporal things go as Thou wilt; I have enough for eternity. O happy me, since I can purchase this inestimable gift from Thee so cheaply by gratitude! I am resolved, then, to be more grateful than I have hitherto been, and never will I cease in all my actions, which shall be directed to Thy honor and glory, to thank Thee for all Thou hast done for me. My first thought in the morning when I awake, my last thought at night when I retire to rest, all my thoughts, words, and actions during the day, whenever I think of Thee, shall be nothing but a constant *Deo Gratias!* Thanks be to God! Eternal thanks be to God for all the good He has done me! Praise and honor be to the God of goodness now and forever. Amen.

Conclusion
and resolution.

¹ Sacrificium laudis honorificabit me, et illic iter quo ostendam illi salutare Dei.—Ps. xlix. 23.

² Quoniam non cognovi litteraturam, introibo in potentias Domini.—Ibid. lxx. 15, 16.

THIRTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON THE MANY REASONS WE HAVE FOR BEING GRATEFUL TO GOD.

Subject.

We are obliged to be grateful to God, 1st. By the many general benefits He has bestowed on us; 2d. By the many special benefits we owe His goodness.—*Preached on the fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Magnificabant Deum, dicentes: . . . quia Deus visitavit plebem suam.—Luke vii. 16.

“They glorified God, saying, . . . God hath visited His people.”

Introduction.

In what did this gracious visitation that God vouchsafed His people consist? In raising from the dead a young man, whom Christ, the Son of God, gave back to his mother. Was that all? Yes; the whole benefit consisted in that, and therefore the people, full of reverence and awe, began to praise God: “And there came a fear on them all; and they glorified God, saying: A great prophet is risen up among us; and, God hath visited His people.” And not alone those who were present on the occasion, but all in the country who heard of it, were filled with the same feelings of awe and respect, for the Evangelist continues: “This rumor of Him went forth throughout all Judea, and throughout all the country round about. Ah, Christians, what reason have we nowadays to praise and glorify our God, for every day He raises the dead to life, not indeed to a mortal life, but to a much better one, when He restores sinners to His favor, and gives back to them, when they repent, the life of grace, as St. Augustine says, speaking of this gospel.

But, setting this aside for the present, what countless other benefits do we not daily and hourly receive from the Divine Goodness! And that, too, from a God of the most pure and perfect goodness, who, as we have seen already, requires a constant gratitude from us; a gratitude, as I have proved on the last oc-

casion, which God looks for only that He may bestow still more on us as a reward for it. Now I say further, that, even if we had no profit or advantage from it, still common decency should impel us to be grateful to God on account of the many general and special benefits we have received from Him. These I shall now briefly recall in the style of a meditation.

Plan of Discourse.

The number of benefits we have received from God obliges us to a constant and unceasing gratitude. Such is the whole subject of this meditation. The number of the general benefits, as we shall consider in the first part. The number of the special benefits, as we shall consider in the second part.

O God of goodness, by a new benefit, which we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels, grant that after this meditation on the countless good things we owe Thee, we may always praise and glorify Thee our whole lives long, as the people did in to-day's gospel: "They glorified God," etc.

In former times the kings of Persia used to observe the following laudable custom: they kept diaries in which they wrote down from day to day all the services and good actions performed for them by their vassals and subjects. For instance, in that year and month, and on that day, such an official gave me good advice, which was of great advantage for the kingdom. On that day such a minister reminded me of an important matter that I should otherwise have forgotten. On that day such a soldier risked his life to render me this or that service, etc. They were in the habit of frequently reading those diaries, so as to keep alive the memory of the services rendered them, and not allow them to go unrewarded. Thus we read in the book of Esther, that king Assuerus, having been saved by Mardochai from a conspiracy that threatened his life, wrote an account of this act in his diary. After the lapse of some considerable time he happened to read this, and at once asked his ministers: "What honor and reward hath Mardochai received for this fidelity? His servants and ministers said to him: He hath received no reward at all."¹ What, exclaimed Assuerus; no reward for such a service as that? That is not right; it is a gross

Men of honor write down daily the benefits they receive.

¹ Quid pro hac fide honoris ac præmii Mardochæus consecutus est? Dixerunt ei servi illius ac ministri: nihil omnino mercedis accepit.—Esth. vi. 3.

forgetfulness on my part. Call Aman to me at once. And when Aman entered, the king caused Mardochai to be clad in the royal garments, to be mounted on his own horse, and be thus led through the city, so that all might learn how he wished to honor his faithful servant.

The divine benefits are too numerous to be written down.

O Christians! If you and I were to keep an account of all the benefits that we receive from the good God, should we not have to say, as St. John did of the actions of Christ, "There are also many other things which Jesus did: which if they were written every one, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written."¹ The same we should say of the benefits received from God; for, if they were to be all written down in detail, the world would not be able to hold the books that should be written. Think and reflect as much as you like, you will not be able to comprehend all you owe to the goodness of God. Turn whither you will, and you find yourself surrounded on all sides by His benefits; nay from the crown of your head to the sole of your foot you are made of nothing else than gifts of God.

First, that of being made to the image of God.

Thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, or eighty years ago, what were you? Nothing. Less than that you could not be. It was God who gave you the being that you now have, and that, too, out of pure goodness, for He was not in the least want of you; and He gave that being to you in preference to many other creatures that He might have created and still can create, who would have served Him far better and more zealously than you do, and yet He has left them in the abyss of their nothingness. And what sort of a being did He give you? The most excellent of all, that of the angels alone excepted. Ask the stone, says St. Augustine, and it will tell you that it received being as you did from the hands of God; but it will complain at the same time that it has not life. How have you, O man, deserved to have life, whereas at first you were a mere nothing, just as the stone was? Ask the trees and plants; they will tell you that they received from God being and vegetative life, as you did; but they are wanting in feeling. And what have you done to merit that excellent property? Ask your dog and your horse; they will tell you that they have received being, life, and feeling from God, as well as you, but that they have not reason nor an immortal soul as you

¹ Sunt autem et alia multa quæ fecit Jesus, quæ si scribantur per singula, nec ipsum arbitror mundum capere posse eos qui scribendi sunt libros." John xxi. 25.

have. What merit had you in the sight of God, that He should bestow on you reason like the angels? What have you done to deserve that your soul should be stamped with the image of His Godhead, that He should create you to possess Himself, and to be happy with Him, if you wish, in His eternal kingdom of heaven? All these things are benefits quite unmerited on your part, that you must ascribe to the goodness and generosity of God in your regard.

Ah, to have been nothing before, and now to be the image of God, the child of God, and heir of heaven; what an immense benefit that is! Greater, indeed, and more glorious than if one were to raise a poor peasant girl from a stable to a royal throne. Alexander the Great considered himself under an obligation to his horse, because it had once saved his life. What valuable presents are sometimes given to a doctor who succeeds in curing a rich man of some dangerous malady! If after death you were raised from the dead by some worker of miracles, what feelings of gratitude would not animate you in his regard! But it is not nearly so great a benefit to be raised from the dead as to be created out of nothing; to be recalled to life from the tomb as to be called forth out of the abyss of nothingness to life. And what must it be to be called to such an excellent form of life, in which one resembles the great God Himself? Imagine you see a sculptor at work with a heap of huge stones before him; he seizes on one of them, and hews away at it until he has made of it a statue of an emperor, to be afterwards placed in the hall of a palace and be the object of universal admiration. If the marble had reason, what would it think of the artist? At first I was but a mass of rough stone; now I represent a great emperor in his court. Why has the sculptor selected me, to make a statue of me, when there were so many other masses of stone quite as well adapted for the purpose as I was? but of them he made a horse, an ox, or a hideous demon. How would not the statue praise the master to whom it owes its being! See and acknowledge, O man, what the good God has done for you! He has selected you from amongst an infinite number of creatures, and while out of your nothingness He might have formed a monstrous, horrible, irrational animal, He chose to make you to the image of His own divine majesty, that He might one day place you in the palace of His glory in heaven. Ask yourself now, in the words of king Assuerus, "What honor and reward hath He re-

The greatness of this benefit shown by a simile.

ceived for this fidelity?" What return have you hitherto made to God for such a priceless benefit? Perhaps you will have to confess to your great shame and confusion: "He hath received no reward at all." God has had nothing in return from me; hardly have I even thought seriously of what I owe Him.

Secondly,
the benefit
of redemption.

Open now the chronicle of your life, and what do you find on the first page? By inheriting the sin of Adam you were an unhappy slave of the devil, an object of the divine anger, a child of reprobation. What did it not cost your God to free you from this misery and to save you from eternal death? It cost Him His incarnation; the price He paid for you is the labor of His thirty-three years on earth, the hunger and thirst, the heat and cold, the poverty and want He suffered for your sake; you cost Him His honor and His blood, which He shed for you to the last drop; and finally you cost Him His life, which He gave up on the shameful cross to save you from death. This is the benefit in which the divine omnipotence and love have done their utmost, so that, if you were God, and He were your servant, He could not do more to prove His love for you. God a man! God a child, a servant, a poor workman, a beggar! God beaten with rods, hung on a gibbet, dead, that you and I might not burn forever in hell! Could a more wonderful benefit be imagined? Ask yourself again, "What honor and reward hath He received for this fidelity?" What honor, gratitude, and love has my Saviour had from me in return for what He has done for me? What have I given Him for the poverty He endured for me? for the labors He underwent, for the sharp thorns, the cruel nails, the precious blood He shed? Ah! "He hath received no reward at all;" little or nothing have I done in return for all He has done for me.

That of having other creatures made for our use.

Consider further, if some good friend were to give you a costly present, a ring, for instance, worth some thousand pounds, and you lost it soon after through carelessness, would you not still look on yourself as under a great obligation to your generous benefactor? Now, God has given you being, and the noble and precious being of a rational creature, made to His own image, redeemed by His blood; and not only has He given it to you, but He constantly preserves it for you lest you should lose it. In addition to this, reflect how good and kind God is to you, how He takes, as it were, all the trouble and labor on Himself, that you may enjoy repose; look on what is around you in the world,

and when you have considered everything outside yourself, you will have to acknowledge that God is indeed kind to you. See the sun during the day, the moon at night; count, if you can, the stars in the firmament, the birds in the air, the fishes in the waters, the animals on the land, the trees in the forest, the crops in the fields, the herbs and flowers in the gardens, the grapes in the vineyards, the fire that warms you, the water that cools you, the bread that daily forms your food, the clothes that cover you, the men with whom you converse, the angels that are always at your side to protect you; consider all these things well. Do you know what they are? They are nothing else but benefits bestowed on you by God; He has given them to you; all these creatures cry out: O man, we are made for you, and the Sovereign God has commanded us to serve you, either for your necessary support, or for your decent recreation and amusement, or to give you a better knowledge and more zealous love of God, so that, helped by us, you may the more easily attain your last end—eternal happiness in heaven. O man, it is for your sake that we exist, and yet you do not love Him who has made us for you! O man, I add, is there any servant or attendant who so faithfully looks after his master's interest as God does after yours and mine? At night He gives and preserves sleep to us; in the morning He awakens us, helps us to rise, to dress, to walk firmly, to take the pen in our hand, to write, to speak, to act, nay, even to think and ponder on things, for we could not move foot, hand, or eye, nor any member of our body, without the presence, assistance, and coöperation of God.

What thanks do we not owe Him for that! A very rich man, who was childless, had adopted a poor boy, richly endowed, however, by nature and grace, and made him heir of all his wealth without condition or exception. The young man, after the death of his benefactor, or rather loving father, used to go every day for many years and stand before his portrait for hours at a time, with tears in his eyes, in an ecstasy of gratitude. When at last he succeeded in taking his eyes off the picture, and turned them on the beautiful objects that filled the room in which he was, he turned them back again, and again fixed them on the portrait of him who had adopted him and made him heir of all that wealth. Tears were the only means he could find of giving expression to the lively sentiments of gratitude that filled his heart. At times he would rush up to the picture and kiss the beneficent hand to

An example showing how grateful we should be to God.

which he owed so much, nor was he ever tired of thus showing his gratitude. O man, whoever you be, when you enter your house, look around at everything you have and enjoy in it; consider all your possessions one by one, and imagine that you see on them all, and on all creatures that are given you for your use or enjoyment, those words written in large characters: "What hast thou that thou hast not received?"¹ Of all the possessions and wealth you enjoy, show me the value of one half-penny that God has not given you. Show me a foot of earth in all your gardens, fields, and vineyards that you do not owe to God, your heavenly Father, who has adopted you as His child, made you heir to all His goods, and preserved you up to this in His service, and ask yourself again: "What honor and reward hath He received for this fidelity?" What return of honor and gratitude have you made Him for His great goodness and liberality in your regard? He hath received no reward at all. Ah, that is the last thing we think of! We are satisfied generally with having those creatures for our use or amusement; but that we should see our Creator by means of them, and thank Him for them, that never enters our minds, because those benefits are common to all men in the world.

Each one
should
thank God
for those
things,
though they
are common
to all.

It is true that I possess those things in common with other men; but am I therefore less bound to return thanks to God? Do I not enjoy those things as well as if they had been made for me alone? Hear what St. Paul says of the benefit of the redemption to the Galatians: "I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself for me;"² as if he wished to say: It is a wonderful thing; the great God is always occupied with me in the most loving manner; He has created me, redeemed me, and adorned me with gifts and graces. He has loved me; for my sake He has come down from heaven, and become a poor man. For my sake (hear this, ye angels! give ear, O men! and be attentive, all creatures!)—for my sake God has suffered, for my sake He has shed His blood and hung on the shameful cross. So has God loved me. But, O holy Apostle, cries out St. John Chrysostom, a special admirer and imitator of St. Paul, what art thou saying! Dost thou take for thyself alone what was done for the whole world? Dost thou not say elsewhere, "He that spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all"?³ God

¹ Quid habes quod non accepisti?—I. Cor. iv. 7.

² In fide vivo Filii Dei, qui dilexit me et tradidit semetipsum pro me.—Gal. ii. 20.

³ Qui etiam proprio Filio suo non pepercit, sed pro nobis omnibus tradidit illum?—Rom. viii. 32.

has, then, loved us all; for all He became man and died, that He might save all from eternal death. How dost thou, then, say, "for me"? Ah, truly, continues St. Chrysostom, those words are worthy the lips of the Apostle of the Gentiles; for St. Paul means thereby to say that each individual should look on the general benefits of the Almighty and thank Him for them as if they were for Him alone. And what difference does it make that He has given to others the same things He has bestowed on you? Have you received less on that account, or derived less profit? If your prince were to give you and all your fellow-citizens a certain sum of money every year, would your present be less because others receive the same, or would you owe less gratitude to your prince? If a father clothes his six sons with the same costly stuffs, must they not all be equally grateful to him? Do you lose any light because the sun shines on all men? Does it harm you that the earth bears all men as long as it continues to bear you? The rain moistens all countries, the fire warms all who approach it, the air refreshes all who breathe it; are you any worse off on that account, or have you not as much of these things as if you alone enjoyed them? All these benefits you enjoy daily in common with all men. Do you not see what a debt of honor and gratitude you owe your Benefactor? But perhaps you still consider these things as small, precisely because they are common; then open your own particular diary, and examine the special benefits that God has bestowed on you in preference to other men, from the first moment of your life to the present day.

Second Part.

Answer me these questions: How is it that your neighbor is poor, and has hardly bread enough for himself and his family, while you are well provided with everything? Why must so many work hard all day to earn their bread, while your food is placed on the table without any labor on your part? Why are you so well clad, while so many are covered with rags? Why is that man blind, while you have good sight? That other deaf and dumb, while you can hear and speak? That other a cripple, while you have the perfect use of your limbs? Why is one man ugly and deformed, and you are not so? Why is that man stupid, simple-minded, ignorant, while you are clever? Why are you in good health, and so many others sickly and delicate? Why have others to live in the midst of trials and crosses, while you are prospering, or at all

Special benefits are a preservation from many defects and miseries.

events have much less to suffer than they? Tell me the reason of all this, the cause of such a great difference. Those others are men as well as you; can you prove that you are more deserving than they? Could not God have caused you to be born in the same circumstances, the same poverty and misery? Could He not at this very moment place you in the same position they are in? And if you are better off now, to whom do you owe that? To no other but your good and gracious God. "What honor and reward hath He received for this fidelity?" What return of honor, gratitude, and love have you made Him? "He hath received no reward at all." Perhaps you have not thought even once of thanking Him.

Vocation to
the true
faith.

If you wish to consider a still greater special benefit conferred upon you by God, then go in thought through so many towns and countries of Europe, Africa, Asia, America, China, Japan, India, Brazil, Persia, Morocco, Greece, Sweden, Denmark, England, Holland, and many other places inhabited by heathens, infidels, Turks, Jews and heretics; find out, if you can, how many came into the world in those countries on the very day on which you saw the light. Tell me now, why has God created your soul in a Christian, Catholic land, and not in the midst of idolatry or heresy? Why—since Catholic Christendom, compared to all the other forms of religion in the world, is so small in numbers—why have you had the happiness of being born of Catholic parents and brought up by them? Oh, how many souls are now, during this hour, while we are here together, condemned to hell because they had not the true faith, while you are in the Church of God! You, in preference to so many others, and even to Catholics who have to live among infidels or heretics, and thus have not the opportunities that you enjoy—you are often strengthened by the holy sacraments, fed with the precious flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, and encouraged to good by the word of God. How many children, even amongst Catholics, die before birth, or immediately after, without baptism, so that they can never hope to attain eternal happiness in heaven? Why was that not the case with you? Who spoke a good word for you to save you from it? Must you not, with St. Augustine, gratefully acknowledge, praise, and glorify the special goodness of God in your regard? "I see," says the holy Doctor, and you and I can say the same with truth, "I see that what I am so glad to have had granted to me has been denied to countless numbers."¹

¹ Video innumerabilibus hominibus hoc negatum, quod mihi gratulor esse concessum.

“What honor and reward hath He received for this fidelity?” What return of thanks and love have we made our God? Oh, ungrateful wretch that I am! “He hath received no reward at all;” or, at all events, a very slight one.

Still another question I have to ask you: How long is it since you committed the first mortal sin? (I say nothing of the last one, which you committed perhaps yesterday or this morning.) Suppose that it is ten, twenty, or thirty years ago; tell me now, why are you not ten, twenty, or thirty years in hell? O endless mercy of God! I tremble and am amazed at the same time when I think of this! What great merit have you had before God more than so many others who were surprised by a premature death in the midst of their sins, and hurried down to hell? Why has not God had such patience with that man, that woman, that boy, that girl, your own companion in sin perhaps, and not waited for their repentance? They are now in the flames of hell, and will be there forever; but you, who have perhaps committed far more sin, have been allowed time for penance by the mercy of God, so that, if you wish, you can gain heaven. Think what an immense benefit that is, that the Lord has freed you from hell and the punishment you so richly deserved every time you committed mortal sin, as soon as you repented of and confessed your guilt.

Forgiveness
of our sins.

But perhaps you have never offended God by mortal sin? If so, I wish you joy. You have a still greater benefit to be thankful for, since God has saved you in preference to many others from the dangers and occasions of sin in such a special manner, either by keeping away temptations from you, or by giving you His powerful graces in them, without which graces you would have lamentably fallen. “O my God,” sighs forth St. Augustine, “it is to Thy grace I must attribute my freedom from the evils I have not done, and which were ever committed by man. If it had not been for Thy grace, I should have committed all the sins in the world.”¹ “What honor and reward hath He received for this fidelity?” What thanks and praise has God received from you in return for such a priceless benefit? “He hath received no reward at all,” or a very trifling one.

Preserva-
tion from
many sins.

Consider, finally, the countless great benefits you owe to God on account of His having freed you from many other evils; for

And from
other evils

¹ Gratiae tuæ debeo quaecunque non feci mala. Nisi tu hoc mihi fecisses, ego omnia peccata mundi fecissem.

instance, from falling and breaking an arm or a leg; from some misfortune that might have cost you your life, as has been the case with many in the world. Consider the benefits of which you know nothing, and that Divine Providence showers down on you while you are not thinking of them, while you are asleep. Have you as many hairs on your head as you have received benefits from God? It would be much easier for you to count the former than the latter; no matter how long you spend in thinking about them, you will never reach the end of the divine benefits. And mark that you owe all these things to God. If the evil spirit could offer us paradise, we should not take it from his hands, since he is a vile and despicable demon, just as no honorable man would take a present from one who is engaged in a disreputable occupation. So that the value of a gift is increased by the dignity of the person from whom it comes. It is God, then, that great Lord of infinite majesty, who is in no way in need of you, who has nothing to hope or fear from you,—He it is who has done for you so much good and conferred on you so many benefits.

Thus we
owe God
unceasing
gratitude.

If we have any sense of honor left, what feelings of gratitude should not even this slight enumeration of the divine benefits excite in us? Must we not often say with our whole hearts, in the words of the Prophet David: “What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that He hath rendered to me?”¹ Ah, my God, what return can I make for Thy goodness to me? If all the members of my body were so many tongues, and I did nothing all my life but praise and thank Thee, would that be too much for me to do? Nay, would it be enough? The Gospel tells us that when Lazarus came out of the grave he was bound hand and foot: “And presently he that had been dead came forth, bound feet and hands with winding-bands, and his face was bound about with a napkin.”² But, O Lord, Thou hast given him life, and called out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth! How can he obey Thy call, bound as he is? Shouldst Thou not first have loosed him, and then told him to come out of the tomb? No, says Vega, Lazarus had to learn that after having been so wonderfully restored to life he was a prisoner of Christ, and that he should not in future move hand or foot or eye, unless to praise and thank his Benefactor. Must we not

¹ Quid retribuam Domino pro omnibus quæ retribuit mihi?—Ps. cxv. 12.

² Et statim prodiit qui fuerat mortuus, ligatus pedes et manus institis, et facies illius sudario erat ligata.—John xi. 44.

come to the same conclusion regarding ourselves, my dear brethren, when we consider the countless benefits we owe to the Almighty every moment of our lives?

The Blessed Ægidius makes use of the following parable to explain the greatness of our obligation to God. A certain man had his eyes put out, and his hands and feet cut off, and thus blind, lame, and mutilated, he led a most wretched life. One of his friends once said to him, If some one who could work miracles were to come to you and restore you your limbs, so that you could walk about again, what reward would you give him? I would cheerfully give him a hundred thousand ducats, if I had so much in my possession, answered the cripple. But if he gave you back your hands as well, continued the other, what would you give him then? Everything I could scrape together in the world, was the answer. And if he, moreover, restored you your sight, what then? If the whole world was mine with all its riches, answered the other, I would willingly bestow it on him, and be his servant also all the days of my life, ready to fulfil his every wish. Hear, O man, whoever you be: Who has given you life? God, is it not? Who has given you eyes, and hands, and feet, and all you have? Is it not your God? But these are small benefits compared to the others. What do you, then, intend doing to prove your gratitude to Him? Is it right and just for you to allow even one moment of your life to pass without spending it in His service by a good intention? Is it not right and just that at all events once or twice in the day, in the morning early and in the evening when you are making the examen of conscience, before retiring to rest, you should recollect what you owe to God, and thank Him for it? The swine that are sent into the forest to fatten eat the whole day, and sink down on the ground in the evening satiated, without once looking up to the kindly tree that provided them with food. Such conduct suits swine well enough, but not rational creatures, for no reasoning being should be so ungrateful as to fatten, as it were, the whole day on the Divine Goodness and then throw himself down on his bed without thanking the Giver. Christians, do not forget your morning devotions, nor the evening examen of the faults you have committed during the day, and if you can find no faults to accuse yourselves of, the benefits bestowed on you by God will furnish you with sufficient matter for reflection.

Shown by a
parable.

Countless are the benefits we owe to God. Is it, then, possible

How unjust-

ly, then, he
acts who
offends God!

that we can wilfully offend such a generous Lord? Is it possible that we do not love Him with our whole hearts? When the holy bishop and martyr Polycarp was brought before the tribunal, and the heathen judge threatened him with the most atrocious torments if he did not renounce the faith of Christ, "How can I renounce my Lord, who is so good?"¹ was the holy man's answer. I am now serving Him for sixty-eight years, and during all that time He has never done me the least harm, but has constantly overwhelmed me with benefits; how, then, can I abandon Him and forsake His service? No, there is no torment that can force me to be unfaithful, or to forget the gratitude I owe my generous Benefactor. Use against me the worst torments tyranny can invent, hew me into a thousand pieces, roast me alive, boil me in oil, I am ready to bear it all with joy for the love of that God who has shown me such love and generosity during my life. The only thing I regret is that I have not a thousand lives to sacrifice for Him in return for His priceless love and generosity. How could I be untrue to such a good Lord? My dear Christians, let us think the same when assailed by temptations and allurements to sin, whether they come from the devil, from men, or from our own evil inclinations; let us at once recall the countless benefits we owe the Divine Goodness, and say with St. Polycarp, How can I renounce my Lord, who is so good? During my whole life He has never done the slightest thing to injure me. If now and then He has sent me a cross, it was with a good intention on His part and for my greater advantage, so that I ought to thank Him for that also. Otherwise I have been feeding on His benefits every moment of my life, and now shall I turn my back on Him, and set Him at naught by trampling His law under foot? No, I cannot do that. Away with all the goods of the world and all the joys and pleasures of the flesh! Away with the flatteries and praises of men! I would rather die a thousand times than wilfully offend by sin my Sovereign Benefactor.

Repentance
and resolution.

Ah, my God, would that I had thought of that long ago! Alas, only too often have I sinned against Thee and shamefully abandoned Thee in spite of Thy countless benefits! I ought to sink into the ground with shame! I am more ungrateful than the dog, that serves its master truly in return for the bone thrown to it. And now it is not the fear of the hell I have so often de-

¹ Quomodo possum renuntiare Domino meo tam bono?

served, not the loss of the joys of heaven that I have so often forfeited, that troubles me, but rather the black ingratitude I have shown towards Thee, my Benefactor! Never, O God, with the help of Thy grace, shall I be guilty of it again! Hear, ye heavens, and give ear, O earth, that are created by God for me! I love my God and yours with my whole heart, and for His sake I hate and detest all the sins of my life. What I am, O Lord, is the result of Thy goodness, and what I am shall be henceforth devoted to Thy service out of gratitude. For no other end or object do I wish to live, but to praise and love my Sovereign Benefactor. For no other end do I desire the kingdom of heaven but to give proofs there for all eternity of Thy goodness to me, which I shall then praise and bless without end in the society of the angels and the elect. Amen.

THIRTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON THE NATURE OF GRATITUDE TO GOD.

Subject.

1st. True gratitude to God consists chiefly in loving Him with our whole hearts. 2d. From this we can see whether and in what degree we have been grateful to God hitherto.—*Preached on the sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Ipsæ vero apprehensum sanavit eum.—Luke xiv. 4.
“But He, taking him, healed him.”

Introduction.

What a good and kind Saviour we have! I must again cry out; wherever He goes He does good. Hardly had He seen the dropsical man of whom the Gospel speaks than He at once healed him without being asked to do so: “But He, taking him, healed him.” Ungrateful, wicked Pharisees! I must also exclaim with indignation, who were not softened by that goodness of the Son of God, but continued to persecute Him everywhere, and to act as spies on His actions! Yet Christ does not cease doing good to the sick and needy. We have hitherto, my dear brethren, treated of the gratitude we owe to God for the benefits He has

bestowed on us, and we have seen, first, that He expects a constant, unceasing gratitude from us mortals, since He confers benefits on us out of pure goodness without hoping to gain anything Himself thereby, and He never ceases doing good to us for a moment. Secondly, that He expects this gratitude solely in order that He may thus be induced to bestow still greater benefits on us; from which we came to the conclusion that he who has but a little is already rich enough, and can obtain from God all that is necessary for his salvation, provided he is only grateful for what he has already received; therefore we should at once return heartfelt thanks to God even for the least benefit. Thirdly, we have represented to ourselves the number of the general and special benefits that God showers down on us daily, and on which we hardly bestow a thought; from which we concluded that every man with any sense of honor should be unceasingly grateful to God. Fourthly, when treating on another occasion of the vice of ingratitude, we have experienced feelings of horror for that vice; for, as a general rule, they who are most endowed by God with worldly goods are most wanting in gratitude to Him. But now, if you wish to know what you are to do so as to prove your gratitude to God in a fitting manner, I shall answer your question in this sermon.

Plan of Discourse.

True gratitude to God consists chiefly in loving Him with our whole hearts above all things. This I shall show in the first part. How are we to know whether and in what degree we have hitherto been grateful to God? This I shall show in the second part.

O God worthy of all love! we can give Thee nothing in return for the countless benefits Thou bestowest on us; at least, then, grant us Thy grace, that we may do the little in our power, with which Thy goodness will be satisfied, that is, that we may love Thee with our whole hearts above all things. Obtain this grace for us by thy intercession, O Virgin Mother Mary, and you, holy guardian angels.

Gratitude to God requires three things. True gratitude, as St. Thomas of Aquin describes it, consists in three things. "The first is, to acknowledge the benefit received."¹ "The second is, to praise his benefactor and return him thanks."² "The third is, to make what return one can according

¹ Primum est quod homo acceptum beneficium recognoscat.

² Secundum est, quod laudet et gratias agat.

to circumstances and opportunity.”¹ Therefore true gratitude must show itself in the memory; for certainly a benefit is never worse bestowed than on one who hardly ever thinks of it, nor acknowledges in his heart that he has received it. It must show itself in speech and outward signs, by which the inward feelings of the heart are declared in praising and speaking highly of one’s benefactor. Thus, when a beggar receives even a piece of dry bread at the door, he cries out: “May God reward you a hundred-fold!” King David had, as it were, not tongues enough to give expression to his feelings whenever he recalled the benefits conferred on him by God; and therefore he begged of all creatures in heaven and on earth to help him in sounding the praises of God. “Praise ye the Lord from the heavens; praise ye Him in the high places. Praise ye Him, all His angels; praise ye Him, all His hosts. Praise ye Him, O sun and moon; praise ye Him, all ye stars and light. Praise the Lord from the earth: fire, hail, snow, ice, stormy winds which fulfil His word; mountains and all hills; beasts and all cattle; kings of the earth and all peoples; princes and all judges of the earth; let the old with the younger praise the name of the Lord.”² The three youths in the fiery furnace at Babylon, through gratitude at being preserved by God unhurt in the midst of the flames, invited all creatures to join with them in praising their Creator. “All ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord; praise and exalt Him above all forever!”³ they sang with jubilant hearts. Finally, true gratitude must show itself in our thoughts, in our hearts, so that we endeavor to make what return we can for the benefit received. In our hearts, I say, and not in our hands alone; for if the present I make my benefactor does not come from a well-meaning heart it is not a sign of true gratitude, but rather an act of hypocrisy and falsehood, by which I may indeed deceive men, who cannot see the heart, but not the all-seeing eye of God, who is everywhere present.

Now, the love of God above all things comprises these three con- None of

¹ Tertium est quod retribuatur pro loco et tempore secundum suam facultatem.

² Laudate Dominum de cœlis; laudate eum in excelsis. Laudate eum omnes angeli ejus; laudate eum omnes virtutes ejus. Laudate eum sol et luna; laudate eum omnes stellæ et lumen. Laudate Dominum de terra: ignis, grando, nix, glacies, spiritus procellarum, quæ faciunt verbum ejus; montes et omnes colles; bestię et universa pecora; reges terræ et omnes populi; principes et omnes judices terræ; senes cum junioribus laudent nomen Domini.—Ps. cxlviii. 1-3, 7-12.

³ Benedicite omnia opera Domini Domino; laudate et superexaltate eum in sæcula.—Dan. iii. 57.

these can be
without the
love of God.

ditions. Nay, if that love is wanting, none of the other requisites of true gratitude can be present. For I can look on what I have received as a real benefit without on that account loving my benefactor, and that is what all ungrateful men really do. I can also give utterance to expressions of the deepest gratitude, and praise him who has done good to me, without loving him or wishing well to him; such is the conduct of hypocrites and time-servers, who are skilled in paying empty compliments. I can even make some actual return for the benefit received, and give my benefactor twice what he has given to me, without loving him; and this is according to one of the maxims of the false, treacherous world, which acts in that way through policy, human respect, self-love, and the desire of gaining the esteem of men. But the all-seeing God does not accept that as true gratitude. No, it is the heart, it is true love that He wishes for first of all. "Singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord," says St. Paul to the Ephesians, "giving thanks always for all things."¹ Your thanks must come from an upright and well-meaning heart.

As we see
from Holy
Scripture.

The two first-born sons of our forefather Adam, Cain and Abel, offered sacrifice of thanksgiving to God; but how differently their sacrifices were accepted! "And it came to pass after many days that Cain offered of the fruits of the earth gifts to the Lord. Abel also offered of the firstlings of his flock; and the Lord had respect to Abel and to his offerings. But to Cain and his offerings he had no respect."² Why? I know well that some look for the cause of this difference in the gifts offered; because Abel, as a shepherd, offered the first and best of his flock; but Cain, the husbandman, offered only the last and most worthless of the fruits of the earth. But, asks the Abbot Rupert, why was Cain's gift worthless in the sight of God? Because, "while he was offering his goods, he did not offer himself, since his heart was filled with earthly desires. Abel first offered his heart, and then his goods, so that his sacrifice was valuable."³ Therefore God looked favorably on the sacrifice of Abel, but rejected that of Cain, because it was not offered with true love. Hence without this

¹ Cantantes et psallentes in cordibus vestris Domino, gratias agentes semper pro omnibus.—Ephes. v. 19, 20.

² Factum est autem post multos dies, ut offeret Cain de fructibus terræ munera Domino. Abel quoque obtulit de primogenitis gregis sui; et respexit Dominus ad Abel, et ad munera ejus; ad Cain vero et ad munera illius non respexit.—Gen. iv. 3-5.

³ Cum offeret sua, seipsum sibi retinuerat, repositum habens cor cum cupiditate terrena. Abel primum cor suum, deinde rem suam offerendo plurimam hostiam obtulit.

love nothing I can do to prove my gratitude will be acceptable.

On the other hand, if I love my God above all things with my whole heart, then I have fulfilled all the conditions required for true gratitude. For I thereby acknowledge the benefit received, since it is the motive that impels me to love my benefactor above all things. I praise my God and thank Him even in act, and my whole heart unites in that act. Finally, by this love of mine I make what return I can for the benefits received from God. For, even if I had nothing to give Him but the mite that the poor widow cast into the treasury of the temple, nay, if I were the poorest on earth and had absolutely nothing to offer to the Lord, yet I really give Him everything in my power and at the same time the most pleasing gift that man can bestow, since I love Him with my whole heart above all things. That is worth more than all honors and dignities, all riches and treasures, all the pleasures and joys of the world; and if I had those other things in my power, I would be ready, in virtue of that love, at any moment, to give them up again for God's sake if He required that sacrifice of me in token of my gratitude. Could I make any better or greater return than this?

While the love of God alone comprises all the rest.

Seneca tells us that Æschines, a pupil of the philosopher Socrates, when he saw his fellow-pupils giving presents to their master, and knew that his poverty made him unable to imitate their generosity, went to Socrates and said to him: My dear master, I am too poor to show my gratitude to you as I ought; I have nothing but myself; but what I have I give you with all my heart, and present myself to you. Truly, answered Socrates, you have given me much more than all the others! See there, my dear brethren, the best and most acceptable thanks-offering we can make to our God and Lord. No matter how much I give Him, He looks on it all as of no value if I keep back myself. God wishes to have my heart, and my whole heart, namely, the whole love of my heart; that alone is enough to satisfy Him. But by this I do not mean the act of charity that we make now and then during prayer; for that is only a fitful, intermittent love, that has no constancy. I mean a constant, lasting love, a will once for all firmly determined to serve God with all possible zeal, to keep His commandments inviolably, to avoid even the least deliberate sin, to be fully resigned to His will in all things, and to do everything when, how, and because God wills it to be done.

The nature of this love

The ser-
vants of God
teach us that
by their ex-
ample.

Such were the dispositions of king David, when, considering the numerous benefits bestowed on him by God, he said: "I have inclined my heart to do Thy justifications forever;"¹ I have completely subjected myself to Thy will forever in return for Thy goodness to me. Such, too, were the dispositions of the pious empress Placilla. Besides the other acts of virtue with which she sought to become every day more and more pleasing to God, she was especially given to works of charity and mercy to the poor and oppressed. She visited them in their poor dwellings and in the hospitals; brought food to them, prepared their beds, tended their ulcerous wounds and sores; in a word, she became a nurse to all, and performed services that one could hardly expect from the most lowly servant-maid. Many of the courtiers, who knew little of the Gospel law of Jesus Christ, saw this with indignation and chagrin, because they thought those occupations unworthy the imperial dignity. What! said Placilla; when I remember what I was before, and what I am now by the goodness of God, can I make Him a less return? It is for the emperor in his authority to do his best to promote the honor and glory of God, and to distribute his money among his poor subjects; but it is my duty to wait on those same poor people, to give them good example, and thus to fulfil the will of God in all things, and to show my gratitude to the Sovereign God, who has raised us to the imperial throne. Still more perfect was the way in which a certain king of Ethiopia proved his gratitude, as Nicephorus writes; on one occasion, when he had gained a complete victory over his enemies, he acknowledged that God had fought for him, and therefore, raising his eyes and hands to heaven, he said: O great Emperor of heaven! Almighty Lord of hosts! I see clearly that I have conquered because Thou hast specially helped me; but I have nothing worthy to be offered Thee in return for this benefit. The only thing I have is my crown and kingdom, and that I now lay down at Thy feet as a thanks-offering, so that I may devote myself wholly to Thy service! So saying, he put off his crown, laid aside his purple garments, and retiring into solitude, consumed the remainder of his life in love towards his Benefactor. I repeat, then, my dear brethren, that the best and most pleasing thanks-offering we can make to our God, and that in which true gratitude consists, is to love Him with our whole hearts above all things, so that we

¹ Inclinaui cor meum ad faciendas justificationes tuas in æternum.—Ps. cxviii. 112.

abandon ourselves always to the divine will and pleasure. From this each one may see whether and in what degree he has been grateful to God hitherto. We shall consider this together in the—

Second Part.

If, then, gratitude to God is to be measured according to our love for God, ah, true gratitude, where shall we find you in the world? How many even amongst us Christians resemble those of whom Our Lord complained in the Gospel of St. Matthew: “Hypocrites, well hath Isaias prophesied of you, saying: This people honoreth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me.”¹ We are generous enough to God as far as words go. When we are engaged at prayer in the church, or at public devotions, one act of thanksgiving follows the other, one act of charity the other, while we repeat those acts of love and gratitude a hundred times before our ordinary confessions and Communions. “This people honoreth Me with their lips;” all this is mere outward show, mere empty words; but where is the heart meanwhile? for that is what God wishes to have from us. Is it completely resigned to His holy will and determined to put away all that is displeasing to Him? Are you ready to give up even that sensual attachment to that person, of whom you think a hundred times a day with impure love before you raise your mind to God, who is present, looking at you? Are you ready to put aside that secret wrath against that man who has injured you, and whom you therefore cannot bear to look on favorably? Are you willing to put aside that inordinate desire of temporal goods, which sometimes keeps you from serving God as you are bound to do? that human respect, through which you often neglect your duty, or say and do what is contrary to the law of Jesus Christ, for the sake of pleasing men? that vain spirit of the world, which is opposed to the spirit of God, and induces you to indulge in extravagant dress, and to follow worldly customs in your amusements and conversations, so that you do what you see people of your condition doing, although the friends of God, the apostles and followers of Jesus Christ, nay, Our Lord Himself, the infallible Truth, find fault with such customs and practices? that inordinate love of your children, which makes you bring them up without due care, not chastising them when they

Hence they are not to be looked on as grateful who thank God with the lips, but do not give Him their hearts.

¹ Hypocritæ, bene prophetavit de vobis Isaias, dicens: populus hic labiis me honorat, cor autem eorum longe est a me.—Matt. xv. 7, 8.

deserve it, but encouraging them to lead idle, worldly lives, although negligence in this particular would be enough to make your Judge pronounce sentence of condemnation on you, even if you had no other sin on your soul? Have you put away out of your heart all these and many similar faults? No, you cannot make up your mind to do that; the great God, in spite of all His goodness to you, is not able to get that much out of you. And how, then, can you say with truth that you love your God; that you love Him with your whole heart; that you love Him above all things? And therefore, how can you say that you have given yourself completely to Him out of gratitude for the countless blessings He has bestowed on you? What kind of pleasure can the Almighty have in your prayers, in your acts of love and gratitude, which you utter merely with the lips, and in your confessions and Communions? Your sacrifices are all like Cain's; you give something to the Lord, but not everything; you offer Him the most worthless of your goods, but the best, namely, the heart, you keep for yourself, for the vain world, for your sensuality and carnal desires; therefore God will not look with favor on your offering, but will reject it as unseemly.

Nor they
who do for
God only
what they
are bound to
do under
pain of hell.

Further, how many of us perhaps side with those tepid Christians, who, although they find God so generous to them, are so niggardly to Him that they wish to love Him only so far as they are bound to do in order to avoid mortal sin and eternal damnation? Tell those Christians that they must give the first part of the day, as the most agreeable, to God by prayer; that every evening, before retiring to rest, they should assemble their families and, as all good Christians do, have night prayers and the examen of conscience, thanking God for the blessings given during the day, and begging His pardon for the faults committed; that on Sundays and holy-days they should be regular in going to the church to hear sermons, so as to be encouraged to serve God and be instructed in the duties of their state; that on the same days they should spend at least half-an-hour in reading the Lives of the Saints or some spiritual book; that they should frequently go to confession to some experienced confessor, so as to keep their consciences always pure; that they should often approach the table of the Lord with becoming devotion and reverence and humility, so as to obtain copious graces from God; that they should be diligent in performing the works of Christian charity and mercy; that they should observe Christian modesty in their out-

and demeanor, so as to give good example; tell them all this, and more to the same purpose (and indeed they are not expected to give up a kingdom, like the king of whom I have told you; it is only a small thing that God requires of them to prove their gratitude to Him): What! they say or think at once, to excuse themselves, I am not bound to do those things under pain of sin; I can do or omit them as I please; it is enough for me not to break the commandments in serious matters. Ah, blind mortals that you are! how little you value your souls and your salvation, since you refuse to do what would make it easier to keep the commandments, and without which it is, humanly speaking, impossible to keep from breaking them for a long time! But I will say no more of this. Do not these excuses of yours show clearly enough your odious ingratitude to God, since you refuse to give Him anything to which you are not strictly bound, and which is not absolutely necessary to save you from the fire of hell? Shame on you! Your conduct is intolerable!

If the just God had done nothing for you hitherto but what He is strictly bound to do, O ye poor souls! in what a wretched plight you would now be! God is not bound to give us anything, and yet, out of pure generosity, He has given us everything that we have and are; while we are so niggardly in measuring out our service to Him that we give Him only what we are bound to under pain of sin, only what the fear of hell forces from us. Is that gratitude? Is it not rather odious meanness towards the good God? "In things that concern our own advantage," says St. Thomas Aquinas, "gratitude has no place."¹ For, just as it is no generosity if I do good to myself, nor goodness when I pardon myself; nor mercy when I pity my own miseries, since a natural impulse urges me to shun what is injurious and seek what is advantageous to me, so it is not true gratitude to God when I merely render Him that service which the fear of an eternal evil forces from me. "Gratitude," continues the Angelic Doctor, "always strives to make greater return if possible."² But we are unwilling to give to the Lord God, in return for countless favors, even the little we are able to give Him; and we say by our actions: Behold, O my God, this or that Thou requirest of me under pain of grievous sin; therefore I must give it to Thee, or else I shall be lost forever; but Thou must not expect any

This is acting very meanly with God.

¹ In his quæ sunt ad seipsum, non habet locum gratitudo.

² Gratiæ compensatio semper tendit, ut pro suo posse aliquid magis retribuatur.

more from me; I know well that it would please Thee if I were to do or omit this or that for Thy sake; but Thou wilt not get that much out of me. Fie! is that gratitude? Could any ingratitude be more hateful? At all events, there is not the least doubt that such men do not love God with their whole hearts, and less still that they do not love Him above all things with their whole hearts, as perfectly as a good Christian should.

The most
ungrateful
are they who
return God
evil for
good.

And, finally, my dear brethren, what are we to think of those who, instead of constantly loving God, do not hesitate to offend Him, in spite of His goodness to them, by grievous sin? Instead of the continual grateful remembrance of His benefits, their imaginations are always deliberately filled with sinful thoughts and images, so that God can find no place therein. Instead of praising and blessing God, their tongues are occupied with impure discourses and conversations, with which they mislead innocent souls and bring them into sin; or with uncharitable talk, by which they injure their neighbor's good name and reputation; or with cursing and swearing, with which they rail against the good God when and wherever anything happens to cross their humor. Thus, instead of giving their hearts altogether to God, they drive Him away from them most cruelly, and close the door against Him, so that He cannot enter. This is a terrible thing to think of, but still more terrible is it to remember that there are many of the kind amongst Christians.

Shown by a
fable.

There is a well-known old fable about the hedgehog. In the beginning of the spring, tormented by the cold and frosty winds, it came before the burrow of the rabbit, and begged of the latter to give it room until the cold weather should pass away, or else it should die. The rabbit consented, and allowed the hedgehog to enter. But as soon as the latter found its way in it began to unroll itself and displayed its prickly spines, so that the poor rabbit, not finding room to escape them on account of the smallness of the hole, was grievously wounded. It began to cry and complain; is this the thanks you give me, it said, for sheltering you? Keep off a little, at least; you see that I have not room to escape being hurt by your prickles. What! said the hedgehog; if you have no room here, go elsewhere. And the poor rabbit had to leave his home and seek shelter in some other place. This is a fable, my dear brethren, but it is a true picture of the ingratitude of men towards their Sovereign Benefactor. They speak Him fair and make a thousand acts

of gratitude and love with the lips; they cry out and appeal to Him when they are in want. Oh, how well they can then humble themselves, and submit to Him! But when it comes to actual proof, when they have got possession of the house, how unbecomingly they act towards their Host! That is, when they have received many benefits from God, and things go according to their wishes, oh, then they cry out: Away with God, we do not want Him here! When they are sick and bedridden, or oppressed with sorrow, or suffering persecution, they are most diligent in prayer and visiting the church as far as their state allows; they shed copious tears, and often receive the holy Communion with great devotion. But when they are restored to health, or freed from the trouble that oppressed them, what do they do? They spend their time in dancing and amusing themselves, in following the luxurious customs of the world, and offending God. They know very well that God and mortal sin cannot dwell in their hearts at the same time; but, for the sake of gratifying their wicked desires and passions, they do not hesitate to commit many sins. God complains and, as it were, says to them: You hurt Me; I have not room in your heart! Is that your thanks for My goodness to you? Away with You, then! is the terrible answer they give, at least in act, to their good God; away with You! I care not for Your company.

That is the reason of the bitter complaints we read in the Book of Job against such ungrateful mortals. “Who said to God: Depart from us; and looked upon the Almighty as if He could do nothing: whereas He had filled their houses with good things.”¹ Mark those words; at the very time when He had filled their houses with good things, with corn, wine, and all the necessities of life, at that very time they said to God: Depart from us; they turned Him out of their houses and said to Him: away with You; we do not want You here. From this we can see, my dear brethren, that the good God will never abandon us of Himself; He must be first abandoned by us, and, as it were, violently driven away from us. Is not that treating Him with the utmost scorn and contempt? Ungrateful man! do you turn God out of your heart because He has overwhelmed you with good things? Cannot He who has given you all you have take it away from you again? Cannot He who has given you health

God complains of them.

¹ Qui dicebant Deo: recede a nobis; et quasi nihil facere posset Omnipotens, aestimabant eum; cum ille impleisset domos eorum bonis.—Job xxii. 17, 18.

again send you a grievous illness? Cannot He who has blessed you and your household hurl you down into the depths of poverty and want at any moment? And yet you treat Him with contempt at the very moment when things go according to your desires? Oh, blackest ingratitude which any man or even irrational animal can be guilty of! But what do I say? There is even a worse degree of ingratitude to be found amongst men. What is it? Hear what God Himself says by the Prophet Isaias: "Thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins; thou hast wearied Me with thy iniquities."¹ Thou hast forced Me to serve thee against Myself on account of thy sins, by those very benefits thou receivedst and dost daily receive from Me. By the clear understanding I gave thee thou hast compelled Me to help in thy double-meaning expressions, which conceal the worst kind of poison for souls, and which thou givest utterance to amid laughter and merriment, to the great scandal of those who hear them; nay, thou dost actually commit those abominations to writing and scatter them abroad in all places. By the wealth I bestowed on thee thou hast made Me help thee to gratify thy pride, dissoluteness, revenge, and intemperance. Thus thou hast, as it were, compelled and forced Me to be thy helper and coöperator in offending against My own law.

Their prayers and thank-offerings cannot please God.

That is a fine way to show gratitude! And yet these very people pray in church with others, and praise God, and thank Him with the lips, and offer Him the holy Mass as a sacrifice of thanksgiving! Away with such prayers! Away with such works of devotion and thanksgiving and acts of love! "To what purpose do you bring Me frankincense from Saba?" says the Lord to such people by the Prophet Jeremias; "your holocausts are not acceptable, nor are your sacrifices pleasing to Me."² Why not? "Because they have not heard My words, and they have cast away My law."³ And again, by the Prophet Isaias: "To what purpose do you offer Me the multitude of your victims, saith the Lord? I am full. Offer sacrifice no more in vain; incense is an abomination to Me. My soul hateth your solemnities: they are become troublesome to Me, I am weary of bearing them. And when you stretch forth your hands, I will turn

¹ *Servire me fecisti in peccatis tuis; præbuisti mihi laborem in iniquitatibus tuis.*—Is. xliii. 24.

² *Ut quid mihi thus de Saba adferis? Holocaustomata vestra non sunt accepta, et victimæ vestræ non placuerunt mihi.*—Jer. vi. 20.

³ *Quia verba mea non audierunt, et legem meam projecerunt.*—Ibid. 19.

away My eyes from you. But if you wish your thankofferings to be pleasing to Me, wash yourselves, be clean, take away the evil of your devices from My eyes, cease to do perversely, learn to do well.”¹ Ask with the Prophet Micheas: “What shall I offer to the Lord, that is worthy,” for all the benefits God has showered down on me? “Shall I kneel before the high God? Shall I offer holocausts unto Him?” Is it enough for me to offer Him a hundred Masses? “Shall I give my first-born,” and sacrifice him like Abraham? All this will be of no good as a return for the benefits I have received, unless my heart is pure, and I am fully resigned to His holy will. “I will show thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requireth of thee.” What is that? “Verily, to do judgment, and to love mercy, and to walk carefully with thy God,”² and to love Him above all things; in this true gratitude consists.

Let us once for all, my dear brethren, resolve to practise this gratitude. And, O my sovereign God, what canst Thou do to move me to love Thee, since Thou hast hitherto failed to do so, in spite of the favors Thou hast conferred on me? Truly, I love Thee, and will love Thee with my whole heart, not with the lips alone; but I will prove my love by deeds, inasmuch as I will always endeavor, with Thy grace, to do Thy holy will in all things as well as I can. Whatever service, love, and gratitude I can render Thee, I still acknowledge that it is all too little in comparison with the countless benefits I owe Thee. Therefore I give Thee all I have, and I say, as the disciple did to his master, since I am too poor to make a proper return to Thee, I give myself up altogether to Thy service. “I have inclined my heart to do Thy justifications forever.” If any creature in the world has hitherto attracted my love against Thy will, behold, O Lord, I now renounce that creature and give that love to Thee. If any one in the world has angered me, and done evil to me, so that I have desired revenge, I renounce that revenge for Thy sake, and forgive that man from my heart. If temporal goods have taken

Conclusion
and resolution
to love
God constantly
above all
things.

¹ Quo mihi multitudinem victimarumstrarum dicit Dominus? Plenus sum. Ne offeratis ultra sacrificium frustra; incensum abominatio est mihi. Solemnitates vestrae odit anima mea; facta sunt mihi molesta, laboravi sustinens. Et cum extenderitis manus vestras avertam oculos meos a vobis. Lavamini, mundi estote, auferte malum cogitationumstrarum ab oculis meis; quiescite agere perverse; discite bene facere.—Is. i. 11, 13—17.

² Quid dignum offeram Domino? Curvabo genu Deo Excelso? Numquid offeram ei holocaustomata? Numquid dabo primogenitum meum? Indicabo tibi, o homo, quid sit bonum, et quid Dominus requirat a te. Utique facere judicium, et diligere misericordiam, et sollicitum ambulare cum Deo tuo.—Mich. vi. 6, 7, 8.

hold of my heart, I renounce the desire of them for Thy sake, and will in future share more liberally with the poor what Thou hast given me. If my carnal desires have found pleasure in anything that displeases Thee, I sacrifice that pleasure for Thy sake and renounce it forever. If the world with its followers has led me into vanities contrary to Thy holy law, I give up those vanities for Thy sake, and here renew the oath I swore in baptism, when I renounced the devil, the world with its pomps and vanities, which Thy Spirit cannot tolerate. Thou alone, O Lord, shalt have full possession of my heart, and in Thy love alone will I live and die. Amen.

On the Vice of Ingratitude, see the foregoing Second Part.

THIRTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON GRATITUDE TOWARDS OUR HOLY GUARDIAN ANGELS.

Subject.

The holy angels are our protectors, 1st. in life; 2d. in death; therefore we all owe them the greatest love, honor, and gratitude.—*Preached on the feast of St. Michael, the Archangel.*

Text.

Angeli eorum in cœlis semper vident faciem Patris mei.
—Matt. xviii. 10.

“Their angels in heaven always see the face of My Father.”

Introduction.

What angels? The angels in heaven. Whose angels? Their angels; for all men, no matter how vile and wicked they may be, all without exception, have one of those great princes of heaven at their side to accompany and protect them always. “He hath given His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. In their hands they shall bear thee up, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.”¹ Oh, what goodness on the part of God to us vile mortals! What an honor for our souls! What a happiness for us poor creatures! What condescension on the part of those heavenly spirits! But I also must exclaim with astonishment, What odious forgetfulness and ingratitude, that we

¹ Angells suis mandavit de te ut custodiant te in omnibus viis tuis. In manibus portabunt te, ne forte offendas ad lapidem pedem tuum.—Ps. xc. 11, 12.

so seldom think of those angels, that we show them so little honor, love, and gratitude! This ingratitude, my dear brethren, if it is to be found amongst us, I will now try to banish from our minds, by showing, to the greater honor of our holy guardian angels, a part of that which all men owe them.

Plan of Discourse.

They are our protectors; that is enough, and it will form the subject of this sermon. They are our protectors in life, as we shall see in the first and longer part. Our protectors in death, as we shall see in the second part. Therefore we all owe our holy angels the utmost honor, love, and gratitude; such shall be the conclusion.

O holy angels, you cannot refuse to help and assist me to-day. For if I were to ask that favor from you only with a view to my own advantage, I would still rely on your generosity, which I have often and evidently experienced during my life in all sorts of dangers, both of soul and body; but because you see that my only object is to further your honor and our gratitude to you, you will be, as it were, compelled to assist me in a special manner. This grace I hope to receive through the hands of Mary, your Queen, and so I go on with confidence.

All of us who are in this world are either in the state of sanctifying grace or in the state of mortal sin. In both cases the holy angels protect us. And first with regard to the state of sin; oh, what a wretched state to be in! What greater misery can there be for a man, whose end is God alone, who is created to know, love, and be happy with God; whose heart can have no peace or repose until he possesses God;—what greater misery can there be than for him to live in such a state that, wherever he is, he is surrounded on all sides by the omnipresent God, whom he has made his bitterest enemy; surrounded by the cruel demons, whose bond-slave he is, and who await only a sign from their Creator to drag him down to hell? And as long as he is in that state, he bears about in his body a soul that is an abomination in the sight of God, and a conscience that keeps gnawing at him night and day, giving him neither rest nor peace, and constantly crying out to him, as Pilate did to Christ, “What hast Thou done?”¹ Thou hast offended thy God and lost heaven. And if he is surprised by death in that state, he immediately becomes a

The sinner is in an unhappy state in this life.

¹ Quid fecisti?—John xviii. 35.

brand for the fire of hell, in which he is to burn forever without being consumed; while, the longer he continues in that state, the farther he wanders away from heaven, and the more difficult he makes his conversion. Oh, truly unhappy is the condition of the sinner! And all the more worthy of commiseration, the less he, blinded by his evil desires, acknowledges his misery, like the fishes that swim and play for a while around the bait, and at last, not seeing the hook concealed in it, snap at it and are taken.

And it would be a desperate one, if his holy angel did not protect him.

Truly desperate and unchangeable would, I say, be the state of the sinner, were it not that there is a source of hope still left; and that is the protection of the guardian angel. He it is, O sinner, who, when all creatures are in arms against you, and heaven and earth have conspired for your punishment—he alone it is who stands by your side to defend you. Origen could never imagine this to be the case, for he thought that, when a man fell into mortal sin, his guardian angel abandoned him, just as the physician leaves his patient when the latter refuses to follow his advice and to take his medicines. And I, too, would be of the same opinion, my dear brethren, if I were not aware that the holy Fathers and theologians unanimously look on it as erroneous. For, when I consider on one side the excellence, purity, and holiness of the heavenly spirits and on the other the abominable vileness of the soul in the state of sin, there is nothing astonishes me more than to think that those blessed spirits can bear to associate themselves so closely with the stench of sin as to be the companions of sinners, although the insults offered their Creator by sin cause them the utmost horror and aversion. But this very circumstance adds to the benefit they confer on us. “We daily offend the angels deputed to guard us,” cries out St. Peter Damian with astonishment. “But although they have so much to bear from us, they endure it patiently, nor does it lessen, but rather increase, their concern for our welfare.”¹ Their object herein is to protect us against the rage and attacks of the hellish spirits, who, after we have committed mortal sin, have a right to our souls, and to remind us constantly of the danger of eternal ruin, to cut off the occasions of many sins, to deter us from following the way of vice, and to bring us on to the right path.

¹ Quotidie angelos ad nostram custodiam deputatos multipliciter offendimus. Ipsi autem licet frequenter a nobis injuriam patiantur, sustinent tamen, nec minor illorum circa nos custodia est, imo major sollicitudo.

In the book of Exodus we read that when Moses was on his way to Egypt with his wife and children an angel threatened to kill him: "And would have killed him."¹ The reason of this was, according to the commentators, that he had not observed the law of circumcision with his youngest son. A similar incident happened to Balaam. As he was travelling to the court of king Balac, the ass he was riding went aside out of the way into a field; he beat the animal and tried to bring it back into the road, but it resisted and crushed its rider's leg against a wall, and at last threw him on the ground. Balaam, enraged at this, beat the ass still more severely, and abused the poor animal as if it were to blame, because he knew not that it was an angel who wished to hinder his journey. What was the angel's object? Hear what he said to that Prophet: "I am come to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse and contrary to me: and unless the ass had turned out of the way, giving place to me who stood against thee, I had slain thee."² Balaam said: I have sinned, not knowing that thou didst stand against me; and now, if it displease thee that I go, I will return."³ For Balaam was animated with the evil intention of cursing the people of God; and the angel tried to divert him from it by threatening him with death. In almost the same way do the holy angels act towards those under their charge when the latter are about to do evil, or have already broken the commandments and are on the broad way that leads to hell; not, indeed, that they appear to us in visible form, but they terrify and threaten by inwardly moving the heart. That fearful uneasiness of mind, the gnawing worm of conscience that one feels after committing mortal sin, and feels even against his will, what else is it but the sharp sword held before him by his good angel, who tries to deter him from vice and bring him back from the way of sin? Those piercing words that one sometimes hears in sermons, when he least of all expected them, and which, as it were by accident, touch on his secret sins and explain the enormity of them, so that he is driven to amend his scandalous life, to give up the society of some creature that was the occasion of ruin to his soul, to restore ill-gotten goods, to make good the sacri-

His angel
tries to
bring him
back by
frightening
him.

¹ Et volebat occidere eum.—Exod. iv. 24.

² Ego veni ut adversarer tibi, quia perversa est via tua, mihique contraria; et nisi asina declinasset de via, dans locum resistanti, te occidissem.—Num. xxii. 32, 33.

³ Dixit Balaam: peccavi, nesciens quod tu stares contra me; et nunc, si displicet tibi ut vadam, revertar.—Ibid. 34.

legious confessions he made either by concealing a mortal sin through shame, or through want of a firm purpose of amendment and true contrition,—all these and similar inspirations are so many swords and arrows that the holy guardian angels suggest to the preacher while he is preparing his sermon at home, or, as often happens, while he is actually delivering it in church, so that the inspiration comes to him quite unexpectedly and without his having thought of it beforehand; and their object in so doing is to enable the preacher to inflict a salutary wound on their charges, that may enable them to leave the way of vice and to return to God.

It rejoices
the angel
when the
sinner obeys
him.

These threats do not come from hatred towards the sinner, although the holy angels abhor all sin and wickedness, but from true love and tenderness and compassion; just as the loving mother cannot bear to see her child dirty, for she has an abhorrence of dirt, and therefore is most careful to wash it off; for, while she hates the dirt, she loves her child most tenderly. Oh, what joy an angel feels, my dear brethren, at seeing the sinner entrusted to his care profit by the means offered for his conversion! The Son of God Himself pictured this joy by the parable of the shepherd who, after long seeking, finds the lost sheep, brings it home on his shoulders, and invites his friends and neighbors to rejoice with him. “So I say to you,” adds Our Lord, “there shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance.”¹ But, on the other hand, what trouble and sorrow for an angel to see his charge, in spite of all exhortation, running blindly along on the way of sin that leads to eternal ruin! “They rejoiced,” says St. Bernard, speaking of the holy angels, when they saw us returning to God by penance, as if they had seen us coming back from the very gates of hell; what will be their feelings if they see us coming back from the very gate of paradise, into which we had already put one foot, and going back to our old vices?”² Nevertheless they do not cease to follow up the obstinate sinner, and, if nothing else is of any avail, to pray for him constantly, in order to stay the avenging hand of the angry God, and to obtain a respite for the sinner, that he may do penance.

¹ Ita dico vobis gaudium erit coram angelis Dei super uno peccatore pœnitentiam agente. —Luke xv. 10.

² Exultaverunt cum nos ad poenitentiam venimus, tanquam super his, quos ab ipsa inferni porta vidissent revocari; quid erit tunc, si ab ipsa paradisi janua reverti viderint et abire retrorsum eos qui jam pedem alterum in paradiso posuerunt?—S. Bern. Sermon. xxii. in Vig. Nat. Dom.

It seems to me that I sometimes hear God exclaiming with displeasure, in the words of the man in the Gospel of St. Luke when he came to his fig-tree for the third time and found no fruit on it: "Behold, for these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none; cut it down therefore; why cumbereth it the ground?"¹ Why should the useless wood take up so much ground? So it seems to me that I hear the angry God saying: It is now many years since I expected fruits of penance from that man, but I have hitherto found nothing in him except the weeds of sin and vice; cut him down therefore; why should he cumber the ground? Away with him! Go, O death, and take him from the world into eternal fire! Why should that man cumber the earth? His hands are full of injustice; his mouth is filled with invective, railing, swearing, and cursing; his heart is full of hatred and bitterness against his neighbor; he is ruining his family by dissolute living; he laughs at holy things, and will not hear of repentance or amendment. Why, then, should he live any longer? What is that woman doing on earth? She sleeps till late in the day, and spends hours in dressing and tricking herself out, in eating, drinking, gambling, in dangerous company. Thus she spends days, weeks, months, and years. Why should she cumber the ground? What is that sensual young man doing on earth? He passes his days in doing nothing, or in doing evil, and squanders his parents' money; his first and last thought is directed to the gratification of his sensual appetites. Why should he cumber the earth? What is that young girl doing on earth? She spends her time in standing idly at the door, dressed in the height of the fashion, or in late walking and dangerous intercourse with others, thus giving scandal and occasion of ruin to souls. Why should she cumber the ground? What are those fathers and mothers doing who train their children in such an un-Christian manner in all the vanity of the world, and, to the great sorrow of their guardian angels, lead their souls to the demon, away from God? Why should such people live? Cut down therefore those unfruitful trees; into the fire with them; they are fit only for burning! Thus speaks God, the Lord and Master of the vineyard. And woe to men if His words were always acted on! How many unfruitful trees would now be burning in hell! And who prevents that? The garden-

They try to
restrain the
wrath of
God, that
He may not
smite the
sinner.

¹ Ecce anni tres sunt ex quo vengo quærens fructum in ficulnea hac, et non invenio; succide ergo illam; ut quid etiam terram occupat?—Luke xiii. 7.

er to whom the vineyard is entrusted; the angel, namely, who has to take care of the soul. "Lord," he says entreatingly, "let it alone this year also, until I dig about it, and dung it, and if happily it bear fruit; but if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."¹ Ah, my God, give him still a little respite! Leave him longer in life! I will try to soften his heart by good inspirations; I will let him weep and wail in all sorts of tribulations, until misfortune opens his eyes, and he at last produces fruits of penance.

Many have
therefore
reason to
thank their
good angels.

Ah, my dear brethren, how many are there of us here present who have not been sometimes in that most dangerous and unhappy state of sin? If we could see all the hidden things that happen, and that are known only to God and to His all-seeing Providence, how many of us would have to say: There, at that time, in that illness, on that journey, on that occasion, in those circumstances, I was in imminent danger of death; the axe was already laid to the root of the tree; and if the blow had fallen in the state in which I then was, where should I be now? Where else but in the everlasting fire of hell? That I was saved from the danger, and got time to repent; that I saw my unhappy condition, repented of and confessed my sins, and again became a child of God, to whom have I to ascribe that? That is the precious grace for which I have to thank you, my dear angel, next to God and the Blessed Virgin, and I still owe you my thanks for it. It is to you I owe the protection I received while in that unhappy state, and my being saved from eternal ruin.

Even the
just are
in need of
their guar-
dian angels.

Just and pious souls, what a happiness for you to know that you have never been in that state, or else that you have long since freed yourself from it by true repentance! Yet you, too, have to thank your holy angels for protecting and preserving you in the state of grace. But why so? For it would seem that we are not in need of a protector while we are in the grace of God; for who can hurt the true servant, dear friend, and adopted child of God, one who has the Sovereign Lord as his master and friend, and seeks nothing but to please and love Him with his whole heart, so as to be loved by Him in turn? "Say to the just man that it is well,"² He says Himself; and again: "Whatsoever shall befall the just man, it shall not make him sad: but the wicked shall be filled with mischief."³

¹ Domine, dimitte illam et hoc anno, usquedum fodiam circa illam, et mittam stercora; et siquidem fecerit fructum; sin autem, in futurum succides eam. —Luke xlii. 8, 9.

² Dicite justo quoniam bene.—Is. lli. 10.

³ Non contristabit justum quidquid ei acciderit: impli autem replebuntur malo.—Prov. xli. 21.

I know, my dear brethren, that if we can find true peace, joy, and happiness anywhere in this vale of tears, we must seek it in him who has a good conscience and is always in the friendship of God; the wicked do not believe this, but all the good know it by experience. But, ah, always to keep in the grace of God, on the right way to heaven, and never to wander from it by sin—what a rare thing that is among men on earth! If our nature were not so frail, and weak, and opposed to the spirit, and constantly inclined to unlawful pleasures; if, like the angels and saints in heaven, our wills were immovable; if there were no robbers to waylay us on the road of justice; then, perhaps, we might be without fear or anxiety; but we daily and hourly experience the contrary. For we are surrounded on all sides by dangerous occasions, temptations, allurements to sin in hundreds; snares from within, snares from without, ready for our souls day and night; attacks from the devils, from men, from friends, from enemies, from ourselves, that we must always be on our guard against. Thousands there are who have entered on the way of justice, few who have continued on it without sometimes going away on the road of sin. Therefore with reason does the Apostle warn us: “He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall.”¹ Nor need we seek occasions and dangers of sin. Many go out like Dina to see the women of the strange country, and like her they come back having lost their virginal purity, or with their consciences tarnished, and in the state of mortal sin. O ye holy angels, if we had not you as our companions, what would become of us? How quickly would we not be led astray from the path of rectitude! “Who, I ask,” we must say and sigh forth with St. Laurence Justinian, “who could overcome the rage of such fierce enemies, escape their snares, conquer their temptations, or detect their frauds, if he were not helped by his guardian angel?”² Oh, certainly, there is not one!

Our holy guardian angel, my dear brethren, is our most faithful companion and helper while we are in the state of grace; and partly by himself, partly by the weapons he places in our hands, he repels the attacks of the invisible enemies of our souls. “The angel,” says St. Ambrose, “is always going round about a man, and warding off from him what might hurt his soul.”³ Am I

How they
are protect-
ed from sin
by their an-
gels.

¹ Qui se existimat stare, videat ne cadat.—I. Cor. x. 12.

² Quis, quæso, nisi angelico suffultus esset auxilio, tam immanissimorum hostium valeret superare rabiem, effugere laqueos, tentationes vincere, fraudesque reterege?

³ Angelus in circuitu est hominis, qui præstendit ne quis noceat ei.

going anywhere, my angel is with me; am I standing still, he is at my side; when I am asleep, he watches over me; when I am awake, he protects me; he carries me in his arms as a mother does her child: "He hath given His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. In their hands they shall bear thee up, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." Our angel is our teacher, says St. Cyril, who always instructs our ignorance, enlightens our understanding, and discloses to us the vanity and falsehood of worldly joys and goods, and the snares of temptations, that we may not be so often deceived by them. St. Augustine, speaking of the guardian angels, says: "With great care and watchfulness they help us at all times, on all occasions providing for our wants; they assist us when we work; protect us when we are at rest; encourage us in combat, and crown us when we are victorious."² Unceasingly do they speak to our hearts to keep us away from sin, and to exhort us to the constant love of God. The blessed Hermelinda, a tender maiden, had left her home and had gone into a remote village, that she might serve God apart from the tumult of a large town. The lord of the place, when he saw her, became inflamed with love for her, and would have carried her off by force, if her angel had not warned her in time, and said to her: "Go away, O virgin, and preserve intact the purity thou hast consecrated to God."³ Oh, how often have we not heard the same words spoken to our hearts, Go away from that house, in which you will be led into sin! Go away from that company, avoid that meeting, or else you will be in danger of losing your soul. Go not to that theatre, or the arrows of death will pierce your soul, entering by your eyes. Keep away from such places; go not near them! Those are the words of our good angels, who warn us to avoid the dangers and occasions of sin. Whence comes that inward dread and horror we sometimes experience when we are about to do something against the divine law? It is again the voice of our holy angel, who cries out to us, as St. John the Baptist so often did to Herod, "It is not lawful."⁴ To think this or that; to speak of it; to look at it; to do it: there is nothing wrong in that, says the world; others make no scruple of such things; but our angel says

¹ Ubique curat ignorantias nostras.

² Magna cura et vigilantissimo studio omnibus horis et locis succurrentes, et providentes necessitatibus nostris; adjuvant laborantes; protegunt quiescentes; hortantur pugnantes; coronant vincentes.

³ Recede, virgo, recede, et virginitatem, quam Deo consecrasti, inviolatam custodi.

⁴ Non licet.—Matt. xiv. 4.

to us by that secret anxiety: It is not lawful; have nothing to do with it; it is against the Christian law. Others dress in this or that way; it is the usual fashion; many respectable ladies wear low dresses; can I not do the same? No, it is not lawful for you; nor can the fashion excuse it. I can get that office in such and such a way, and make great profit by it; but how? Is the matter right in conscience? No; it is not lawful for you. What I have heard and seen of this or that person is already known; can I not speak of it to my friends? No; it is not lawful; you would thereby lessen your neighbor's good name; say nothing about it. And in the same manner on other occasions do we hear the warning voice of our good angel.

Those good thoughts with which a pious soul is armed against temptations, and encouraged to despise all earthly things and to combat bravely against its enemies, are also the voice of the good guardian angel, who calls out to that soul, as St. Michael, the prince of the angels, did to Lucifer when he drove that rebellious spirit and his followers into hell: "Who is as God?" Who can be compared to God? Ah, what is there on earth that deserves honor, love, and esteem as God does? Vain honors of the world, false riches that the earth gives, deceitful joys that are offered in this vale of tears! what is there in you that, I will not say can be compared with God, but that can approach in any degree the happiness to be found in God? Who is as God? Carnal pleasures, animal delights! if you could last for an eternity, could you be compared to one moment of the true pleasure that is found in God? Who is as God? The crowns of kings, the earth with all its riches and treasures, the sea with all its pearls, could they equal even the least of those riches and treasures that are to be found in the possession of God alone? Who is as God? No, there is nothing in heaven, nothing on earth, nothing amongst angels, nothing amongst men, that can be compared to God. Shall I, then, be so senseless and foolish as to forget my God for the sake of such riches, to renounce Him for the sake of such goods, to offend Him for the sake of such joys, and lose Him forever? What good would all the wealth of the world be to me, if I do not possess God, the highest Good? Strengthened by this knowledge, pious souls resolve to give up everything in the world, rather than offend against the law of God. Strengthened by this knowledge, they have courage to smite in the face those who seek by caresses and flatteries to lead them into sin; and

And
strength-
ened against
temptations.

there are heroines of that kind in our very midst in Treves this day. My dear brethren, if any one of us who is in the state of grace makes such a resolution as that, he may thank his good angel for obtaining that grace from God for him, and inspiring him with that firm determination. Thus the holy angels protect us in life; but, what is of still more importance, they continue to protect us even to the moment of death, as we shall briefly see in the

Second Part.

The most
terrible time
is the hour
of death.

The most dangerous, and, all circumstances considered, the most terrible time, at which even the holiest servants of God tremble when they think of it, is the hour of death and of our entry into a long and uncertain eternity. That is the terrible moment in which the demons redouble their attacks, employ all their snares, strain every nerve, to destroy the agonizing soul, and, like dogs in pursuit of game, to seize it in their open jaws; for this is the last moment of our lives, and they know that after that they will not be able to do us any harm. "Woe to the earth and to the sea," says St. John in the Apocalypse, "because the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time."¹ As long as a man is in good health, the devil is not very anxious if he refuses to listen to his wicked suggestions, and repels all attacks of temptation, for the evil spirit consoles himself with the thought, If I cannot have that man to-day, I may to-morrow; if he is not amongst the number of my slaves now, he may be next week, or next month. But when the last moment arrives, when the tempter sees (and he easily can see from the temperament and disposition of the body) that only a few days or hours of life are left, then he calls all his hellish furies to help him, and makes, as it were, the last assault on the soul, because it depends on that moment whether he is to have it for all eternity or not. Woe to the earth and to the sea! Woe to the weak and frail soul, hemmed in on all sides! How would it be able to withstand such fierce attacks, if it had no help and assistance to rely on from others?

But even
then the
servant of
God need
not fear,

But, my dear brethren, even in this terrible moment we must be of good heart and courage; for, although we have a powerful enemy against us, we have a still more mighty hero and protec-

¹ Vae terræ et mari, quia descendit diabolus ad vos habens iram magnam, sciens quod modicum tempus habet.—Apoc. xii. 12.

tor on our side, namely our guardian angel, who can and will drive away all the hellish furies, if we only now make a friend of him by remaining constant and faithful in the service of God. When we now think of the last moment of our lives, we are sometimes animated by the same feelings as the servant of the Prophet Eliseus experienced when he saw a great army coming against him. "Alas, alas, alas, my lord," said he to the Prophet, "what shall we do?" "Fear not," answered Eliseus; "for there are more with us than with them."¹ The same I may say to you, pious Christians, who honor your guardian angels. Fear not; when you think of the hour of death, you see approaching to your great terror and anxiety a vast number of the enemies of your souls, who seek nothing but your destruction; and in truth you will be surrounded by them in that moment. But fear not, for there are more with you than with them. He who will then protect you is much more powerful than all the legions of hell that may attack you. If the devil is anxious to conquer you, and drag you down to hell, your good angel is still more determined not to abandon his charge in that most important juncture, but to defend you and bring you with himself to heaven. If he devoted himself so earnestly to protect you during life, he will surely employ still greater care in that supreme moment to prevent your soul from being lost. He will act like the angel Raphael, who by his help completely subdued the enormous fish that was on the point of devouring the younger Tobias. He will be like the angel who came to the assistance of Daniel, and so protected him against the lions that they did not harm him. He will act like the angel of poor Lazarus, who called on many of the heavenly spirits to accompany his soul, that it might be carried with still greater pomp into Abraham's bosom.

See, my dear brethren, what great benefits we have received from our guardian angels, and what faithful protectors they are in life and at the hour of death; and let every one who has any sense of decency left conclude from that what gratitude, honor, and love we owe them. With reason might we ask, like the younger Tobias after he had recounted all he owed to the companion of his journey: "What wages shall we give him? or what can be worthy of his benefits?"² If we were to give him the half of our possessions, it would not be a sufficient return for

because he has an angel to protect him.

Therefore we owe our angels great gratitude.

¹ Heu! heu! heu! domine mi, quid faciemus? Noli timere, plures enim nobiscum sunt, quam cum illis.—IV. Kings vi. 15, 16.

² Quam mercedem dabimus ei? aut quid dignum poterit esse beneficiis ejus?—Tob. xii. 2.

what we owe him. So it is, Christians; if we were to devote ourselves altogether to the service of our holy angels it would not be enough to repay them for the good they have done us during our lives, nor for what we expect from them in our last extremity.

Many are
wanting
therein.

But, alas, holy angels! if your goodness and patience were not greater than our ingratitude and forgetfulness, you would long ago have left and completely abandoned us. If you were to represent to each individual in particular all the benefits bestowed on him by you that are known to you alone, and to say: See, at that time, while you were in the state of sin, you might have fallen and broken your neck, or have been struck by lightning, or have been carried off by a sudden death and condemned to hell; it was I who saved you from the fall; my hand invisibly held back the thunder-bolt; I cooled the heat of the fever that you were suffering from, and restored you to life, that you might not be lost forever. On another occasion, in that temptation or danger, you would have consented to sin; or you were about to go into a house or company where you would have heard or seen something that would have completely corrupted you. It was I who strengthened you in temptation, filled your mind with other thoughts in that dangerous occasion, and turned away your eyes from dangerous objects; against your will, I placed an obstacle in your way, that you might not go with companions who would lead you into sin. During all the years of your life, and from the first moment of it, I have been always your guide, your protector, your teacher, your servant and attendant. If, I repeat, you, O holy angels, were thus to speak to us, and at the same time to say: What return have you made me for all this? Have you ever honored me in earnest, or called on me to help you in necessity to show your child-like confidence in me? Have you ever thanked me, nay, have you even thought of me once in the day? Oh, how many would have to be ashamed and by their silence to acknowledge their shortcomings in this respect! But what odious discourtesy and rudeness it is to have such a faithful companion on a long journey, who shows us the way, protects us against robbers and murderers, consoles us when we are fatigued, and actually carries us in his arms and tries to bring us home, while we never look at him or say a friendly word to him, nor even thank him for his kindness! Is not that, I say, an odious discourtesy?

Conclusion

If any of us here present, my dear brethren, have to ac-

knowledge themselves guilty in this respect, let them at least in future show themselves grateful to their holy guardian angels. and exhortation to sinners to be grateful to their angels.

“What wages shall we give him?” What can we do to show our gratitude? God Himself answers: “Behold, I will send My angel, who shall go before thee, and keep thee in thy journey, and bring thee into the place that I have prepared.” And how have you to act towards him? “Take notice of him, and hear his voice, and do not think him one to be contemned.”¹ O sinner who are still in the state of sin! your holy angel protects you while you are in that state; out of gratitude do him the honor of hearing his voice and following his invitation to return to the Lord your God. If the loss of the friendship of God, or the forfeiting of the joys of heaven, or the danger of eternal fire in hell cannot tear you away from your sinful excesses, have some respect at least for the angel who is with you in all places, and be ashamed to do what you would not dare to do in the presence of any honorable man, of a simple child, or even of a lowly beggar. When, as you imagine, you are quite alone, without an eye to watch you, never forget the words of St. Augustine, “Your good angel sees you, and your bad angel sees you, and God sees you, who is better than both.”² Think, then: He will see me if I indulge in that bad thought; he will see me if I do that bad action; he will see me if I spend the whole morning before the looking-glass, curling my hair and decking myself out to catch the eyes of others; he will see me in the dark night, if I go here or there. My good angel will see me, and be sorry; my bad angel will see me, and rejoice; the Lord of the angels will see me, and be angry. My good angel will see me, and complain of me; my bad angel will see me, and accuse me therefore before the judgment-seat of God; the Lord of the angels will see me, and will condemn me. Oh, sinner, give at least this honor and joy to your holy angel, to whom you owe so much, and let this thought keep you from sin in future! For his sake renew this resolution every morning: To-day I will be on my guard not to commit a grievous sin, so as not to trouble my guardian angel.

“Take notice of him, and hear his voice.” Our angel pro- How the

¹ Ecce ego mittam angelum meum, qui præcedat te, et custodiat in via, et introducat in locum quem paravi. Observa eum, et audi vocem ejus, nec contemnendum putes.—Exod. xxiii. 20, 21.

² Videt te angelus tuus bonus; videt te angelus tuus malus; videt te angelo tuo bono et malo melior Deus.

just should
honor
them.

fects us when we are in the state of grace. Rejoice, pious Christians! honor him, and always follow his admonitions. A child never gets up in the morning without saluting its father and mother; nor does it go to bed in the evening without wishing them goodnight. "Take notice of him." Our angels love us far better than our fathers and mothers do; do they not deserve the same tokens of respect? Should we not recommend ourselves to them in the morning, and thank them in the evening? A pious Christian appoints certain days in the year on which he goes to holy Communion in honor of his holy patrons, and a certain day of devotion in the week or month which he consecrates entirely to them; could we not do the same for our angels, to whom we owe much more? The child, when it hears a dog bark, or is threatened by some one, or is in any danger whatever, runs first of all to its mother's lap; let us show the same confidence in our guardian angels, and call upon them to help us in temptations, to advise us in doubt, to comfort and console us in trial. Oh, how often I have experienced, and still daily and hourly experience, the efficacy of this! Such, too, will be the case with you, my dear brethren, if you fly to your good angels with child-like confidence. Help us, O holy angels, to have that confidence, and to show to you devotion, honor, and unceasing gratitude, so that, after having experienced your assistance during life, we may also be helped and protected by you at the end of our lives, and be brought by you into the heavenly country, where we shall better understand what we owe to you, and praise our God with you forever. Amen.

On Ingratitude towards our Holy Angels, see the foregoing Second Part.

THIRTY-FIFTH SERMON.

ON GRATITUDE ON ACCOUNT OF THE EXTIRPATION OF HERESY.

Subject.

The being saved from heresy is an indescribably great benefit; therefore the whole country should return thanks to God for it every year.—*Preached on the festival annually celebrated to commemorate the extirpation of heresy from the city of Treves.*

Text.

Benedictus Dominus qui non dedit nos in captionem dentibus eorum.—Ps. cxxiii. 6.

“Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us to be a prey to their teeth.”

Introduction.

The whole psalm from which I have taken this text was sung by king David with grateful heart in the name and person of the Jewish Synagogue, after it had been saved from extreme danger. “If it had not been that the Lord was with us,” he begins, “when men rose up against us, perhaps they had swallowed us up alive.”¹ Blessed be the Lord who hath not given us to be a prey to their teeth. “Our soul hath been delivered, as a sparrow out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are delivered. Our help is in the name of the Lord.”²

O city of Treves, well mayest thou utter those words with grateful heart! Go back in thought to former times, to the year 1559, and consider what happened then, and ask what is the meaning of the procession that the Gentlemen’s Sodality then held in the church of the Most Holy Trinity on Lætare Sunday. Thou wilt be told that in that year cruel men, urged on by the powers of hell, that is the heretics, were plotting thy ruin, and trying to swallow up alive the souls of all thy inhabitants, and would have actually succeeded in doing so, had not the Lord of heaven come to help thee and save thee from their teeth. And thou wilt be told that this procession has been instituted as a perpetual memorial and in thanksgiving for that benefit. Yet it seems that most of the people of the town know nothing of this; that is perhaps the reason of the small attendance at the procession. I will therefore explain the matter now as I promised, and show (in which the whole subject of the sermon is contained)—

Plan of Discourse.

That the procession in question is a solemn act of thanksgiving for the indescribably great benefit of being freed from heresy; a

¹ Nisi quia Dominus erat in nobis, cum exurgerent homines in nos, forte vivos deglutissent nos.—Ps. cxxiii. 1-3.

² Anima nostra sicut passer erepta est de laqueo venantium; laqueus contritus est, et nos liberati sumus. Adjutorium nostrum in nomine Domini.—Ibid. 7, 8.

benefit that the whole city, nay, land of Treves still continues to receive from God. From this I shall show by an unanswerable argument that not only the members of the Gentlemen's Sodality, but also all the inhabitants of the town, without distinction of sex or condition, are under a solemn obligation of gratitude to take part in this celebration.

I begin, relying on the assistance of the almighty God, which I implore through the powerful intercession of Mary, the Queen of heaven, of whom the Church says, "Thou alone hast extirpated all heresies in the whole world." Do you also help, O holy guardian angels of this town and of all its inhabitants.

How heresy
was intro-
duced into
Treves in
former
days.

The year 1559 was indeed a sad one for this city and diocese of Treves; for the plague of religion, I mean accursed heresy, then began to show itself, and in a short time so increased and gained the upper hand that this Catholic and holy town, that had kept its faith from the time of the apostles, almost saw itself, to its utmost astonishment, become apostate from the true faith and take sides with heretics. The first cause of this was a child of Treves, who seemed to have been brought into the world to bring ruin on this town. His name was Caspar Olevianus, a young, crafty, and daring man. He had travelled through France, and had there learned the new and damnable tenets of Calvin. Thus perverted, he came back to his native land, where he began to pose as a preacher of the Gospel, to teach the doctrines of Luther to his fellow-countrymen, and to make them known in the world. For this purpose he set up a school, having obtained permission to that effect from the then magistrate, and commenced instructing youths in the liberal arts; he did not, however, neglect his secret design, but availed himself of his position to instil the poison of heresy into their young minds. When this first stratagem of his was crowned with success, to such an extent indeed that he brought over some of the chief men even of the magistracy to his side, he became more daring, and on St. Laurence's day boldly mounted the pulpit and preached his new gospel to the crowd of both men and women that flocked to hear him, blaspheming violently against the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, against the Saints of God and the ceremonies of our holy faith. There arose at once a violent dispute among the members of the council. All who were good Catholics condemned the audacity of Olevianus, and commanded him to cease preaching; but many

of them, amongst others the then mayor and some of the members of the different guilds, were already perverted, and declared for the Augsburg Confession; so that he paid little attention to the prohibition, and continued preaching his heretical doctrines with greater violence; nay, he even tried to raise a revolt amongst the citizens against the clergy and those members of the council who remained true to the faith. The number of his followers increased daily, and he was helped, moreover, by the princes of other states who had fallen away from the faith in those dangerous times, such as the Palatiné, Wurtemberg, Hessen, Baden, Zweibrucken, who promised to help the rebellious citizens, sent ambassadors to them, and exhorted them to be constant in the new religion by the efforts of another preacher, whom they sent over to help Olevianus. Unhappy Treves, to what a state thou wert reduced! And what could be done to help thee?

John von der Leyen, the reigning archbishop and elector, was very much disturbed at the mischief thus threatened to his flock, and in order to avert it, he sent some prudent and learned men into the town to exhort the magistrates and citizens in authority to punish the rebels, and to adhere to their ancient faith. With them he sent a zealous Catholic preacher, to strengthen the wavering in the true faith, and to bring back the apostates to the fold. But all to no purpose. The Archbishop's ambassadors had to return as they came; and when the preacher ascended the pulpit in the church of St. James' hospital, the bells were set ringing as if for a fire, whereupon the heretics and the raging crowd assembled together with their leader Olevianus and rushed into the church with drawn swords and spears, so that the preacher had to keep silent and to take to flight, while even the women pursued him with the chairs and benches of the church. The Archbishop himself, who hoped to quell the riot by his presence, was treated most shamefully; for as he was on the point of entering the town at the head of a hundred and seventy soldiers, one of the chief men shut the gate in his face, and threatened him with evil consequences if he dared to oppose the Augsburg Confession, or to interfere with the liberty of those who favored it; while the heretical partisans of Olevianus mounted the Simeon's tower, and directing the cannon against the Archbishop's soldiers, threatened to fire if they did not withdraw. The Archbishop promised to do nothing against the free-

How the
heretics
grew more
daring.

dom of the town, but to leave all in peace, and he was then allowed to enter his palace; but hardly had he done so, when the rioters assembled in arms on the market-place, and blocked up all the streets and lanes with chains, took the keys of the doors out of the hands of the Catholics, so that no one might enter the palace, and put up placards everywhere denouncing the priests, and threatening with imprisonment and death those who refused to join them. The well-meaning prince saw that mildness was of no use under such circumstances, and that his archiepiscopal authority was only laughed at, so he left the place as soon as possible and went to the Palatinate.

How they
were at last
restrained.

Thus things were in a most desperate condition, and there was almost danger of the Catholic religion being at an end in Treves. Such would have been really the case, if the good God, doubtless at the intercession of the martyrs of Treves, had not at last extended a helping hand. The Archbishop, who was much concerned for the spiritual welfare of his flock, resolved to attempt by force what he could not succeed in doing by mildness. He caused the Moselle to be blocked up above and below the town, all vessels to be detained, the water that flowed into the town to be cut off, and the roads leading to it to be well guarded, so that there might be no means of approaching the place. Thus food began to get scarcer every day, and the people commenced to suffer the pangs of hunger. Gradually the rebels lost heart; those who still remained Catholic at heart, but through fear, weak-mindedness, human respect, or sloth had kept still, began to assemble; they took up arms (and amongst them the guilds of the coopers and shipcarpenters were specially renowned for their bravery), seized on Olevianus and his chief partisans, and shut them up in prison. The Archbishop then, at the head of two hundred men, horse and foot, entered the town, to the great jubilation of the Catholic population. Olevianus and his followers were sentenced to perpetual banishment. The fear of a similar punishment induced those who had given their adhesion to the Augsburg Confession to make a humble retraction before the prince and the Catholic magistrates, and to promise that they would in future remain faithful to their religion. When the town had been thus purged of the filth of heresy, and the people restored to their wonted quiet, the pious prince returned heartfelt thanks to God, while he left to us the happy memory of his having saved Treves from the plague of false doctrine and

from eternal ruin. There, my dear brethren, you have a short description of what happened in those days, as it is recorded in the Annals of Treves by Brower and Masenius.

There, too, you have the reason of the procession held every year on Lætare Sunday. It was first begun by the priests of the Society of Jesus, who were invited to Treves by the above-mentioned archbishop in the following year, 1560, in order to purge the place of the remnants of heresy, to revive the study of the liberal sciences, which was then almost entirely neglected, and to reform the corrupted morals of the people. The following are the words that the Archbishop wrote partly to Father James Laynez, then general of our Society, and partly in other letters relating to that matter: "It is known to all good men what the Church of God has to suffer through the treachery and wickedness of heretics, and how it labors under a want of good teachers as well as of sound doctrine. The most Reverend Archbishop and Prince has therefore resolved to avert those evils and to invite the Fathers of the Society of Jesus to undertake the office of preaching and teaching in the university, thus healing both evils at the same time, restoring the studies in the university, and instructing the people in the Catholic faith, bringing back apostates to the true fold, and confirming the wavering." Nor was the pious prince disappointed in his expectations; for after four years he writes thus to the Jesuits assembled in Rome: "We have found the work of your Fathers to be of the greatest advantage to our afflicted diocese; we see that it is still continuing to do good, and we hope it will continue to do so in future. Therefore we thank first the great God, the author of all good, and then you, in our own name and that of our flock; and we acknowledge with gratitude and joy that we have in such almost desperate circumstances received a consolation that was as unmerited as it was unlooked-for." After that happy change had been brought about by the help of God, the procession, which on that account first started from the church of the Society of Jesus, was begun, and has been solemnly held every year since then by the members of the Gentlemen's Sodality, they having first read the profession of faith, as a perpetual memorial of their gratitude to God for the benefit He bestowed on them in freeing the land from heresy, and also to show their constancy in adhering to the one true Catholic faith, and their zeal and readiness to defend it at the cost even of their lives and property. But when I speak

Therefore
the annual
procession
is held.

of the Gentlemen's Sodality, you must not think I allude to the handful that now compose it, distinct as it at present is from the sodalities of men, of youths, and others. But you must remember that in Treves in those days there was only one sodality, established by our Society in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of heaven, which comprised the magistrates, gentlemen, ordinary citizens, young men, and the whole population; this was afterwards, to increase devotion, and for the greater good of souls, split up into various sodalities and confraternities. This is perhaps the reason why, with the lapse of time, the memory of that benefit has died out, and has been kept up only by the yearly procession of the Gentlemen's Sodality. In those days the whole population assembled yearly to offer their thanks to God, and they have just as good reason for doing the same nowadays; for, as history proves, the danger of those times and the escape from it affected all inhabitants of Treves without distinction of sex or condition, and still affects them to this day.

And with
good rea-
son, for woe
to Treves if
the heresy
had not
been
stopped.

Let us, then, consider this matter, and look a little closer into what history tells us of it. Suppose, my dear brethren, that the heresy that had begun to show itself had not been so happily extirpated, but had gained additional adherence, until it had established itself firmly—and indeed it then seemed to be all up with the Catholic faith—what would have been the consequence? Alas, I tremble at the bare idea of it! Unhappy, Treves, wouldst thou then indeed have been, not only for time, but for eternity! How would it have been with thy children and with their children and grand-children? How would it be at this moment with thy present inhabitants, and with their descendants who would dwell in thee? For the poison of heresy would have infected the whole land, and the false doctrine of Luther or Calvin would have been handed down from generation to generation, to the great destruction of immortal souls. Sad experience shows us what has occurred in this way in other kingdoms and countries and principalities throughout Europe, and especially in Germany, where in the disastrous days of the archheretics Luther and Calvin even one apostate succeeded in planting heresy and infecting the people with it. The formerly so arch-Catholic and holy kingdoms of England, Sweden, Denmark, Prussia, Holland, Wurtemberg, Hessen, Hanover, Brandenburg, Nassau, and many other countries, in what state are they at present? Although there are

some really good Catholics in them still, yet heresy has always held the upper hand. Would it not have been the same here in Treves?

O God of infinite goodness and justice, couldst Thou have shown greater anger against our land than if Thou hadst not then stopped the tide of false doctrine? Poverty, hunger, plague, war, devastation, and all ye temporal chastisements, whatever be your names, you are indeed golden rods and desirable punishments when compared to heresy! So it is, O merciful God! We kiss humbly the well-meaning hand with which Thou visitedst this land at different times, and punishedst it in a fatherly manner, although with severity. Thou hast punished us with wild beasts, especially in the year of Our Lord 462, when raging stags and fierce wolves rushed out of their caves and deserts in droves, and devoured the frightened inhabitants of the town and villages. Thou hast frequently punished us with scarcity, especially in the year 983, when the long drought caused everything in this and the surrounding country to be burnt out of the ground. Thou hast visited us with terrible inundations in the years 1296 and 1333, when the Moselle overflowed its banks to a most extraordinary height, so that it flowed over the stone bridges and into most of the houses of the town. Thou hast chastised us with a wonderful plague in the year 1381, when numbers of people began to dance and spring about the streets and country as if they were deranged. Thou hast frequently scourged us with pestilence followed by famine. In the year 1313 the plague carried off thirteen thousand people in the town of Treves alone, from which circumstance we may gather some idea of the great size of the place at that time. But during the same year famine drove the people to such extremity that some mothers were known to kill and eat their own children. In the year 1605 the pestilence which then raged for three years almost emptied the town of its inhabitants; but, softened, by the prayers and penance of the survivors, Thou didst in a wonderful manner take away the plague from them. In the year 1636 the same sickness caused such misery that in the surrounding villages of six hundred people hardly twenty survived; in our college alone, in which there were very few then, fourteen were swept away in the flower of their youth, from which we may form some idea of the devastation caused by the plague in the town itself. In the same year, victuals became so scarce that

God has often punished this town.

two hundred dogs were eaten as a delicacy; mice, cats, and similar animals were eagerly sought after as food, and on that occasion, too, there was a woman who ate her own child. Thou hast chastised us with grievous wars and calamities—who can say how often? To say nothing of ancient times, when this town, which was then very large, was four times completely laid waste, there are still people alive who remember the year 1673, when this town and country was for two years groaning under a foreign yoke, and so hard pressed were the inhabitants, both lay and clerical, to pay the monthly tribute that was imposed on them, that many, driven to desperation, were glad to have an opportunity of leaving house and home and taking to flight, while beautiful churches and convents were burnt to ashes out of mere wantonness, or were levelled to the ground; this cathedral was made a stable of, in which the horses were fed on the high altar, and all the clergy, the nobility, and the common people, with the sole exception of the children, were compelled to work day and night, like the Israelites in Egypt, the executioner standing near with the rope in his hand, ready to hang up any one who ceased from his labor. So strict were the tyrants in enforcing this cruelty that a certain councillor and a canon were on one occasion dragged by the hair of the head to the gallows, because the required number of workmen was not complete, and they would have been hanged if their innocence had not been proved in time. But why should we speak of these things? There has hardly been a war in modern times which Treves had not to feel the first brunt of. The heavy debts that still burden the landed property and vineyards on the Moselle are a sufficient proof of the misery war has brought on us.

All these
were salu-
tary pun-
ishments.

See, O Lord, how hard Thou hast punished us hitherto! But we kiss Thy fatherly hand, for all those chastisements have had no other end and object but to humble our pride, to bring us to true penance for our sins, to correct our vices, and as it were to compel us to amend our lives, so as to make us live in a Christian manner and increase our glory in heaven. Thus in 1605 many wonderful conversions of most hardened sinners followed on the plague of that year; while of the plague of 1636 a priest of our Society writes as follows: “All these trials and calamities have been sweetened and completely wiped out by the Divine Goodness through the most abundant and satisfactory fruit which has been the result of our labors; for all the non-Catholics of the

country, with hardly an exception, have returned to the true faith, while those who were wavering have been strengthened, and many great sinners have been moved to repentance." Without those chastisements the wicked would have continued in their vicious habits and have lost their souls; and it is those chastisements we have to thank for the fact that so many, nay, the greater number of the people of Treves lead good Christian lives. Therefore all those punishments are fatherly visitations, and we are bound by a debt of the deepest gratitude to Thee, O good God, for them.

But apostasy from the true faith, heresy,—oh, what a terrible punishment, from which not the slightest advantage for souls can be derived! Faith is that gift of which St. Paul truly says: "Without faith it is impossible to please God,"¹ so that it is not merely helpful and advantageous for eternal life, but indispensably necessary to attain it; it is the corner-stone of our salvation, the source of all the meritorious good works, without which it is impossible to do good and to merit salvation. O God of goodness, if Thou hadst not given us the true faith, or if Thou hadst taken it away from us by allowing us to apostatize, of what good would all Thy other benefits be to us, costly and precious as they are? What better would we be for having our souls created to Thy image? for having been preserved in life? We should live, it is true; but we should be at enmity with Thee, and could not hope to have any share in Thee forever. Of what good to us would be the redemption that we owe to Our Lord Jesus Christ, who shed His blood for us on the shameful cross to save us from hell, if we could not share in the merits of it through want of the true faith? Of what use to us Thy precious blood which Thou gavest us in baptism, when Thou didst adopt us as Thy children and the heirs of Thy kingdom? Even this would be of no use to us if, after coming to the age of reason, we had committed even one mortal sin, for without faith in Thee we could not have supernatural love for Thee, nor true repentance for our sins, nor could we perform one good work that would be meritorious in Thy sight. So that it still remains true that without faith it is impossible to please God; and we should be amongst the number of those of whom Thou sayest: "He that believeth not shall be condemned."² O my God, it is enough to make

Heresy is
the worst of
all.

¹ Sine fide impossibile est placere Deo.—Heb. xi. 6.

² Qui vero non crediderit, condemnabitur.—Mark xvi. 16.

our hair stand on end even to imagine the terrible consequences that would have ensued if Treves had then been delivered over as a prey to heresy.

Hence we
owe God
most heart-
felt thanks
for freeing
us from it.

But now, praised and blessed be Thy goodness in time and eternity! Thou hast conferred on us a benefit that we can never sufficiently prize. Thou hast saved us in time from a danger that was most imminent. "If it had not been that the Lord was with us," we must humbly repeat with Thy servant David, "when men rose up against us, perhaps they had swallowed us up alive." "Our soul hath passed through a torrent; perhaps our soul had passed through a water insupportable."¹ "Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us to be a prey to their teeth. Our soul hath been delivered as a sparrow out of the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we are delivered. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth." O God of love! if the greatness of the benefit received must be measured by the evil from which it freed us, what are we not bound to do to show our gratitude to Thee! Yes, truly, Christians of Treves, consider this matter, and acknowledge that we are bound to show all possible gratitude to the Lord. Nor am I speaking now only to the members of those sodalities that take part in the annual procession; I am addressing the magistrates, the ladies and gentlemen, all the Catholics of Treves, lay and clerical, great and small, rich and poor, without distinction of sex or condition; because that benefit concerns them all without exception, and therefore all are bound by the debt of gratitude arising from it.

We show
our grati-
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tisements.

By way of thanksgiving for being delivered from the wolves and wild beasts, Bishop Mamertus in his day instituted the Rogation days, that are now observed throughout Christendom before the feast of the Ascension, and solemnized by a public procession and by abstinence from flesh-meat. In Treves, by way of thanksgiving for being delivered from the same plague, a yearly abstinence from meat is observed on the Wednesday after Jubilate Sunday, and a procession is held which is called the Wolf's Procession, and in olden times it was ordered that at least one member of each family should be present at it. And that, too, with good reason, for when a calamity is general every one feels the benefit of being freed from it. Through gratitude for the cessation of the drought and scarcity we still hold the procession instituted

¹ *Torrentem pertransivit anima nostra; forsitan pertransisset anima nostra aquam intolerabilem.*—Ps. cxxiii. 5.

by Egbert in the third week after Easter, which is called the Bann-Procession, and in which the priests visit the different churches, bringing with them the relics of the saints. At this procession, in the same week, many of the people from the surrounding villages are present and send forth their supplications to heaven in prayers and hymns. And with good reason, too, for the benefit they thus commemorate was a general one. In thanksgiving for the cessation of the dancing-mania a yearly pilgrimage was instituted to the chapel of St. John, not far from Kylburg; and doubtless that, too, is the origin of the Dancing Procession held every year in Epternach during the holy days of Pentecost. And with good reason, for the cessation of a general calamity is a general benefit. During the pestilence that made such havoc here in 1605 the students, accompanied by the greater number of the citizens, went in procession to all the churches of the town, and all received holy Communion in our church of the Most Blessed Trinity, and the plague ceased almost immediately. In order to keep it away altogether, the Confraternity of St. Sebastian was established in the church of St. Gangulph, to which a great concourse of people throng every Wednesday; while on the feast-day of that saint numbers of people from all parts of the town take part in the procession. With reason, for the benefit they commemorate is a general one. In the year 1522, when the besiegers retired from before the town, a procession of the clergy and citizens was held by order of the Archbishop as an act of thanksgiving. You all know well enough what is meant by the grand procession that is held yearly on the feast of the Nativity of our Blessed Lady, in which almost all the inhabitants of the town, both lay and clerical, take part, in the church of St. Matthias; it is a feast of praise and thanksgiving in honor of the Blessed Virgin, and a perpetual memorial that on that day, in the year 1673, this town was freed from its enemies and from the heavy burden of tribute. With good reason, for the being delivered from a general calamity is a general benefit. Such, my dear brethren, is the gratitude we showed and still show to God for being freed from those punishments that, as we have seen, are for the good of our souls, so that we ought to return God thanks for them.

What thanks, then, are we not bound to give to God for freeing us from the heresy that had almost got the upper hand, and would have been a fearful, nay, eternal punishment for many

Much more
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souls! Is not this benefit as great as any of the others, and as general? But what do I say? The greatness of this last benefit, and at the same time of our obligation to God, must in this case be measured in a special manner. The other calamities that afflicted our land were indeed general, but they affected only our forefathers, while we feel no evil results on account of them. Their deliverance from them was indeed a general benefit, but only for our forefathers; for if they had not been delivered, if, for instance, all the inhabitants of Treves had been devoured by the wolves, it would not follow that the present inhabitants of the town would suffer the same fate. If famine had carried off the people in those days, we should not therefore have to suffer the pangs of hunger. If the dancing-mania had driven them all to death, it would not follow that we should be infected with the same madness. If the pestilence had emptied the town then, it does not follow that it should rage amongst the present inhabitants. If during the war the enemy had ruined and destroyed everything, we should not therefore have the same evil to dread. For those punishments are not inherited and transmitted from one generation to another. But on the other hand, if heresy had not been extirpated, and the people had all apostatized, that evil would not have been confined to our forefathers, but would have descended down to our own time, bequeathed from one generation to another, and we in turn should leave it to our descendants, as we know to have been the case in those countries in which heresy flourishes. Thus the punishment of our forefathers would have been our punishment too; and hence our deliverance from heresy is a benefit of which we still feel the effects. If, then, we still hold a thanksgiving celebration in memory of those other benefits, although they were simply benefits for and in the time of our ancestors, it is then clearly in accordance with right reason that we should be most zealous in showing our gratitude for that last great favor that God has conferred on us.

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grateful to
absent our-
selves from
the proces-
sion.

And you can see for yourselves what an odious ingratitude it would be for the greater number of the people to absent themselves from the procession next Sunday on the pretext that it does not concern them, that it is an affair of the Sodality alone. Shame on those who say so! You know the incident of the ten lepers mentioned in the Gospel of St. Luke; they all cried out to Our Lord for mercy and begged Him to cure their loathsome disease.

“Go,” said the merciful Saviour to them, “show yourselves to the priests.”¹ They were all cured: “And it came to pass as they went they were made clean.”² But what followed? “And one of them, when he saw that he was made clean, went back, with a loud voice glorifying God, and he fell on his face before His feet, giving thanks.”³ What? said Our Lord, what is the meaning of this? “Were not ten made clean, and where are the nine? There is no one found to return and give glory to God, but this stranger.”⁴ What think you of this incident, my dear brethren? Is it not a faithful picture of the ingratitude of which many are guilty? Could a worse leprosy of the soul than heresy be imagined? The good God has in a wonderful manner, as we have already seen, freed our ancestors and us at the same time from that leprosy. If Our Lord were now to come amongst us in visible form and see the thanksgiving procession as it is held every year, could He not ask, to our great confusion, What is the meaning of this? Were not ten made clean? Were not all the people of this town freed from heresy and kept in the true faith? And where are the nine? Where are the others, the ladies, the gentlemen, the common people who share in that great benefit? There is hardly any one found to show gratitude to God but the Sodality of the gentlemen and young men, and amongst the latter there are many who do not belong to the town, but are in the habit of going from one town to another. Is that the way to show gratitude for a signal favor? Christians of Treves, what answer could we make to such reproaches, to hide our shame?

Oh, no, God of goodness, we acknowledge to our great confusion that we cannot answer it; all we can do is humbly to confess our shortcomings in this respect, inasmuch as we have been so slothful hitherto with regard to this procession. Pardon us our fault; ascribe it to ignorance, or rather want of reflection. We have not known or heard the weighty reason for which this procession was instituted. Now that we are better instructed, we all acknowledge that we are bound by a debt of the deepest gratitude to Thee for such a great benefit; and we shall certainly be

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion to at-
tend the pro-
cession.

¹ *Ite, ostendite vos sacerdotibus.*—Luke xvii. 14.

² *Et factum est, dum irent, mundati sunt.*—Ibid.

³ *Unus autem ex illis, ut vidit quia mundatus est, regressus est, cum magna voce magnificans Deum, et cecidit in faciem ante pedes ejus, gratias agens.*—Ibid. 15, 16.

⁴ *Nonne decem mundati sunt? et novem ubi sunt? Non est inventus qui rediret, et daret gloriam Deo, nihil hic alienigena.*—Ibid. 17, 18.

more zealous in honoring Thee by being present every year at the procession. And we shall make a beginning next Sunday; and that the memory of the favor we owe Thee may not die out, parents will tell their children, and the latter will hand down to their descendants the story of what happened in this town, and of how the procession was instituted to show our gratitude; so that, as we have inherited that great favor from the time of our ancestors, we may implant our feelings of thankfulness in our descendants, that they may be kept in perpetual memory. This festival of thanksgiving will in any case strengthen us in the true Catholic faith, and we shall be filled with devotion at the sight of the multitude of people praying and singing hymns. Christians of Treves, such is your resolution, is it not? And may God grant you grace to keep it! Amen.

ON PRAYER.

THIRTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE OBJECT OF PRAYER.

Subject.

We pray and are not heard, because the things we ask of God are too vile and worthless.—*Preached on the fifth Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Petite, et accipietis.—John xvi. 24.

“Ask, and you shall receive.”

Introduction.

Joyful news, that, my dear brethren, and consoling words! “Ask, and you shall receive.” What is easier than asking? What more agreeable than to receive all you ask for? And He says it who cannot fail to fulfil His promise, for with the great, almighty God to will and to accomplish are one and the same thing. “Amen, amen, I say to you; if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you.” Where are now the poor? Are there no more needy or oppressed mortals in the world? Is there no one in want of help and assistance? If there is, why does he not come forward? All he need do is to send forth a single sigh to heaven, and he will be freed from his misery, and will obtain all the help he requires. But perhaps people are too much ashamed to beg. And yet why should they be? A beggar who is hungry may be refused twice or three times, but he will come back the fourth time if he has any hope of getting an alms. Now, God will not turn any one away from His door. Or are they too proud to beg? If so, they should remember to what a mighty Lord they address their petitions. Rich nobles and princes are not ashamed to ask a favor of the emperor. Or do they perhaps find more consolation in living on

in their misery than in being freed from it? That I can hardly imagine to be the case, for their tears and sighs prove the contrary. Ah me! they exclaim; who will free me from my sufferings? Why do you not come and ask? And here, my dear brethren, it seems to me that, if many dared to speak out their minds in public, I should hear them say: It is easy for you to talk of being proud, or ashamed; we have heard that often enough; we find no great joy in our sufferings; we have crosses and trials enough. We have asked to be freed from them, and still continue to ask; but that is all the better we are; we do not get what we ask for. What? Do you mean to say that such is really the case? If so, how are you to understand the words, "Ask, and you shall receive"? You say: I have asked, but have received nothing. Then either God has failed to keep His promise, or else you have not prayed as you should. We cannot maintain the first without blasphemy, so that I am forced to lay the blame on the second, namely, that you do not pray as you should. And in this I am supported by St. James, who says in his Epistle: "You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss."¹ Some of you perhaps pray in the state of mortal sin; others are not humble enough when they present their petitions to God; others have not confidence enough; others are not sufficiently in earnest, but are slothful and indifferent in their prayers; others ask for things that are too worthless and vile. All prayers of this kind are not right prayers; therefore you ask, and receive not. I do not intend to consider all those faults of prayer to-day, my dear brethren, for time would not permit it. The first I have already explained, namely, that our prayers are not efficacious if we do not amend our sinful lives; the others will furnish matter for several instructions; the last, which I consider the chief cause of our prayers being fruitless, I shall explain to-day; namely—

Plan of Discourse.

We pray, and are not heard because the things we ask from God are too vile and worthless. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

May the God of goodness give us through the intercession of His holy mother Mary and the holy guardian angels His light and grace to see this fault and to amend it, so that we may experience the truth of the words, "Ask, and you shall receive."

¹ *Petit, et non accipitis, eo quod male petatis.*—James iv. 3.

Prayer is defined in different ways. But all theologians are agreed in calling it an act of religion by which God is honored. St. Clement of Alexandria calls it a sacrifice, and the best and holiest of sacrifices: "We honor God by prayer, and that is the best and holiest sacrifice."¹ Now, when sacrifice is offered, the gift presented must be worthy of the person to whom it is offered. To give to a prince a handful of worm-eaten nuts or a rotten apple would be to insult rather than honor him, and would excite his anger instead of disposing him favorably towards you. Still worse would it be to make an unsuitable offering to the Sovereign God. Cain offered Him sacrifice: "And it came to pass after many days, that Cain offered of the fruits of the earth gifts to the Lord."² What did he gain thereby? "To Cain and his offerings He had no respect,"³ says the Scripture. Why? Because the offering was too vile; for Cain had selected the worst of his fruits to offer to God. Nay, all the sacrifices of the Old Law would have been vile in the sight of God, had they not been symbols and figures of that infinite sacrifice which the High-Priest Jesus Christ offered of Himself on the cross, and still continues to offer daily on our altars in the holy Mass. St. John Damascene says of prayer, that it is to ask suitable things from God.⁴ As it would be disgraceful for princes and kings to give away worthless things, so it would not be treating them with proper respect to ask such things from them. Drexelius relates that when Thrasilus asked king Antigonus for a single small piece of money the latter repelled him with indignation, saying: Away with thee, thou shameless fellow! thou hast not asked for a kingly gift."⁵ Kings are wont to give away large sums of money, gold chains, and portraits set with precious stones, but not a few wretched coppers. Nearly in the same sense does St. John Chrysostom speak of prayer: "Just as no one would dare to ask an emperor for a torn garment, or for a few farthings, so should you be careful not to ask the Almighty God for vile and worthless things."⁶

It is dishonorable to a great lord to ask him for worthless things.

¹ Deum precibus honoramus, et hoc est optimum et sanctissimum sacrificium.

² Factum est autem post multos dies ut offerret Cain de fructibus terræ munera Domino.—Gen. iv. 3.

³ Ad Cain vero et ad munera illius non respexit.—Ibid. 5.

⁴ Oratio est petitio decentium a Deo.—S. Damas., lib. iiii., de fide orthod.

⁵ Non petis munus regium.

⁶ Quemadmodum ad imperatorem nemo pro veste discissa, nec pro decem obolis ereptis audet accedere, ita etiam tu atque adeo amplius cave ne ad Deum accedas pro rebus vilibus, contemptis, et nihili.—S. Chrys. in Ps. cxlii.

Many do
that when
they ask
God for
temporal
things.

Since that is the case, my dear brethren, what wonder is it that so many pray much and receive little? When we look carefully at our prayers, we see that it is only vile and worthless things that we seek from God; that we have knocked at the gate of heaven to ask for some wretched rag, as if the Lord God kept a poor shop of earthly things, and we went as children do, to beg Him to give us a pear or a nut. For, let us acknowledge the truth; what have we hitherto prayed for? I can easily guess: we have had some bodily pain to suffer, or were troubled with sadness and mental anxiety, and wished to be freed from it. Some dear friend of ours was grievously ill, and we wished to see him restored to health. Our domestic affairs were not prospering, and we desired to be more fortunate. We were suffering secretly from poverty, and could not live up to what our standing required, and had a difficulty in finding bread for our children and domestics, so that we desired to have a larger income. We were in danger of losing our reputation or good name, and wished to be freed from that danger. We were engaged in some law-suit or other important affair that we desired to bring to a successful termination. The weather looked threatening for our crops and vineyards, and we prayed for a favorable season, and so on. These were the things that drove us to church, made us fall down on our knees and hold up our hands to heaven, with bitter tears and deep sighs; on account of these things we have made vows, undertaken different acts of devotion, promised pilgrimages, and unceasingly implored the aid of heaven; if we could only have those wishes of ours fulfilled, we esteemed ourselves happy enough, and did not think of asking anything else.

For all
such things
are as nothing
in His
sight.

Oh, what vile things those are! how worthless, vain, and often injurious! Is it really worth while to ask such things from the great God, who can give true and spiritual goods, and who offers us what will last forever? Is that the only request you have to make? Away with your begging! you do not ask a royal gift, much less a divine one becoming infinite majesty and generosity. All those temporal things are mere shadows, child's play, that are absolutely nothing in the sight of God. "My substance is as nothing before Thee,"¹ says the Prophet David, speaking to the Lord. My sceptre and crown, my health and prosperity, my riches and possessions are as nothing in Thy sight and estimation, O Lord. And that is what Our Lord remarks to His dis-

¹ Substantia mea tanquam nihilum ante te.—Ps. xxxviii. 6.

ciples in to-day's gospel, when He says to them, as if reproaching them: "Hitherto you have not asked anything in My name." But, Lord, the two sons of Zebedee had already asked to have the chief places in Thy kingdom. Peter had asked for permission to build three tabernacles on Mount Thabor. The other apostles had made many requests of Thee. Does not that count for anything? No; "hitherto you have not asked anything." Their requests were only for temporal things, and those I do not regard as of any value. "If you pray," says St. Ambrose, "ask for great things; ask for eternal and not for transitory things; do not pray for money, which is rust, nor for possessions, which are earth. God will not hear you, unless you ask Him for what He thinks worthy of His generosity."¹ He does not look on temporal goods as benefits. You do not care for the bare bones or rags that you throw out into the street. Now, the almighty God throws as it were temporal goods out of His hands into the world; He bestows them on heathens and Turks, even on the greatest sinners and His worst enemies, although they never ask Him for them, nor thank Him, nor hardly know even that they come from Him. But we, says St. Basil, should remember that we are children of God, and should ask Him for things worthy of such children and such a father.² It is not becoming for the children of God to ask for things indifferently, nor for God to bestow all things indifferently.³

Study the life of the Son of God, and see what He thought of temporal goods. He did not think it worth while to look at them even from a distance. Poverty, contempt before the world, hunger, thirst, bodily pain and mental anguish, those were the things He chose for Himself. If riches, honors, prosperity, sensual joys and pleasures had seemed great goods in His sight, He would certainly have valued them and made choice of them; for He is the Eternal Wisdom and must appreciate all things at their true value. So that, if we Christians value temporal goods so highly, and ask for them so earnestly and constantly in prayer, does it not seem as if we wished to accuse Our Lord of not knowing how good they are? Is it not a sign of great ignorance in

And in that
of Our Lord,
in whose
name we
must pray.

¹ Tu cum oras, magna ora, quæ æterna sunt, non quæ caduca. Noli orare pro pecunia, quia ærugo est; noli orare pro possessione, quia terra est. Non audit Deus, nisi quod dignum ducit suis beneficiis.

² Eaque pete tibi, quæ digna sunt rege et Deo.

³ Non decet filios Dei omnia indifferenter petere, nec Deum decet omnia indifferenter dare.

us to make so much of that in which the Lord of all holiness could find no good? And remember that our prayer, to be efficacious, must be offered in His name; for so we read in the gospel of to-day: "If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you." And again: "Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in My name, that will I do."¹ "If you shall ask Me anything in My name, that I will do."² But how can we ask in the name of Jesus Christ when we pray for things that He has taught us to despise, or when we ask to be freed from things in which He has taught us to seek for happiness? Earthly goods are called by Him "the deceitfulness of riches;"³ but trials He calls beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are they that mourn;"⁴ and He says that He will not look on us as His disciples unless we at least detach our hearts from all earthly goods: "Every one of you that doth not renounce all that he possesseth cannot be My disciple."⁵ If, then, we ask for temporal goods, can we appeal to the name and authority of Jesus Christ with His heavenly Father, and expect Him to bestow on us such vain things that both God Himself and the Son of God consider as worthless? That would be utterly unbecoming what is due to such infinite majesty.

Nor is it becoming for God to give such things alone.

Plutarch tells us that Alexander the Great gave to Perillus the sum of fifty talents. Perillus, out of politeness, excused himself from accepting such a large sum, and said that ten talents would be quite enough. What? exclaimed Alexander. "It might be enough for you to receive, but not for me to give;"⁶ you should remember that I am a king. In the same way, I imagine, God speaks to the Christian who prays earnestly for temporal goods. It would be enough for you, a miser, if I were to fill your coffers with money, your barns with corn, your cellars with wine; but it is not enough for Me to give. For you, an ambitious man, it would be enough if I were to give you a great name before the world, and make you beloved by men; but it is not enough for Me to give. It might satisfy you, a vain child of the world, if I were to give you a long, comfortable, and pleasant life; then, indeed, you would imagine you had a heaven on earth, and

¹ Quodcumque petieritis Patrem in nomine meo, hoc faciam.—John xiv. 13.

² Si quid petieritis me in nomine meo, hoc faciam.—Ibid. 14.

³ Fallacia divitiarum.—Matt. xiii. 22.

⁴ Beati pauperes spiritu; beati qui lugent.—Ibid. v. 3, 5.

⁵ Omnis ex vobis qui non renuntiat omnibus quæ possidet, non potest meus esse discipulus.—Luke xiv. 33.

⁶ Tibi quidem sat est accipere, sed mihi non sat est dare.

trouble yourself little about My eternal heaven; but that would not be enough for Me to give. Gold I look on as dross, honor as an empty breath, sensual pleasure as poison, a long life as a protracted imprisonment. To bestow such things as those is unbecoming My infinite majesty and sovereignty, My infinite wisdom and holiness, and is not at all enough for My infinite generosity. Therefore, if you want nothing but such trash, you may go away; I will not hear your prayers.

Therefore I repeat with St. Ambrose, when you pray, ask for great things, for eternal, not for transitory things. Ask for supernatural, true, and heavenly goods, for the precious gifts of His heavenly grace, for pardon of your sins, amendment of your life, purity of conscience, zeal in the divine service, and constant virtue; these are goods that do not cease with this life. They are the wares that God offers to sell you without money, and to bestow on you without measure, if you only desire them. These are the treasures that Jesus Christ gained for us at the price of so much labor on His part, shedding His blood and suffering death on the cross. And now He has to see that you attach so little importance to them that you hardly bestow a thought on them, and that you always ask for dross and smoke, for worthless things. Must He not feel chagrined at such conduct? Tell me; you have invited a good friend of yours to table, and to show him all imaginable honor, you place before him the most costly and well-cooked viands, and the best wines that you could procure, thus preparing for him a feast with a great deal of trouble. On the appointed day your guest comes, sits down to table, but, either through ignorance, or rudeness, or vanity and obstinacy, refuses to touch any of the food placed before him, and endeavors to satisfy his hunger with dry bread, butter, and cheese. What would you think of that? Would it not annoy you to see that after all the trouble you took to give him a good dinner he refuses to eat it? Truly, not without reason was the Lord angry with the Israelites of old. He rained down bread on them from heaven, in which they could find all possible delights of taste, and yet they longed for the flesh-pots and garlic of Egypt, which they had when they were groaning under the yoke of Pharaoh. "Who shall give us flesh to eat?" they exclaimed. "We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free-cost; the cucumbers come into our mind, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic. And the wrath of the Lord was exceed-

He is displeased, then, if we ask Him for nothing better.

ingly enkindled; to Moses also the thing seemed insupportable.”¹ Christians, God has prepared a heavenly food for us; He offers us supernatural goods with the utmost liberality, but we meanwhile sigh and long for the garlic of the world. Our desires are fixed on earthly things; our thoughts always revert to them; we labor and fatigue ourselves for the sake of them; while we feel nothing but nausea and disgust for the heavenly and eternal goods that our well-meaning God offers us for the advantage of our souls. For these we have no desire; we hardly trouble ourselves to think about them; if we have them, we do not even take the trouble of adverting to the fact; if we lose them by committing mortal sin, as we often do without fear or shame, we are as little disturbed as if we had lost nothing whatever. Must not our prayers and sighs, then, move God to anger, instead of inducing Him to look favorably on us?

Nor does He
act contrary
to His
promise
when He
refuses
such paltry
things to
our pray-
ers.

But, some may object, Christ has promised to give everything that we ask for in His name: “Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in My name, that will I do.” Now, temporal prosperity, riches, good health, and avoiding danger and misfortune, are surely comprised in that word, “whatsoever;” nor is it wrong to ask for such things. Quite right, my dear brethren. But listen to what I have now to say. A servant-maid goes to the upper end of the town and brings away a pitcher of water out of the Moselle; could you now say that the river no longer flows through Treves? Not by any means, you answer. But why not? Because a whole pitcher full of water has been taken out of it, and of course that water belonged to the river? No matter, you reply, because the quantity is so small in comparison with the size of the river that it cannot be missed. This is the very answer given by St. Augustine to your objection. Writing of the Gospel, he says: “Whatever else is asked for, it is as if nothing had been asked for;”² and that he says of things that are not advantageous for eternal life. “Not that earthly things are really nothing; but when we make them the objects of our desires, they are as nothing compared to eternal life.”³ And thus it is that Our Lord still keeps His word to us, although He refuses to hear our requests for worthless

¹ Quis dabit nobis ad vescendum carnes? Recordamur piscium quos comedebamus in Ægypto gratis; in mentem nobis veniunt cucumeres et pepones, porrique, et caepe et allia. Iratusque est furor Domini valde; sed et Moysi intoleranda res visa est.—Num. xl. 4, 5, 10.

² Quidquid aliud petitur, nihil petitur.

³ Non quia nulla omnino res est; sed quia in tantæ rei comparatione quidquid aliud concupiscitur, nihil est.—S. Aug., Tract. 102, in Joan.

things. For He has promised to give us all we ask from Him to show His liberality, and that He will not refuse even the most precious thing we desire in His name; nay that He, the great God, will give us Himself, if we only wish to possess Him. In former times king Assuerus promised Esther whatever she might ask, and Herod made the same promise to the dancing-girl Herodias. "What wilt thou, queen Esther? what is thy request? It shall be given to thee."¹ And Herod swore, saying: "Whatsoever thou shalt ask I will give thee."² Now, if Esther had gone to Assuerus and asked for a needle, or the dancing-girl had petitioned Herod for a nail for her shoe, could those two kings be condemned as having broken their word if they refused to hear such paltry requests? No, certainly; for their intention was to grant something really valuable. Therefore Assuerus said: "If thou shouldst even ask one half of the kingdom, it shall be given to thee."³ In the same way Herod said: "Whatsoever thou shalt ask, I will give thee, though it be the half of my kingdom."⁴ It is neither wrong nor unlawful to ask God for temporal prosperity, health, good fortune, and so on; for God wishes that we should pray to Him for those things, since by such a prayer we honor Him, and acknowledge ourselves to be His creatures, who are always in want of Him, and Him to be our most loving Father, the sovereign Lord of all things, and the richest, most merciful, and generous of all lords. Thus the Catholic Church has appointed certain days on which she offers public prayers to avert sickness, unfavorable weather, scarcity, war; to obtain rain, general peace, and so on. But to desire these things and nothing more is not worthy of the divine generosity; to wish for them first of all, and to long for them as if you had no desire for heavenly goods; to sigh for them, as if you would be quite content with them alone, and hoped to find your happiness therein; to wish for them to such an extent that you feel quite cast down and miserable when you must do without them; a prayer of that kind is altogether useless, unbecoming, and unworthy of the infinite majesty of God.

If you wish to pray for temporal things, then observe at least the order fixed by Christ in the Lord's Prayer, in which the

It is lawful
to pray for
temporal

¹ Quid vis, Esther regina? quæ est petitio tua? Dabitur tibi.—Esth. v. 3.

² Quidquid petieris dabo tibi.—Mark vi. 23.

³ Etiam si dimidiam partem regni petieris, dabitur tibi.—Esth. v. 3.

⁴ Quidquid petieris dabo tibi, licet dimidium regni mel.—Mark vi. 23.

things; but we should first ask for heavenly goods.

first petitions are, "Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;" in the fourth place comes the petition for our daily bread, while last of all we pray to be delivered from evil. "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and His justice: and all these things shall be added unto you;"¹ namely, the things that pertain to your temporal well-being. When you purchase whole bales of goods in a shop, some trifle is generally added to them, although you have not paid for it. In the third Book of Kings we read how God promised to give the young king Solomon whatever he wished: "And the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, saying: Ask what thou wilt that I should give thee."² Solomon considered for a time how he could make the best use of such a golden opportunity, and at last he asked for nothing more than wisdom to be able to discern good from evil, and to rule the people of God. "Behold," said the Lord, greatly pleased at this request, "I have done for thee according to thy words, and have given thee a wise and understanding heart, in so much that there hath been no one like thee before thee, nor shall arise after thee."³ And not only that, "Yea, and the things also which thou didst not ask I have given thee; to wit, riches and glory, so that no one hath been like thee among the kings in all days heretofore."⁴ Thou shalt be honored and esteemed by all, and shalt be the happiest man on earth, and that "Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life nor riches, nor the lives of thy enemies, but hast asked for thyself wisdom."⁵ If, instead of asking Me for wisdom, thou hadst asked for honors or riches, thou shouldst not have had either one or the other; but as it is, I give thee all together. Such is the way in which God acts, my dear brethren, when we pray for some important thing, and observe the right order in the objects of our petitions.

The prayers of most people are not

Let no one, then, be surprised if his prayers are frequently not heard; for he has not observed the proper order; he has given

¹ Quærite ergo primum regnum Dei et justitiam ejus, et hæc omnia adjicientur vobis. —Matt. vi. 33.

² Apparuit autem Dominus Salomoni per somnium nocte dicens: postula quod vis ut dem tibi. —III. Kings iii. 5.

³ Ecce feci tibi secundum sermones tuos, et dedi tibi cor sapiens et intelligens, ut nullus ante te similis tui fuerit, nec post te surrecturus sit. —Ibid. 12.

⁴ Sed et hæc quæ non postulasti, dedi tibi, divitias scilicet et gloriam; ut nemo fuerit similis tui in regibus cunctis retro diebus. —Ibid. 13.

⁵ Quia postulasti verbum hoc, et non petisti tibi dies multos nec divitias, aut animas inimicorum tuorum, sed postulasti tibi sapientiam. —Ibid. 11.

the first place to worthless, paltry things; he has set more value on earth than on heaven; his bodily welfare has wrung from him more sighs and tears than the salvation of his soul. He is acting like king Jeroboam, who stretched forth his hand against a prophet in spite of the threats of divine vengeance that were pronounced against him; but his temerity was punished on the spot, for his hand withered up immediately: "And his hand which he stretched forth against him withered, and he was not able to draw it back again to him."¹ Hardly had he felt the effects of the divine anger, when he turned to the Prophet and begged of him to pray to God for him; but for what? "Entreat the face of the Lord thy God, and pray for me that my hand may be restored to me."² See how foolishly this king acts, says Theodoret; he is troubled and concerned on account of his hand; but he thinks nothing of the harm done his soul. Should he not first have begged of the Prophet to ask God to forgive him the temerity he had been guilty of, and to pardon his sins? But no; he never thought of that; his hand was his chief concern, while he cared nothing for his soul. How do we act, my dear brethren, when by divine decree some misfortune happens to us or those belonging to us, in our bodily well-being, or in our temporal affairs, or in our good name? We moan and lament; we complain of the hard times, of the sickness that we suffer from, of the war that oppresses us; we run to the prophets; we have Masses said. Pray for me, we cry out, that I may recover my health; that the losses I have sustained may be made good; that the journey or business I am undertaking may be prosperous, etc. But we hardly bestow a thought on our souls; their welfare is what troubles us least, what gives us least concern. But we are totally wrong in the whole matter. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice," that is the most important of all. Pray, have Masses said, fast, give alms, first of all that your sins may be forgiven, that you may be patient under adversity, that you may despise the world, that you may practise the Christian virtues, that you may be always resigned to the will of God, and may always have the grace to do His holy will. Pray often with the Catholic Church, "that Thou wouldst raise up our minds to heavenly desires;" if we are

heard because they do not observe this order.

¹ Et exaruit manus ejus, quam extenderat contra eum, nec valuit retrahere eam ad se. —III. Kings xiii. 4.

² Deprecare faciem Domini Dei tui, et ora pro me, ut restituatur manus mea mihi.—Ibid. 6.

in earnest about that, then we can ask for health and temporal blessings and prosperity.

How to pray
for temporal
things.

Nor must the reason of our asking those things be any other than the attainment of our last end. St. Augustine gives us beautiful advice on this head. "When you pray for temporal things," he says, "ask for them in moderation, and leave the giving of them altogether to His good will, fearing for yourself, so that He may grant them if they are for the good of your soul, but withhold them otherwise."¹ "For it is the doctor, not the sick man, who can say what is good or bad for the latter."² Therefore, in such matters, we must leave the whole affair to Divine Providence; for instance, we might say: Thou seest, O Lord, how weak and miserable I am, and how long I am now lying on my sick-bed; Thou canst help me, if Thou wilt; if Thou knowest that health is more useful to me to enable me to serve Thee more zealously, and to gain my eternal salvation, then, I beg of Thee, make me strong again! But if, on the other hand, sickness is more conducive to my last end, then grant me patience to bear it for Thy honor and glory, as long as may be pleasing to Thee; for it is better for me to gain heaven by sickness and suffering than to lose my soul by being in good health. Thou seest, O Lord, in what a miserable plight I shall be if my husband, wife, child, or dear friend should die; Thou canst help, if such is Thy will. Do so, then, I implore Thee, that I may save my soul in peace, and praise Thee with joyful heart! But if the contrary is better for my salvation, then, O Lord, act as Thou wilt; take from me by death whom Thou wilt; but do not refuse me Thy grace and consolation! It is better for me to be deprived here of all human consolation, and to rejoice with Thee afterwards in heaven, than to live in pleasure and lose my soul. Thou seest, O Lord, how hard I find it to provide for my children; how bitter the poverty I am secretly suffering from; how I am despised, persecuted, oppressed; what great profit or loss this lawsuit may bring me; what I have to expect from this undertaking; free me and mine, I beseech Thee, from all poverty, evil, and misfortune—for with Thee nothing is impossible—that I may serve Thee better, and save my soul! But if the prosperity I ask for is not good for my eternal welfare, then, O Lord, let Thy holy will be

¹ Quando autem petitis temporalia, cum modo petite, et cum timore illi committite, ut si prosint, det; si scit obesse, non det.

² Quid enim obsit vel prosit, medicus novit, non ægrotus.

done! It is better for me to suffer for a while here than to be poor in eternity; better to be despised and rejected by men here than to be excluded from Thy grace and friendship. Only grant me grace not to offend Thee in my misery by any sin, but to continue praising and blessing Thee. In a word, if Thou wilt bestow temporal blessings on me, I beg them of Thee for no other purpose but that, as Thy Church says, "being sufficiently assisted by present helps, we may desire eternal things with more confidence." I will ask Thee, as Thou hast taught us, to free us from what Thou knowest to be bad for us: "Deliver us from evil." This, my dear brethren, is the prayer that pierces heaven, that is becoming the infinite majesty of God, that offers a pleasing violence to His omnipotence, and that brings down in rich abundance, not only divine grace and heavenly goods, but also temporal blessings.

O my Lord and my God, if I had always prayed in that way, what comfort, happiness, and peace of mind I should enjoy, and what a great treasure of merit I should have amassed for my soul! Ah, now I know where the fault lay! Thou wert indeed right, O Lord, to refuse so often to hear my prayers; for my petitions were directed to the welfare of my body as their chief object. Foolish mortal that I was, I knew not what to ask for. If Thou hadst granted my prayer, it would have been probably bad for my soul; I thank Thee therefore for having refused me. Like a foolish child I stretched forth my hand to grasp a knife; well was it for me, O Lord, that Thou hast kept it from me, otherwise I should have done myself an injury. Like a sick man I hungered for food that would have been fatal to me; well indeed was it for me that Thou, O Lord, hast not gratified me, or else I might have lost the life of my soul forever. Henceforward I shall allow Thee to do with me and mine what Thou wilt; I leave everything to Thy fatherly care. Thou knowest best what is good or bad for me. Do with me, then, as Thou pleasest. I am ready for sickness as well as for health, for poverty as well as riches, for adversity as well as prosperity. One thing alone, O Lord, I beg of Thee, and will continue to beg of Thee, do not withdraw Thy grace from me; do not deprive me of heaven; for my soul shall now be my greatest care. If I am in Thy friendship, although all other things are taken away from me, then I have all I want. But if I have all this world can give, and am wanting in Thy grace alone, then I have nothing. Keep me

Conclusion
and resolution
thus to
pray.

520 *On the Manner in which we Ought to Pray.*

therefore always in Thy grace, and I shall have nothing more to desire. Amen.

THIRTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

ON THE MANNER IN WHICH WE OUGHT TO PRAY.

Subject.

Many Christians do not pray, 1st. because they are not humble; 2d. because they are neither persevering nor constant.—*Preached on Quinquagesima Sunday.*

Text.

Ipsè vero multo magis clamabat: Fili David, miserere mei.—Luke xviii. 39.

“But he cried out much more: Son of David, have mercy on me.”

Introduction.

There we have a blind but excellent teacher, from whom we Christians might learn a great deal as to the manner in which we ought to pray. In the first place, he was not ashamed to cry out in the presence of so many people, making known his wants with the utmost humility: “He cried out, saying: Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” Again, he was not deterred by the threats of those who were annoyed at his persistence—“They that went before rebuked him that he should hold his peace,”—but rather became much more fervent in his prayer: “But he cried out much more: Son of David, have mercy on me.” Nor did he cease until Our Lord had granted his petition. See, my dear brethren, what a beautiful lesson this blind man teaches us by his example; for we learn from him that we must pray with becoming humility, but at the same time with constancy and perseverance, if we wish to be heard by God. Oh, how many Christians are wanting in this particular! I might perhaps make to many the same reproach that Christ made His apostles on another occasion. “Hitherto you have not asked anything.”¹ And so it is in truth; many Christians do not pray, although they appear in church every day, and, as they imagine, offer up their prayers there. Be not surprised, my dear brethren, at what I am saying; I will soon show you that I have good reason for it.

¹ *Usquemodo non petistis quidquam.*—John xvi. 24.

Plan of Discourse.

Many Christians do not pray, but rather demand and desire, as I shall show in the first part. Many Christians do not pray, but rather begin to pray, as I shall show in the second part. The first fault consists in a want of humility and reverence; the second in a want of constancy and perseverance. Therefore they are not heard.

To amend both these faults in future we now humbly and earnestly beg Thy light and grace, O God of goodness, through the help of the prayers of Thy Mother Mary, and of our holy guardian angels.

There is a great difference between demanding and asking. To demand is to insist on having something that belongs to us by right; to ask is to beg for a favor that the person we are asking is not bound to give us. If I have a right to demand a thing, I need not pay many compliments nor seek for fine phrases in which to express my wishes; I can boldly urge my right, and insist on its being recognized. But if I am obliged to ask a favor, I must act far differently; I must bow and scrape, and make known my wants with the utmost humility, and persevere in my request until I get what I want. What would you think, my dear brethren, of a beggar who, dressed in costly apparel, with his hat on his head and a sword by his side, walks unannounced into the house of some rich lord, and there explains his wants in haughty words, saying: You must know, sir, that I am in need of this or that, that I must have so much money; and now I am come to demand it. Is that the way for a beggar to act? Away with you, the lord would say; where are my servants? Show this fellow the door at once! Be off with you, and see whether you will get what you want elsewhere! That is not the way to ask a favor. I have never seen a beggar act in that way. If I wish to give alms, there are poor people enough who know far better how to behave when they ask me to help them. And truly, beggars are skilled in the art of asking! How humbly they stand at the door! How pitifully they cry out through a crack or the key-hole, Give me a piece of bread for God's sake! And if you meet them in the street, or at the church-door, they go down on their knees in the mud (that they do not look on as a humiliation for them), and with folded hands and feigned tears implore your help so earnestly, that sometimes your heart would needs be made of stone to withstand them. And

Beggars are very humble when asking for alms.

if they have a good coat at home, they are very careful not to bring it out with them; a few rags suit their purpose far better; the more ragged they are, the better for them, although their bare limbs show out here and there. Nor can you get a word out of them but sighs and moans and bitter complaints of their poverty and misery. Oh, they exclaim, with the intention of exciting the pity of those who hear them, what a poor wretch I am! For the love of God, give a trifle to a poor man, who has not tasted a bit of bread for the last twenty-four hours (although there may not be a word of truth in what they say). They point with their fingers at their sores and ulcers; sometimes they pretend to have sicknesses that they have really never suffered from, so as to move the passers-by to compassion, and persuade them to bestow an alms on them.

We are all
poor beg-
gars as far
as our
bodies are
concerned.

What are we, my dear brethren, when engaged in prayer? Such is the question asked by St. Augustine. And he answers: "All of us are beggars when we pray to God;"¹ no matter how rich or great we may be in the eyes of the world, we are then no better than beggars who knock at the door of the mighty Lord of heaven and ask for an alms. "But I am a beggar and poor,"² is the humble confession of King David. And what sort of beggars are we? Ah, we are in far greater want than all the beggars in the world put together, and therefore, like them, we must knock and ask constantly. He who wishes to make sure of a yearly income invests his money in some safe property, so that if the income fails he may have his money again. God wishes to have a daily income of prayer from us mortals; what has He done to make sure of it? He has invested in our wants and miseries, as if to say, I will allow man to suffer from weakness and frailty of body, from dangers that threaten his soul, from uncertainty and blindness in the understanding, from public misfortunes and calamities, so that he may know that he is in need of My help, and thus always keep his eyes fixed on Me, and fly for refuge to Me by prayer. Ah, truly, we do not need, like other beggars, to make ourselves appear poorer than we are, nor to pretend to be suffering from all sorts of diseases in order to move God to take pity on us. For indeed our misery is greater than we imagine, greater than we ourselves can say. There is not a crumb we eat, nor a drop we drink, nor a thread

¹ Omnes, quando oramus, mendici Dei sumus.—S. Aug. Serm. 15. de verb. Dom.

² Ego autem mendicus sum et pauper.—Ps. xxxix. 18.

of clothing we put on, that we must not receive as an alms from the hands of God.

But these wants are of the least consequence. How do matters stand with our souls? A secret pride, innate in all men; a self-love that shows itself in almost all our actions, and ruins even our good works; a vain sensuality that cannot bear the least discomfort or suffering; a constant, excessive care for temporal things, by which the heart and mind are turned away from the love of eternal goods and from our last end; an unceasing strife that the flesh wages against the spirit and against right reason, which often leads us into sin, and in any case constantly tempts us to unlawful pleasures; these and countless other evil inclinations, desires, and wounds of the soul are hidden in us, and through want of attention we are hardly aware of their existence. And what a multitude of outward temptations, occasions, and dangers we have to withstand from other creatures, and from the suggestions and assaults of the evil one, inclined as we are already to wickedness! Alas, at any moment we can lose an eternal heaven; at any moment we can prepare eternal torments for ourselves. To avoid this twofold evil, we are in want of the help and grace of God, without which we are incapable of forming even a good thought.

As far as
our souls
are con-
cerned.

Now the will of God is that we should ask and pray to Him for that help and grace. Nay, according to the opinion of the holy Fathers and many theologians, there are some men to whom God has given no other means of avoiding sin and saving their souls than the power to pray, and by praying constantly to obtain further graces; and if they do not make use of this means, they fall into sin and are lost forever. Thus we are beggars before the Most High God. It is not necessary for me to describe what a great Lord He is whom we implore an alms from. Let it suffice to say that He is the almighty God, from whom princes, kings, and emperors must not be ashamed to beg an alms on bended knees and with folded hands, as poor needy mendicants; the God before whose throne the angels of heaven tremble with awe. "You who ask," is the warning that St. John Chrysostom gives to all who pray, "see of whom you are asking. Who are you? A mere mortal. Of whom are you asking? God."¹ You are a poor, miserable creature, unworthy of obtaining anything; you are asking God, the King of kings, the Lord

So that we
must have
recourse to
God, but
with all hu-
mility.

¹ Vide, quis rogas, quem rogas. Quis? Homo. Quem? Deum.—S. Chrys. Hom. ix. in Orat. Dom.

of hosts, the Ruler of heaven and earth, the Sovereign God of infinite majesty. Oh, if we only thought of this when we enter the church or otherwise dispose ourselves for prayer, and if we had at the same time a lively recollection of our poverty and misery, with what humility would we not appear before such a great Lord in order to make known our wants to Him! Hence some moral theologians are of the opinion that God inspired the old custom that beggars have of sitting generally at the church-doors, or in the streets that lead to the church, so that the faithful might learn from their example how to appear before God as beggars and present Him their petitions in prayer.

Many who
pray are
wanting in
inward hu-
mility of
heart.

But how do we act? Where is our inward humility? Where the outward signs of our being poor, needy mendicants, who come to beg an alms from this great King? Are not many Christians like the proud beggar who comes forward with a demand for his just rights, rather than with a humble petition for alms? If we could see into their hearts, what proofs should we find therein that they acknowledge their poverty and misery? O all-seeing God, Thou knowest all things, and canst see how it is with them in this respect! Dost Thou not find amongst them some Pharisees like those of whom Thy holy Evangelist St. Luke has said: "And to some who trusted in themselves as just, and despised others, He spoke also this parable: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee, standing prayed thus with himself: O God, I give Thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers."¹ Dost Thou not find, I say, people of that kind even amongst Thy own Christians, who stand up in Thy holy house to hear Mass, and know not even what they are to pray for, or why they should pray? If they are not under the pressure of some temporal calamity, or otherwise not obliged to ask Thee for worldly prosperity, they are as strange with Thee as if they were not at all in need of Thy assistance and grace, although in reality they are in the midst of miseries and dangers as to their souls, and therefore have good reason to beg Thee humbly to help them. If they some times read for an hour or so what they find in their prayer-books, they imagine they have rendered Thee a wonderful service, for which Thou owest them I know not

¹ Dixit autem et ad quosdam, qui in se confidebant tanquam iusti, et aspernabantur ceteros, parabolam istam: Duo homines ascenderunt in templum ut orarent; unus Phariseus, et alter publicanus. Phariseus stans, hæc apud se orabat: Deus, gratias ago tibi quia non sum sicut cæteri hominum, raptores, iniusti, adulteri.—Luke xviii. 9, 10, 11.

what gratitude and reward; as if a rich man were bound in any way to the poor beggar, simply because the latter has knocked at his door for an alms! But they do not come here to beg for alms like mendicants. "To beg I am ashamed,"¹ they say with the steward in the Gospel; and their want of humility shows that they speak the truth, or that they imagine they need not beg. What wonder is it then that they receive nothing from God, says St. Augustine, speaking of the words of the psalm, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him."² "You are not heard, because you are rich;"³ not, indeed, always rich in money and worldly goods, but in your own imagination and opinion; for you do not know your own poverty, or at least you do not act as a poor man.

And what shall I say of the humility of the body and of outward behavior during prayer? If a newly baptized convert from one of the Eastern isles, who has never seen a church, were to come here during holy Mass, and ask me what the people are doing, and I were to tell him that they are all poor beggars asking an alms from the King of heaven, who is here present, what! he would exclaim in astonishment; are those all beggars? Yes; all without exception. And those who stare round them so boldly; those who kneel on one knee, or who loll on their benches so comfortably, moving their lips—are they beggars too? And they who read two or three words out of their books, and then spend twice the time talking with each other; they who are tricked out in the latest fashions, and seem to do what they can to attract attention; are they all poor beggars? Yes; at least so they say. And what alms are they begging for? For pardon of the sins by which they have offended their sovereign Lord; for the grace to escape the hell they have so often deserved, to remain in the friendship of God, and to enjoy the eternal happiness of heaven after death. But that is impossible; you are deceiving me. When I was coming into the church, I saw some people at the door, who asked me to give them a farthing, the smallest coin you have in this country, and they were far more in earnest; they went on their knees, and bowed their faces down to the ground before me, although I am only a man like themselves; these I look on as poor mendicants in reality. But those others, with their flaunting apparel and haughty behaviour? Beggars? And

And in outward humility of behavior.

¹ Mendicare erubescio.—Luke xvi. 3.

² Iste pauper clamavit, et Dominus exaudivit eum.—Ps. xxxiii. 7.

³ Ideo non exaudiris quia dives es.

before God? And they are asking Him to forgive their sins, and bestow eternal life on them? I do not believe a word of it. At all events, their manner shows that they are not in earnest. I should rather have thought that they came here to show off their magnificence and grandeur before their Lord, or to see who should make the best appearance. Ah, Christians, surely that man would have guessed the truth with regard to many.

Hence God
rejects
their pray-
ers.

And so it is; you are not heard because you are rich; you are not humble like poor people, but proud like the rich, and altogether overbearing in your manners. What have such beggars as you to do here? There is nothing for you; not even the words with which the beggar is usually dismissed: God help you! For it is from God that you are begging, and He says to you: I know you not; you are not real mendicants; you seem to be richer than I myself am on the altar; you do not act as supplicants, but haughtily demand as if you had a right to command Me. For such as you I have nothing. My coffers are open to give rich alms, but to those humble people who know their own misery and My majesty, and who entreat Me with proper humility and reverence. Go to the poor first, and learn how to behave, and then come back to Me.

Hence we
must pray
humbly,
like Christ
and His fol-
lowers.

Consider what the publican did in the temple: "The publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes towards heaven," much less turn round to stare about him, "but struck his breast, saying: O God, be merciful to me a sinner." And he got what he asked for: "This man went down into his house justified, because every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."¹ If it is perhaps no longer necessary for you to implore of Me the forgiveness of your sins, then, at all events, you will not look on yourselves as greater or holier than My apostles and other faithful servants. Consider how Paul acted during prayer; "I bow my knee," he says himself, "to the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ."² See how Peter behaved when he raised Tabitha to life: "Peter, kneeling down, prayed."³ My Apostle James used to remain so long on his knees that they became quite hard: "He prayed so long on bended knees that the skin of them

¹ Publicanus a longe stans nolebat nec oculos ad cœlum levare, sed percutiebat pectus suum, dicens: Deus propitius esto mihi peccatori. Descendit hic justificatus in domum suam; quia omnis qui se exaltat humiliabitur, et qui se humiliat, exaltabitur.—Luke xviii. 13, 14.

² Flecto genua mea ad patrem Domini nostri Jesu Christi.—Ephes. iii. 14.

³ Petrus ponens genua oravit.—Acts ix. 40.

seemed to have become as hard as that of a camel.”¹ My holy servant Paul the Hermit was so accustomed to pray on bended knees, with his hands raised to heaven, that he died in that posture, and remained in it some time after his death. If these examples cannot move you to humility, then consider My only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, and see in what a lowly posture He prayed to Me in the garden: “Kneeling down He prayed.”² But He did not think that enough: “He fell upon His face praying.”³ And you, poor mortals, who are dust and ashes, and are as nothing before Me, dare to appear in My sight with such little respect? What! exclaims St. Cæsarius of Arles in astonishment; mercy throws itself on the ground in prayer, and misery is ashamed to bend the knee? Holiness humbles itself even to the earth, and wickedness does not even fold its hands? The Judge lies prostrate on the ground, and the poor sinner who has so often merited death stands or sits there in a most unbecoming manner? And still people are surprised that their prayers are not heard? No, my dear brethren, where there is no humility, there is no prayer. “The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds,”⁴ says the Holy Ghost by the wise Ecclesiasticus; “and he will not depart till the Most High behold.”⁵ If we wish, then, to avoid all mistakes in this matter, let us, when we enter a church, or otherwise dispose ourselves for prayer, first think with David of what we are: “But I am needy and poor;” and then of what He is to whom we pray: “In what day soever I shall call upon Thee: behold I know Thou art my God,”⁶ to whom the utmost reverence is due. But this, my dear brethren, is not yet enough for us; for they who are not wanting in humility are sometimes at fault in another way; they do not pray, but only begin to pray; and thus they are wanting in perseverance, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

A beggar sees a rich gentleman passing by in the street; he runs after him as hard as he can, and cries out: Give me something for God’s sake! The gentleman, being engaged in talking

Beggars do not cease asking till the alms is given them.

¹ Flexis genibus deprecabatur in tantum, ut camelorum duritiem traxisse ejus genua crederentur.—S. Hieron. l. de Viris Illustribus.

² Positis genibus orabat.—Luke xxii. 41.

³ Procidit in faciem suam orans.—Matt. xxvi. 39.

⁴ Oratio humiliantis se nubes penetrabit.—Ecclesi. xxxv. 21.

⁵ Et non discedet donec Altissimus suspiciat.—Ibid.

⁶ In quacunque die invocavero te, ecce cognovi, quoniam Deus meus es.—Ps. lv. 10.

with a friend, does not answer, but puts his hand in his pocket with the intention of giving the poor man something; the latter, weary of waiting, goes away. Do you think that the right way to beg? No, you say; the man is not in earnest, or else he does not understand his trade. But why? He cried out for alms, but got nothing? No matter; he should have had more patience; he could easily have seen that the gentleman was well disposed towards him, and in any case, he should have continued to ask and cry out louder. See how other beggars act. Once, twice, thrice, four, five times they are repulsed with the customary "God help you," but do they go away? Not at all, unless they know by long experience that at that house or with that gentleman there is little hope of their getting anything; otherwise they ask over and over again, as long as there is the least hope of getting an alms; they will even follow you for the length of a whole street, until, wearied by their importunity, you are at last forced to put your hand in your pocket to get rid of them. And after they have been thus repulsed thirty times in the day, they think themselves fortunate if they have been able with all their begging to put together a few pence, all in farthings.

So should
we act in
prayer, for
God has
promised
everything
to our pray-
ers.

Ah, my dear brethren, what are we thinking of? How those beggars condemn and put to shame our laziness and carelessness, or rather our false shame or impatience in prayer! Do we pray as long, as earnestly, as perseveringly, as eagerly to be helped in our spiritual wants and to obtain the grace of God and eternal goods, as they do for a few farthings, nay, for a piece of dry bread? Can we, dare we, then, doubt of the generosity and good will of Our Lord, or think that, when we knock at His door, He will send us away empty-handed, provided we pray earnestly and our request is just? A doubt of that kind would be nothing better than an insult offered to the Divine Mercy and Goodness, and a denial of God's truthfulness and fidelity. If we had not His clear and oft-repeated promises to hear our prayers, then indeed we poor mortals might perhaps have cause to be afraid of presenting our petitions to such a great Lord, and to doubt whether we should be allowed to have an audience of Him, not to speak of His granting our prayers. But could anything be more favorable, more generous, or more glorious for us than the magnificent promises made by the God of truth? We are astonished at the offer made by the vain Herod to the dancing girl, "Ask of me what thou wilt, and I will give it thee.

though it be the half of my kingdom; and he swore to her,"¹ to make her quite sure. We think Solomon fortunate in having such a magnificent offer made him by the Almighty God: "Ask what thou wilt that I should give thee."² Oh, we say, what a great favor that was! How fortunate for Solomon! But what have we to be amazed at? Is our fortune less? Has not God said just as much to me and you and all men? Has not Christ, the Son of God, made the same promise to us, and assured us of it by a twofold oath, as we read in the Gospel of St. John: "Amen, amen, I say to you: if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you."³

Mark, my dear brethren, how unlimited and generous this promise is. If you ask anything, He says, whatever it be; He makes no exception; as long as your request is a reasonable one, and you make it duly, it will be granted. Mark, too, how forcibly, how sweetly He tries to impress this promise on us, so as to encourage us to confidence in prayer. He does not say, If you ask God, or the Lord; but, the Father. Can there be any sweeter name than that? Nay, to put away all fear from our minds, He does not say My Father, but simply "the Father," the common Father of all, of whom He elsewhere says: "I ascend to My Father and to your Father."⁴ Where is the dutiful child that does not willingly ask a favor from its father, especially when it sees that it is a favorite with him? And to our still greater consolation Christ assures us of that: "For the Father Himself loveth you;"⁵ so that it is not even necessary for Me to ask for you. Mark further how He complains, as it were, that we are so bashful and diffident in making requests of Him: "Hitherto you have not asked anything."⁶ How is that? "Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full."⁷ "Knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened."⁸ If you were to ask your heavenly Father to work

He encourages us by the strongest assurances to trust in His promise.

¹ Pete a me quod vis, et dabo tibi; licet dimidium regni mei; et juravit illi.—Mark vi. 22, 23.

² Postula quod vis ut dem tibi.—III. Kings iii. 5.

³ Amen, amen dico vobis, si quid petieritis Patrem in nomine meo, dabit vobis.—John xvi. 23.

⁴ Ascendo ad Patrem meum et Patrem vestrum.—Ibid. xx. 17.

⁵ Ipse enim Pater amat vos.—Ibid. xvi. 27.

⁶ Usque modo non petistis quidquam.—Ibid. 24.

⁷ Petite, et accipietis, ut gaudium vestrum sit plenum.—Ibid.

⁸ Pulsate, et aperietur vobis. Omnis enim qui petit, accipit; et qui querit, invenit; et pulsanti aperietur.—Matt. vii. 7.

a miracle for you, to transfer mountains from one place to another, to dry up rivers, or to raise the dead, and it were necessary or advantageous for you, ask without hesitation and with child-like confidence and firm faith, and it will be done for you, as many know by experience.

Hence we must not doubt that our prayers will be heard, if we only persevere.

With all this, then, I ask you again, Christians, can we have the least doubt that our prayers will be heard by the Almighty God, or can we complain that we are too miserable, too much exposed to temptations and dangers of sin, while we have such a powerful means of defence at hand that we can make use of at any moment? Yes, you think; these are all fine words; but what better are we for them? I have often prayed for many things, even for what concerns my salvation; for instance, to be freed from some vexatious temptations, to overcome some evil passion, to have a zealous love for God, to be patient in adversity, to be fully resigned to the divine will; I have prayed for the conversion of my husband, my wife, but all to no purpose. I myself am as I was before, and those belonging to me are not a whit better. But what are you saying? Have you prayed for those things? and to God? and humbly and fervently, being in the state of grace? Yes, I have done the best I could. But that cannot be; you have not prayed; you have only begun to pray, and have acted like the beggar who went away at the first refusal through impatience. No, such is not the case with me; I have often asked for that favor from God, but He seems unwilling to hear my prayer, so that, seeing all my labor to be of no use, I have grown tired of it.

And not cease through despondency.

Away with such despondent thoughts! Judith, a weak woman, although she was not a Christian and knew nothing of the magnificent promises of Jesus Christ, could give you a sharp reproof on this head, as she formerly gave her fellow-citizens of Bethulia. Holofernes had subjected the whole country round; the Jews in Bethulia, thinking that a hard fate was in store for them too, devoted themselves to fasting and prayer; the women laid aside all their ornaments, went to the temple, and there with their little children raised their voices in prayer to God; the priests, clad in penitential garb, stood before the Lord; but all seemed of no avail. For in spite of the prayers and fasting Holofernes advanced to besiege the town with a hundred and twenty thousand foot and two and twenty thousand horse. The people again had recourse to God; young and old, great and small, men

and women, priests and laity, they all cried out to the Lord for help. "Have mercy on us," they said, "because Thou art good."¹ But God did not come to their help; the more they prayed the less grew their hopes of deliverance. Ozias, the chief man of the place, could not help shedding tears of compassion: "Ozias, rising up all in tears, said: Be of good courage, my brethren, and let us wait these five days for mercy from the Lord. But if after five days be past there come no aid, we will do the thing which you have spoken."² For the people, reduced to the verge of despair, had resolved to surrender the town to the enemy, since their prayers had been fruitless. When the courageous Judith heard this, she was filled with indignation. "What is this word," she said, "by which Ozias hath consented to give up the city to the Assyrians if within five days there come no aid to us?"³ Do you wish, then, to excite the anger of God instead of continuing to implore His mercy? "You have set a time for the mercy of the Lord, and you have appointed Him a day according to your pleasure," on which He is to hear your prayers. "And who are you that tempt the Lord,"⁴ and thus put Him to the proof? Keep on praying; the Providence of God will know when to help you.

The same I now say to you, O Christians; one of the chief qualities of efficacious prayer is constancy and perseverance. "God wishes to be asked," says St. Gregory; "He wishes to be compelled, and to be conquered by a sort of importunity."⁵ This is the meaning of the parable in the Gospel of St. Luke. Is there one of you, such is the tenor of the parable, is there one of you who goes to his friend in the middle of the night, and calls out to him through the door: My dear friend, lend me three loaves, for some one is come to visit me, and I have nothing to put before him; but the friend tells him to go away, as he is in bed and does not wish to get up. "Yet if he shall continue knocking, I say to you, although he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will

God wishes to be forced, as it were, to hear us, by our constancy in prayer.

¹ Tu quia pius es, miserere nostri.—Judith vii. 20.

² Exurgens Ozias infusus lacrymis dixit: æquo animo estote fratres, et hos quinque dies expectemus a Domino misericordiam. Si autem transactis quinque diebus non venerit adiutorium, faciemus hæc verba, quæ locuti estis.—Ibid. 23, 25.

³ Quod est hoc verbum in quo consensit Ozias ut tradat civitatem Assyriis, si intra quinque dies non venerit nobis adiutorium?—Ibid. viii. 10.

⁴ Posuistis vos tempus miserationis Domini, et in arbitrium vestrum diem constituistis ei. Et qui estis vos qui tentatis Dominum?—Ibid. 13, 11.

⁵ Vult Deus rogari; vult cogi; vult quadam importunitate vinci.

rise, and give him as many as he needeth. And I say to you," adds Our Lord, "Ask, and it shall be given to you; knock, and it shall be opened to you."¹ It is not enough to knock once, twice, or three times; you must keep on knocking until you are heard, and the door is opened to you. "Perseverance," says St. Jerome of this parable, "is a great thing, and more friendly than the friend himself. For it deserves what is denied to the friend; the latter receives not when he asks in a friendly manner, but his perseverance excites compassion."² God often acts as if He were deaf to our prayers, partly because He does not wish to bestow His gifts too lightly, lest we should not esteem them properly, for generally we think little of what we easily acquire, and partly to induce us to pray more and for a longer time. "When God sometimes," says St. Augustine, "is slow in giving, He shows that He values His gifts, but not that He wishes to deny them. It is more pleasing to us to receive what we have long wished for, but what we get easily we soon despise. God keeps back for a time what He does not wish to give at once, that you may learn to have a great desire for great things."³

For He takes
pleasure in
our prayers;
shown by a
smile.

He thus acts with us as a mother with her child. Sometimes, to amuse herself, the mother holds out to the little one an apple or a nut; and the child at once stretches out his hand for it. But does she give it to him at once? No; otherwise her amusement would soon be over. The child must first run after his mother, laughing and crying, pulling her by the sleeve, and hanging on to her dress, until at last he compels her to sit down. But the fun is not over even then; she holds the apple tight in her closed hands, so that the child has to open one finger after the other, and when it has come to the last one, the mother again closes the fingers that were first opened, and the whole affair begins anew. At last, when the child is wearied with crying and entreating, she opens her hand and gives him the coveted fruit, to the great satisfaction of both parties. Such is the loving strife into which our heavenly Father, whose delight is to be with the children of men, as He Himself says, enters with His pious ser-

¹ *Etsi ille perseveraverit pulsans, dico vobis, etsi non dabit illi surgens eo quod amicus ejus sit, propter improbitatem tamen ejus surget, et dabit illi quotquot habet necessarios. Et ego dico vobis: petite, et dabitur vobis; pulsate, et aperietur vobis.*—Luke xi. 8, 9.

² *Magna perseverantia est, quæ quamdiu importuna est, plus amica est quam amicus. Ecce quod amico negatur, perseverantia promeretur: illi non largitur familiariter pulsanti; hunc pertinaciter miseretur oranti.*

³ *Cum aliquando aliquid tardius dat Deus, commendat dona, non negat. Desiderata diu dulcius obtinentur: cito autem data vilescent. Servat sibi Deus quod non vult cito dare, ut et tu discas magna magis desiderare.*—S. Aug. de verb. Dom., c. 1.

vants. He has, so to speak, a pleasure and delight in their fervent prayers; if He were to give them at once what they ask of Him, they would cease praying; therefore He keeps His hand closed fast, and allows them to sigh and weep for a long time, not with the intention of refusing them what they ask, but to excite their desire for it still more. At last, after having had experience of their perseverance, He opens His generous hand and bestows on them much more than they desired and asked for; as the Prophet David says to Him: "When Thou openest Thy hand, they shall all be filled with good."¹

God has acted often in this way even with His most beloved servants, letting them pray for a long time without granting their petitions. Moses was perfectly pleasing to Him, yet He did not grant him a complete victory over the Amalekites until he was determined to persevere in prayer in spite of his great fatigue. "Persevering prayer," says St. John Chrysostom of him, "confirms persevering victory."² Isaac was dear to God, and yet he had to wait for twenty years before having an heir from his sterile spouse, in spite of his prayers. "For twenty years," says St. Chrysostom, "Isaac continued to pray and entreat the Lord, and then at length he obtained his request."³ I have a feeling of pity for the poor woman of Chanaan of whom we read in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "And behold a woman of Chanaan, who came out of those coasts, crying out, said to Him: Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David."⁴ And what did the otherwise so merciful Saviour do? He hardly even looked at her, and did not deign to answer her a single word: "Who answered her not a word."⁵ She continued to implore and entreat Him most pitifully: "Lord, help me."⁶ But He takes not the least notice. Even the disciples, who were tired of the scene, began to add their entreaties to hers: "And His disciples came and besought Him, saying: Send her away, for she crieth after us;"⁷ as if they wished to say: Lord, help that woman, that she may go away and not deafen us with her clam-

Hence He often allows His servants to pray for a long time without hearing them.

¹ *Aperiente te manum tuam, omnia implebuntur bonitate.*—Ps. ciii. 28.

² *Perseverante prece perseverans victoria roboratur.*—S. Chrys. serm. de Moyse.

³ *Viginti annis mansit Isaac orans et deprecans Deum, et tunc tandem assecutus est quod desiderabat.*—Idem, hom. 94 in Gen.

⁴ *Ecce mulier Chananaea a finibus illis egressa clamavit, dicens ei: miserere mei, Domine, Fili David.*—Matt. xv. 22.

⁵ *Qui non respondit ei verbum.*—Ibid. 23.

⁶ *Domine, adjuva me.*—Ibid. 25.

⁷ *Et accedentes discipuli ejus rogabant eum dicentes: dimitte eam, quia clamat post nos.*—Ibid. 23.

ors. But the Lord remains as immovable as before; nay, He spurns her from Him as if she were a dog: "It is not good to take the bread of the children, and to cast it to the dogs."¹ Ah, dear Lord, what strange language that is for Thee to use! Where is Thy mildness, and that gentle heart that is so full of compassion for even the greatest sinner? How canst Thou thus turn away that poor woman, and leave her almost in despair? My dear brethren, Our Lord had far different intentions on that occasion. He was pleased with the fervor and faith of the woman, and wished to display them still more. She came up to Him and said: "Yea, Lord, for the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters;"² as if she wished to say: Take pity on me; give me at least a crumb! Then at last the generous hand was opened. "O woman," said Jesus to her with astonishment, "great is thy faith; be it done to thee as thou wilt, and her daughter was cured from that hour."³ If the woman had gone after the first or second rebuff, her daughter would not have been healed. Nearly in the same way did God act towards St. Monica. With burning tears that holy woman prayed for the conversion of her son Augustine. How long, and how often? Every day for seventeen years. Now, if she had grown tired and given up praying after the first ten or twelve years, her son would have become worse and worse, and there would have been no hope for him; ah, and then, too, the Catholic Church would not have the great St. Augustine.

Nay, He
acted thus
to His own
Son.

But why do I speak so much of men in this matter? I could tremble with fear if I did not know that, when God delays to grant our prayers, He is only dissembling, as it were, and striving with us in a loving manner; for I see the incarnate Son of the Eternal Father, Jesus Christ Himself, lying on His face on the ground in the garden, and praying to His heavenly Father, nor is He answered; I see Him standing up and again prostrating and repeating the same prayer; but He finds no hearing as yet in heaven. I see Him falling down for the third time and repeating His prayer with sighs and tears, before His Father sends Him an answer by an angel. What am I to say or think of this? O poor mortals, miserable sinners that we are! what are we thinking of? The Eternal Father allows His only-begotten

¹ Non est bonum sumere panem filiorum, et mittere canibus.—Matt. xv. 26.

² Etiam Domine; nam et catelli edunt de micis quæ cadunt de mensa dominorum suorum.—Ibid. 27.

³ O mulier, magna est fides tua; fiat tibi sicut vis, et sanata est filia ejus ex illa hora.—Ibid. 28.

Son, whom He loves most of all, and who is innocence itself, to lie there in the utmost anguish, and to knock three times at His door, before He opens to Him; and we imagine that we have done enough when we knock once or twice by prayer at the door of heaven? And we complain and grow tired and give up if we do not receive a favorable answer the first or second time we knock? That is to say, that God must attend to us at once, although we perhaps often refuse to hear His voice when we are in the state of sin.

No, my dear brethren, that will not do. If we wish to pray properly, let us not merely begin, but continue to pray constantly and perseveringly, especially when we are asking for something that is conducive to our spiritual welfare, and that should be the chief, nay, the only object of our prayers. "Do not give way too soon," says St. John Chrysostom, "for you have the promise of Christ. Do not leave off until you have received. If you pray with that disposition, saying: I will not cease until I get what I ask: you will certainly be heard." If we are to-day refused what we ask for, we can still get it to-morrow. If we are not heard this year, we shall surely be next year. And meanwhile we can be certain that our trouble in prayer will not be in vain, nor go unrewarded. Ask, says the Lord of heaven, but ask with inward and outward humility, as is becoming before such infinite majesty. Ask, but with constancy and perseverance, because that is the way in which the Lord wishes to be prayed to. Ask thus, and you will receive. Amen.

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion to pray
humbly and
persever-
ingly.

THIRTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

ON THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

Subject.

We always receive when we pray to God; therefore we should pray often, nay, always.—*Preached on the twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost.*

¹ Noli sponte concidere, sponsonem Christi tenens. Non desistas donec accipias. Si cum hoc studio mentis accesseris, et dixeris: nisi accepero, non recedam, prorsus accipies. —S. Chrys., hom. xxiv. in Matt., c. 7.

Text.

Orate autem ut non fiat fuga vestra in hieme.—Matt. xxiv. 20.
 “But pray that your flight be not in the winter.”

Introduction.

What? And in those troublous times that are to precede the end of the world, during the reign of Antichrist, when everything is to be destroyed on the approach of the Day of Judgment, and men will be filled with anguish, will they then be able to do something for themselves by prayer, since Christ says that we must then pray? Truly, my dear brethren, prayer is always efficacious; we have that assurance from God Himself: Ask, and you shall receive. No exception is made of time, place, or other circumstance. “Amen, amen I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you.”¹ No matter what it is, only pray. Do you want consolation in your troubles? Pray, and you will find it. Do you want help in persecutions? Pray, and you will surely have it; you can take my word for this. My dear brethren, we have still the same comfort; the same means is in our power to use every day. I have already in different sermons shown why God does not often hear our prayers; for we either ask for things that are too vile and worthless, or we do not pray humbly and fervently, or we do not desire to receive what we ask for. But when I consider the matter better, I see that I have made a mistake in saying that God often does not hear our prayers. I retract that; our prayers are always heard; the prayer of the just man is never fruitless, as I shall now explain.

Plan of Discourse.

We always receive when we pray to God; therefore we should pray often, nay, always. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

God of goodness and generosity! we beg of Thee in the name of Thy Son, through the merits of Mary, Thy virginal Mother, and the intercession of our holy guardian angels, that Thou wouldst teach us how to pray and impel us to pray always.

Although
we do not
always re-
ceive what
we pray for,

What are you saying now?—so it seems to me that I hear many objecting. That we always receive when we pray to God? But that is an evident falsehood, and if you ever told

¹ Amen, amen dico vobis, si quid petieritis Patrem in nomine meo, dabit vobis.—John xvi. 23.

a lie in your life, you surely have done so now. I take as witnesses all who are now present in church; ask them all one after the other how often they have hitherto prayed to God, and what they asked from Him; the most of them will tell you that they have prayed a hundred times or more for this or that, and yet out of the hundred petitions hardly one has been granted. How many a sick man sighs forth his prayers for recovery, and still remains as ill as he was before? How many a poor man would have been rich long ago if the prayers he sent forth to heaven for better fortune had been heard; but he is just as badly off as ever he was; the beggar's staff is still his only support. How many a sad and sorrowful heart begs to be freed from the heavy burden of tribulation? O how often, how earnestly I have prayed and got others to pray for the health of my dear child, my husband or wife! But what was the good of it all? Death was unmoved by my prayers; the objects of my dearest love are now in the grave, to my great sorrow of heart. How often have I not prayed, and I still pray, that my wicked husband or undutiful son may be converted, but all to no purpose; there is not the least sign of amendment. How often have I not begged of God to free me from that violent temptation; but my prayers have been only empty sounds cast forth to the winds; I am just as much tempted as ever I was. And now you try to persuade us that we always receive whenever we pray to God? No, I do not believe it, and will not, even if you preach a hundred sermons about it; daily experience shows me that what you say is false.

But listen to me for a moment before you decide. Suppose that you are a poor beggar, and I a rich man (which latter is certainly not the case, for I have not a farthing in my possession); you come to me and ask me for a trifle for God's sake. I put my hand in my pocket and give you a gold-piece. What would you say to that? Oh, truly, your gratitude would be boundless, and you would ask of God to reward me a thousand times. But why? Have you got what you asked from me? Yes, you say, and I am well content with it. But that is not the case; you asked for a trifle, and you did not get the trifle. Yes, you reply, but I got something very much better, for there are many small coins in what you gave me. If I got that much at every door I knock at, I should soon be a rich man. So that in that case you have no difficulty in seeing that your prayer is granted,

Yet we always get something better; shown by a simile.

Now that is the way in which the rich Lord of heaven distributes alms to all who knock at His door. Never does He refuse any one who asks Him, especially when one is in the state of grace; we always receive from Him something a thousand times better than what we ask and hope for.

And something infinitely more precious than all earthly goods.

Hear, O human soul, and acknowledge thy happiness, says St. Augustine; "whatsoever you shall ask the Father in My name, that will I do."¹ This is a promise made in your favor by the God of infallible truth, whose fidelity is unchangeable and cannot deceive you. If the emperor said to you, Ask what you will, and I will give it to you, what a great sum of money, or a large property, you would at once beseech him to bestow on you! And behold, the Emperor of heaven and earth has said: "Whatsoever you shall ask, that will I do." Think now, what would you like to have. Give free rein to your greed; enlarge as far as you can your powers of desiring; an almighty God promises to give you whatever you ask. Do you wish to be rich? Then ask Him to bestow on you the whole land of Treves, nay the whole earth, so that all men shall be your subjects. And when you have the earth, ask Him for the sea too. Are you not yet satisfied? Then ask Him to give you the air, although you cannot fly; ascend in thought to the heights of heaven, and say: the sun and moon and stars and the whole firmament must be mine; for He who has created all those things, and can still create endless creatures like them, has promised you that He will do whatsoever you ask. But when you have gained possession of all this, what have you after all? Nothing but vanity; all is vanity; you have things that are not of so much value to you as a farthing would be to a beggar. You have received creatures, that cannot make you greater, because they are all less than you; that cannot make you rich, because they are all poorer than you; that cannot satisfy or content you, because you are capable of an infinite Good, which is the end and aim of your existence. God has other goods in His inexhaustible treasury which He can bestow on you. Suppose now that, instead of those things which you have just had in your imagination, He were to give you something of infinitely greater value and use to you, could you with truth say that He has not granted your prayer? And such is the treasure that God is not merely ready to give, but which He actually bestows on you, whenever you

¹ Quidquid petieritis Patrem in nomine meo, hoc faciam.—John xiv. 13.

send forth a prayer to Him even in thought. No matter what you ask, you always receive something infinitely greater and more precious than what you desire.

And is there anything more to be said of this matter? Do not forget, my dear brethren, that the prayer of the just man is always a good and meritorious work. For, in the first place, it is an act of religion, by which God is adored, honored, and praised. In the second place, it is an act of faith in God and in His almighty power. In the third place, it is an act of hope and confidence in His mercy and promises. In the fourth place, it is an act of humility by which we acknowledge God as our Sovereign Lord, from whom all benefits come, and ourselves as poor beggars, wanting many things and expecting an alms from His generous hand. Therefore, since by every good work in which the good intention is not wanting sanctifying grace is increased in the just soul, it follows that that increase is gained in a special manner by prayer. And this is the treasure which, along with other benefits, we receive from God by prayer. But, you will say, is that all? Christians, is not that enough? O blind mortals that we are, to make so little of such a priceless blessing! If you give a poor child a precious stone as an alms, it will not even be grateful to you for it, because it does not know the value of the gift, but will go away discontented, and throw away the stone, thinking it of no more value than a piece of glass, which it would be willing at any moment to exchange for a bit of bread. O foolish child! If you only knew what a treasure you possess, you would jump with joy! Keep it, and by means of it you will be able to procure for yourself as much bread and butter as you wish. Such is the way in which we, too, act, my dear brethren. Oh, you think, I have prayed so long and so often, and have clamored at the door of heaven, without receiving anything! What? You have received nothing? You neither know nor understand how rich you have become in consequence of your begging. You have received sanctifying grace; be satisfied with that alms, and rejoice with your whole heart. Do not throw it away, for if all the treasures of the world were offered you in exchange for it, you should not accept the offer; the whole world and all it contains is nothing in comparison with the least portion of that grace.

Do you wish to know what it is worth? Place in a scale the blood, the life of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; that is the only

When we pray in the state of grace, we receive an increase of sanctifying grace.

What a great treasure!

ure that
is.

price that could buy that grace that you have received at the door of heaven by saying one "Our Father." Your soul has been clothed with a garment that so wins the love and affection of God that He is forced to acknowledge and receive it as His spouse. You have received a piece of money with which you can purchase heaven. If you had done nothing else in your whole life, and had no other grace to bring with you into the next life but what you gained by saying that one "Our Father," God would be bound to give you heaven, and to bestow Himself on you as your eternal possession; because the soul that leaves this life with even the least particle of sanctifying grace is sure and certain that heaven belongs to it as its everlasting inheritance. You have received a participation of the divine nature, according to St. Thomas of Aquin and all theologians, by which you are adopted as a child of God, nay, you are become in a certain sense like to God, so that, if one who has not seen God were to behold a soul in the state of sanctifying grace, he would think it God on account of its great beauty. Do not imagine I am exaggerating; I am only using the words of the Angelic Doctor himself. You see, he says, the iron glowing in the furnace; you think the iron is nothing but fire, and if you were not already aware that the iron is different from the fire, you would not believe that they are two distinct things, so like do they seem to each other. So, too, the soul that is adorned with sanctifying grace, which is a participation of the divine nature, might on account of its appearance be taken for God, if we did not know the truth about the matter. By your short prayer you have received a bequest which, as Nierenberg does not hesitate to say, if you were the only one who possessed it, and supposing by an impossibility that God could die, would make you and you alone heir to all He ever owned. So great is the price and value of the least portion of sanctifying grace.

Hence we
always re-
ceive as of-
ten as we
pray.

Do you know, O man, what a magnificent alms you have received by your prayer? And that you can always have whenever you pray with proper dispositions, as long as you remain in the friendship of God. Let no one, then, complain that he has prayed in vain, that his prayers are not heard, that he has received nothing; but rather let every one acknowledge with thankful heart that God has bestowed on him far more than he would have dared to expect or hope for. True, you have not received the bodily health for which you have often prayed, or the temporal

prosperity, or the recovery of your child, your husband, your friend, etc., or freedom from trial and temptation. These were the miserable farthings for which you begged, and which God knew well would not be good for your soul. But instead of them you have got something that is worth infinitely more than all those things put together. Nay, if we consider the end and object of your prayers, I can well say that you almost always receive that for which you pray. Here you must remember that God often hears us without our knowledge. You pray, for instance, for fine weather, and it continues to rain; you pray for rain, and the drought still keeps on. Then you are under the impression that your prayer is not heard; but you are wrong. Why so? When you prayed for rain or fine weather, your reasoning will had no other object but a good harvest, and by its means the comfortable support of yourself and family. God does not give you the rain or fine weather you ask; but He either increases your income, or else saves you from some misfortune which would have done much harm to your prospects, or else He bestows a blessing on your business; in a word, in spite of the persistent drought or rain, you are well provided for, and that was your object. Thus your prayer is heard as far as its end and aim is concerned. You beg to be freed from some troublesome temptation, and you are tempted more frequently than before. You say again, God does not hear me. And again you are wrong. Why so? The object of your reasonable wish was not, surely, that you should be deprived of merit, but that you might be saved from sin; God does not free you from the temptation, but He strengthens you with His special grace, so that you do not fall into sin. Thus your prayer is heard; and the same is to be said of everything we ask from God. So that it is and remains true that he who prays will certainly receive even more than what he asks for. If God were to give us no other favors but helps to avoid sin, to overcome temptation, to do good, to persevere in good, all of which are granted to fervent prayer, must we not be more than content with that great and supremely happy state of sanctifying grace? If God had never given us anything but free permission to pray, should we not be ever grateful to Him for that alone?

O Christians, how fortunate we are in having such an easy means always at hand. Can any one with reason complain that he is spiritually poor and needy, that he can do little good, and heap up little merit for eternity, since he has it always in his

How fortunate to have such an easy means of

increasing
our eternal
glory.

power to pray, and with little trouble to dip deep into the inexhaustible fountain of the divine wealth, and thereby to enrich his soul as often and as much as he wills? Think of what I have already said to you; a single degree of sanctifying grace, which the soul receives for saying one "Our Father," is already a price that can buy the glory of heaven. Two degrees can purchase twice as much glory; a thousand degrees can earn a glory a thousand-fold greater; for according to the measure of sanctifying grace will be also the measure and greatness of the joy and happiness of the elect in heaven. Now, since we are assured by that infallible promise of God, "Ask, and you shall receive," that when we pray devoutly, being in the state of grace, we receive a new degree of sanctifying grace, calculate, if you can, the immense treasures that will be accumulated for all eternity by the soul by prayer alone, during ten years, if that soul is given to frequent prayer. And what a treasure of riches it will receive during its whole life, especially since according to the measure of grace the merit of each good work is proportionately increased. This is a calculation that surpasses all human ingenuity.

Yet most
people neglect it.

Should not this urge us to do nothing else in future but pray without ceasing, so that our souls may always grow richer and richer? God help us! when there is a question of temporal gain, which is after all only dross and folly, and of which we can bring nothing with us into eternal life, how diligent, industrious, thrifty and busy we are, as if we could not be satisfied; and although we have such an easy means of gaining eternal riches, we are so careless about them! How do most Christians spend the day? Christ our Saviour warns us "that we ought always to pray, and not to faint."¹ Pray always, indeed! In the morning they awake, and their heads are at once filled with thoughts of what they have to do during the day; hardly are they dressed, when they go to their different occupations,—the tradesman to his work, the peasant to the field, the merchant to his shop, the lawyer to his office, the maid to the kitchen or the garden; every one goes to his usual business, and that generally without a supernatural intention, without a thought of his last end, or of God and His holy will. In the evening they think only of retiring to rest. Thus most of their days are begun, passed, and ended without prayer, without merit; thus they spend whole years, until at last they find themselves poor and meritless at the door of eternity,

¹ Quoniam oportet semper orare et non deficere.—Luke xviii. 1.

when they will hear the words, "Time shall be no longer;"¹ the time of meriting is at an end. Meanwhile we do not cast a thought on the immense treasure of graces we have foolishly lost, that we might easily have gained every day.

This is what the envious demon, who cannot bear to see us doing good, is most anxious to prevent, so that he may rob us of the fruit of prayer, the great advantage of which he is well acquainted with. "The great war between us and the demon," says St. Nilus, "is solely on account of prayer."² Therefore he either distracts our minds, so that we are occupied the whole time with trifles, or he annoys us so that we do not think of prayer, or he persuades us that prayer is only fit for women, who have nothing else to do, and that it is not of such great importance. If he cannot succeed in keeping pious people from prayer, he has recourse to a thousand artifices to disturb them, and fills their imaginations with all kinds of images, that at least they may not have devotion or attention during prayer, and so may be deprived of a great part of the fruit of it. There are some of us, my dear brethren, who must acknowledge, as they know by their own experience, that they are never so plagued with thoughts of their temporal affairs as when engaged in prayer; others must admit that the most horrible images assail them generally during prayer. What is the reason of that? Oh, the hellish serpent knows well what prayer can do; he cannot bear to see the soul conversing with God, and therefore he strives either to keep us from prayer altogether, or to distract us and make us weary of it. St. Gregory of Tours tells us that the two holy brothers Lupicinus and Romanus, whenever they went to pray in their solitude, were assailed by the demons, who threw stones at them, to try to distract them, and frequently wounded them most severely;³ but those brave servants of God were not frightened at that; they continued their prayers, and at last the baffled demons had to desist from persecuting them. Perhaps that, too, is the object of the tempter in presenting all kinds of distracting thoughts to us during prayer. But let us not believe the deceiver; let us rather despise his suggestions and distractions and follow the advice of Our Lord, so as not to be deprived of such a great treasure. St. Bridget was assailed by numerous temptations during prayer; on one occasion the

Whereat the
devil is
greatly
pleased.

¹ Tempus non erit amplius.—Apoc. x. 6.

² Bellum universum inter nos et dæmones nonnisi de oratione.

³ Quotiescunque pro more suo genua flexissent ad orandum, statim imber lapidum profluentibus dæmonibus in eos decidebat, adeo ut sæpe vulnerati immensis dolorum cruciatibus torquerentur.

Blessed Virgin appeared to her and said: Do not fear, my daughter, no matter what horrible suggestions the envious demon plagues you with at such a time, even though you cannot always free yourself entirely from them, yet be constant in resisting the Evil One; take no pleasure in those images that disturb you against your will, and do not cease from prayer; you will be thus helped to gain greater merit and more glory in heaven. Let us take this to ourselves, my dear brethren, and not allow any suggestions or temptations to keep us from our customary prayers.

Beggars
desirous of
alms are
much more
skilled in
asking

If I could say to a poor beggar with truth, Over there lives a rich gentleman who is never more pleased than when he is distributing generous alms, and the oftener he is asked for them, the better satisfied he is; he is never wearied giving; if you go to him twenty times a day, he will always open his purse, and he never gives less than a ducat—what do you think? Surely, the man would not believe me, but would think I am joking, for he could never imagine that such a generous man is to be found on this earth. And indeed he would be quite right. The first thing we have to heed when asking favors from another is, not to be too importunate or shameless, and not to come too often to him. Otherwise he will say to us, as is the custom: Oh, you were here yesterday! this morning I gave you something; you must certainly be a shameless fellow to come back so soon and so often. Do you think I have nothing to do but to put my hand in my pocket and give money to you? Be off with you at once, or I will get the stick. If a prince were to give audience once a week, that would indeed be very often, and would show great condescension on his part. How many have to spend whole months and years at the courts of kings and emperors, waiting for a chance to hand in their petitions? Yet that beggar would at least trust so far to my word that he would see whether I spoke truth or not; and if he found that what I said was really the case, would he allow any person or any business to prevent him from speaking daily to such a generous and good benefactor? No indeed; a ducat is always worth having, and is a great deal more than he could otherwise gain in a day.

We are as-
sured by
God that
we shall
always re-

O Christians, what an infallible assurance we have from the lips of God Himself! Only come to Me, He says; "Ask, and you shall receive." And who of us, O Lord, may come and ask of Thee? All without exception; I am generous to all who call

upon Me. As St. Paul says, He is "rich unto all that call upon Him."¹ And what may we expect from Thee, Lord? The smallest alms I give is worth more than all the riches and treasures of earth. When shall we come and pray to Thee? When is it most convenient for Thee? How long can we have audience of Thee? Ask whenever you please, by day or night, wherever you are; any time suits Me; at every moment I am ready to hear your petitions and to distribute My alms. How often may we come? The oftener the better; every day, every hour, nay, every moment. "Pray without ceasing,"² without intermission. You will never tire Me, never trouble Me with your importunity in knocking at My door, never exhaust My treasures. Christians, do we believe that? No, we do not believe it, or at least we do not care for the alms offered us, otherwise we should be a great deal more eager in begging. "Hitherto you have not asked anything."³ Ask, then. Hear how He Himself is more eager in begging us to pray to Him, more desirous so to speak of bestowing His gifts on us, than we are to ask for or to receive them. O God of goodness, what are we thinking of? Should we not cheerfully spend every moment of our lives in prayer, since Thou art ready to act so generously to us every moment? Yes, Father of mercy, I will pray, I will come to Thee a hundred times; I will, as far as I can, be importunate in knocking at Thy door; and if I should not receive any more than what I can merit by the prayer itself, which increases sanctifying grace, that will be more than enough for me. I cannot, dare not ask for anything more precious or more useful.

And now I imagine I hear many masters and mistresses, laborers and tradesmen, servants and sick people crying out: Alas, how unfortunate our condition!—But why?—Can you ask such a question? Do you not see that we can rarely profit by that grand opportunity? and is not that a misfortune for us?—But how is that?—While religious in their convents have nothing to do but to pray and praise God, we have to look after our domestic affairs and to labor and run about here and there the whole day, so that we have no time to pray. If we can manage to hear Mass in the morning, it is a great thing, as much as we can do; in the evening we are so tired that we can only say a few prayers and hurry to bed. That is all we can do in the way of praying the whole

ceive; therefore we ought to pray always.

We can do that in spite of our other occupations and difficulties.

¹ Dives in omnes qui invocant illum.—Rom. x. 12.

² Sine intermissione orate.—I. Thess. v. 17.

³ Usquemodo non petistis quidquam.—John xvi. 24.

day. We, say the sick people, can hardly say an "Our Father" on account of our weakness, and while others are increasing sanctifying grace in their souls, and thus enriching them, we lie here tortured in body and poor in soul.—My good people! I see well that you do not know what prayer is. It would indeed be an unfortunate thing for you if you could only pray, as you say, twice a day. But in reality you have time enough for prayer if you wish. If praying consisted only in going to church, or moving the lips while holding the book or the beads in the hand, then you would have cause for complaint. St. Paul knew well that you must look after your households and your work; he exhorts the heads of families to do so, and tells servants that they must obey their masters with all diligence; and yet he says to all without exception: "Pray without ceasing." He knew well that work and daily domestic duties do not allow people to spend much time on their knees or with their prayer-books. No, says St. John Chrysostom; prayer does not consist in that alone; nothing can prevent you from praying always, neither time, nor place, nor state, nor occupation, nor care, nor labor, nor sickness, nor weakness. God does not require your voice or your words, or that your knees should be always bent, or your hands stretched out. "Prayer is an elevation of the soul to God;"¹ it is a thought, a pure intention directed to God. And this is not impossible for you, married women, in your nurseries; for you, officials, in your tribunals; for you, merchants, in your business; for you, tradesmen, in your work-shops; for you, peasants, in the fields and vineyards; for you, maids, in the kitchen and in the garden; for you, sick people, on your beds of pain; for you, afflicted ones, in your tribulations. Therefore your work is prayer, your writing and studying is prayer, your buying and selling is prayer, your suffering and weeping is prayer, your standing and sitting is prayer, nay, your eating and drinking is prayer, if all these things are done in the state of grace with a supernatural intention directed to God. See how easy it is to pray always; how easy to increase unceasingly sanctifying grace and thereby our reward in heaven; and that immense treasure is wantonly forfeited when we forget the good intention and do not direct our thoughts to God during our actions.

Moreover, the best and most useful kind of prayer, and that which is most pleasing to God, is the prayer called ejaculation,

¹ *Oratio est mentis elevatio in Deum.*

by which we frequently send up our petitions to God in a few words, or even by a mere thought, without moving the lips at all. These prayers are looked on by St. John Chrysostom as the best and most convenient means of protecting one's self against temptations. "If you now and then inflame yourself with frequent prayers, you will give no chance to the devil."¹ Sigh inwardly at the thought of your sins,² continues the same holy Doctor; ascend now and then with a glance of your eyes and in desire to heaven;³ say sometimes in your heart, O God, be merciful to me!⁴ thus you will pray often during the day."⁵ There are many ejaculatory prayers you can use at different times according to the different circumstances you are in, or the wants you wish to have supplied. Thus you can make a short act of faith, of hope, of charity, of sorrow for sin, and renew the good intention. For instance, during your work you can say or think frequently: For Thy sake, O God, I do this, and because it is Thy will, O Lord; all for Thee O my God! In trouble or suffering: Lord, Thy will be done! O my God, I have deserved this! In temptations and dangers of sin: Lord, come to my aid, do not abandon me! My God, I love Thee above all things! At meal-times: I thank Thee, O Lord! While dressing: Clothe me, O Lord, with Thy grace! and so on. The Lord's prayer contains seven short ejaculations that are suited to every circumstance in which we can be situated. If you wish to awake confidence in God, let your prayer be: Our Father who art in heaven. If you wish to praise and bless God: hallowed be Thy name. If misfortunes oppress you: Thy kingdom come. If trials are bearing heavily on you, sigh forth to God: Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. If you are poor and needy: Give us this day our daily bread. If you have been offended by others and excited to anger, say to God: Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. If you are assailed by temptation: Lead us not into temptation. If you are troubled at the approach of misfortune: Deliver us from evil.

Prayer of that kind often and habitually repeated in all our daily actions is, I say, the most excellent and meritorious prayer, and one that is most pleasing to God. For like an arrow it

prayers is
often to
make ejacu-
lations.

These pray-
ers are
most pleas-
ing to God.

¹ Si per intervalla crebris precationibus teipsum accendis, non dabis occasionem diabolo.

—S. Chrys. hom. 4 de fide Annæ.

² Ingemisce amare.

³ Suspice in cœlum.

⁴ Dic in mente: miserere mei Deus.

⁵ Et absolvisti orationem.

pierces the clouds and ascends to heaven, and often a short ejaculation brings more merit to our souls than half a bookful of prayers that we say without proper devotion. In books we find the affections of others, namely those which occurred to the person who wrote them, and there is many a one who does not understand what he reads, or is not in earnest about what he is asking with his lips. Therefore St. Augustine says: "There are many who speak to God, few who pray to Him."¹ But those ejaculations come from the very depths of the heart, and are sent forth to God by an earnest will and sincere affection. We know by experience that when praying from a book we are exposed to a thousand distractions, so that at the end we often do not know what we have been praying for, or what we desire from God. There is no room for such distractions in ejaculations, so that by their means we can keep constantly in the presence of God; the soul becomes familiar with Him, always keeps up a friendly conversation with Him, and drinks deep at the fountain of His graces. There is a great difference between beggars. One comes to your door and asks for something; who is he? you inquire. He appears to be a stranger, answers the servant; I do not see him often. Oh, then give him a piece of bread. On the other hand, if one of your poor neighbors, whom you are accustomed to relieve, comes to you, he will be far differently received; for you will take him into your room and give him whatever meat and bread is left after meals. Even so, I imagine, it must be with the two classes of Christians; with those, namely, who pray only at stated times, from their books, and those who, besides praying at stated times, keep themselves in constant union with God by frequent ejaculations. The first receive an alms; but they are so to speak strangers; while the second, being well-known friends of the Master of the house, receive much more abundantly. Ah, my dear brethren, let us accustom ourselves to beg in that manner! That is the way to pray without ceasing; that is the way to receive without ceasing.

Sinners, too,
should pray.

Sinners, alas, how I pity you! You cannot hope to profit by this as long as you are enemies of God; therefore repent and get out of that miserable state as soon as possible by true penance. But do not abandon prayer even while you are in sin; for if you do not merit thereby an increase of sanctifying grace, which is impossible, as you have totally lost grace by mortal sin, yet you

¹ Loqui cum Deo multorum est, orare autem paucorum.

will receive something, and your prayers will not be fruitless. It is true that he who knows himself to be guilty is unwilling to stand before his judge; the rebellious subject, who knows that his crime has been detected, is afraid to come before his sovereign. If you consider your state as sinners, you will find that it is indeed a sad thing for you to be in want of everything, and to have to beg everything from that God who is your enemy, and to dare to call upon that God for help even while you are opposed to Him. Yet it would be the worst of all mistakes to give up prayer because you are in the state of sin. For there is no better or speedier means of freeing yourselves from sin than to fly to God by prayer. If you neglect that means, you will fall from one sin into another, and will continue in sin until you despair of ever being forgiven. "Because I was silent, my bones grew old,"¹ says the Prophet David, speaking as a sinner. You are grown old in vice, O sinner, because you have kept silent and have not opened your mouth to call on God for help. If you had had frequent recourse to the mercy of God, to Mary, the Queen of heaven, to your holy guardian angel, they would have warded off from you many attacks, and prevented many falls and dangers of sin, and you would not now be entangled in those evil habits that make conversion so difficult for you. "Because I was silent, my bones grew old." A sinner who, although in the state of sin, has still a little common sense left, as the Holy Ghost says, "will open his mouth in prayer, and will make supplication for his sins."² Although, says St. Chrysostom, you are in disfavor with the Lord; although you have squandered the goods of your heavenly Father; although you know that you must direct your prayer to God, who is your enemy and is angry with you, begin nevertheless to pray with fervor and humility, and God will give you His special grace, so that you will truly repent, be admitted again to His favor, and avoid the eternal punishment that is now prepared for you if you do not amend your life. God does not look on it as an insult to be prayed to by the sinner; He is rather more displeased when the sinner ceases to pray; "for He is angry only when we do not pray; and He hates us only when we cease asking from Him."³ And who has more reason to humble himself before the almighty

¹ Quoniam tacui, inveteraverunt ossa mea.—Ps. xxxi. 3.

² Aperiet os suum in oratione, et pro delictis suis deprecabitur.—Ecclus. xxxix. 7.

³ Non enim nisi quando non postulamus, irascitur; tunc etiam nos solum, quando non poscimus, aversatur.—S. Chrys. hom. 23 in Matt.

God in fervent prayer than the sinner, who is in danger of eternal death every moment? If you were in disgrace with your prince, and knew that he had resolved to put you to death, what efforts would you not make to find some one to intercede for you! No humiliation would be too great, no expense too heavy for you in such circumstances. God is ready to hear you; you need no advocate nor outlay of money to be well received by Him; He Himself invites you to come and ask Him to forgive you. "Cease from sin," is the advice that St. Chrysostom gives you; "shed tears of penance, and then go to Him. For you are not as desirous to be forgiven as He is to forgive."¹ Pray, then, but first of all for true sorrow and repentance for your sins. Often say with the public sinner: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner;"² and with the penitent David: "O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy indignation, nor chastise me in Thy wrath. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak."³ Look on me, O God, with eyes of favor; draw my soul from out of the abyss into which it has been hurled by sin. "Turn to me, O Lord, and deliver my soul; O save me for Thy mercy's sake."⁴ By means of those fervent aspirations often repeated you will obtain the grace of true contrition, and will be able to say with the same David: "The Lord hath heard my supplication, the Lord hath received my prayer."⁵

Conclusion
to pray con-
stantly.

Thus it is true, my dear brethren, as I have endeavored to prove, and as Christ Himself has assured us, that when we pray we always receive from God; and no man's prayer is ever fruitless. "I beseech you, brethren," is the warning of St. Bernard by way of conclusion, "always to have at hand that most powerful safeguard of prayer. For of one of two things we may be certain, that He will give us either what we ask, or what He knows to be much better for us."⁶ Why, then, have I been so remiss in prayer hitherto, and so foolishly lost thousands of eternities of glory? I may have been punctual in saying my daily prayers, but what

¹ Cessa offendere, et lachrymas funde, et ita accede. Non adeo cupis dimitti peccata tua, sicut ille cupit peccata dimittere.—S. Chrys. hom. 36 in Act. Ap.

² Deus, propitius esto mihi peccatori.—Luke xviii. 13.

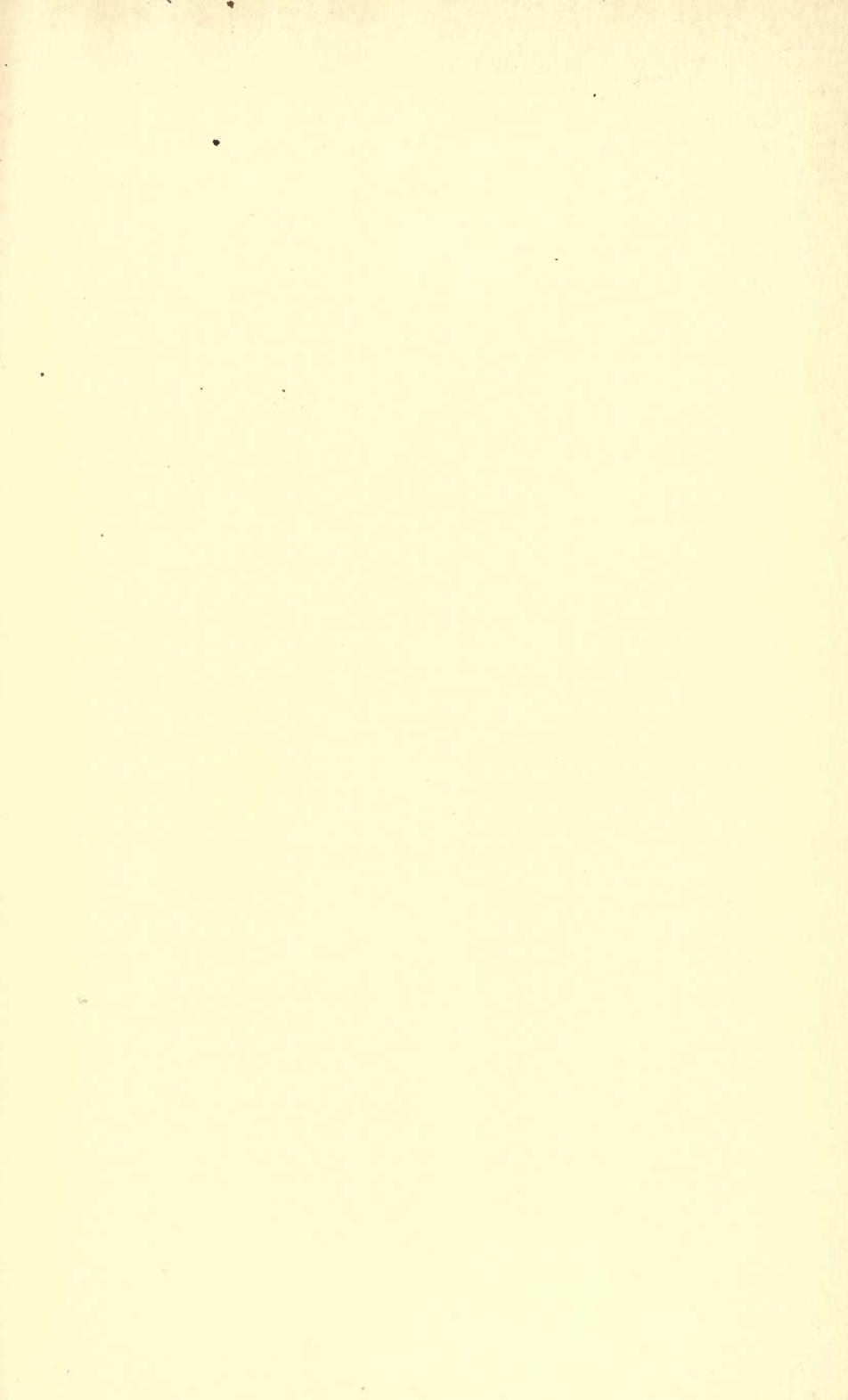
³ Domine, ne in furore tuo arguas me, neque in ira tua corripas me. Miserere mei, Domine, quoniam infirmus sum.—Ps. vi. 2, 3.

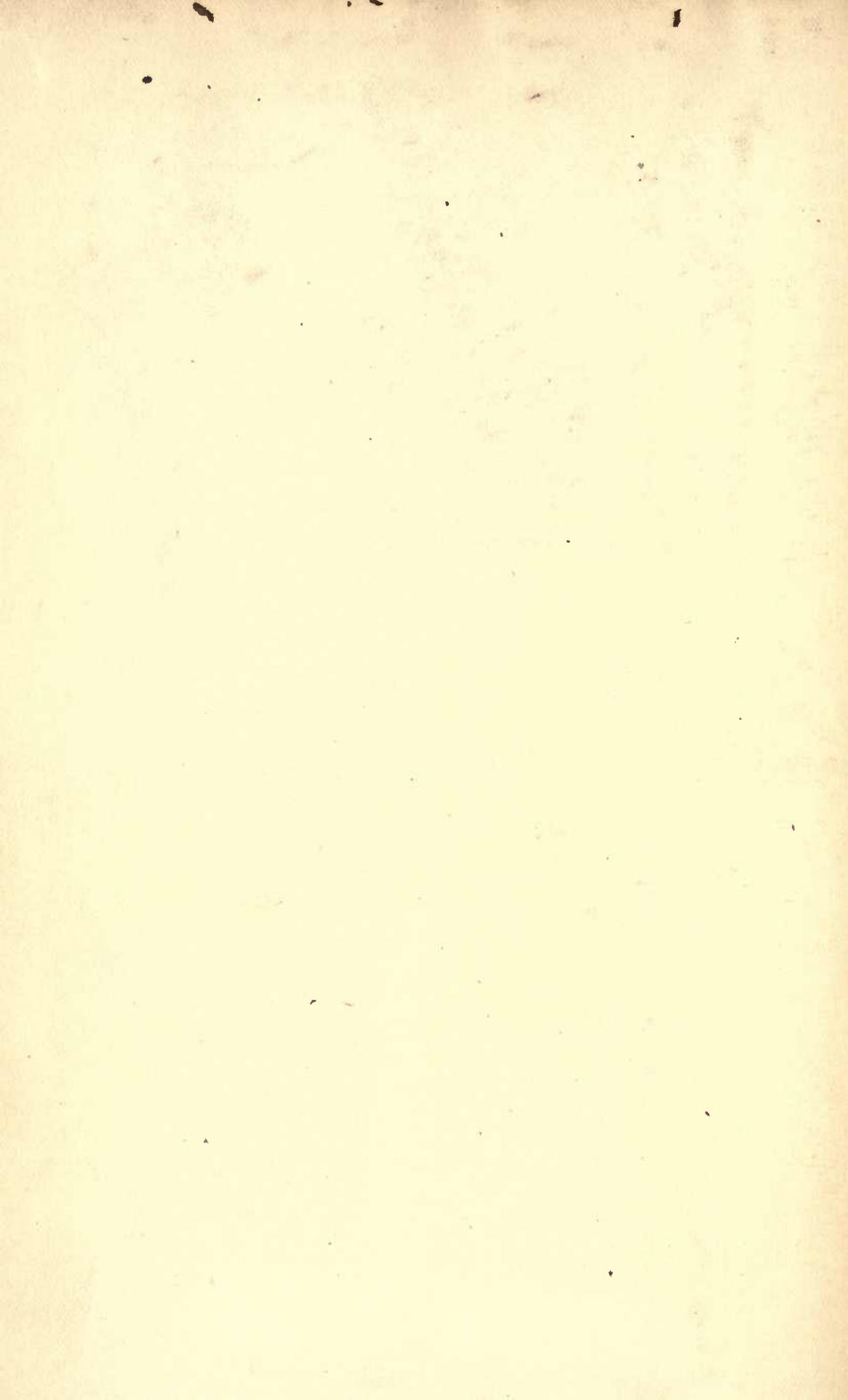
⁴ Convertere Domine, et eripe animam meam; saluum me fac propter misericordiam tuam.—Ibid. 5.

⁵ Exaudivit Dominus deprecationem meam, Dominus orationem meam suscepit.—Ibid. 10.

⁶ Rogo vos, fratres, ut semper ad manum habeamus tutissimum orationis refugium. Unum indubitanter e duobus sperare possumus, quoniam aut dabit quod petimus, aut quod nobis noverit esse utilius.—S. Bern. serm. 5 in fer. iv. Cin.

is that after all? How coldly, slothfully, distractedly I have said them, without fervor, spirit, earnestness, or relish! In future, then, I will be more diligent, more fervent in prayer, and will make most industrious use of such an easy means of enriching my soul. If I know not how to pray, I will at least ask for that grace: Lord, teach me how to pray, that I may ask an alms from Thee. Teach me to pray constantly, that I may be always united with Thee the whole day in all my actions, that I may constantly enrich my soul with Thy treasures, and here on earth gather together those goods that I shall be able to bring away with me after death to live on them in Thy glory forever. Amen





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